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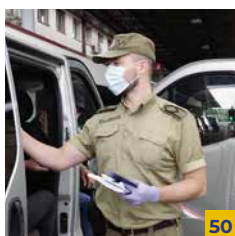


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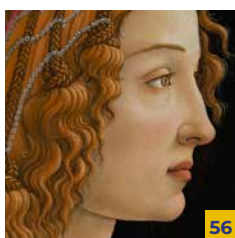
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Nikola Hendrickx

EDITORIAL

The international media have widely covered the Ryanair incident in May 2021, when Belarus forced a flight from Athens to Vilnius to land in Minsk under the false pretext of an alleged Hamas bomb threat, in order to arrest the journalist and Belarusian student, Raman Protasevich and his girl friend Sofia Sapega, who were on board.

In the meantime, other "incidents" have been reported in news coverage from this former Soviet Republic.

There is the recent defection of Krystsina Tsimanouskaya, a Belarusian athlete who vanished from Tokyo to find refuge in Austria, instead of returning to the country.

Then, Vitali Chychoy, an opponent of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, was found dead in a park in Kiev in early August.

These events, worthy of the Cold War period or of a John Le Carré novel show the extent to which the regime of Belarusian president Lukashenko increasingly resembles a dictatorship.

Much criticised by his population, but also within the European and international institutions, Alexander Lukashenko - whose presidential elections were widely contested for fraud in 2020 when he allegedly took 80% of the vote - is beginning to realise how his power is beginning to waver.

All this is unlikely to have prompted him to moderate his repression of his population.

Internationally, his authoritarian regime is having difficulty containing a certain diplomatic isolation, especially in Europe.

Therefore, Lukashenko's relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin become all the more essential for his political survival.

There is no longer any doubt that the Belarusian leader is practically on the verge of putting his fate in the hands of Moscow.

Just on the economic level, the favours of his Russian ally are, in this respect, most significant. For example, in 2020 Russia granted a loan of 1.5 billion dollars to Belarus as a "gesture of support".

But in addition to low interest loans, Belarus has also been granted special access to the Russian market. So much so that Belarusian companies enjoy favourable terms that even other members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) do not.

Economic analysts believe that this preferential treatment guarantees the survival of large sections of the business sector in Belarus, especially within the food and engineering industries.

According to the Institute for Energy and Finance Foundation in Moscow, such favourable preferences has allowed the Belarusian economy to generate about \$11 billion between 2011 and 2020.

But there exist also a number of shady sources of income, and cross-border smuggling has played a significant part in propping up the country's economy.

Certain goods manufactured in the EU are relabelled and the relevant customs documents are falsified. These falsely labelled goods are then smuggled into Russia in order to not only evade EU sanctions but also to circumvent excise payments on various products.

There are practically no border checks between Russia and Belarus due to this preferential market access and illicit trade has prospered over the years.

The scale of this smuggling may be small compared to official Russian loans, but it is still considerable.

Russia has also offered assistance to the Belarusian security forces in their actions against the numerous anti-government demonstrations.

As proof of this alliance, Lukashenko no longer hesitates to present his Russian counterpart as his main and faithful ally.

Recently, he even presented the Ryan Air flight "incident" as an action approved by Putin himself.

As far as the master of the Kremlin is concerned, all this represents a godsend; it fits perfectly into his geopolitical designs and provides an unparalleled opportunity to bring Lukashenko closer to Russia in a bid to push ahead with the creation of a Russian-Belarusian Union.

Lukashenko's power is also increasingly based on his relationship with Vadimir Putin. They coordinate their foreign policy and stand together against international pressure from democratic states.

Putin's refusal to condemn the abuses of the master of Minsk is tantamount to tolerating them. For the European institutions, Putin must condemn Lukashenko's actions regarding the Ryanair incident, or be held responsible for them as well.

They also demand that he call for the immediate release of Raman Protasevich and Sofia Sapega, so that Russia can be included in any punitive actions that Europe imposes on Belarus regarding the incident.

While initially, the European authorities reacted strongly, it is true that the first firm actions are usually short and tend to slacken with time.

European leaders must keep up the pressure on Belarus and Russia. The Ryanair incident would not have happened without Russia's support, and Russia is the only country that continues to support Belarus' actions following the incident. We Europeans must continue to hold Russia accountable for its complicity in this brazen display of air piracy.

Let's hope that the warnings of European leaders will be followed by concrete action and that the words of European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, "the outrageous and illegal behaviour...will have consequences" will not be empty words.

Trajan Dereville



A DREAM, AND NOT A PLEASANT ONE

Can Russia keep the peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools,” said civil rights leader Martin Luther King in a speech he gave in St. Louis in March 1964, two years before he was murdered by a white supremacist. It’s very sound advice but not easy to take because of the risks involved. That’s why it helps to have some sort of guarantor to make certain that if and when you lay down your weapons in a gesture of peace and good will, the other side won’t simply pick up theirs and shoot you. But given its record, who in their right mind would choose Vladimir Putin’s Russia to fulfil that rôle? It would be like the Senate of Ancient Rome inviting Hannibal and his Carthaginians to look after the Empire for them, while they pop out to the shops. Well, perhaps not. Azerbaijan and Armenia, still in dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, should recall the words of the Prussian military commander, Helmuth von Moltke, who wrote in 1880, in a letter

to a friend, “Everlasting peace is a dream, and not even a pleasant one; and war is a necessary part of God’s arrangement of the world... Without war the world would deteriorate into materialism.” Sorry, Helmuth, but I think that particular ship sailed long, long ago. We live in a world of so-called *realpolitik*, defined in my Chambers Dictionary as “practical politics based on the realities and necessities of life, rather than moral or ethical ideas”. Or to put it another way, “Every man for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost,” in the words of the Victorian writer and poet, Dinah Maria Craik. Certainly, in foreign policy terms, Putin and his foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, seem to be adhering to Craik’s concept. As to underwriting a peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the neighbours might have chosen almost any other country in the world, one might think, with greater confidence in a peaceful outcome. But instead Armenia chose Russia. But it wouldn’t

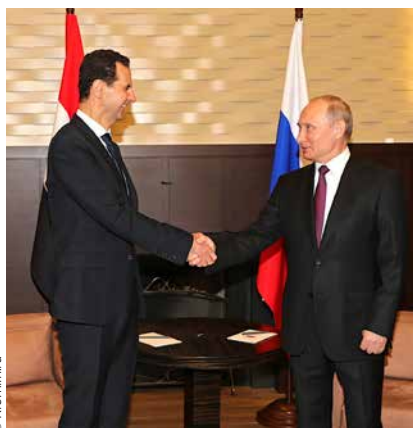
do to ignore Azerbaijan. Bakü, the world’s 20th largest oil producer, has reserves of 7,000,000,000 barrels, or in other words enough to last for another 200 years.



Baku

Given Russia’s recent history of intervening wherever it fancies (and especially where it will most annoy the West), it might seem an odd choice

to many, except that both countries were once part of the Soviet Union's mighty empire. It would seem to be that Putin and Lavrov want to restore that glory, ruling an empire the size of the Soviet Union's but without resorting to Communism in any way. Indeed, their reign has been described as a "kleptocracy" or an "oligarchy", a country ruled by its richest elite with the aim of their further enrichment. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, analysing Russia's contributions at the United Nations, concludes that it really comes down to definitions. What the West defines as 'international law' is not at all how the same words are defined in Moscow. "In analyzing how Russia goes about promoting its status as a global power at the UN," says the Endowment, "the concept of international law stands out as Russia's most important battle line. In speech after speech, both Putin and Lavrov have stressed the importance of upholding international law. Lavrov often contrasts this law with an alternative that he maintains the West is promoting to expand Western interests and values; in a 2018 address, for example, he argued: 'Today we can trace a tendency to substitute for international law, as we all know it, some kind of 'rules-based order.'" Based on this unfamiliar (to us in the West) interpretation, his support for President Bashar al-Assad appears logical. However awful a government may be, however corrupt, acquisitive, murderous and cruel its leader, by Putin's logic it deserves to retain power at any cost. No-one must be allowed to threaten that. That's why Putin supported (and continues to support) al-Assad's use of military force against his own civilians and even helped him to impose it.

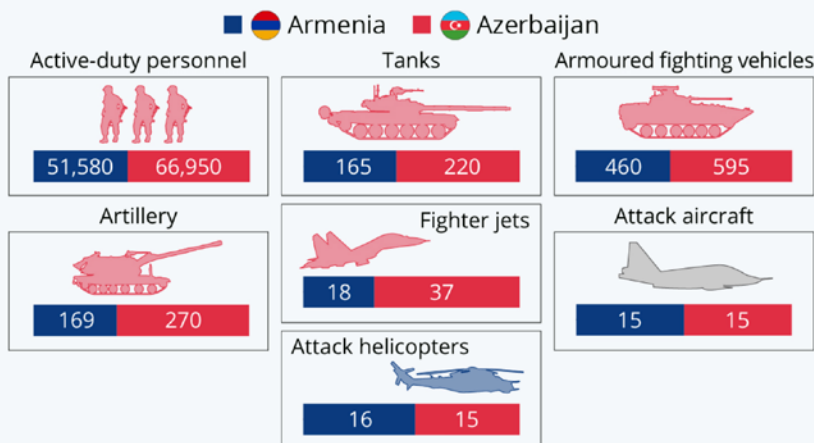


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Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin

Armenian & Azerbaijani Military Strength Compared

Estimated military equipment/personnel of Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020*



* Selected equipment. Russia also stations MIG-29 fighter jets in Gyumri, Armenia.
Source: Statista Research



statista

In addition, of course, al-Assad is now somewhat in his debt, giving Russia access to strategic ports in the Mediterranean. But all of this is, supposedly, secondary: "In Russian practice," write the Carnegie Endowment, "the legitimacy of recognized governments is absolute regardless of their origins, governance, human rights record, or any other external norm. This concept echoes Russian domestic preoccupations in the era of colour revolutions, the Arab Spring, and domestic unrest."

HISTORICAL CONFLICT

Russia, of course, famously annexed Crimea, hitherto a part of Ukraine, and has since built a bridge across the strait that prevents large vessels from reaching a number of important Ukrainian Black Sea ports, such as Odessa and Chornomorsk. Russia has recently been accused of reinforcing its troops along the Ukraine border while flagrantly giving support to pro-Russian rebels in Donetsk and Luhansk. It seems that Lavrov's much-vaunted belief in 'international law' is somewhat open to interpretation. Existing governments must be defended against rebellion unless Russia doesn't like the government

concerned and instead supports the rebels, as is the case in Donetsk and Luhansk. So where does Nagorno-Karabakh fit into this? It is described in the Encyclopaedia Britannica as "an autonomous oblast of the former Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic" and as a self-declared country whose independence is not internationally recognised. The oblast covered some 4,400² kilometres, but the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, as it has determinedly called itself since 1992, lays claim to a much larger 7,000² kilometres.

It includes the north-eastern elevation of the Karabakh range of the Lesser Caucasus, its territory varying from flat and empty steppe to dense forest. The encyclopaedia defines it as a "region of Azerbaijan", incidentally, not of Armenia, which will no-doubt annoy the Armenians, not to mention the citizens of Nagorno-Karabakh itself, most of whom are ethnically Armenian.

The entire area has been subject to wars of possession for centuries, perhaps millennia, so in some ways this disagreement over what and where Nagorno Karabakh can be said to be should come as no surprise. Not far

away, Urartu had, by 900 BCE, evolved into a civilisation whose subsequent destruction is mentioned by the ancient Greek historian, Herodotus, although there's some disagreement over who or what destroyed it. Was it the Cimmerians? Or could it have been the warlike Scythians? Or was it even, as the poet Lord Byron put it, "The Assyrian (who) came down like a wolf on the fold, / And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold." Byron was writing about a different war, though, involving Babylon. If you're interested, it's mentioned in the Christian Bible, (II Kings, 18:13 and after), where Sennacherib's Assyrian forces came up against "all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them", as the Bible puts it. Sennacherib "came down" on quite a lot of cities "like a wolf on the fold". Indeed, he was famous for it. What's more, it's believed that King Sennacherib (or Senecherib) was the first ruler of the Kingdom of Artsakh, which seems to have been in what is now Nagorno-Karabakh. It gets very complicated if one starts to base present-day policies on the politics of ancient history.

The forces of Azerbaijan and Armenia may wish to emulate Sennacherib in their method of approach, but both sides have found only inconclusive outcomes to their endeavours. During 2020, Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a six-week war over Nagorno-Karabakh. Once again, the outcome was inconclusive and the fighting didn't stop, despite the deaths of more than a thousand soldiers and civilians. Not that such considerations seem to influence rival leaders; their citizens are dispensable; mere pawns. After all, during the Second World War, the Nazi High Command determined to seize Azerbaijan in order to gain its valuable oilfields, upon which the Soviet Union depended. Not to mention its natural gas and (more important for Russia than for the Third Reich) tea.



German troops during Operation Fall Blau in 1942

Despite an enormous effort, Germany's Operation Fall Blau (Case Blue) never quite reached the border, coming up against a Soviet force of up to 800,000 Azerbaijanis, of whom perhaps 50% were killed defending their country's frontiers. Looking back to the more recent 2020 skirmishes, both sides, in Bakü and Yerevan, rejected attempts by the United Nations, the United States and Russia to get them to stop fighting and talk peace. Russia succeeded in getting a ceasefire in early October 2020, but it broke down, as did further ceasefires negotiated by France, Russia and the United States acting together and then by the US alone. Each side accused the other of breaching the terms of the ceasefire. To be fair, Russia appears to have done its best to stop the fighting; it negotiated the 1994 ceasefire which is still in place, although periodically ignored on the ground. Russia, for its part, is pledged to defending Armenia, while Turkey has pledged to support Azerbaijan, while neighbouring Iran is home to a large number of ethnic Azeris, which could lead to further complications and create a pretext for further confrontation.



Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

INVITING A PEACEKEEPER

Armenia's Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, has proposed that Russian armed forces should be stationed along his country's border with Azerbaijan (and certainly around the disputed borders of Nagorno-Karabakh) to discourage incursions by Azeri forces, although both sides would appear to be equally guilty.

Both, of course, accuse their opponents of flouting the Russian ceasefire whilst



Deceased Armenian soldier Albert Hovannisyan in the midst of artillery fire during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War

protesting their innocence. Sensible proposals are hard to spot from either Yerevan or Bakü (and certainly not from Stepanakert, the de facto capital of the disputed region, which the Azeris call Xankändi). One of the many obstacles to a lasting peace is the close proximity to one another of the soldiers of both sides, while communications between them are virtually non-existent. As a result, we see the sort of situation that arose in July this year, in which Armenia claimed that Azeri forces had opened fire on Armenian positions at the Gegharkunik section of the border, compelling Armenian forces to return fire. You will not be surprised to hear that Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defence later claimed that it was Armenian forces that had opened fire with automatic weapons and grenade launchers towards a village in the Kelbajar region, as well as throwing hand grenades, so the Azeri forces 'had no choice' but to return fire. I can recall similar excuses being given, and with equal conviction, when teachers separated disputatious gangs of children in my school playground. It was a school in a fairly poor area of North East England, and disputes were rare but vicious. When they arose, they were mainly between Catholic and Protestant children, who appeared to dislike each other without quite understanding why. It's something they had caught from their parents. Opponents invariably defended themselves with that well-worn old expression, "they started it". My teachers never believed them, and ringleaders were usually punished. Not surprisingly, these days, diplomacy forbids the use of the cane on politicians, however blatant the lies and however troublesome the protagonists.

So, what exactly does Nagorno-Karabakh have to offer? It has vineyards and also groves of mulberry trees, where silkworms have been encouraged to breed and grow to feed the more exclusive parts of the textile and fashion industries. In addition, the region grows cereals and raises cattle, sheep, and pigs, as well as playing host to some light industry, especially in the field of food processing. It doesn't sound like something worth dying for, although as somebody's birthplace, it has immeasurable value, "an ill-favoured thing, sir, but mine own", as Shakespeare put it in *As You Like It*. Since Moscow has succeeded in negotiating ceasefires along the Nagorno-Karabakh border, why not trust it to be an 'honest broker', you may wonder. The problem is that its record is hardly unblemished. After all, after Soviet forces intervened in Bakū in 1990, it led two years later to Armenian forces carrying out what has been described as one of the worst atrocities of modern times: the slaughter of 613 people in Khojaly, according to Azeri sources. They included 106 women and 63 children. Speaking to Turkey's Anadolu Agency on the 28th anniversary of the atrocity, Khazar Ibrahim, formerly Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Republic of Turkey, said that the tragedy happened during the military aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan, which started in the late 1980s in the dying days of the USSR. "And then it turned into the very hot period, and in 1992 Khojaly genocide was committed against Azerbaijani civilians. Elderly people, women, kids, babies were killed, maimed and taken hostage, and the fate of most of them are still not known until today," he said. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Armenian forces took over the town of Khojaly in Karabakh on Feb. 26, 1992, after battering it with heavy artillery and tanks, backed up by an infantry regiment.



Russian-Armenian Joint Military Exercise Held Near Turkish Border



Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin

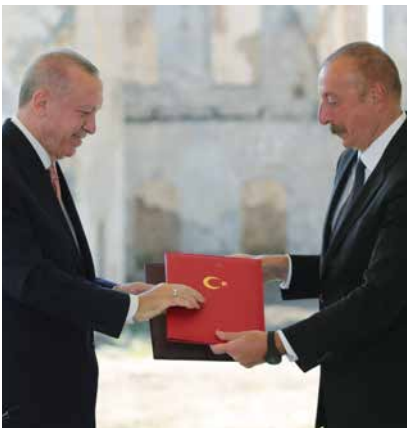
GOING OFF BANG – OR PHUT?

Now Yerevan seems to have embraced shared security as well as political and economic integration with Russia.

It rejected the offer of an Association Agreement with the European Union in 2013 (Russia doesn't like the EU and misses no opportunity to criticise it). Furthermore, Russia continues to supply up-to-date military equipment to Armenia, which Yerevan used during the Second Karabakh War, thus making Azerbaijan understandably nervous. There is concern, too, about the firing of Iskander missiles, which are Russian-produced mobile short-range (supposedly) ballistic missiles, targeted at Shusha, a leading Azeri cultural centre, shortly after Azeri troops had liberated it from twenty years of Armenian occupation. The Kremlin initially dismissed the claim that it was their missiles that had been used, but this was undermined by the Armenian prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan (yes, the same chap now requesting Russian troops to be stationed along the border) who said that only 10% of the missiles fired into Azerbaijan had exploded. The President of Azerbaijan had previously said he had no data to back up the claim that Iskanders had been used, so Pashinyan managed to undermine Moscow's denials, call the Kremlin a liar and to suggest its latest short-range missiles weren't quite up to scratch. The Armenian military were miffed, too, and there have been dark rumours about a possible coup d'état. After all, Moscow has never liked Pashinyan much anyway.

As if that were not enough, Azeri mine clearance engineers found parts of the missiles, only to discover that they were not Iskander-E missiles, which have approval for export, but were, in fact, Iskander-M types, which have a range of up to 620 kilometres. Exporting them contravenes the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), under which exporting any missile with a range in excess of 300 kilometres is banned. The MTCR, created originally by the G-7 group, now includes 35 countries and is aimed at preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. In this case, either Russia ignored it or chose to flaunt its ability to worry the world. It certainly makes a nonsense of Moscow's strong denials: "It wasn't me, 'guy, honest." It also tends to support the perhaps somewhat unwise claims of Pashinyan that Russia's celebrated new missile is a dud, whether or not that's true. That won't help Moscow to sell it around the world. Who wants to buy something that has earned a reputation as a 'weapon of mass embarrassment' with which to defend their interests. Russia's involvement in the region is not, of course, to cement peace but rather to ensure that the tensions and uncertainties remain, thus ensuring Russia's long-term rôle as the one and only power broker. Russian peace-keeping forces are garrisoned in Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia also has a military base in Armenia itself. It all helps to keep the pot simmering to Russia's advantage, although rumours of a possible Turkish base in Azerbaijan have drawn warnings from the Kremlin. Russia may expand its interests without criticism but others (including Turkey, it seems) may not.

Armenia, then, seems to be sidling ever closer to Russia. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, has been earning itself a reputation for corruption, graft and excessive censorship. When I was in Bakü a few years ago, my guide was not keen on letting me film for more than a few seconds “in case we’re seen”. She had a palpable fear of anyone in uniform, not without good reason. I was stopped by a policeman and questioned while I was filming Bakü’s magnificent “flame towers” and their reflections in the waters of the Caspian Sea. He didn’t speak English, I don’t speak Azeri, and my interpreter had not yet arrived, so the exchange was conducted in grunts with much pointing at my passport, my camera and by showing him some of what I had shot. Later, with the interpreter in tow, I stopped to film in a market, and was constantly urged by her to get the filming finished quickly, which could involve being physically urged towards the car. The same thing happened in the street or near any of Bakü’s most popular monuments. Despite her obvious nervousness, I managed to complete my mission without further police involvement (albeit with some blurred footage).



Turkish President Recep Erdoğan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev

I was conscious, however, of a certain degree of caution being exercised over exactly whom I could interview and under what circumstances. In the police control room, where I was allowed to film, a photograph of President Ilham Aliyev gazed down from the wall. Aliyev seems to be everywhere. He is always keen to stress his country’s close links with Turkey: “Many factors bind us together,” he said, when he and Turkish President

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan signed the so-called Susha Declaration in June. “First of all, it is about history, culture, common ethnic roots, language, religion, national values, national interests and brotherhood of our peoples. Today, we are setting a unique example of cooperation and alliance on a global scale.” The signing will have worried Armenia and angered Russia.

KEEP IT IN THE FAMILY



Azerbaijani President, Ilham Aliyev inspecting his troops

Ilham Aliyev has built himself a reputation for brutality. He seems to hate much of the media, routinely refusing accreditation to foreign journalists, while imprisoning home-grown ones. Critical articles can result in a beating, with the victim being prosecuted for “disturbing public order” (and, perhaps, damaging police truncheons?). One Azeri journalist, Khadija Ismayilova, was secretly videoed with her boyfriend in an intimate moment and threatened with public humiliation unless she gave up journalism. Others, having fled the country, have subsequently been kidnapped and brought back for trial on trumped up charges.

In an interview with the BBC in November 2020, Aliyev denied many of the allegations. “We have free media, we have free Internet,” he told the interviewer. “Now, due to the martial law we have some restrictions but before there have been no restrictions.” That’s not been the experience of journalists based there. But don’t look for change any time soon: Aliyev’s success in Nagorno-Karabakh has won him support he’s never known before.

“Azerbaijan’s victory in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh has transformed President Ilham Aliyev’s political stature,” reports Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “boosting his popularity to levels he never experienced during his 17 years of authoritarian rule. The return of parts of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan’s control, along with all seven occupied districts around the breakaway region, has changed the way many in the country view Aliyev’s leadership.” In any case, running Azerbaijan has become a family business. He married Mehriban Aliyeva in 1983 and she is now First Vice President of the country.



Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and the First Lady

They have three children and five grandchildren, so there will be no shortage of descendants to assume his mantle one day. According to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), Aliyev and his entire family have been enjoying the country’s oil wealth. “Using a network of secretive companies in offshore tax havens,” says the ICIJ, “his family, advisers and allies set about acquiring expensive overseas homes and positions in the country’s valuable industries and natural resources, including the family’s majority control of a major gold mine that has been unknown until now.” It would explain everything for the Roman poet, Virgil, who wrote in the Aeneid: “Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, / Auri sacra fames!” (*To what do you not drive human hearts, cursed craving for gold!*)

Azerbaijan’s journalists are, of course, very nervous. It’s all because of the media’s rôle in uncovering what became known as the Azerbaijan



OCCRP journalist Khadija Ismayilova

Laundromat, a massive money-laundering scheme set up to enable Bakü to bribe foreign politicians to help whitewash Azerbaijan's somewhat tarnished reputation over things like corruption and human rights abuses. During the period 2012 to 2014, several members of the country's elite had access to a secret slush fund of some €2.5-billion with which to bribe leading European politicians, buy expensive luxury goods for themselves and 'friends', to launder dirty money and so on. Some of those politicians subsequently gave speeches in defence of Aliyev's regime at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, although those found to have done so for money were subsequently barred from the building. The leaked banking records were revealed by the Danish newspaper Berlingske, which passed them on to the global anti-corruption body, the OCCRP. The origins of the money had been hidden through shell companies, mainly based in the United Kingdom. As the OCCRP pointed out, "Among other things, the money bought silence.

During this period, the Azerbaijani government threw more than 90 human rights activists, opposition politicians, and journalists (including the OCCRP journalist Khadija Ismayilova) into prison on politically motivated charges. The human rights crackdown was roundly condemned by international human rights groups." Meanwhile, at least three European politicians, a journalist who wrote stories friendly to the regime, and businessmen who praised the government were among the beneficiaries of Azerbaijan's dirty money. "Reporters for OCCRP, the Danish newspaper Berlingske, and their partners found two separate sets of documents for each of the four British companies that make up the

core of the Azerbaijani Laundromat," said the OCCRP website, which explained what the two separate sets of documents represent, "Paperwork they filed with the Companies House, where British company registration records are kept; and the filings they made when they opened accounts at Danske Bank in Tallinn, Estonia. The two sets tell different stories but have one main thing in common: The beneficial owners and directors listed in both cases are not real." What the whole sordid affair seems to reveal, over and above the corruption at the heart of Azerbaijan's government, is the willingness of so many seemingly respectable financial institutions in supposedly 'enlightened' countries to avoid looking too closely at a company's bona fides when there's a smell of money in the air. The French playwright Jean Anouilh wrote in "Alouette in 1953: *"Dieu est avec tout le monde...et, en fin de compte, il est toujours avec ceux qui ont beaucoup d'argent et de grosse armées"* (God is on everyone's side...and in the last analysis, he is on the side of those with plenty of money and big armies). It has always been like that since people had evolved sufficiently to stand upright and hold a spear. Or even a large rock. What it means in practice for Azeri critics of President Ilham Aliyev has been long prison sentences in appalling conditions. When Amnesty International looked at what was happening on the ground in 2017, they found that 150 people remained locked up on politically motivated charges. Even some who had fled the country have been rounded up and brought back to pay for daring to suggest Aliyev could be corrupt. The OCCRP investigation further implicated several other countries, including Armenia (surprise, surprise), Monaco, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine, although the allegations were not immediately pursued.

PROTECTING AZERBAIJAN'S WOMEN

For the Council of Europe, committed as it to defending human rights, the way of life in Azerbaijan is embarrassing. Azerbaijan became the 43rd member state of the Council in 2001 but its record on human rights has not been exactly exemplary. Council experts are now cooperating

closely with Azerbaijani authorities who are working in the field of women's rights and the protection of women from violence, including respect for the Istanbul Convention on domestic violence. Ironically, Turkey is now seeking to abandon it, having bravely pushed it through to its widespread acceptance and adoption. The debates will lead to 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, due to be put into place in November. The scheme is to involve representatives of the State Committee on Family, Women and Children Affairs, the State Committee on the work with Religious Organisations (Azerbaijan, like Iran, is a follower of Shia Islam), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population, the Commissioner for Human Rights and the various civil society organisations involved in delivering such campaigns under the Azerbaijani National Action Plan to combat domestic violence for 2020-2023. It's a very big 'ask' for Azerbaijan: on the one hand, campaigning for women's rights and freedom from violence while also trying to deal with missile attacks, Armenian and Russian territorial ambitions, and the country's poor reputation abroad.



Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović

The plan is all very encouraging – until you look carefully at the President and his rôle in the continuing conflict. In a letter to Aliyev, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović is outspoken in her concerns, urging him not to "perpetuate and multiply the already deeply-running grievances between the communities

affected by the conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.” In this context, the Commissioner expresses concern at the recent inauguration of the ‘Trophy Park’ in Bakü, which reportedly displays Armenian military equipment taken as trophies during the war and shows dehumanising scenes, including wax mannequins depicting dead and dying Armenian soldiers. “I consider such images highly disturbing and humiliating,” said the Commissioner. “This kind of display can only further intensify and strengthen long-standing hostile sentiments and hate speech, and multiply and promote manifestations of intolerance.” I remember something similar in Afghanistan, where supporters of the Mujahideen (not the Taliban, you’ll note; they are very different) were selling off Russian military supplies (bits of uniform and badges, not weapons) to raise money for their cause. Whether these came from intercepted supply lines or were taken from the bodies of dead Russians I do not know, and I’m not sure I want to.

In late July, another flare-up in Nagorno-Karabakh led to the deaths of three Armenian soldiers. It was followed by an acceptance of yet another Russian ceasefire proposal “to calm tensions”. The Armenians said their forces had come under attack by Azeri forces, an incident in which four other Armenian servicemen were injured. Two Azeri soldiers were also injured by shelling, according to Azerbaijan’s defence ministry. In a statement, it accused Armenian forces of what it called “provocations” in the Kalbajar district and said its army would ‘continue to retaliate’.



Azerbaijani combatants of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

It later said it had accepted a Russian proposal to enforce a ceasefire in the area, but also accused Armenia of continuing to shell Azeri positions. Armenia’s defence ministry said it, too, had accepted the ceasefire. The incident was, according to a report on Al Jazeera, “one of the deadliest since a six-week war between ethnic Armenian forces and Bakü over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and surrounding areas ended last year.” As The Halo Trust reports on its website, “However, its people have been haunted by the presence of landmines for more than two decades as a result of the 1988-94 Nagorno Karabakh War. In fact, there have been more landmine accidents per capita in Karabakh than anywhere else in the world. A quarter of the victims were children.

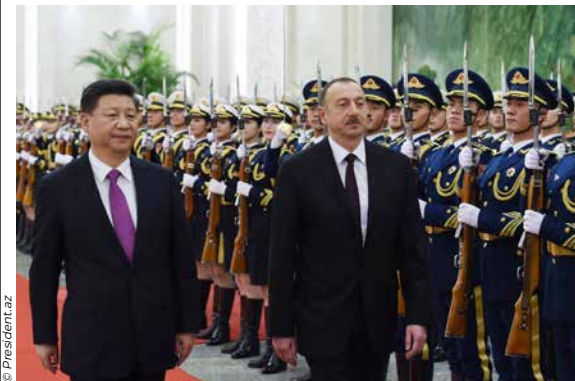
HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

The whole idea of Russia playing the role of “peacekeeper” between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh region is comical (or would be, were it not tragic). When in recent memory has the presence of Russian troops led to peace? Russia relies on coercive action and manipulation of the participants in any conflict into which they insert themselves. This has been no different in the late 2020 conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The deployment of peacekeepers to a conflict zone by any other country besides Russia would generally be seen as a step in the right direction. But when Russian troops are involved, beware. This could always be a mere Trojan Horse. Russian troops arriving for peacekeeping in the South Caucasus region is a way for Putin to reassert control over his instrument of regional manipulation – the frozen conflict between two post-Soviet states in Nagorno-Karabakh. Putin wants to be seen on both sides of the conflict as the guarantor of peace. He does this by freezing conflicts in place with no solution in sight, and not by “peacekeeping”.

For Russia, the peace agreement here was not about a cessation of hostilities, merely a means to reinsert itself into a dispute that will persist into the future, whether frozen or hot, and regardless of which ethnic group or state occupies the disputed territories. Turkey’s

arrival on the scene in Azerbaijan simply gives Putin one more reason to intervene. Russia took advantage of the conflict to regain influence for itself in Azerbaijan’s internal politics. They now have their own troops installed in the region which can be used for future leverage against any move by Azerbaijan of which the Kremlin doesn’t approve. The troops could even be used as leverage in the case of open hostilities between Turkey and Russia.

Lastly, we must also remember that Putin has his secret weapon -- The Wagner Group, a ‘private military company’ (PMC) We may yet see Russian PMCs like Wagner arrive in the region as a separate – and deniable – way for Russia to reassert its malign influence over the conflict. Claims of sightings of Wagner mercenaries in the region have already appeared openly in the press. As in Africa and Syria, PMC’s often take security roles and may well move into the region to give Putin a way to manipulate things behind the scenes.



Ilham Aliyev with President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping

Russia is also one of Azerbaijan’s main suppliers of arms. “As of today, military and technical cooperation with Russia is measured at \$4-billion (€3.41-billion) and it tends to grow further,” President Ilham Aliyev said after meeting with Putin in Baku in 2013

It’s easy to get the impression that the only things to have changed since Urartu’s struggles against Cimmerians, Scythians and the seemingly wolf-like Assyrians is the size and type of the weapons used. Today we see automatic weapons, grenades and missiles being employed in the destruction of human beings, rather than Sennacherib’s “cohorts gleaming in purple and gold” with their bronze-tipped spears and swords. The end result is much the same

for the victims. Nagorno-Karabakh gets its earliest historical mention in inscriptions dedicated to Sardur II, King of Urartu from 763 BCE to 734 BCE. The document was uncovered in the Armenian village of Tsovk. While I was filming in Armenia, my interpreter and guide was very keen to point out Mount Ararat, a popular place on the tourist trail, especially for Bible-minded Americans, as the place where Noah's ark finally landed, and it's very hard to miss. Local traditions hold that the area around Nagorno-Karabakh was the first to be settled by the descendants of Noah. The name Ararat is a Hebrew version of the name Urartu and the two volcanic mountains, Ararat and Little Ararat, are strictly speaking in Turkey, although they're on the border. Mount Ararat is the symbol of Armenia and is clearly visible, even dominant on the horizon, when viewed from the Armenian capital, Yerevan.

Some of those who have climbed Ararat claim to have seen the remains of a ship of some sort up there, most others do not, and given the wood-and-reed shipbuilding techniques of the time, it seems extremely unlikely that much of such a vessel would remain extant. Irving Finkel, Assistant Keeper at the Department of the Middle East in the British Museum, in his book "The Ark Before Noah", relates a Babylonian version of the story that predates the Biblical account. The Ark was, he explains, built using "quantities of palm-fibre rope, wooden ribs and bathfuls of hot bitumen to waterproof the finished vessel". It doesn't sound like the sort of construction likely to survive for several millennia. After all, it only had to stay afloat for six days. What's more, in Finkel's version, taken from a cuneiform tablet handed in to him at the British Museum, the Ark was round, like a giant coracle, but huge, extending to an impressive 3,600 metres. I attended a lecture by Finkel, who explained his unravelling of this extraordinary document. It was fascinating. The Biblical version of the Noah story is just one of several ancient tales about a vast flood and a virtuous man who saved animals, along with his family, in what amounted to a large, round lifeboat. The version of the flood story that appears in Gilgamesh not only predates the Biblical version but also predates Homer, being at least 4,000 years old.



Baku

Ancient Urartu suffered incursions because it was in the way of migratory routes for Cimmerian nomads heading northwards and for Scythians going in the opposite direction. We know the Urartu town of Teishebaini was abandoned in around 590 BCE, after its granaries were set on fire and the whole place burned down. By 585 BCE Urartu was being controlled by the Orontid dynasty, probably ethnic Armenians, allied with the Medes, who came from Iran. As always, the local people suffered because of the ambitions of others. Will the presence of yet more soldiers, even if they're designated "peacekeepers", make things better? History suggests probably not, especially as they seem to include the so-called Wagner Group, a shadowy mercenary group waging unattributable wars on the Kremlin's behalf. The group was reportedly founded by Dmitriy Utkin and it allows Putin to insert himself into bloody conflicts without apparently getting his hands dirty. They were active in the war against Ukraine in Donbass and have been reported to have been present in Donetsk and Luhansk.



The Wagner Group private military company (PMC)

The Wagner Group is now owned, it's claimed, by Sergei Prigozhin. Incidentally, the name 'Wagner' had supposedly been Utkin's call-sign, chosen because of his admiration for the Third Reich, which seems unlikely, given how bitterly Soviet Russia suffered at the hands of the Nazis before defeating them. After all, one can enjoy listening to *Der fliegende Holländer* without feeling obliged to raise one's right arm in salute to a dead racist megalomaniac.

A friend of mine, the former British MEP Saj Karim, now a consultant with Haider Global, has been in Bakü, seeing for himself what's been going on there. He served on the European Parliament's South Caucasus Delegation for 5 years, and knows something about the long conflict. He feels the blame lies away from both Bakü and Yerevan. "I have for a long time taken the view that both Azerbaijan and Armenia are victims of Foreign policy choices made elsewhere, most notably in Moscow by President Putin. Of course no one in the region can say that but it's a fact," he told me. "With the changed ground realities a huge development agenda is now required. Mine clearance, resettlement of IDP's (internally displaced persons), reconstruction, ecological challenges to name but a few. The International community has a real rôle to play. This is a time to win the peace and heal through progress for all - genuinely excluding no one in the prosperity just waiting to be seized." I hope he gets what he has wished for. Of course, the Kremlin sells arms to both Armenia and Azerbaijan. One might well imagine that Putin doesn't want this conflict to end, along with his malign influence in the region. Where there's a war there's a way, seems to be his motto. Historians may still be writing about a conflict continuing over control of Nagorno-Karabakh in another 4,000 years from now.

Jim Gibbons

NEWS IN BRIEF

JOIN THE AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON EU CYBERSECURITY MARKET



Qualified EU cybersecurity market experts are hereby invited to respond to a call for expression of interest for an Ad Hoc Working Group on the EU Cybersecurity Market.

In an effort to gain broader representation in the forthcoming ad hoc working group on EU cybersecurity market, the EU Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) is relaunching the call for expression of interest for an ad hoc working group on the EU cybersecurity market.

All prospective applicants must observe the new deadline for applications of 10 September 2021, at 12.00, EET (Athens time zone).

The ENISA Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) on the EU cybersecurity market seeks to support ENISA in analysing market trends and segments, with a focus on cybersecurity solutions to meet the dynamic market needs of stakeholders.

While underpinning the EU cybersecurity market, the global cybersecurity market may also be considered, for example when addressing the EU dependency on or requirements for market actors from outside the Digital Single Market.

The focus on the EU cybersecurity market aims to “improve conditions for the functioning of the internal market” and “foster a robust European cybersecurity industry and market”, as foreseen in Activity 7 of the ENISA Single Programming Document 2021-2023, in line with article 8.7 of the Cybersecurity Act to proactively assess market trends within Europe.

Timeline and activities planned

The estimated lifespan of this ad hoc working group is for three years from launch.

The terms of reference are available at: Ad-Hoc Working

Group on EU Cybersecurity Market

EU cybersecurity market experts interested in applying are invited to submit their application to ENISA by using the dedicated application form. It is important to note that: any past application does not qualify for this call and previous applicants must re-submit their applications.

SPANISH AUTHORITIES DEPLOY EMSA'S REMOTELY PILOTED AIRCRAFT TO ENHANCE GENERAL MARITIME SURVEILLANCE OFF THE COAST OF GALICIA



Over the coming months, the Spanish ministry of transport's maritime safety and rescue body SASEMAR will be using EMSA's remotely piloted aircraft services from its MRCC base at Finisterre in the northwest of Spain to enhance general maritime surveillance for a range of different operational tasks including maritime traffic control and pollution prevention.

The considerable advantages of using unmanned aircraft for maritime surveillance have been recognised for several years now by Sasemar for which air operations are a fundamental part of the essential day-to-day services. While the flights will provide additional, complementary means to Sasemar in performing its roles of preventing and curbing pollution, and controlling maritime traffic, they will also serve the national fisheries authorities (Spanish Secretary-General for Fisheries) working to protect sea-fisheries resources and to ensure their sustainable development.

EMSA's Executive Director, Maja Markovčić Kostelac underlined the significance of the operation: “Back in May 2017, EMSA started out testing RPAS capabilities with Sasemar as one of our key pioneering partners. It is only fitting that Sasemar is able to capitalise on these services now – particularly for the vital coast guard role they play. Four years down the line, we're pleased to see our RPAS services being used widely across Europe for maritime surveillance operations in everything from emissions monitoring and environmental protection to traffic control and search and rescue”.

The aircraft being used is a CAMCOPTER® S100 model and it is under contract to EMSA from Schiebel Aircraft GmbH. It has several features making it suitable for this

service, including the ability to take off and land from an area smaller than 5m x 5m, flight endurance of over six hours and a range of greater than 100km. Information is gathered on board from optical and infrared cameras as well as from an AIS receiver

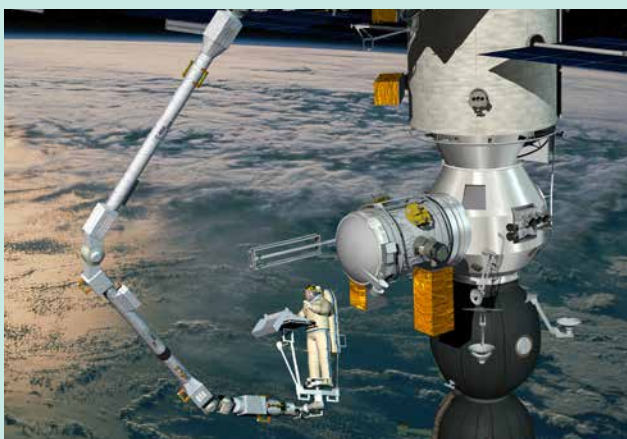
ABOUT RPAS

Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) services are offered free to all EU member states by EMSA. They have been developed to assist in maritime surveillance operations and ship emission monitoring, and can operate in all seas surrounding the European Union. RPAS services can provide support to traditional coast guard functions, including search and rescue and pollution prevention and response. The services are offered to member states individually and as part of EMSA's regional RPAS strategy, which allows multiple coast guard functions in several EU states to be supported by one or more RPAS services. Further expansion of RPAS regionally is planned in 2021 and 2022.

ABOUT EMSA

The European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) is a decentralised agency of the EU, based in Lisbon, Portugal. EMSA serves the EU's maritime interests for a safe, secure, green and competitive maritime sector, delivering value for member states through support for pollution prevention and response, maritime surveillance, safety and security, digitalisation and the provision of integrated maritime services, and technical assistance.

EUROPEAN ROBOTIC ARM READY FOR SPACE



© ESA - D. Ducros

Artist's impression of the European Robotic Arm (ERA), which will be attached to Russia's Nauka (meaning 'Science') Multipurpose Laboratory Module (MLM). As well as moving cargoes, ERA will also transport cosmonauts like a cherry picker crane from one external location to another, saving time and effort during spacewalk activities

The European Robotic Arm (ERA) will be launched to the International Space Station together with the Russian Multipurpose Laboratory Module, called 'Nauka'. ERA is the first robot able to 'walk' around the Russian segment of the Space Station. It has the ability to anchor itself to the Station and move back and forward by itself, hand-over-

hand between fixed base-points. This 11-metre intelligent space robot will serve as main manipulator on the Russian part of the Space Station, assisting the astronauts during spacewalks. The robot arm can help install, deploy and replace elements in outer space

ERA is 100% made-in-Europe. A consortium of European companies led by Airbus Defence and Space Netherlands designed and assembled it for ESA. The robotic arm is largely funded by the Dutch government.

18 ARRESTED FOR SMUGGLING MORE THAN 490 MIGRANTS ACROSS THE BALKAN ROUTE

Up to 100 people accommodated in a 60 m2 (un)safe house

Officers from the Romanian Police (Poliția Română) and Border Police (Poliția de Frontieră Română), supported by Europol, dismantled an organised crime group involved in migrant smuggling across the so-called Balkan route.

The action day on 29 July 2021 led to:

- 22 house searches
- 18 suspects arrested
- Seizure of munitions, five vehicles car, mobile phones and €22 000 in cash

The criminal network, active since October 2020, consisted of Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian and Romanian citizens. The criminal group had cells in the countries across the Balkan route from where regional facilitators managed the recruitment, accommodation and transport of migrants from Jordan, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Several criminal cells based in Romania facilitated the border crossing from Bulgaria and Serbia of groups of migrants and arranged their temporary accommodation in the area of Bucharest and in western Romania. The migrants were then smuggled to Hungary on their way to Germany as a final destination. In total, 26 illegal transports of migrants were intercepted and 490 migrants were detected in an attempt to illegally cross the Romanian border. Very well organised, the criminal group was involved in other criminal activities as well, such as drug trafficking, document fraud and property crime.



© Europol

Safe house used to hide migrants

Up to € 10 000 per migrant

Migrants were paying between € 4 000 and € 10 000 depending on the trafficking segment. For example, the price for facilitating the crossing from Romania to Germany was between € 4 000 and € 5 000. The migrants, some of which were families with young children, were accommodated in extremely poor conditions, often with no access to toilets or running water. For the safe houses, the suspects rented accommodations or used the residences of group members, mainly situated in the areas of Călărași County, Ialomița County and Timișoara. In one of the safe houses, measuring about 60 m², the suspects hid 100 people at the same time. The migrants were then transferred in risky conditions in overcrowded lorries between merchandise and in vans hidden in concealments without proper ventilation.

Europol facilitated the exchange of information and provided analytical support. On the action day, Europol deployed one analyst to Romania to cross-check operational information against Europol's databases in real time to provide leads to investigators in the field.



© Europol

Transport of illegal migrants

Red light for migrant smugglers speeding at up to 250 km/h

While speeding dangerously across Bulgaria, Greece and Hungary to avoid police detection, the smugglers caused injuries to multiple people as well as one death

An investigation by the Bulgarian General Directorate for Combating Organised Crime (Главна дирекция Борба с организираната престъпност), the Hellenic Police (Ελληνική Αστυνομία) and the Hungarian National Police (Magyar Rendőrség), supported by Europol and Eurojust, led to the dismantling of an organised crime group involved in migrant smuggling. The leaders of the gang were arrested during the action.

Results:

- Simultaneous raids in Bulgaria, Greece and Hungary
- 15 location searches
- 12 suspects arrested (6 in Bulgaria, 5 in Greece and 1 in Hungary)

- Seizures included 25 vehicles (including 15 high-end cars), electronic equipment (laptops, GPS devices, tablets), more than 40 mobile phones, more than 100 SIM cards, crypto-mining equipment and cash

The suspects were collecting between € 2 000 and € 2 500 per person for the journey, and were transporting up to 15 migrants at a time. Both migrants and smugglers were injured in several speeding incidents. While the smugglers were racing with police at dangerous speeds, migrants were also concealed in the trunks of the vehicles. In the course of the investigation, 43 smugglers were arrested before the action day, while 1 smuggler died in a car accident. In total, 442 migrants were smuggled, of which 13 were injured.

Northern Greece is an important hub for migrant smuggling due to the reinforced border protection along the Evros river. Following the crisis situation at Evros in February 2020, several mass migratory movement attempts were disrupted.

The operation was carried out under the umbrella of the Greek National Operational Plan signed by Europol and the Hellenic Police in June 2016. The aim of the plan is to disrupt organised criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling and to reinforce secondary security controls in migration hotspots.

Europol facilitated the exchange of information and provided analytical support. On the action day, Europol deployed two experts on the spot to enable the real-time exchange of information between investigators, Europol and Eurojust, and to cross-check operational information against Europol's databases, providing leads to investigators in the field

NORTH MACEDONIA: CRAMPED PRISON CONDITIONS, DETAINEE ILL TREATMENT AND OPAQUE PRISON MANAGEMENT AMONG LONGSTANDING CONCERNS FOR ANTI-TORTURE COMMITTEE



Macedonian prison

Despite minor improvements including the renovation of one wing of the remand section of Skopje Prison and the closure of three problematic wings of Idrizovo Prison, most longstanding concerns with respect to living conditions in prisons persist, concludes the latest report

on North Macedonia published by the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT).

The CPT noted cramped, unhygienic and decrepit conditions of detention in the so called 'ambulanta' unit, the closed-regime wings of Idrizovo Prison and the unrenovated wings of Skopje Prison, based on an "ad hoc visit" to the country from 7-9 December 2020.

Published with the Government response (<https://rm.coe.int/1680a359cc>), the report criticises an "anachronistic" approach towards treatment of remand prisoners at Skopje Prison (being locked in their cells for 23 hours a day with nothing to do and being denied contacts with their children), no "purposeful" activities for sentenced prisoners at Idrizovo Prison and poor-quality healthcare offered to prisoners due to the reluctance of the Ministry of Health to take a more "strategic approach" in its delivery.

Furthermore, the CPT again heard allegations of physical ill-treatment of criminal suspects by police officers and inspectors consisting primarily of slaps, punches, kicks and blows with truncheons or other objects (including hand-held electroshock devices and walkie-talkies), allegedly inflicted for the purpose of apparently extracting a confession. The CPT calls on the authorities to vigorously explore all means to ensure that the message of zero tolerance of ill-treatment of detained persons reaches law enforcement officials at all levels.

In the CPT's view, the dialogue with the authorities of North Macedonia, which is based upon mutual trust and understanding, requires "concrete action" to implement many long-standing recommendations as set out in the report.

Source : European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)

NCI AGENCY AWARDS CONTRACT TO AIRBUS FOR MAJOR IT UPGRADE

The NATO Communications and Information (NCI) Agency awarded a contract valued at 9 million EUR to upgrade technology equipment at 14 NATO and European sites in the Balkans.

Airbus Defence and Space, a Norwegian company, was awarded the contract following an international competitive bidding process. The NCI Agency will manage the replacement of mission-critical IT equipment at 14 national and NATO locations. Each site plays a key role in supporting the command and control of the Kosovo Force (KFOR), the NATO-led international peacekeeping force, as well as the European Union Force (EUFOR) mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"Achieving the contract award milestone is an important step for the Alliance. This IT modernization means the Balkans area of operations will be more closely connected to the rest of NATO, creating a strengthened communications infrastructure," said Alexandru-Mihai Andrei, Senior Project Manager, NCI Agency.

The Balkans area of operations includes Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, North Macedonia, and Albania.



Site improvements at all locations will include upgrades to IT equipment at subordinate ground stations to communicate with mission headquarters, as well as replacing IT infrastructure and client device equipment.

Experts from the Agency will also work with Airbus to install the latest IT infrastructure and services needed to host up-to-date applications capable of enterprise level information sharing and communications. And they will re-engineer the existing architecture to align with current NATO standards, while implementing server virtualization and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) improvements.

Other locations being refreshed with state-of-the-art IT equipment include the European Union Command Element, which is located at NATO Joint Force Command (JFC) in Naples, Italy and also Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) EU Support Group based in Mons, Belgium.

The NCI Agency plans to complete the project by the end of 2022.



Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation General of the Army Sergey Shoigu

MAIN TRANSFORMATIONS IN RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES HAVE BEEN COMPLETED

The Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation General of the Army Sergey Shoigu has inspected the Krasnoyarsk Machine-Building Plant, also known as 'Krasmach', where he examined the production workshops and heard the reports of the administration of the factory.

“It is important not to reproduce old soviet items, but to create a chain of production of modern models that would surpass the characteristics of their foreign analogues”, said the General of the Army Sergey Shoigu at the meeting with the employees of the factory.

In addition, the Minister of Defence announced: 'Currently, all the main transformations in the Army and Navy have been mostly completed. There has been established a new branch: the Aerospace Forces, there have been formed self-sufficient grouping of troops on the strategic areas, the Joint Strategic Command of the Northern Fleet, Special Operations Forces, Military Police, unmanned aviation units'.

In his assessment, nowadays the Russian Army is modern, mobile, compact and capable. The proportion of new armament, military and special materiel in the troops has reached 70.1%, in strategic nuclear forces: 86%.

Source : mil.ru/en/news

SBU BLOCKS FSB AGENT NETWORK INCLUDING LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

The SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) exposed and suppressed activity of an agent network of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) in Kherson region.

The network was organised by a former officer of the SBU regional office. He resigned in 2014 and was recruited by FSB officers during his trip to Russia.



By order of the Russian special service, the offender created an extensive intelligence network involving a wide range of officials :

- an SBU officer in Kherson region;
- an employee of the local prosecutor's office;
- a police officer;
- an official of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine;
- a former official of the regional state administration.

The SBU established a Moscow handler of the network, career FSB officer Vitaliy Korol, dealing with Ukrainian issues. In 2015-2016, he stayed in the separatist-held area of Donetsk region as a member of the FSB task force, aka Manhust.



Seized FSB ID card holder

SBU investigators documented numerous facts of intelligence gathering and passing through FSB closed electronic communication channels.

The Russian special service was interested in confidential information on activities and personnel of the SBU regional office, local law enforcement agencies, military units and government authorities.

Every month the FSB paid the offender for his work.

During searches, the detainees were seized of computer equipment and means of communication, Russian symbols, foreign currency (US dollars, euros and Russian rubles).

The FSB resident and his agent, SBU officer, were detained in accordance with Art. 208 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine. They received suspicion notices for high treason. A type of detention is to be chosen.

Urgent investigative actions against other members of the network are underway. The operation was conducted under the supervision of the Prosecutor General’s Office of Ukraine.



© Mifru

Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation General of the Army Sergey Shoigu

TEAMVIEWER AND SIEMENS HEALTHINEERS FORM PARTNERSHIP TO ENABLE NEW REMOTE SCANNING SERVICE WESCAN FOR DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING

- Partnership enables new digital business model for Siemens Healthineers
- Important step in combating shortage of skilled radiology technologists

Siemens Healthineers has recently started offering its customers WeScan. WeScan is a new service that helps healthcare providers to perform magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) examinations if they lack qualified radiology staff. With the WeScan service, customers may seek access to a pool of skilled remote imaging technologists who help operate the MRI scanner using syngo Virtual Cockpit2, the remote scanning software of Siemens Healthineers.

As Siemens Healthineers assists its customers via WeScan from outside their own IT-network, real-time data transmission across the internet and high security standards are central requirements. Therefore, Siemens Healthineers has formed a new partnership with TeamViewer. TeamViewer's remote connectivity technology is now incorporated as part of the WeScan service offering because of its high security standards, powerful data transfer performance, and ease of operation.

A SMART YACHTING AND MARINA RENDEZ VOUS

To encourage development of virtuous marinas

that will welcome tomorrow's yachts

The first *Monaco Smart Yachting & Marina* rendezvous will be held at the Yacht Club de Monaco on Monday 20th September 2021 before the Monaco Yacht Show and Monte-Carlo Gala for Planetary Health which takes place on 23rd September.

The day of talks and meetings is being organised by Monaco Marina Management, as part of development of sustainable marina projects that the Monegasque company assists, with the support of Blumorpho, a deep tech with positive impact digital innovation accelerator.

In line with actions already taken by the Principality to position itself as a yachting capital, the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation and the Monaco Government's digital transformation programme, Extended Monaco, were also keen to support this unprecedented meeting alongside Credit Suisse, which is establishing itself as the bank for yachting and Bombardier.

The aim is to present new innovative solutions that help protect the environment, the ultimate goal being to design more virtuous marinas. New technologies, including digital make it easier than ever before to achieve the energy transition through better more efficient use of resources, adoption of renewable energy sources, and protection of the seas and oceans employing customised sustainable business models.

"Smart yachting is an avenue for the future of Monaco. It is a component full of potential for the transformation of our economy and attractiveness", says Frédéric Genta, the interministerial delegate in charge of Monaco's digital transition.

Visit: <https://smartyachtingmarina.com/program/>

U.S.T.A.I.N.A.B.I.L.I.T.Y
SMART
YACHTING & MARINA

**SMART YACHTING & MARINA
RENDEZVOUS**

 **MONACO**

20TH SEPTEMBER 2021



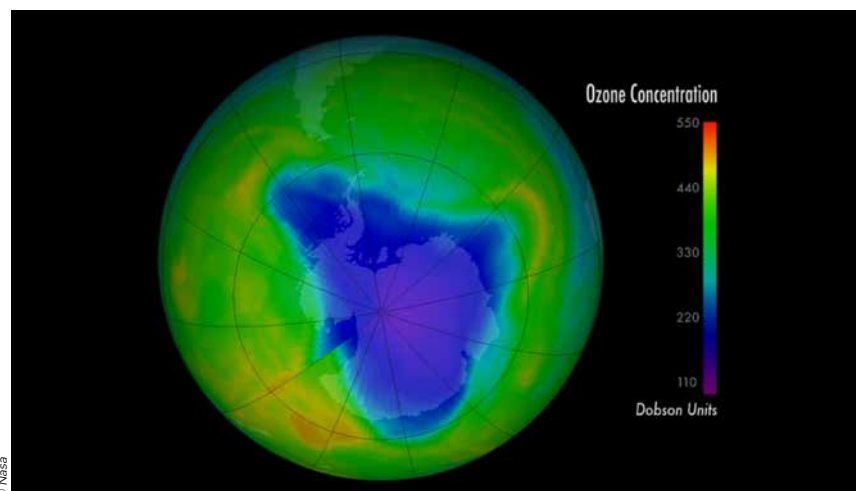
A1929 Frigidaire ad in the Saturday Evening Post

CHILLING FACTS

The secretive trade in illegal refrigerants

If the smugglers of one illicit substance find themselves getting cold feet, it probably means that one of their containers is leaking. You see, what they are quietly and unobtrusively trying to get into a target country are hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs. HFCs are organic compounds used as refrigerants and as the 'blowing' agent in polymer foams. You'll also find them being used in certain types of fire extinguisher, in cleaning products and as the propellant in some aerosol sprays. Their use in extinguishing fires has become widespread. Effectively, they remove heat, thus quenching the fire, and some can also disrupt free radicals, which can help extinguish a fire by interfering with key chemical reactions. You may recall that HFCs were welcomed onto the scene in the wake of the Montreal Protocol, which came into force in January 1989, banning the use of the even more damaging chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) that had been in use, and viewed as a miracle product, since the 1930s. CFCs, which are (for the technically-minded) halogenoalkanes, were developed following a number of fatal accidents involving the refrigerators of the time

The first patent went to Frigidaire in 1928 and by 1935, Frigidaire and its competitors had sold some 8,000,000 new refrigerators in the United States using a CFC known as Freon-12, developed by Du Pont and General Motors under the name of their joint venture Kinetic Chemical Company. CFCs had built a deserved reputation for being non-toxic. After the Second World War, CFCs made it possible to install air conditioning in homes, cars and offices. Sounds too good to be true? It was, and the danger was only discovered years later through space research.



Scientists saw a significant decrease in ozone over Antarctica in 1985, shown above

The problem is that research in the 1970s showed that inorganic chlorine radicals in the stratosphere could be the result of the photolytic decomposition of CFCs through ultraviolet radiation.

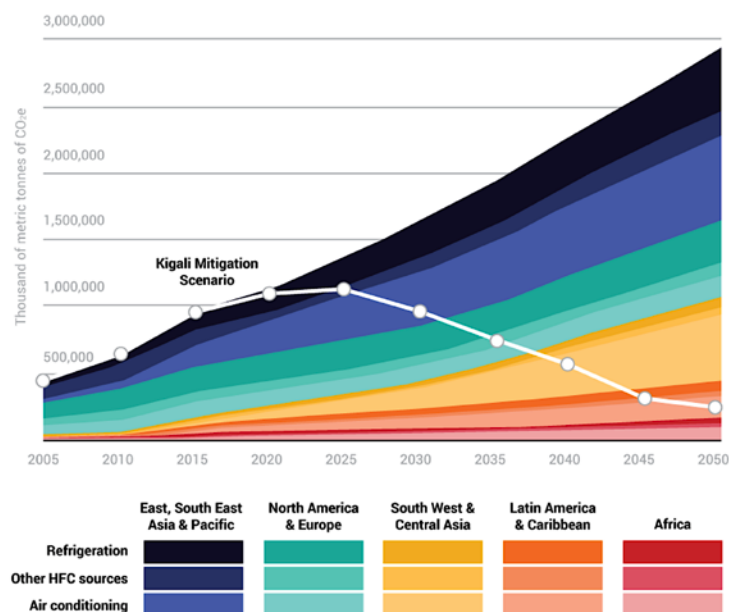
Furthermore, the inorganic chlorine released could destroy the ozone layer, which absorbs dangerous ultraviolet radiation from space, thus keeping us, the world's wildlife and plants alive. This was further confirmed by NASA and in 1985, a hole in the ozone layer was discovered over the Antarctic. Two years later, a number of countries signed up to the Montreal Protocol to reduce the production and use of substances harmful to the ozone layer, even though some scientists still argue that ozone holes can occur naturally. We certainly know they can be caused by CFCs. Better safe than sorry, anyway: CFC-11 can last in the atmosphere for 55 years, while CFC-12, or CCl₂F₂, has a recognised lifetime of 140 years. The replacement chemical chosen was hydrofluorocarbon (HFC). It looked very promising and in its most useful forms, CH₂FCF₃, or HFC 134a, has been shown to be non-flammable and to have low toxicity. It is a big step forward from CFCs. As a result of the Montreal Protocol and the later Copenhagen Amendment, production of CFCs effectively ended in 1996.

So, everything in the garden is lovely now? Well, no: while HFCs have a zero potential to cause ozone depletion, are chemically stable, non-flammable and nonreactive, as well as decomposing in just 14 years, they can break down in the troposphere, the lowest level of our atmosphere and the place where our weather takes place, and its carbon-fluorine bonds can trap infrared radiation from the sun, redirecting it towards the surface. As a result, its potential to cause global warming (GWP) is reckoned to be 3,770 times as great as that of carbon dioxide. In other words, although our ozone layer won't be destroyed by HFCs as it would have been by CFCs, it can roast us alive. That's why a drastic reduction in the production and use of HFCs was called for in what's called the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, agreed in 2016.

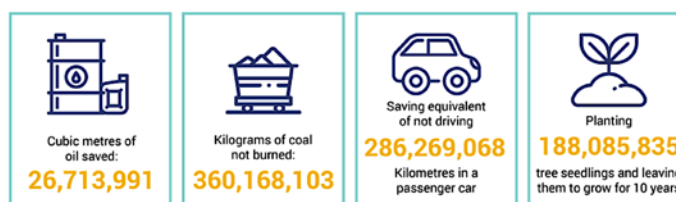
The Kigali Amendment, an agreement to phase down HFCs globally, to the Montreal Protocol was adopted by 197 parties meeting in the Rwandan capital on 15 October 2016. The

Worldwide impact of the Kigali Amendment

Evolution of HFC emissions from main sources and Kigali Amendment mitigation scenario*



Greenhouse gas mitigation impact**



sheccoBase

Amendment sees developed countries take the lead on phasing down HFCs, starting with a 10% reduction in 2019 and delivering an 85% cut in 2036 (compared to a 2011–2013 baseline).

Entering into force in 2019, it demands a reduction of 80 to 85% by 2047, with the aim of avoiding additional global warming of up to 0.4o Celsius by the end of this century. Keeping pace with the science is a challenge, but the European Commission has set about trying to restrict access to HFCs. Under this plan, manufacturers and users of these products are supposedly incentivised to switch to more climate-friendly alternatives. “Since the introduction of the HFC quota system,” says the Commission’s website, “the European Commission has been closely monitoring its effects on the market and innovation. In the initial phase that ran until 2018, prices for the gases that do the most damage to the climate increased sharply, acting as a powerful motivation to use more climate-friendly substitutes.” Indeed,

the new restrictions also acted as a powerful motivation for dishonest people to go on supplying the damaging gases, known as ‘F-gases’, by smuggling them into Europe.

STEMMING THE FLOW

The Commission opted for a quota system on fluorinated greenhouse gases with the aim of cutting the use of HFCs by 79% by 2030 (the so-called “F-Gas Regulation”). It may not be quite as ambitious as the Kigali amendment’s demand for a cut of up to 85% by 2047, but it’s a step in the right direction. Sadly, the smuggling of banned refrigerants into the EU is ridiculously easy. All the criminals have to do is buy HFCs where it’s still legal to do so and then ship them across borders in a clandestine way. HFCs, even when smuggled, are very often cheaper than permitted alternatives, and the profits from the trade can then be used to fund the purchase of weapons, counterfeit goods or for people smuggling.



And according to the independent organisation, the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) in 2018, smuggled HFCs added the equivalent of 16.3 million tonnes of CO₂ to Europe. This represented more than 16% of the 2018 quota – and is more than the total CO₂ emissions of Slovenia. What's more, how can the end user ever be sure that the HFC gas they buy is reliable or from a safe source? Analysis by Oxera Consulting LLP for the European Fluorocarbon Technical Committee (EFCTC) estimates that up to 31 million CO₂-equivalent tonnes (CO₂eqT) were illegally imported into the EU in 2019. This is around one third of the legal quota in 2019. Furthermore, Oxera uncovered a discrepancy of 19-million CO₂eqT in 2018 between the reported exports from China to the EU and the official EU figures. There has also been a spectacular growth in export volumes from China to neighbouring countries that cannot be justified by the actual economic growth on the ground. It coincided with the EU's clampdown on legal imports of HFCs. If it's accurate, it would mean that an additional 34-million tonnes CO₂ equivalent were being brought into the EU every year. That's comparable, the EFCTC argues, to every one of the 1.2-million citizens of Brussels taking one trans-Atlantic flight every day for a year.

So, this is a serious, and very large problem for the planet and for its people. HFC-smuggling is not a minor offence. It encourages a range of sometimes deadly crimes and destroys Earth's climate. Unfortunately, it's also extremely difficult to intercept. In 2020, according to the EU's anti-fraud office, OLAF, Italian customs authorities stopped a shipment of 300 cylinders of illicit HFC gases from entering the EU. OLAF supported the police and customs

operation by providing the Italian authorities with additional information about the consignment. The importer of the consignment had no legal right to quotas and what is more the imported gases were in non-refillable cylinders, which are not allowed to be imported into the EU at all. The environmental impact of the cargo, had it reached the market, says OLAF, would have been roughly equivalent to the emissions produced by a car travelling for 35 million kilometres: around 6,800 tonnes of CO₂.



Polish customs stopping smugglers with R-404A in fake LPG car tank

“The cargo had travelled from China to the port of Livorno, Italy,” said OLAF's website. “It contained approximately 3.7 tonnes of hydrofluorocarbon gases (HFC) and hydrochlorofluorocarbon gases (HCFC), packaged in 300 non-refillable cylinders, which are illegal in any case. Italian customs authorities identified the consignment as suspicious and seized it after verifications and information provided by OLAF confirmed its illicit nature.” Similar seizures have also been made by authorities in the Netherlands and Romania. “One positive cooperation case leads to the next,” said Ville Itälä, OLAF's Director General. “We are happy that OLAF was able to support the Italian authorities in this successful operation, just as we did earlier in the year with our colleagues in the Netherlands and Romania. This is precisely the kind of cooperation that we are working hard to establish between OLAF and national authorities, not only in Europe but across the globe. Such cooperation is the key to defeating the smugglers and counterfeiters, and all the more important when it helps stop dangerous gases like HFCs causing irreparable damage to our environment, health and economy.”

There's a more recent victory over the smugglers for OLAF to brag about, too.



Working together with Spanish authorities earlier this year, they dismantled a crime gang trafficking in HFCs. Operation Verbena led to the seizure of 27 tonnes of illicit refrigerant gases, or F-gases, and to the arrests of five people. It was the biggest such operation yet at EU level, and apart from the seizures, investigators discovered a further 180 tonnes of illicit HFCs that had been smuggled earlier. It's now thought the gang involved may be responsible for emissions of more than 234,000 tonnes of CO₂-equivalent gases into the environment, the equivalent, say OLAF, of a car driving all the way around the world 9,000 times.

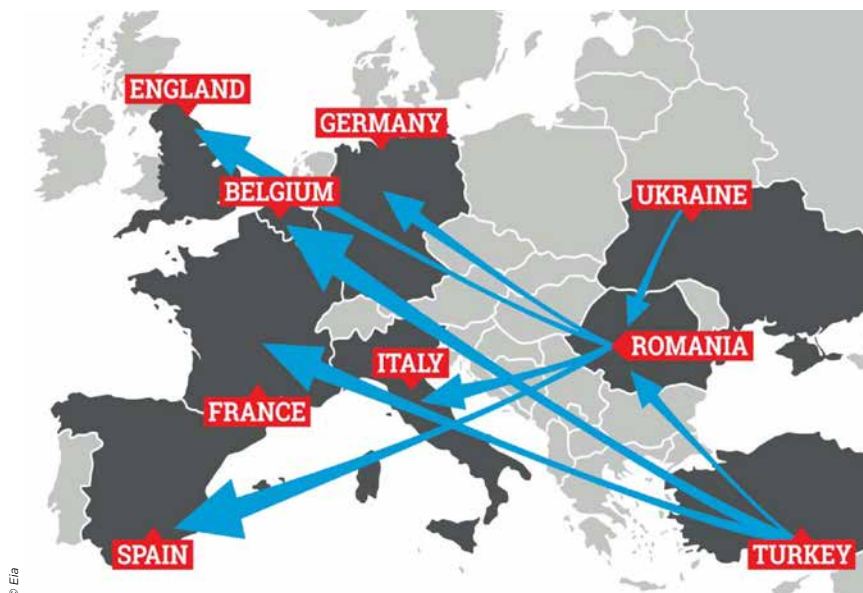
The Spanish Police, in a statement to the media on-line, said: “It is the largest European operation carried out to date against greenhouse gas fraud, having intercepted more than 27,000 kilograms of fluorinated gases and discovered more than 180,000 more. Five people have been arrested as alleged members of a complex business network that acted in violation of community regulations, causing the emission of tons of gases into the atmosphere without authorization.” Being an HFC smuggler, then, while relatively easy for some, is not without its risks.



A Polish HFC seizure

A CONFUSION OF GASES

OLAF, together with others, has been monitoring the routes the traffickers use to get their illicit shipments into the EU. They found two main routes into



© EIA

Potential trade routes for illegal HFCs entering the EU

Romania being used, one directly from Ukraine and one from Turkey, going via Bulgaria. One of the routes involved several Romanian companies buying large consignments that had arrived in Turkey from China. These were then divided up before onward transportation to Romania. Romanian customs officers, though, succeeded in intercepting 76-tonnes that were being taken from Turkey to Romania, where 5 companies had placed an order. One of them – but only one – had an EU quota for buying HFC gas legally. According to the EIA, 83% of those working in the refrigeration sector are aware of the illegal traffic in HFCs and a surprising 72% have been offered disposable gas cylinders, even though they are banned in Europe. Not only does the use of smuggled and illegal HFCs endanger the environment, it also undercuts legitimate enterprises and allows unfair competition for those companies that are abiding by the law.

The immediate aftereffect of the EU's "Phase Down" of HFCs, as it was called, saw little change in prices. However, according to a European Commission report, from mid-2017 onwards, prices for some of the potentially damaging gases started to rise dramatically, reaching a peak in early 2018 at 6 to 13 times their original prices. The more potent (and dangerous) the gas, the higher the price, it seems. Even so, the prices never quite reached the level that had been assessed as 'appropriate': €50 per tonne, CO₂ equivalent. There were also reports of legally-obtained HFCs being in short supply for those still using them, especially in Germany, Italy and Spain.



Ten tonnes of HFC-404A seized by Dutch customs in September 2020

The one that was hardest to locate was an HFC called R404a, which has a high Global Warming Potential (GWP) and is already discontinued by many suppliers, having been banned in new applications, although I found it for sale on a UK website offering a 70% discount. Only reclaimed R404a, extracted for re-use from existing equipment, is permitted under EU rules to service pre-existing equipment and only until 2030. It is used in industrial and commercial refrigeration and also in transport refrigeration. Two more HFCs are R134a, which is widely used in car air conditioning and servicing, and R410a, which may be being used in the EU to produce air conditioning equipment, although it cannot be retrofitted to equipment designed to operate with R22 refrigerant because it is used at a higher pressure.

Just in case you're wondering what, in this wonderful world of organic chemistry, R22 is, I shall tell you: it is known more correctly as chlorodifluoromethane or difluoromonochloromethane, (such long names must complicate the labelling of containers) and is a hydrochlorofluorocarbon, better known as HCFC-22, or R22, or CHClF₂. It has been commonly used as a propellant and refrigerant, but officially not anymore. This means that if your air conditioning system was built with R22 as the refrigerant, you can go on using it but it will be hard to replace worn out parts and completely impossible to refill it with R22. It sounds complicated, even confusing, but the aim is to lower the average GWP of the gases supplied to the refrigeration industry.

THE FUTURE IS CHOCOLATE

Of course, though, air conditioning and refrigeration are not the only uses to which refrigerant gases have been and are still being used. According to the American Chemical Society's fascinating and surprisingly accessible website, "a survey of 1,000 U.S. adults conducted for Honeywell earlier this year by ORC International (Opinion Research Corporation International) found that more than 100 people thought spray chocolate was a good idea.



A survey of automobile garages in Hessen, Germany estimated that 25 per cent of HFC-134a used was illegal

Over 80 people liked the notion of spray ketchup." What about global warming? It seems personal convenience usually comes first.



Air conditioning and refrigeration are not the only uses to which refrigerant gases have been and are still being put

“While the unusual proposals for aerosol condiments didn’t get a stellar reception, the opinion research experts at ORC did find that 93% of those surveyed use aerosol products in some capacity. Hair spray, deodorant, paint, cooking oil spray, flat tire filler, shaving cream, and bug bombs are just some of the many aerosol products out there.” So, there you are: would you give up spray chocolate to save the planet? Clearly, for many people the answer is ‘no’. In the rich smorgasbord of available industrial gases, what’s left? HFC134a is one. It’s a 1,1,1,2-Tetrafluoroethane, which was introduced in the early 1990s as a replacement for dichlorodifluoromethane (R-12), which seriously depletes the ozone layer. Or how about HFC152, known to its friends as 1,1-Difluoroethane, or DFE, an organofluorine compound with the chemical formula C₂H₄F₂. It is often used as a propellant in aerosol sprays because it is impossible for it to harm the ozone layer, a low GWP



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Berlaymont

and a short atmospheric lifetime of just 1.4 years. I shouldn’t be flippant about this because it matters. We have a choice, once the business of converting to less harmful means of refrigeration has been sorted out, between satisfying our desire for – let’s face it – unnecessary fripperies and the continued existence of a habitable planet. “Want to save the planet from destruction?” “No, let’s spray our tongues with chocolate instead!”

The European Commission is fairly happy with the way things have been developing. Between 2015 and 2018, the total amount of HFCs supplied to the EU market (including in such equipment as air conditioners) dropped by 37% in CO₂ equivalent, although the drop in volume was only 25%. This is thought to represent a shift in supply towards HFCs with lower GWP and other alternatives. There is a “but” in here, though. There has been a fragmentation of the supply chain, with traditional suppliers losing market share to new competitors. Five or so years ago, there were just over 100 companies supplying the gases, some of them large and dominant. Now there are some 2,500, many of them holding only small quota rights, with transfers within groups becoming common. The number of players involved means more paperwork and transaction costs have inevitably impacted on end prices. It has also made the job of policing the imports to ensure the exclusion of illegal gases more difficult.

The situation has reached the stage at which the 57 companies involved in using the gases in

question are seriously worried. Their representative body, the EFCTC, wrote to the European Commission in May 2021 requesting a tougher clamp-down on the black market in HFCs that has sprung up. “New data released in February 2021 show that this illegal market continues to bypass the EU F-gas regulation quota system which has been in place since 2015,” the letter reads. “Research by Oxera Consulting LLP, analysed by EFCTC, shows that the black market was thriving in 2019. Up to an estimated 31 million CO₂eqT (CO₂ equivalent tonnes) could have entered through EU borders illegally.” The assessment of the current situation is clearly not favourable, but the letter predicts worse to come. “2021 is marking a new phase-down step, as the F-gas regulation² sets a reduction of the quota from 63% to 45% compared to pre-2015 level. As a result, we anticipate an increase in illegal imports of HFCs this year.” The EU’s understaffed and mostly underfunded customs services look like having a tough time of it, despite the successes justifiably boasted about by OLAF. The letter wants the Commission to promote best practices by ensuring that customs authorities have access to the “necessary information and tools”. At present, customs officers can check if an importer has an import quota, but not how much has already been imported. The letter also wants to see tougher fines for offenders and better cooperation with OLAF, Europol and others in order to gather evidence and collect additional data on just how big the illegal market may be. If legitimate and highly-regarded operators in this sector want to see tougher laws being applied, it suggests that something is seriously wrong.

The plain fact is that HFCs (and even some CFCs) are essential in the pharmaceutical industry. For instance, inhalers for asthma sufferers still use inhalers powered by CFCs, although their use has been severely reduced since it was discovered how much damage they can do to the ozone layer. For many years, chlorofluorocarbon propellants were used in most aerosol products, but since 1996, their use has been limited to aerosols

needed in the treatment of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Gases are also used in the production of foam products.



© Nrf

Azodicarbonamide (ADA), for instance, used to be called 'the yoga mat' gas, because of its use in creating foam rubber of the type used in the production of yoga mats. The main product of azodicarbonamide decomposition is nitrogen, along with some CO₂, CO (carbon monoxide) and NH₃ (ammonia). It's also a chemical substance that has been approved for use as a whitening agent in cereal flour and as a dough conditioner in bread baking, although such a use has been banned in, for instance, Australia and the EU because it's

thought that it may be carcinogenic. For blowing bubbles in foam products, HFCs have provided an alternative, albeit not for much longer, probably.

I'M NOT FOREVER BLOWING BUBBLES

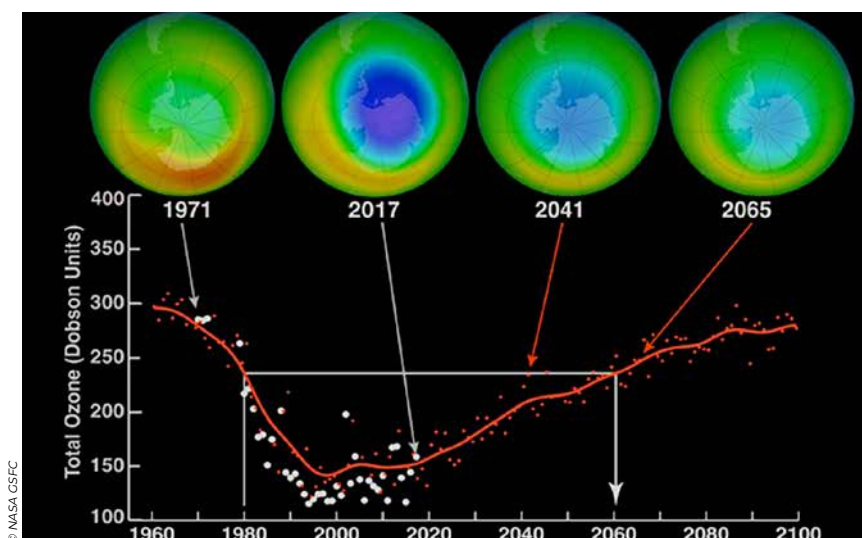
The idea behind what's called a 'blowing agent' is a chemical that can produce a cellular structure, such as foams and packing materials, which can reduce the weight of a product as well as giving it extra rigidity. CFCs, of course, were for many years the 'go-to' material until the Montreal Protocol in 1987. They were initially replaced with HCFCs - chlorodifluoromethane or difluoromonochloromethane - but as these also deplete the ozone layer, albeit not quite so badly, they are also being phased out. The differences between CFCs and HCFCs will mean more to chemists than to the rest of us. The key difference between CFC and HCFC is that the CFC contains only carbon, fluorine and chlorine atoms whereas HCFC contains hydrogen, carbon, fluorine and chlorine atoms. More importantly, CFC causes serious ozone depletion but HCFC, comparatively, has much less of an impact on the ozone layer. It's still bad enough to get it phased out, however.

CFCs are a class of compounds containing fully halogenated paraffin hydrocarbons. "Halogenated" simply means using a process

involving the addition of a halogen halide molecule or the substitution of a halogen atom in an organic (carbon containing) compound. "HCFCs are less stable than CFCs because HCFC molecules contain carbon-hydrogen bonds," explains the Global Monitoring Laboratory on its website. "Hydrogen, when attached to carbon in organic compounds such as these, is attacked by the hydroxyl radical in the lower part of the atmosphere known as the troposphere. (CFCs, because they contain no hydrogen, and, therefore, no carbon-hydrogen bonds, are not destroyed by the hydroxyl radical.) When HCFCs are oxidized in the troposphere, the chlorine released typically combines with other chemicals to form compounds that dissolve in water and ice and are removed from the atmosphere by precipitation. When HCFCs become destroyed in this way their chlorine does not reach the stratosphere and contribute to ozone destruction." HCFCs, then, are less destructive than CFCs, but they're by no means good for the planet. Most of the depletion of ozone is caused when chlorine or bromine, a halogen found in seawater, reach the stratosphere, and 84% of the chlorine entering the atmosphere comes from man-made sources, such as CFCs and HCFCs, with the remaining 16% coming from natural sources, such as the sea and from volcanoes. Roughly 50% of the bromine entering the atmosphere also comes from man-made sources, mostly halons.

BETTER, BUT NOT BEST

Some of the HCFC molecules released into the atmosphere eventually get to the stratosphere, where they are destroyed by photolysis (the breaking of a chemical bond by the impact of a photon). The chlorine thus released in the stratosphere can then take part in reactions that may damage the ozone layer. HCFCs, however, are significantly degraded by two atmospheric mechanisms, unlike CFCs, which are destroyed virtually completely in the stratosphere by photolysis, but because photolysis rates for HCFCs are generally slower than those for CFCs,



© NASA GSFC

Images above the graph show a view of the South Pole in October over time including measurements taken in the past in 1971 and 2017 and model projections of ozone over the area for 2041 and 2065. The graph shows the average minimum ozone over Antarctica in October

proportionately less chlorine is released when compared to CFCs. These properties explain why HCFCs are expected to deplete much less stratospheric ozone than equivalent amounts of CFCs. They are, however, still destructive; research into air trapped decades ago, far from habitation or industry, shows that concentrations of HCFCs have grown rapidly in recent years.

As explained above, about half of bromine entering the stratosphere is from man-made sources, mostly halons, which can be any of a group of organohalogenic compounds containing bromine, fluorine and one or two carbons. If you're wondering why protecting the ozone layer matters so much, Ozone is the Earth's shield against harmful levels of ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun. Without it, life would be almost impossible, with many of us suffering skin cancers, cataracts, and damaged immune systems. That's why getting tough with the smugglers is important. Europol show information on their website



Screenshot of disposable cylinders of R-134a for sale on Facebook in Greece

about one large-scale success in 2019, in which Spanish authorities uncovered an organised crime group involved in the illegal trade.

The specialised Environment and Urban Planning Unit of the Spanish Public Prosecutor's Office coordinated the Nature Protection Service of the Spanish Civil Guard (Guardia Civil) to carry out the investigation, supported by Europol and the French National Gendarmerie (Gendarmerie Nationale). The investigation revealed that a company in Valencia, Spain, was involved in smuggling ten



Clare Perry

tons of R22 (chlorodifluoromethane) refrigerant gas without a legal licence, bringing in a profit of between €500,000 and €1-million for the gang. The Europol website says that "Police launched their investigations in 2017 when the Spanish Ministry of Environment was informed of R22 gas allegedly being exported to Panama illegally. The operation disclosed that the company repackaged R22 refrigerant liquids that should have been sorted as hazardous waste. This led to around 10,000 kg of R22 gas being traded illegally as regenerated gas. The investigation revealed that these ten tons of illegally exported gas would have released (the equivalent of) 17,000 tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere." Next time you get sunburned, blame the criminals.

It is not a victimless crime; we are all victims. Yes, certainly, legitimate businesses are suffering but at the end of the day we all are, and it is seriously impeding Europe's attempts to be more climate-conscious. Criminal gangs have spotted an opening through which to make extra money, without regard to the people they hurt along the way. The potential climate impact of this illegal trade could amount to the greenhouse gas emissions of more than 6.5 million cars being driven for a year.

"The most shocking revelation," said the EIA on its website, "was the discovery that these hazardous gases were being smuggled around Europe below unwitting passengers and drivers in the luggage compartments of transcontinental coaches, among other methods." Crooks only care about money, of course, even those

who regularly attend churches of various kinds. Clare Perry, EIA's Climate Campaigns Leader, said on the organisation's website: "It's no exaggeration to say the future stability of human society sits on a knife-edge and time is running out to meaningfully tackle climate change. We can't afford a single misstep in our efforts to keep the global temperature rise below 1.5°C and the sheer scale of illegal HFC trade into the EU should be ringing alarm bells throughout the bloc – this is the biggest eco-crime no-one's heard of and that needs to change, fast." There's no sign of that happening, unfortunately. The EIA identified a growing trend of illegal HFC-404A in circulation, a super-potent refrigerant that is banned from topping up large refrigeration systems. In 2020, this refrigerant accounted for more than one-third of all HFC seizures. R404A is an HFC blend, intended as a replacement for R22 and R502, but it is regarded as having as high potential for global warming. As a result, attention being increasingly focused on lower GWP alternatives, such as R407F and R407A, along with newer options like R448A and R449A, which are non-toxic and non-flammable refrigerant blends that closely match the properties of R404A.

The world is warming, and if the EU is to try and save it on behalf of us all, it will need all the help it can get. Just remember that the same criminals may also be engaged in trafficking drugs, guns and people. They're not nice people. We would be breathing cleaner air without them.

Maurice Cooper



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YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Problems over the ritual killing of animals for meat in Europe

The phrase 'you are what you eat' was used as the title of a book by Doctor Gillian McKeith, published in 2005 to coincide with her programme of the same name on Britain's Channel 4 television. It ran from 2004 to 2007 and promoted healthy eating. The phrase is said to have originated in the 1826 book, published in France under the title "Physiologie du Gout, ou Méditations de Gastronomie Transcendante" (Physiology of Taste, or Meditations of Transcendent Gastronomy) in which the author, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, wrote: "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are." If so many people today just eat fast food delivered by young people on scooters or collected outside fast-food joints, what are we all?



© Nrf

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

In English, the word 'burgher' (with an 'h') used to mean a freeman or citizen of a borough, while the word 'burger', which is pronounced in the same way, means something that certainly wouldn't taste the same, being – as my Chambers dictionary puts it – "a fried or grilled cake of meat, etc." I imagine it's the "etc." that may cause some people to worry. But whatever kind the meat turns out to be, you may be concerned as to how it was killed. At least, you will be if you're a devout Jew or a Muslim. And ensuring your meat is truly kosher or halal is not so easy in some parts of Europe.

The Jewish system for the ritual slaughter needed to produce kosher meat is called shechita and it must be carried out by a shochet, a specially trained and respected man (not a woman) from the Jewish community. When shechita is performed correctly, a shochet severs the animal's carotid arteries and the jugular veins with a long knife that is surgically sharp and without imperfection – there

must be no nicks or scratches on the blade – theoretically causing the animal to lose consciousness instantly through massive blood loss.

Both faiths say the slaughter is humane because the exsanguination is so fast. The system employed by Muslims is remarkably similar and must come from the same historic roots. It's called dhabihah (pronounced "zabiha") and the slaughterer must say "Bismillah" – in the name of Allah – over each beast as it is killed. In Sura 6 of the Qur'an, it is written "Eat of that over which God's name has been mentioned, if you believe in his signs". There are also strict rules about the type of meat and the method of killing. "Forbidden to you," says Sura 5, "are carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, what has been hallowed to other than God, the beast killed by strangling, the beast killed with a violent blow, the beast fallen to death, the beast gored by some other animal's horns, and that eaten by a wild beast, except those whom you slaughter; and that which is slaughtered at the altar and that which is distributed by the throwing of arrows [for foretelling the future]; this is an act of sin." It's the ban on killing with "a violent blow" that is seen by some as barring the use of pre-stunning, the supposedly humane method of making the slaughter as painless as possible



© Wikipedia

Medieval stunning using a mallet

Laws governing ritual killing vary considerably. It's so complicated that the Library of Congress (LOC) has a long article about it on its 'Law.gov' page, which is very helpful, if slightly out of date now: "Several European countries do not allow derogations from the general requirement of prior stunning," it informs us. "These include Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and Slovenia. Switzerland and Lichtenstein require prior stunning except for poultry. Finland requires concurrent sedation (normally stunning as the knife is applied); legislation is pending that would require prior stunning. At the subnational level, two of the three regions of Belgium have recently enacted laws requiring prior stunning, which will become effective in 2019 unless overturned by litigation pending in Belgium's constitutional court." They were not overturned so became law in the Flemish and



A 15th-century depiction of shechita and bedikah

Walloon provinces until a decision by the Advocate General of the EU's Court of Justice forced that and similar laws elsewhere to be overturned, only for that judgement itself to be overturned by the Court sitting as the Grand Chamber. It's very confusing. In Denmark, use of prior stunning is required by law, although halal and kosher meat, obtained through traditional ritual means of slaughter, can be imported. In some specialised abattoirs in Denmark, halal meat is produced but the ritual slaughter is preceded by a form of sedation. The meat produced this way, though not strictly conforming to the dhabihah rules, is even exported to the Middle East, labelled as halal.



© Wikipedia/Jonas Amadeo Lucas

Lamb sacrifice on Id al Adha, Islamic festival of animal sacrifice

Under the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter and the EU's Council Regulation 1099/2009, animals must be stunned or sedated in some way prior to slaughter. Both, however, allow Member States to permit derogations from the pre-stunning requirement in the case of ritual slaughter when requested by religious communities. Some do, some do not. The laws also vary in other parts of the world and it seems likely that both the dhabihah and shechita methods were originally supposed to be the most humane way to kill an animal you want to eat. On 'The Conversation' website, Professor Suzanne Rutland of the Department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies at the University of Sidney writes that for thousands of years, the kosher method of slaughtering was believed to be the least painful. She points out that Judaism is concerned with

animal welfare: "Indeed, hunting is not permitted in Jewish law, the Bible rules that animals have to rest on the seventh day as well as humans, and the Talmud states that one should feed one's animals before one feeds oneself."

WHEN IS PAINLESS REALLY PAINLESS?

Does stunning work? Is it enough? In the United States, where science is viewed as purely empirical and free of moral prejudices, little research has been done into whether or not ritual killing is humane. It should be pointed out that some smuggled footage of dhabihah and shechita slaughter being carried out in abattoirs around the world suggest it is not in every case. Much depends on the individuals involved and how committed they are to following the rules. The UK's New Scientist magazine ran an article in 2009 looking into the practice and judged that it was not as humane as had been claimed. "Brain signals have shown that calves do appear to feel pain when slaughtered according to Jewish and Muslim religious law, strengthening the case for adapting the practices to make them more humane," wrote Craig Johnson, who led the study at Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand.



© MasseyUAC
Professor Craig Johnson

Johnson anaesthetised the animals being used in the experiment before performing the rituals. "The team first cut sedated calves' throats in a procedure matching that of Jewish and Muslim slaughter methods. They detected a pain signal lasting for up to 2 minutes after the incision. When their throats are cut, calves generally lose consciousness after 10 to 30 seconds, sometimes longer."

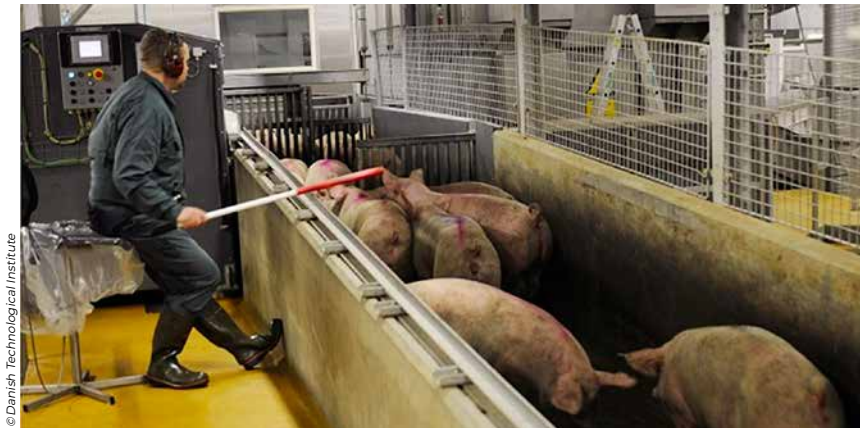


The researchers discovered that the pain felt by the animals originates from cutting the nerves in the throat, not from blood loss, which they believe demonstrates that severed nerves continue to send pain signals until the time of actual death. If the animals were stunned 5 seconds after the incision, however, the pain signal disappeared immediately. Johnson told New Scientist that the religious communities had assured him that animals do not experience any pain, so the results of his research may come as a surprise to them.

It comes as no real surprise to animal welfare campaigners, of course, such as the UK's Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). On their website they highlight a report from 2003 by the Farm Animal Welfare Council (now renamed the Farm Animal Welfare Committee), which concluded that: "The level of restraint of conscious animals required for slaughter without pre-stunning was far greater than for conventional slaughter." And also that: "A large cut made across the neck of a conscious animal would result in very significant pain and distress before the animal loses consciousness (around 5 to 7 seconds for sheep, 22 to 40 seconds for adult cattle)."

BITING OFF MORE THAN ONE CAN CHEW

A visit to a working abattoir is a salutary experience, if seldom a pleasant one. As a journalist I have had to visit several over the years, especially during the scare over bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), sometimes called 'mad cow disease'. The bellows of fear from the cattle awaiting their turn to be slaughtered are distressing to hear but less so than the screams of



© Danish Technological Institute

All medium-sized and large pig abattoirs in Denmark use CO2 for stunning before killing

pigs. They sound distressingly like small children. The slaughter and subsequent processing in abattoirs are overseen by a veterinary inspector who must be shown examples of each animal after slaughter to check that it is fit for human consumption. In one where I was filming, the severed and partially skinned head of a newly killed cow was brought to the inspector and in what was left of its neck a pulse was clearly beating. I'm sure an expert would say that it was just a reflex action, and that the beast was most certainly dead – it certainly didn't alarm the staff in the cutting room nor the veterinary inspector – but it was, none-the-less, a disturbing thing to see.

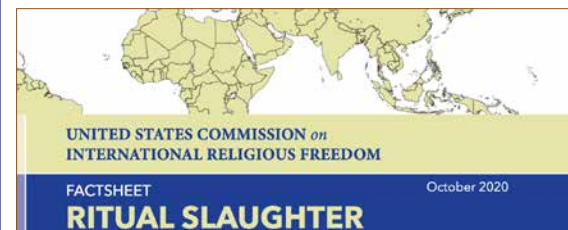
According to the Eurogroup for Animal Welfare, most Europeans are in favour of pre-stunning, although the idea was rejected by the Advocate General of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), obliging a number of EU member states to reverse their laws restricting ritual slaughter in order to permit it to continue, albeit not for long, as we shall see. In an October 2020 Press Release, the Eurogroup said: “In stark opposition with the recent Advocate General’s opinion, EU citizens want all animals to be stunned before slaughter.” In a survey into public opinion on ritual slaughter and pre-stunning in Europe, organised by the Eurogroup, 92% of EU citizens said they would like to allow Member States to adopt additional measures to ensure higher animal welfare standards during slaughter if they wished. The survey was unequivocal in its results. 89% of respondents believed it should be mandatory to render animals unconscious before they are slaughtered. In addition,

87% wanted the EU to bring in rules to make stunning compulsory before slaughter, including before ritual slaughter, while 80% would favour the EU prioritising funding to find alternative and more humane ways to slaughter that would be acceptable to religious authorities, if such a thing is ever possible.

Of course, the wider public don't always get everything right. Left to the people at large, for instance, would the death sentence be reintroduced for the most heinous crimes? A lot of people have indicated in surveys that they would like that. What other sorts of laws might be introduced, or what existing laws might be scrapped altogether? How many populist leaders would succeed in getting their followers to vote them into a presidency for life? There is an old saying in commerce: “the customer is always right”. A self-employed small businessman friend of mine always added to it: “the customer is always right – stupid, pig-headed, ignorant and ill-informed but right. Up to a point.” The point in question was the one at which it would impact on his profits. It could be argued, therefore, that these questions are best left to experts. But then the question arises: which experts? It's a conundrum, and one that most political leaders have failed to solve to everyone's satisfaction, which is why there are so many pressure groups trying to persuade them one way or another. Political centrists and the liberal-minded often seem to think that most people think like them. A Saturday evening spent talking to ordinary people in drinking establishments in the poorer areas of their less fashionable towns would soon disavow them of that belief.

MANY WAYS TO DIE

What those with strong religious beliefs would find acceptable varies greatly. As shown on the fact sheet on ritual slaughter provided by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which reads: “animal rights activists and others contend that shechita and dhabihah are inhumane methods of slaughter, and as a result have sought to limit the practice by requiring stunning the animal at certain points in the process or banning the practice outright.



Some countries have laws that require an animal be stunned before the cut is performed ('pre-cut stunning'), after the cut is performed ('post-cut stunning'), or at the same time as the cut ('concurrent sedation').” The USCIRF is not in favour of these restrictions: laws restricting methods of ritual slaughter could be considered as restrictions on religious freedom, they conclude. With the laws varying across the EU, it is difficult for devout Jews or Muslims to fully observe the ordinances of their respective faiths when it comes to eating. Even then, says the USCIRF, the two faiths differ in their responses to the legal restrictions. “While some Islamic authorities accept certain types of stunning in ritual slaughter, there is virtually no such allowance by Jewish authorities.”

The Council of Europe's European Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter, which dates from 1979, and the EU's Council Regulation 1099/2009 from thirty years later, both demand stunning before slaughter, but they also authorize countries to make their own regulations concerning “slaughtering in accordance with religious rituals”. This vagueness is what has left the mish-mash of regulations across Europe. Germany, for instance, has banned slaughter without anaesthesia,



© animalquality.org

but a Federal Administrative Court decision permits ritual slaughter by trained people in an accredited slaughterhouse under observation by the local veterinary inspection office.

In Cyprus, the Department of Veterinary Services said they were granting exemptions to the EU Directive requiring pre-cut stunning, but the Jewish community there has complained that they do not, in fact, do so. Jews there are allowed to import kosher meat, but it costs much more, of course. There was a Joint Ministerial Decision in Greece to permit ritual slaughter according to the demands of halal and kosher principles, but it has to include stunning immediately after cutting (except for poultry) and take place in a properly licenced abattoir. The Finnish Animal Protections Act means that stunning is required there before cutting, however it is allowed for animals to be stunned at the same moment as slaughter takes place. Islamic authorities have accepted meat produced that way as halal but Jewish community leaders refuse to regard it as kosher. Denmark banned ritual slaughter without pre-stunning but allows halal and kosher meat to be imported.

DEATH ON TRIAL

I have already mentioned the confusing case of Belgium's federal system, where two of its three regions, Wallonia and Flanders, adopted legislation banning ritual slaughter without pre-stunning. This was challenged by the Coordinating Committee of Jewish Organisations who filed a lawsuit in the country's Constitutional Court, which turned to the EU's Court of Justice for advice. In the end, it upheld the bans, although ritual slaughter was allowed in any case in the Brussels region, but then that verdict was overturned by the Advocate General

of the EU's Court of Justice. It was not a verdict that found favour with the Eurogroup for Animals. "In 2020 we should not think that, as cited in the opinion, animal welfare and religion 'often sit uneasily', as technology and best practice are there to guarantee that both values are respected at the same time", said Reineke Hameleers, the group's Chief Executive. However, that was not the end of the story.

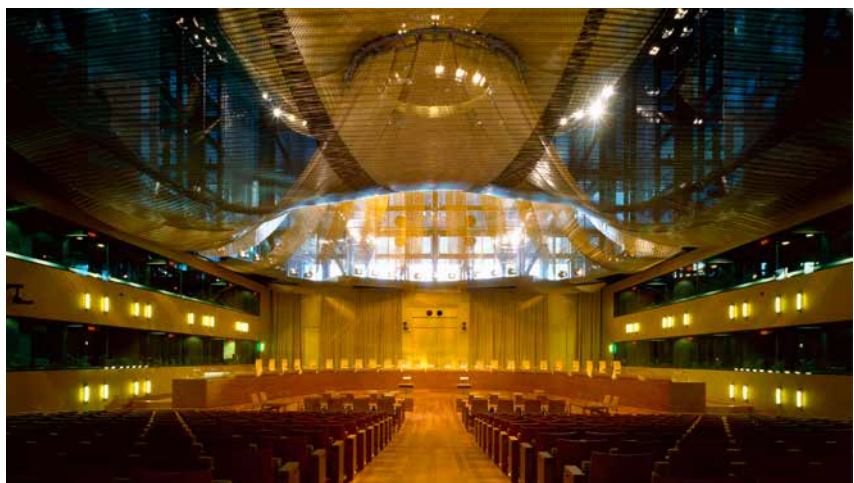


Reineke Hameleers

That had been just the Advocate General's opinion, which the full Court is not obliged to follow and on this occasion it didn't. Sitting as the Grand Chamber in December 2020, it upheld the view expressed in Regulation No. 1099/2009 that the main objective must be the protection of animals. "In order to promote animal welfare in the context of ritual slaughter," it announced, "Member States may, without infringing the fundamental rights enshrined in the Charter, require a reversible stunning procedure which cannot result in an animal's death." It further clarified its findings like this: "Member States

may adopt national rules aimed at ensuring more extensive protection of animals at the time of killing than those contained in Regulation No. 1099/2009 in relation to ritual slaughter." The Belgian decree requires that all animals slaughtered for human consumption must be killed only after using proper stunning procedures to limit animal suffering and promote humane slaughtering practices. This amendment seems to remove the exceptions for religious and ritual slaughter that were originally allowed by Regulation 1099/2009.

Muslim and Jewish groups argue that this new restriction seriously infringes their rights to religious freedom of expression because they are unable to obtain meat from animals slaughtered in accordance with their beliefs, but the Court's formal judgement leaves very little 'wiggle-room': "Killing animals may induce pain, distress, fear or other forms of suffering to the animals even under the best available technical conditions," says the opening paragraph. "Certain operations related to the killing may be stressful and any stunning technique presents certain drawbacks. Business operators or any person involved in the killing of animals should take the necessary measures to avoid pain and minimise the distress and suffering of animals during the slaughtering or killing process, taking into account the best practices in the field and the methods permitted under this Regulation. Therefore, pain, distress or suffering should be considered as avoidable when business operators or any person involved in the killing of animals breach one of the requirements of this Regulation or use permitted practices

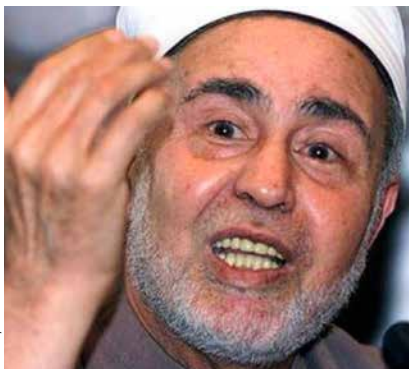


Court of Justice of the European Union

without reflecting the state of the art, thereby inducing by negligence or intention, pain, distress or suffering to the animals.”

The Court of Justice’s ruling has been savaged by religious groups. Doctor Mark Goldfelder, Director of the National Jewish Advocacy Center and the founding editor of the Cambridge University Series on Law and Judaism, condemned it in no uncertain terms: “The ruling was factually wrong, legally problematic, discriminatorily hypocritical and systemically dangerous.” In an angry article on the New Europe website he repeats the claim that ritual slaughter is humane.

“Kosher ritual slaughter (shechita) requires the use of a special razor-sharp elongated blade that severs the trachea and oesophagus of the animal in one fluid motion, causing instantaneous loss of blood pressure, so that the animal feels nothing.” The research carried out in New Zealand would not appear to bear out that claim but perhaps it is something that merits further research. Whatever the outcome, though, it seems unlikely to persuade religious groups one way or the other. The Court judgement, whilst recognising the need to respect religious freedoms, is clear that animal welfare must come first. “In order to assess whether such a limitation is permissible,” it says, “the Court finds, first of all, that the interference with the freedom of manifest religion resulting from the Decree is indeed provided for by law and, moreover, respects the essence of Article 10 of the Charter (of Fundamental Rights), since it is limited to one aspect of the specific ritual act of slaughter, and that the act of slaughter is not, by contrast, prohibited as such. The Court



Muhammad Sayyid Tantawy

finds that that interference meets an objective of general interest recognised by the European Union, namely the promotion of animal welfare.”

Slovenia passed its own Animal Welfare Act in 2012 under which all ritual slaughter is banned, and this was upheld in 2018 by the Constitutional Court. The country’s Islamic community provides certificates to companies producing meat from stunned animals to confirm that it is nevertheless halal in their judgement, but the Jewish community imports kosher meat from countries that produce it. The United States is not happy with Europe’s smorgasbord of regulations, which it sees as unfair to Jews and Muslims. It says it confirms their ‘outsider’ status and would prefer Europe to drop its various regulations regarding the way in which ritual slaughter requires pre-cut stunning.

A 1935 fatwa by the Mufti of Delhi declared that non-fatal stunning that is thus ‘reversible’ is allowed under Islamic law. Al-Azhar rector Muhammad el-Tayyeb el-Naggar confirmed in 1982 that stunning would not make the practice un-Islamic. Many Muslim authorities accept reversible stunning prior to the cut, such as with electricity or a round-headed hammer, but Jewish authorities are less inclined to view the idea favourably. According to Jewish law, slaughter of cattle and poultry must be carried out with a single cut to the throat. According to ShechitaUK, all forms of mechanical stunning “which may include asphyxiation by gas, electrocution by tongs or water or shooting with a captive bolt gun, cause pain on application and are thus prohibited by Jewish law”. It’s an incredibly delicate area for politicians and lawyers to wander into. On Oxford Academic’s ‘Animal Frontiers’ website the problem is set out clearly: “Current concerns about religious slaughter focus on stress of preslaughter handling using certain devices, pain and distress that may be felt during and after neck cutting, as well as prolonged times to loss of brain function and death if stunning is not applied.”



THE MOST UNKINDEST CUT OF ALL?

For Muslims, the correct method of slaughter is the one laid down in the Qur’an and the Hadith (the sayings and acts of Mohammed). “Prior to the act of slaughter (Al-Dhabh), pronouncing the name of God (Tasmiyya) is a requirement. Following restraint, slaughter is carried out by a transverse incision of the neck to achieve instant and copious exsanguination. Rapid and maximum blood loss is crucially important because consumption of blood is forbidden.” For Jews, the rule is similar (and, of course, much older): “A trained slaughterman, Shocet, appointed by the Shechita Board, makes a transverse cut across the neck using a sharp, special knife, the chalaf. The chalaf needs to be inspected for sharpness after each cut. Preslaughter stunning and damage to tissues such as haemorrhages are not accepted. The reasons for rejecting stunning include that the original method is superior, painless, and causes instantaneous insensibility while stunning causes damage to carcasses.” After slaughter, the carcass is carefully examined by a special inspector, who looks for such defects as haemorrhages, while rejecting certain parts (treifa). The meat is then ‘porged’ (examined in order to locate and remove prohibited parts). Forbidden tissues, such as blood and various fats known as chailev are removed, as well as the sciatic nerve, which normally means the removal of the hind legs and everything behind the twelfth rib. As with Islam, the consumption of blood is forbidden as they believe God ordered them to reserve it for him. The rear part of the animal removed this way is usually sold into the general market for meat because it is difficult and tedious to ‘porged’.



A poster from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, PETA

Jehovah's Witnesses, who were persecuted by Hitler's Nazis, along with the far more numerous Jews, Roma, Sinti and others, are also forbidden to consume an animal's blood. So, if a Jehovah's witness performs the slaughter, can a Muslim consider the meat halal? Well, possibly; the Irshad website is ambivalent: "With respect to their ritual sacrifice, they need to ensure that the strict conditions of slaughter are met, namely, that (1) the throat is cut with a sharp instrument whilst the animal is alive, (2) three of the four vessels (carotid arteries, trachea and oesophagus) are severed, and (3) the name of Allah is mentioned, in any language, at the time of slaughter." So, the answer could be yes, but is probably 'maybe'.

Another animal welfare pressure group, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, PETA, is unequivocal in condemning ritual slaughter, whilst admitting that at some point in time it was probably more acceptable: "The dietary laws of Islam and Judaism require that animals be 'healthy' at the time their throats are cut. When these laws were passed thousands of years ago, they were probably more humane than any other existing alternative. However, the world has changed drastically since then, and today, slaughter is just the final stage of a life filled with misery, pain, and fear for animals raised for their flesh on factory farms."

It's worth remembering that UK-based PETA is against animals being put to use by humans in any way and at any time, not just for food. "It's a simple fact that no form of slaughter – religious or otherwise – can ever be humane," says PETA's website. "The sheer number of animals required to feed society's current meat habit makes individual attention to their wants and needs impossible. In conventional abattoirs in the UK, millions of cows, pigs, sheep, and chickens are improperly stunned using captive-bolt guns, electrocution, or gassing every year, meaning that their throats are slit while they're conscious and terrified." In what may be a sign of wishful thinking, PETA reports that growing numbers of Muslims are turning their backs on meat and advocating kindness to animals



while many Jews, they say, now believe that eating vegan is, as they put it, the new kashrut (dietary law) of our age. That may seem hard to believe but apparently veganism is growing so fast in Israel that the country has been dubbed 'the vegan capital of the world'. Don't forget to say mazel tov when you next raise a glass of carrot juice.

In fact, even the judgement of the Court of Justice is open to interpretation. "Animals shall only be killed after stunning in accordance with the methods and specific requirements related to the application of those methods set out in Annex I. The loss of consciousness and sensibility shall be maintained until the death of the animal." But then it goes on to say: "In the case of animals subject to particular methods of slaughter prescribed by religious rites, the requirements of paragraph 1 shall not apply provided that the slaughter takes place in a slaughterhouse." As the saying goes, the whole issue is as clear as mud. No amount of science is likely to persuade people where deeply held beliefs are involved. Facts and scientific proof are mutable; beliefs are very often set in stone.

James Lookwood



Rosia Montana which operated from 1971 until 2006

WHEN HISTORY IS GOLD

'Our mountains bear gold' (old Romanian saying).

The recent decision to place Rosia Montana in Romania under UNESCO protection, brought the subject to public attention once again. The ancient gold mining complex in Transylvania was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Why these fierce discussions? First of all, it is because this place is no ordinary one, nor one without a complicated legal and moral story. The decision put practically an end to any chances of resuming mining activities in the area.

Rosia Montana is a community of sixteen villages located in a district known as the Golden Quadrilateral. It is located in the idyllic Apuseni Mountains in western Romania and is - as UNESCO has stated, arguing its decision - 'the most significant, extensive and technically diverse underground Roman gold mining complex known today'. Over 166 years, beginning in 106 AD (when Roman Emperor Trajan and his army defeated the local citizens and annexed Dacia

to the Roman Empire (author's note), Romans extracted some 500 tons of gold from the site, developing highly engineered works, different types of galleries and waterwheels (Source: www.unesco.org).

Rosia Montana was a significant source of gold in the Roman Empire, with some researchers suggesting that it was an extension of previous Bronze Age mining in the area. They also suppose that most Roman golden artifacts across Europe could have been crafted from Transylvanian gold, as the region was an important source of gold in Europe, as early as the 3rd millennium BC.

What attracted the historians and archeologists most to Rosia Montana was the fact that the mining site combined Roman advanced mining systems with locally developed techniques, unknown elsewhere in those ancient times. The mining activities in the region continued throughout the Middle Ages until more contemporary times. The Golden Quadrilateral has been one of

Europe's most prolific mining districts for over 2000 years.

More than 15,000 artifacts, necropolis and Roman graves were discovered during extensive archeological research. They all offered a pretty good idea about the usual life in those times and gave precious information about the community structures which supported the excavating activity.



Dacian gold bracelet, dated to the 1st century BC or 1st century AD, from Sarmizegetusa Romania



Rosia Montană, in the Județul Alba, Romania

The whole region went into oblivion for a long time until 1997, when the name resurfaced in public discussions. Rosia Montana Gold Corporation (RMGC), a company established in 1997, with the participation of the Romanian state-owned mining company Minvest Rosia Montana SA (with 19,31%) and Gabriel Resources, a Canadian company, listed at the Toronto Stock Exchange, (with 80,69%). RMGC was planning to develop, in its own words, 'the most modern mine in Romania' (www.rmgc.ro). In 1997, the corporation obtained a 20-year concession for gold mining at Rosia Montana.

The initial plans were to invest 1.7 billion USD into the project, which naturally attracted a lot of attention, but consequently also a lot of debate and controversy.

Between 1997 and 2002 the newly formed company conducted geological explorations to determine the actual quantity of existing gold and silver resources. The explorations led to the conclusion that the site is one of the richest in Europe, with an estimated 17.1 million ounces of gold and 81.1 million ounces of silver. In a list of the top 50 untapped gold reserves in the world, Rosia Montana ranks 17th.

After such important discoveries, it is self-evident that the interests in the region would be high. In 1999, Rosia Montana Gold Corporation obtained the license for exploration. So, theoretically at least, the road was clear.

Initially, the project brought hope for a better life in the area around Rosia Montana; lower unemployment rates and higher living standards for the locals, better infrastructure and much more. Those were in fact major arguments of the supporters of the mining project, claiming that the activity would bring around 5.3 billion USD into the

Romanian economy and a much needed revival of the region. Although Romania is a country with rich mineral resources, with gold and silver reserves estimated at about 760 tons, Romanian gold hasn't been extracted in a long time in the area, because of the outdated technologies and high production costs.

Also, in an attempt to win over the public, RMGC stated that it has actively supported the local community, funded numerous projects, opened up for public discussions and was fully transparent about the entire technological process. The company claims that, due to the blockage in its activities, it was forced to lay off over 80% of its hired workforce of about 400 Romanian employees.

On the other hand, environmental activists and NGOs mobilised against the much talked about and often politicised mining project. Large protests attracted the public's attention and attracted more and more supporters.



Anti Rosia Montana protest in Bucarest

The main themes addressed by the protesters and opponents of the Rosia Montana project were that the extensive mining activities would destroy four mountain tops in the area, would wipe out three villages, forcing many residents would to relocate, and also would endanger the area's unique and ancient archeological treasures.

It should also be mentioned that the technologies used in the whole process came into question as well. The project involved extensive usage of cyanide in order to separate the gold from the crushed rocks, thus creating a large reservoir full of water contaminated with cyanide.

In response, Rosia Montana Gold Corporation declared that 'today, 90% of the gold extracted worldwide is obtained through the same technology', from Canada or the USA to New Zealand, Spain and Sweden. RMGC also pledged to fully support the entire costs related to the rehabilitation and closure of the mine, in due course. They said that each year, they will deposit the entire amount of money estimated for environmental rehabilitation and long-term monitoring, in a specifically established account, accessed exclusively by the competent governmental authorities.



Romanian president, Klaus Johannis

However, an accident which occurred in 2000 at another Romanian mine near Baia Mare. Here, huge quantities of contaminated water were accidentally spilled into a nearby river that eventually reached the Danube, causing the death of tons of fish and other creatures. This only served to amplify the opposition to the proposed technological solutions and consequently to the entire project.

In 2010, the European Parliament proposed banning the use of cyanide in mining across the European Union. However, due to lack of solid evidence, the European Commission decided against it and the law did not pass.

Under immense pressure from public opinion, environmental protesters, as well as diverging political views, Rosia Montana Gold Corporation never received the final permits to start activity. The next step was that the complete withdrawal of the Romanian government from the project. And in December 2016, it completed the

necessary documents for the inclusion of Rosia Montana area in the UNESCO World Heritage List. This action was intended to put the area under UNESCO protection, and to focus international attention so as to boost local tourism and bring an end to any future mining plans.

Rosia Montana was once again on the public agenda and important publications wrote about this complicated subject. In 2018, the distinguished National Geographic magazine published an article entitled 'In Transylvania, a fierce battle over Gold and Roman History'. In the article, author Douglas Main wrote that the region contained 'the world's largest and most important, intact Roman mining tunnels', thus supporting the decision to list it at UNESCO.



Visible gold in a drill core from the Cetate open pit at Rosia Montana

But also in 2018, Romania, in a highly unusual move, halted the UNESCO proceedings, claiming that a UNESCO listing might affect an ongoing lawsuit with the Canadian company. Rosia Montana Gold Corporation had sued the Romanian state in 2015 claiming several billion US dollars over an alleged breach of contract and unreturned VAT taxes. Gabriel Resources filed a second lawsuit a few years later, requesting arbitration before the World Bank's International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes in Washington (ICSID) against Romania. The lawsuits are still ongoing in 2021, with no anticipated clear outcome.

In 2020, under a new Romanian administration, the UNESCO documents were reintroduced.

2021 brought the final favourable decision. Rosia Montana became part of the UNESCO World Heritage List



on July 27th 2021. This decision, taken by consensus by the World Heritage Committee at its 44th extended session in Fuzhou, China, was saluted by Romanian and international public opinion, as well as by high officials.

Romanian president, Klaus Johannis, said: 'I salute the inclusion of the cultural mining landscape of Rosia Montana in the world heritage list.' He also added later on Facebook: 'It should become a model for enhancing the value of heritage through the sustainable development of the area.'

Romania's ambassador to UNESCO, Simona Miculescu, declared on that day: 'as we anticipated, we have a double celebration today! The Rosia Montana mining landscape was included today on the World Heritage List, as well as in the List of World Heritage in Danger, precisely on the day when Romania celebrates 65 years since joining UNESCO! Wonderful coincidence!'

One of the supporting political parties also posted: 'It is the victory of all who, through their civic involvement, have saved one of the most treasured history of Romanians.' (USR PLUS)

The National Heritage Institute (INP) also cheered at the good news, stating: 'an idea that has grown and endured in the last two decades – thanks to the national and international scientific community, expert institutions, the local community and the civil society gathered around it and brought by Romania to UNESCO's attention – receives top validation today' and added that Rosia Montana has also been added to the List of World Heritage in Danger, 'thus having both its vulnerability and the need for urgent protection measures recognised.'

INP mentioned that 'international cooperation is encouraged and it is recommendable to invite to Rosia Montana a technical reactive monitoring mission to determine the optimal state of conservation and a program of measures.'



Mihai Weber

Mihai Weber, chairman of the Joint Standing Committee of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate on UNESCO, pointed out that 'the local administrations, together with officials of the relevant ministries have a mission, more than ever before, to solve some of the problems that still exist at Rosia Montana.'

A victory was won but the battle is still on...

The future will tell which actions were right, what the legal consequences of these actions will be or how they will affect peoples' lives in the region. What is certain though is that a beautiful Romanian natural area and thousands of years of history will be better preserved and protected, above economic or temporal political interests.

After all... history is gold!

Alexandra Paucescu

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RUSSIA SETS ITS SIGHTS ON UKRAINE (AGAIN)

Will the wary West stand up to Moscow?

One of my clearest memories of Kyiv is a visit to Maidan Square, bustling with people around the large Monument to Kyi, Schek and Khoryv, the legendary founders of Kyiv, that stands at the foot of the even larger and very tall monument to Ukrainian independence. Strictly speaking, I should refer to the place by its correct name: Maidan Nezalezhnosti, which means, unsurprisingly, Independence Square. I was filming (as a video journalist it's my job) and quite a few people gave me hostile, suspicious looks. They clearly didn't trust a man with a camera. Given Ukraine's history, it's hardly surprising. Neither is it surprising that many Ukrainians have little fondness for Russia, even if a sizeable proportion recognize their ethnic unity. During the period 1932-1933, the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin killed a great many Ukrainians in what is called the Holodomor, a term derived from the Ukrainian words for hunger (holod) and extermination (mor), but which is often translated as "death by hunger".

© NIF
Joseph Stalin

It was a deliberate attempt to starve the entire population to death. I have spoken with Ukrainians whose parents and grandparents had suffered that way; they told me what it had been like. They were unable to buy food, Russian

troops and party officials had removed it from the shops as well as from their cupboards, sometimes ripping up floorboards and firing guns up the chimney, I was told, in case any food may have been hidden there. They also took away food bought for family pets and even the pets themselves, in case the peasants ate them. The intruders, some of them soldiers, also forced their way into homes where skeletally-thin families, including children, were in the middle of eating what little they could find, often by foraging. They would take the food outside, pour it on the ground and stamp on it to ensure it was inedible, before driving away. They didn't want the food themselves but wanted to ensure the Ukrainians had nothing to eat.

Any foodstuffs found by these murderous teams were confiscated, often destroyed in front of the victims, while the population had only limited rights to move from place to place. They certainly weren't allowed to cross borders into countries where food was available.



© Wikipedia

People of Vinnytsia in west-central Ukraine (Soviet Union) searching for relatives among the exhumed victims of the Vinnytsia massacre perpetrated by Stalin's secret police the NKVD in 1943

It was an incredibly brutal act and barely understandable, except as an example of Stalin's madness, megalomania and lack of sound judgement, although there was a kind of icy cold logic to it. He had decided to collectivise farming because collectivisation was part of Communism (although Karl Marx would not, I think, have approved of mass murder to achieve it). To reach his goal, Stalin sent teams of party agitators into the Ukrainian countryside. The Ukrainians had resisted the collectivisation plan, so peasants were forced to relinquish their land and their personal property. Wealthy peasants, known as kulaks, and those resisting the collectivisation were deported. Some were shot. It led to desperate food shortages and even armed rebellion in some parts of the country, albeit short-lived and unsuccessful. Stalin admitted to his close confidantes that he was worried that he "could lose Ukraine", but the Politburo decided to go even further, putting towns and villages on blacklists which meant no food of any sort was allowed to reach them. Stalin could have ameliorated the effect by setting norms for grain deliveries to the state.



© Wikipedia

Oleg V. Khlevniuk

He could have reduced grain exports or replaced confiscations with a range of taxes. In his excellent but terrifying book "Stalin – a new biography of a dictator", writer Oleg V. Khlevniuk wrote: "Documents discovered in recent years paint a horrific picture. All food supplies were taken away from the starving peasants – not only grain, but also vegetables, meat, and dairy products. Teams of marauders, made up of local officials and activists from the cities, hunted down hidden supplies – so-called yamas (holes in the ground) – where peasants, in accordance with age-old tradition, kept grain as a sort of insurance against famine." Khlevniuk says peasants were tortured to reveal where their yamas were along with any other food sources. "They were beaten," he wrote, "forced out into sub-freezing temperatures without clothing, arrested, or exiled to Siberia."



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« Bitter Memory of Childhood » sculpture

The reason for this extreme cruelty was that Stalin's collectivisation policy was causing starvation in other parts of the USSR as well and the Politburo was determined to discourage further disobedience. Between 1931 and 1934, at least 5 to 7 million USSR citizens died of hunger or became permanently disabled through starvation, some 3.9 million (a low estimate) of them Ukrainian. Of course, the matter was hushed up by the Soviet authorities and was only revealed to public awareness in 1986, just after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. That, too, had been hushed up by Russia. Back in 2020, a sculpture commemorating the horrendous man-made famine, called "Bitter Memory of Childhood"

and featuring a clearly unhappy and painfully thin little girl, was vandalised at Kyiv's National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide. The culprits pulled the statue down but failed to carry it away, probably because it was too heavy. The police are investigating, but there are obvious suspicions of a Russian involvement, of at least the informal variety. Ukrainians are keen to remember the Holodomor, in order to honour its many victims (often family members); the Russians would rather it was forgotten, although wrecking commemorative sculptures seems an unlikely way to achieve that. It may have been carried out by a group of pro-Russian thugs, although witnesses claim the attack was well organised, with the vandals posing as drunken party-goers. Perhaps they really were just drunken party-goers. The sculpture is being repaired.



A demonstration in Kiev's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square)

The other things I recall about Maidan Square were what looked to be jolly hen parties of young women, singing and dancing in the street, sometimes with nearby boys snapping pictures, as well as groups eating take-out lunches by the founders' sculpture. There was also a veritable army of mainly youngsters shaking collecting tins at strangers like me. They said it was to help fund Ukraine's resistance to the pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine's Donbass region, but they could have been collecting for the rebels instead, for all I could tell. That memory is a reminder of another good reason for many Ukrainians to hate Russia. Whatever the rebels may think they're achieving, Putin has succeeded in doing exactly what Stalin feared: losing Ukraine. What's more, the clumsy ineptitude of Putin's allies in Donbass ended up costing a lot of innocent lives when scheduled Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 from

Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was shot down in July 2014, using a Russian Buk missile that had been fired by rebels who mistook it for a Ukrainian military jet. All 283 passengers and 15 crew were killed. Russia is still denying involvement but only they operate this radar-guided anti-aircraft missile system, parts of which were found at the scene. Putin is somewhat like a very dangerous version of the naughtiest boy in the school who, when caught doing something awful, invariably says “it wasn't me” and accuses the teachers of picking on him.



The site of the MH17 flight crash

HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF

It's strange how the Second World War continues to cast a shadow over the politics of today. Putin's professed hatred of Nazis is the justification he uses for many of his actions. Take, for instance, his attitude to Ukraine and then compare and contrast it with what he did in Syria. Don't look for consistency; there is none. On the one hand, he believes that the rule of law insists on a leader – any leader, regardless of how vicious and corrupt – being kept in power, with many civilians having to die to ensure that happens. Then he dismisses the government of Ukraine as ‘fascist’ to justify his actions to seize at least part of the country. When Ukraine organised a more consistent counter-offensive against the rebels and their Russian allies in 2014, Putin switched to a more ‘hybrid’ approach: a simple invasion of Donbass.



Russian forces entering a captured town in Donbas, Ukraine, in April 2014

He sent a convoy of troops carrying some food supplies for the rebels, which he called ‘a humanitarian convoy’, though one has to wonder about his definition of ‘humanitarian’, when the vehicles were carrying troops and weapons. Putin claimed that Russia had been “forced” to send them in order to “defend the Russian-speaking population”. Ukraine and most Western nations regard it as the invasion of a sovereign nation's territory.

Russia's seizure by force of Crimea is the first example of one country changing international boundaries through invasion since World War II. Some residents of Crimea initially welcomed the Russians as “liberators”, just as some Ukrainians had welcomed the Nazis in 1941 for seeming to remove the USSR's yoke, although those first impressions proved woefully wrong. The Nazis did not believe in Ukrainian independence, quickly attaching Galicia to Poland (not that the Poles had much say in it, of course), giving Bukovina to Romania and putting Romania in charge of Transnistria. The Nazis then started to implement their racial policies, killing some 1.5-million Ukrainian Jews between 1941 and 1944, with many of the deaths occurring in just two days. The murderous incident is reported on the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy honoring the memory of the victims of the Babyn Yar tragedy

“On September 29-30 1941, SS and German police units and their auxiliaries, under guidance of members of Einsatzgruppe C, murdered a large portion of the Jewish population of Kiev at Babi Yar, a ravine northwest of the city” it reports. “As the victims moved into the ravine, Einsatzgruppen detachments from Sonderkommando 4a under SS-Standartenführer Paul Blobel shot them in small groups.” Standartenführer was a Nazi party rank, equivalent to a captain

in traditional military circles outside the fantasist world of the Third Reich.



The Nazis execution site of Babyn Yar in 1941-1943

We have to recall that many of the top Nazis believed in the occult. Many of their stranger ideas are detailed in the book ‘Hitler's Monsters’, by Eric Kurlander. He writes that Hitler and Goebbels believed, among other things, that there had once been a ‘World Empire of Atlantis’ that had been destroyed by moons falling to Earth. Nazi scientists were instructed to check for ‘death rays’ at party headquarters which they feared could be being aimed at them, and to track enemy submarines by using a chart of the Atlantic and a metal cube on a string (I used to know someone who chose their lottery numbers that way; they never won). SS officers studied runes and believed themselves to be connected to a Hindu warrior caste. Partly, it was intended to undermine the theories of relativity, which the Nazis saw as ‘Jewish’ (perhaps it's just as well: if they'd given any credibility to Albert Einstein they may have developed a nuclear weapon, but the antisemitism prevented that). Some even travelled to Tibet during the war to look for a lost Aryan tribe. They believed in astrology, too. The thought of people like Hitler, Martin Borman, Adolf Eichmann, Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler dancing in a fairy ring in the middle of some gloomy forest would be too horrible for even the Brothers Grimm to have dreamed up.

Meanwhile, back in Ukraine, according to a report to headquarters in Kyiv by the Einsatzgruppe, a paramilitary death squad, 33,771 Jews were massacred in this first two-day period. After that, most Ukrainians no longer regarded the Nazis as ‘liberators’. More than 2-million Ukrainians were taken to Germany as slave labourers, although the Germans tagged them “eastern workers”. The Germans only started to retreat from Ukraine after the bloodbath at the Battle of Stalingrad saw the Red Army retaking

the territories seized by Nazi Germany. Altogether, up to 7-million Ukrainians died, while more than 700 of Ukraine's towns and cities were destroyed and 10-million people were left homeless. So, Ukraine has suffered over the decades, from the policies of Stalin and then from the ambitions of Adolf Hitler. They have a right to look to look somewhat askance at an ambitious neighbour, who seems to be hungry for territory, especially one who has stationed 100,000 troops close to its borders.

PULLING STRINGS, CAREFULLY



Discussion between Sergueï Lavrov (left), and Josep Borrell Fontelles

It's very easy with the benefit of hindsight to criticise and condemn those who failed to stand up to bullying by the invaders, but if the people had families and children to keep alive, it may have been a case of what in English is called 'Hobson's choice': no choice at all. That's why it's often best left to powerful outsiders to right wrongs and defend the weak. As far as the EU is concerned, the power that can be exerted is economic. In July, the Council of the EU agreed to extend by a further six months, until the end of January 2022, the sanctions already imposed on Russian persons and entities in response to the deliberate destabilisation of Ukraine. They have been in place since July 2014, when Russia illegally annexed Crimea. According to the Council, the sanctions restrict "access to EU primary and secondary capital markets for some Russian banks and companies, as well as prohibiting certain forms of financial assistance and brokering towards Russian financial institutions" the Council explains. "The sanctions also prohibit the direct or indirect import, export or transfer of all defence-related material and establish a ban on goods for dual-use or direct military use, or military-end users in Russia." In addition, the EU has

put in place diplomatic measures, such as asset freezes and travel restrictions, as well as specific restrictions on economic relations with Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Putin and his head of foreign policy, Sergey Lavrov, apparently dislike the EU and never miss an opportunity to denigrate it, as Lavrov very demonstrated when the EU's High Representative for Foreign Policy, Josep Borrell, visited Moscow in February 2021. His treatment by Lavrov was, to put it mildly, a surprising display of bad manners that suggest disinterest on Russia's part in normal diplomatic relations.

Moscow had announced a pull-back of its forces in April, but they seem to be still there. The head of Ukraine's state security service, Ivan Bakanov, said he agrees with comments made by the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has accused Russia of failing to withdraw its military hardware as promised. There has been an upsurge in fighting in the disputed eastern part of the country around Donetsk and Luhansk, which may explain the more recent build-up of Russian forces. Moscow has also had its forces engaged in military exercises in the Black Sea area near Crimea.



Nato and Ukraine flags

The build-up has drawn criticism from Borrell as well as from NATO and from Washington, who said it was the biggest troop build-up since the seizure of Crimea. Moscow said it was a training exercise prompted by NATO activity in the area. Certainly, there is little agreement between Russia and NATO; the days of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which Russia joined in 1991, are long gone. It's hard to believe now that Russia joined the Partnership for Peace programme in 1994 and actually deployed Russian peacekeepers in support of NATO-led peace support operations in the Western Balkans in the late 1990s.

There was even a NATO-Russia Council (NRC) created in 2002, but Russia's action in Georgia in 2008, which NATO described as "disproportionate" put an



Ukraine Nato exercise

end to that. NATO still calls on Russia to reverse its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, but nobody seriously expects that to happen. All practical civilian and military cooperation under the NRC was suspended in April 2014 in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine, especially its illegal annexation of Crimea. In fact, most countries seem to favour restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity to the way it was prior to Russia's military invasion.

REALITY V. FANTASY

The invasion itself seems to have been planned some time beforehand, according to Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In fact, Russia doesn't deny that but puts a gloss on it by issuing a medal to those taking part in what Moscow calls 'the return of Crimea'. It was the day after the invasion that Ukraine's pro-Russian president of the time, Viktor Yanukovych, fled Kyiv.



Viktor Yanukovych and Vladimir Putin in 2013 Ukraine

Few were sorry to see him go. It pays to take a look at Russia's claim that they were getting back what belonged to them anyway. Russia, or at least its Tsarist Empire, annexed Crimea after defeating the Ottoman army at the Battle of Kozludzha during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774. It then stayed Russian

until 1954, when it was transferred from the Russian Soviet Federation of Socialist Republics to its Ukrainian equivalent. The transfer had been approved by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Why was this generous transfer of power approved? Well, it's hard to be sure, but it's been claimed that it was "a noble act on the part of the Russian people" to mark the 300th anniversary of the reunification of Ukraine with Russia, related to the Treaty of Pereyaslav, signed in 1654 by representatives of the "Ukrainian Cossack Hetmanate and Tsar Aleksei the First of Muscovy to evince" – and I quote – "the boundless trust and love the Russian people feel toward the Ukrainian people". Another part of the deal mentions the "strong links between the peoples of Russia and Ukraine" but it doesn't stand up to scrutiny. The Turkic-speaking Tatars had lived in Crimea for centuries and could be said to be its most long-standing native population, but in May 1944 Stalin had them deported en masse to inhospitable sites in Central Asia, where they were forced to remain for more than four decades, prevented from returning home. Crimea was not their absolutely original home, either. The Tatar Confederation was incorporated into the Mongol Empire by Genghis Khan when he unified the Steppe tribes.

Today's Russo-Ukrainian tension seems to be based on the uniquely Russian concept of "reflexive control". We have little experience of it in the West but it has been a recognised weapon in Russia's armoury for very many years. The Russians call it *maskirovka*, described on the website of the Georgetown Security Studies Review as an old Soviet notion in which one "conveys to an opponent specifically prepared information to incline him/her to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action". It could be described as "strategic diplomatic lying",



Russian President Vladimir Putin signing the laws on admitting Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation in 2014



Mike Lindell, American businessman, entrepreneur, and conspiracy theorist

something at which today's Kremlin excels. It has been taught at Russian military academies for very many years and seems to rely on the fact that people generally believe what they'd like to be true, rather than what actually is. It encourages self-deception to the advantage of the perpetrators over the people doing the believing. It's very much one with Russia's use of electronic communications to spread disinformation and pro-Russian propaganda. It worked, too; why else would an astonishing 53% of Republican voters still claim that Donald Trump won the last election but was cheated out of it by fraud. During a TV interview earlier this year, American (and Republican) businessman Mike Lindell tried to put over a baseless conspiracy theory, blaming a voting machine company for fraud in the 2020 presidential election. Roughly a quarter of American voters seem to believe that Joe Biden "stole" the election, without really being able to explain how, or at least trying to explain a variety of possible (but false) methods.

It was nonsense, of course (bringing to mind the Nazi hierarchy's belief in the supernatural and their pre-ordained natural place in history) and the interview was interrupted by the newsreader pointing out that the network accepted the official election outcome, although that didn't cause Lindell to shut up. Remember the Republican extremists' attack on the Capitol in January? Only 29% of Republicans think Trump was in any way to blame for that and despite the presence of known Trump supporters, a surprisingly large number think it was really staged by left-wing activists to make Trump look bad. Putin must be laughing his socks off; who needs normal diplomacy if you can undermine your supposed enemy with palpable, almost laughable falsehoods? QAnon supporting extremist Jake Angeli's strange outfit of fur hat, buffalo horns and a spear

would have been quickly recognised by the likes of Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler as belonging to a kindred spirit, and possibly by readers of the Brothers Grimm (what exactly is the seemingly inevitable link between the far political right and a belief in the occult? There could be a doctoral thesis in there for somebody). Interestingly, while seemingly few Republicans think Trump was involved in the Washington attack, Angeli himself said he was responding to a call from Trump for all 'patriots' to be there. It's not sure if he also believes the ludicrous claim that Russia did not invade Crimea and that its annexation was achieved by "volunteers".

DRINK, ANYONE?

Certainly, from Russia's perspective, the war over Crimea isn't over. For ordinary citizens of Crimea, reality is uncomfortable, to say the least.



Asher Rosinger, assistant professor of biobehavioral health and director of the Water, Health, and Nutrition Lab, led the study

Food prices have soared and now there is a shortage of water, although June's cyclone, which led to torrential rain and flooding, has helped to ease the pressure. In an ironic twist, Russia has accused Ukraine of "genocide" for damming the Soviet-era North Crimean Canal, which had provided 85% of Crimea's water. Our distant ancestors were better at finding potable water than we are today, it seems. In an article about our dependence on water in the July 2021 edition of *Scientific American*, Asher Y. Rosinger, a human biologist at Pennsylvania State University, writes: "Without enough water, our physical and cognitive functions decline. Without any, we die within a matter of days. In this way, humans are more dependent on water than many other mammals are." Rosinger's article explains



Russian military restoring the water supply to south-eastern Crimea

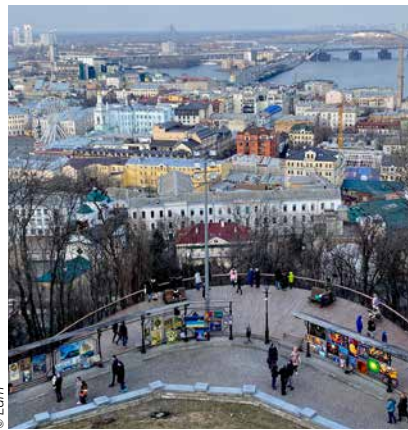
how access to water was pivotal in human development. Between about three million and two million years ago, the climate in Africa, where hominins (members of the human family) first evolved, became drier. During this interval, the early hominin genus *Australopithecus* gave way to our own genus, *Homo*. Rosinger writes that the taller, slimmer build with a greater surface area reduced our ancestors' exposure to solar radiation while allowing more exposure to wind. Water made us what we are. Putin had promised Crimeans "a better life" under his control, but as with previous invaders, many of the promises have yet to be fulfilled.

Reflexive control really works. There is further irony, too: Russia, which has laws to prevent the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights from being acted upon, has now filed a lawsuit in this court that it abhors and ignores, accusing Ukraine of "flagrant violations". Meanwhile, the governor of Crimea has launched a separate action claiming more than a trillion roubles in compensation and claiming that the blockade is an "act of state terrorism and ecoside".

BIG DAY FOR LAWYERS

Needless to say, Ukraine has brought its own action against Russia, but as Moscow has made it a legal requirement to ignore the Court's judgements, it's hard to see anything emerging from all these cases except a financial bonus for quite a few lawyers. Russia has said there will be no war but has deployed large numbers of troops to the area, where they've dug trenches just a few hundreds of metres from those of the Ukrainians. As a matter of interests, some Crimean Tatars, still angry with Russia over the mass deportations all those years ago, have set up camp to guard the dams on that canal. Moscow has accused Ukraine of "hysterical statements" intended

to incite hatred. When there is clearly so much hatred there already, what would be the point? Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister, Oleksii Reznikov, has said that Kyiv would be willing to provide Crimea with humanitarian aid, including drinking water (it provides it already to the eastern territories run by pro-Russian rebels) but there has been no such request. In any case, Reznikov points out, as the occupying force, Russia is responsible under the terms of the Geneva Convention for making sure the people living in the territory have access to drinking water and adequate food.



Ukraine's capital Kiev

The whole area would appear to be in a state of fear and also in a frightful mess as Russia and Ukraine argue over geography, or at least geopolitics. The way in which Stalin dealt with Ukraine in the early years of the war, as reported in Khlevniuk's book, begins to seem oddly familiar. "The Soviet absorption of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus," he tells us, "was not a joyous reunion of

divided nations. For the first year and a half of their sovietization, the new territories underwent the same violent social engineering that the USSR had been experiencing for decades. The goal was to force them into the Soviet mold: do away with the capitalist economic system, inculcate a new ideology, and destroy any real or imagined hotbeds of dissent against the regime." Ok, we can forget the part about destroying capitalism, but taking military action against any resistance seems to remain an element of Russian policy. Even so, Putin's friends and allies are sure there will be no incursion in Ukraine. "He's not going into Ukraine, OK, just so you understand," Donald Trump assured viewers of a 2016 interview on ABC television in America. "He's not going to go into Ukraine, all right? You can mark it down. You can put it down. You can take it anywhere you want." It would be interesting to know (a) how he gained this knowledge (b) why he felt obliged to share it and (c) why he believed Putin. Trump blamed the conflict between Russia and Ukraine on his predecessor, Barack Obama.

So you can believe Trump's assurances or you can continue to worry that the Kremlin will never willingly accept that Crimea and Donbass are parts of Ukraine and not Russia. In any case, there seems very little sign of the sentiments that led to Crimea being transferred into Ukraine's care by Nikita Khrushchev back in 1954. Does anyone still believe in "the boundless trust and love the Russian people feel toward the Ukrainian people"?

T. Kingsley Brooks



After 16-hour talks, the leaders of Belarus, Russia, Germany, France and Ukraine – (left to right) Alexander Lukashenko, Vladimir Putin, Angela Merkel, Francois Hollande and Petro Poroshenko – agreed a new ceasefire deal for eastern Ukraine in the Belarusian capital Minsk, on 12 February 2015. (A previous Minsk ceasefire deal collapsed within days of its signing on 5 September 2014.)



A painting of the conquest of Constantinople by The Crusaders In 1204 by David Aubert (1449-79)

STRADDLING AGES, FAITHS AND CONTINENTS

Turkey plans a highly controversial canal

Istanbul is, by any calculation, a unique and fascinating city. It used to be Byzantium, then became Christianised as Constantinople, named after the Emperor Constantine the Great. He is credited with being a foundation stone of both Western (Catholic) and Eastern (Orthodox) forms of Christianity (mainly viewed as an offshoot of Judaism at the time), as well as a number of other derivatives that were either absorbed, suppressed or in which their followers lost interest. As the inheritor of Rome's empire (which was waning at the time), it was one of the most influential places in the ancient world. "Aucun nom n'est plus prestigieux que celui de Byzance; il n'en est pas qui suscite dans les imaginations un plus éclatant cortège de tragédies somptueuses et confuses." ("No name is more prestigious than that of Byzantium; there is none that arouses in the imaginations a more dazzling procession of sumptuous and confused tragedies," wrote Auguste Bailly, the great French novelist and historian in his informative 1939 book, simply entitled 'Byzance'. I picked up a tattered

copy at Brussels' Place de Jeu de Bal flea market several years ago; having had its illustrations cut out, it was being thrown away, and very interesting it has proved to be for a book that cost me nothing. Bailly had a gift for telling a complicated story simply; his 1924 book about Naples and Vesuvius, "Naples au baisser de feu" (Naples: the kiss of fire), has been made into a movie four times, including by Hollywood (under the title 'Flame and Flesh').



Emperor Constantine

But getting back to the Emperor Constantine, he is an important historical figure for Christians, even though he only converted from Roman pagan beliefs fairly late in life, and was baptized just before his death in A.D. 337. Nevertheless, he had passed laws that made the practice of Christianity legal and also helped convoke the Council of Nicea in 325, from which Christians today still draw clearer definitions of what they're supposed to believe: the Nicene Creed. Historians wonder just how devout he really was, something we'll never know for sure. In his case, it could all have been political. It was a later successor, Theodosius, who really made Christianity the state religion. In any case, Constantine ruled what was the descendent empire of Rome from 306 to 337, and seems to have made quite a good job of it. Constantinople, however, remained a controversial place for Christian leaders, who seemed to have widely divergent views on it, so it came as little surprise when the 4th Crusade, launched by Pope Innocent III, turned aside from trying to

recapture Jerusalem from Muslim forces and instead turned its violent attentions towards Constantinople in 1204. Crusaders seldom kept their word, nor were their actions very 'Christian': they set a prostitute on the emperor's throne, and she sang filthy songs while swigging wine from the church's holy vessels. The Venetians in the army refused to take part, but French soldiers destroyed silver icons and many beautifully produced books and also raped several Orthodox nuns. All-in-all, it was not Christianity's finest hour, and it caused a rift between Western and Eastern Christianity that survives to this day.



Metropolitan Istanbul

Istanbul, as it's now known, of course, straddles two continents, standing at the geographical point at which Europe and Asia are joined. It is a fascinating and wonderful city that I don't think one could ever tire of exploring. It also has excellent and inexpensive restaurants and it has the fabulous Spice Market, a feast for the eyes, the nose and (with a skilful cook) taste buds. I was taken there by a friend who acted as a guide and we ate our lunch in a restaurant above the spice market that is quite hard to spot unless you know it's there. There was, of course, a framed photograph of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk gazing down at us as we ate the excellent food and sipped our raki. Raki is Turkey's national drink, made from twice-distilled grapes and anise, I was told. It probably didn't help the steadiness of my hand as I filmed that afternoon. I have tasted it since but I have never enjoyed it as much as I did there.

Like many a tourist, I have stood at the point on the Bosphorus Bridge where one continent ends and another begins (in theory). I also travelled over the same supposed spot in a water taxi, apparently controlled by a kind of latter-day Captain Ahab chasing Moby Dick. It was a very bouncy ride, with him aiming his fairly



Bosphorus Bridge(15 July Martyrs Bridge), Istanbul, Turkey

small boat at every wave he could see as well as diametrically across the wake of the largest ships. The Bosphorus is a natural strait, linking the Sea of Marmara to the south with the Black Sea to the north, and it is a very busy waterway, ploughed by vessels of every size imaginable, from tiny rowing boats to huge supertankers and even, in 2018, the 'Pioneering Spirit', a dual-purpose pipe-laying and heavy lifting vessel, described on the website of The Maritime Executive as 'the world's largest vessel' in gross tonnage terms at 400,000 gigatons (441 million metric tonnes) and nearly 124 metres in the beam. It has a displacement of 900,000 tons (992 million metric tonnes). She is the world's largest-capacity pipelaying vessel. The Strait itself, which is 31 kilometres long and up to 3,300 metres wide, although in some places much narrower, had to be closed to let the vessel through.

BIGGER, WETTER, LESS SALTY

It looks like soon being joined by another waterway, a man-made canal this time, also joining the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara, thus providing a maritime link to the Aegean and the Mediterranean. It will cut right across the European side of Turkey, effectively turning Istanbul into an island, with the new Canal to Istanbul's West and the Bosphorus to its East. The canal would give Istanbul shorelines on the new canal, the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. In fact, of course, Istanbul isn't "on one side" of the Bosphorus: it sits astride it. You can cross from Europe into Asia without ever leaving the city. The idea is to provide relief for the over-burdened Bosphorus, where ships can find themselves queuing to get through. Some have speculated that Turkey may also have an ulterior motive. The Montreux

Convention, signed in 1936, gives Turkey control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelle Straits, regulating the flow of naval warships, while guaranteeing free passage to civilian vessels, except in times of war. Even in peacetime, though, it restricts the passage of naval vessels that don't belong to Black Sea states (which is why Russia is a fan). In addition to the new canal itself, the development will mean the construction of new ports, including a large container terminal near to Atatürk Airport, Istanbul's principal airport for cargo, maintenance and business flights. Ordinary passenger transport switched to a huge new commercial airport in the European part of the city in April 2019. When it's completed, it will be able to handle some 200-million passengers a year.

The soil extracted in the digging of the huge canal will be used in the construction of artificial islands, which will be integrated into the canal plans, as well as supposedly "earthquake-proof" residential areas.



Halkali-Kapikule high-speed train

There are transport projects under way, connected to the canal, including the Halkali-Kapikule high-speed train, the Yenikapi-Sefakoy-Beylikduzu and Mahmutbey-Esenyurt metro lines in Istanbul, as well as the D-100 highway

crossing. It all sounds very exciting (especially for residents of Turkey or those whose business interests make them regular visitors) but the idea isn't exactly new. It was first put forward in the 16th century by the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent (سليمان العظيم) as the West called him, or as Suleiman the Lawgiver (سليمان القانوني) as he's known in Islamic lands. Work began but was suspended for unknown reasons. There have been further proposals since then, which similarly came to nothing. In the first half of the 20th century an alternative (and somewhat ambitious) idea was put forward: a hydroelectric dam across the Straits of Gibraltar to lower the Mediterranean by 200 metres. There would have had to be another dam across the Dardanelles, too. With some 41,000 vessels of varying types and sizes passing through the Bosphorus Strait every year – that's almost three times the tonnage passing through the Suez Canal – there is always a risk of damage, especially with roughly 8,000 of those vessels being tankers, carrying some 145-million tons (131.542 metric tonnes) of crude oil. In fact some 3% of the world's total volume of oil passes through the Bosphorus. Furthermore, there has been some international pressure on Turkey to increase the possible throughput of marine traffic. What's more, the volume of traffic is increasing. Among vessels greater than 200 metres in length, there were 3,653 in 2006, with a gross tonnage of 475,796,880 tons (431,635,669 metric tonnes).



A gross tonnage vessel

By 2018, it had risen to 4,106 vessels with a gross tonnage of 613,088,166 tons (556,184,228.5 metric tonnes). There is an apparent security risk here. It's hoped that the canal will also reduce the pollution that is currently being caused by having cargo vessels passing through or mooring in the Sea of Marmara.



Turkish President Erdoğan at the Sazlıdere bridge groundbreaking ceremony

It is, of course, an enormous project and one that will take a long time to complete. It also has a lot of opponents, as large-scale projects are always likely to have. Turkey's controversial president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, claims the canal will cost some €8.5-billion to complete, with the project needing up to 10,000 people in the construction phase, and then up to 800 people to operate it. It will, inevitably, have environmental consequences, too, with north-south flow of water through it leading to the effective desalination of the top 25 metres of the Marmara Sea, although the ecosystems at both ends would be affected. At what might be regarded, perhaps, as a more prosaic level, many locals are complaining that the canal will destroy agricultural land and forest, along with a popular walking trail, as well as possibly contaminating groundwater with salt. It's also been suggested that changes to the salinity of the Sea of Marmara could lead to Istanbul smelling of hydrogen sulfide (H₂S). Or to put it another way, rotten eggs. And, as I mentioned before, some are accusing Erdoğan of seeking to get around the Montreux Convention so as to gain greater autonomy over the passage of military vessels from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara and in the other direction. Many critics think the stated timetable for opening the canal in 2023 is simply not workable; the project is just too big.

Erdoğan also faces opposition from Istanbul's city authorities and from local groups because it would, apparently, eliminate Lake Durusu, from where comes 20% of the city's drinking water. There are fears, too, that it could cause overcrowding because more people will move in for the work and the housing. Lake Durusu was originally a lagoon that became separated from the Black Sea

coast, leaving it with no direct connection to the sea. Instead, it is fed with fresh water from a number of creeks, its current area extending to 392 kilometres with a depth of 11 metres. Its surface is 4.5 metres above sea level.

Erdoğan has spoken of charging transit fees to oil and gas tankers using the new canal, but critics say that's unrealistic since free passage through the Bosphorus is guaranteed under the Montreux Convention. It does, however, allow for sanitary inspections before vessels enter the Bosphorus, which some think Turkey might use as a way to 'persuade' ships' masters to use the canal instead. Members of the Qatari royal family have bought property along the route, as has Turkey's Minister of Finance and son-in-law of Erdoğan, Beret Albayrak, allowing both to benefit financially from the anticipated real estate boom. Meanwhile, Turkey's propensity to suffer earthquakes may prove to be a factor: a magnitude 5.3 earthquake shook both Turkey and Greece on 3 August, just 51 kilometres off the Greek coast.



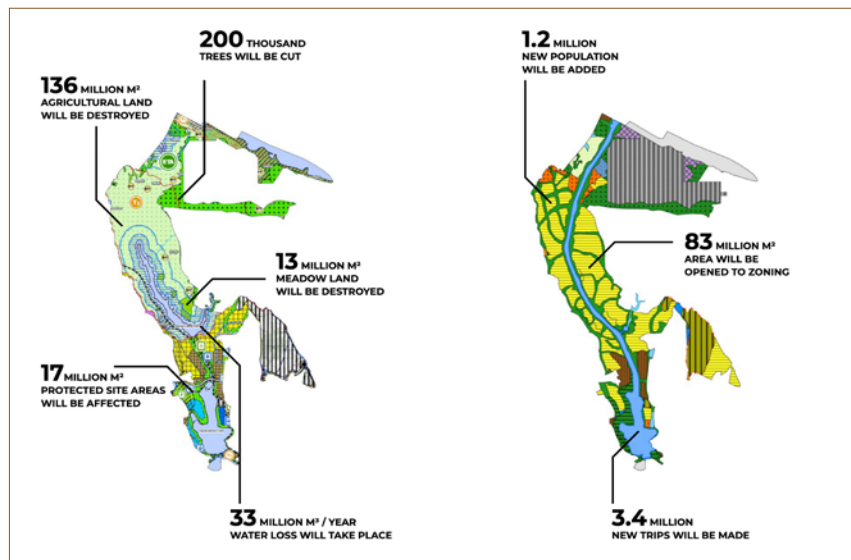
In 2016 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan carried out the first ever vehicle crossing through the Eurasia Tunnel which connects the Asian and European sides of Istanbul via a highway tunnel going underneath the seabed

It was followed by another 5.1 magnitude quake four days later, 54 kilometres from Greece, and then by three more slightly smaller ones on the 6th. On 30th October 2020, a 6.6 (some have put it as high as 7.0) magnitude earthquake in the Aegean Sea hit the area around Izmir, killing 114 people and injuring more than a thousand. The quake even caused a tsunami in the ancient town of Sigacik. So earthquake-resistant housing is important and Istanbul's mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, said that limited financial resources should be used in preparing Istanbul itself for something worse. Perhaps that's why some 80.4% of Istanbul's residents are said to be opposed to the canal project. In April this year, ten retired Turkish admirals were arrested for

criticising the canal project. Erdoğan does not like to hear anyone criticise what he does (or says).

POPULISM IN THE PAST

Erdoğan's predecessors had less of a problem with public opinion; they ignored it. This also applied when a later successor of Constantine the Great, Theodosius, applied the Nicene Creed more vigorously, and who strengthened the walls most firmly against invaders and who defeated Magnus Maximus and Eugenius in civil wars over the crown. His strengthening of Constantinople was impressive, if not universally popular (Emperors of the Roman Empire, even the Eastern one, still had plenty of enemies), coming as it did after further beautification of the mighty city, thus making it mightier still. *"Centre commercial et centre intellectuel,"* wrote Bailly, *"aussi passionnément éprise d'esthétique que de métaphysique, infiniment humaine et n'attachant pas de prix à la vie, offrant aux regards le spectacle simultané de ses foules grouillantes, installé dans ses quartiers immonde, et de ses élites fastueuses pour qui s'élevaient des palais de marbre et d'or, poussant au dernier raffinement toute les subtilités de la pensée, mais conservant l'irrésistible élan de toutes les passions primitives, Constantinople était bien la capitale d'un monde nouveau, point de rencontre et de fusion de trois civilisations – celle de Rome, d'Athènes, et d'Orient – qui, s'interpénétrant et se fondant, allaient donner naissance à la civilisation byzantine."* (Centre of commerce and centre of intellectual thought, as passionately in love with aesthetics as with metaphysics, infinitely human and not putting a price on life, offering to the gaze the simultaneous spectacle of its swarming crowds, installed in its filthy neighborhoods, and of its ostentatious elites for whom arose palaces of marble and gold, pushing to the last refinement all the subtleties of thought, but retaining the irresistible impetus of all primitive passions, Constantinople was indeed the capital of a new world, a meeting point and fusion of three civilizations - that of Rome, Athens, and the East - which, interpenetrating and merging, were to give birth to Byzantine civilization.) It seems Theodosius got quite a lot of things right; is Erdoğan doing as well? According to media reports, the Turkish people don't altogether share his enthusiasm for the canal project.



A graphic presented during the Canal Istanbul Workshop organised by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and the Istanbul Planning Agency in 2020

The canal will have six crossing places and in June this year Erdoğan laid the first stones of one of them, the Sazlıdere bridge. In his speech at the ceremony, Erdoğan strongly defended what he has himself called his "crazy project". He said the canal is vital to defend the citizens of Istanbul and to allow Turkey to take "a more important place" in international trade. He dismissed criticism about the massive costs, arguing that "All stages of the project have been designed in accordance with science." The plan has not pleased Vladimir Putin, who can foresee NATO warships getting easier access to the Black Sea, which Putin views as his back yard. "We view Kanal Istanbul as a project to save Istanbul's future," said Erdoğan at the ceremony. "We are opening a new page in the history of Turkey's development." Apart from the massive construction costs, which Turkey will not find it easy to meet, the opportunities to profit from the work are potentially enormous.



Mehmet Cahit Turhan, Turkish Minister of Transport and Infrastructure

This massive project should provide safe passage for up to 185 ships every day, a big step up from the 118 to 125 currently passing through the Bosphorous Strait, according to Cahit Turhan, Turkey's transport minister, speaking in January. He told the media that the throughflow of vessels could bring in as much as \$1-billion (€0.85-billion) a year. In an interview for Turkey's Anadolu news agency, Turhan predicted that some 50,000 ships would pass through the canal in 2035, rising to 70,000 in 2050 and 80,000 in 2070, with Turkey earning \$5-billion (€4.25-billion) for every 50,000 ships passing through, not to mention an additional \$250-million (€213-million) from ports and logistics centres. There is no doubt that the new canal could be a money-spinner for Turkey, as well as having the added benefits for Erdoğan of making NATO happy and annoying the Russians. However, Turkey has a record for under-estimating costs and over-estimating revenues resulting from proposed new schemes. Six of the country's largest banks have signed a sustainability pact that would make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to lend the money to fund construction. Furthermore, the public-private partnerships (PPP) the government has used to fund other infrastructure projects have proved more costly than was forecast and as a result, Turkey has been obliged to use billions of dollars (Turkey always estimates in US dollars) from public funds on covering shortfalls, while the value of the Turkish lira has continued to fall.



STAYING ALIVE AND AFLOAT

Istanbul is a fascinating place to visit, full of wide parks and boulevards, quaint streets with interesting shops and lined with magnificent buildings, many of them extremely old, while the air is rich with the muezzin calls from the minarets of many mosques.



View of Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey

They're supposed to sing well, too: from time to time, the city mayors had their voices tested for sweetness. The tone-deaf and ungifted were told to leave the call to prayer to more musical singers but were also instructed to take singing lessons. With five calls to prayer every day, it's important. Those I heard in Istanbul whenever I was there had remarkably good voices. It pays to take care there, of course, as it does in most large, bustling cities. Driving is extremely hazardous: Turkey has the world's second highest death rate: 77 deaths for every 100,000 vehicles on the road. The European average is 18.2, in France it's just 8.4, in Germany 6.4, in the UK 5.7. People are sometimes ripped off by taxi drivers, but that's a worldwide problem: I was similarly ripped off once in New York.

However, cases of muggings and assaults are relatively rare, if simple pickpocketing is not. Having seen the place, I can only say that in my opinion, it is well worth the risk. The existence or otherwise of a canal running parallel to the Bosphorus doesn't affect Istanbul's appeal, at least not as yet.

Demand for a new way to cross from the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea, however, has not come from the shipping companies, despite the long waits to get through the Strait, according to the website MEI@75 (Middle East Institute). Despite an increase in the tonnage passing through, there has actually been a slight decline in the actual number of vessels. The queuing doesn't seem to bother the maritime transportation business too much. Over the last 13 years, the average wait time to enter the Bosphorus has been 13.7 hours. This is partially due to weather conditions, such as high winds and fog, but also due to the lack of coastal safety equipment like tugs and firefighting boats that accompany tankers. In any case, navigating narrow, shallow canals had always posed problems for ships' captains, as the blocking of the Suez Canal by the vessel *Ever Given* proved. "Strong wind, current, any mechanical or engine failure, or human error could cause ships to veer

off course and block the entire canal," warned MEI@75, while most of the ships' captains who spoke to the Turkish service of German broadcaster DW said they'd prefer to stick with the Bosphorus.

Furthermore, the construction cost estimates made public don't factor in the value of new and displaced infrastructure – things like roads, pipes, power lines, railway lines and housing neighbourhoods and which could mean that the cost may reach \$250-billion (€213-billion) by 2030. In addition, not only would the canal destroy two of Istanbul's water reservoirs, it would also risk irreversibly contaminating the groundwater reserves of Istanbul and the entire Thrace region. MEI@75 doesn't agree with some pundits that this is all about sidestepping the Montreux Convention. "The relevant questions are how to provide maritime security in the Black Sea, limit Russia's territorial incursions toward NATO partner countries like Ukraine and Georgia, and perhaps how to counter Russian meddling in Turkey's new energy projects in the Black Sea," argues the website. "What's needed is a permanent NATO group, consisting of rotating ships in line with the Montreux treaty's time limitations." I suspect that such an option would annoy the Kremlin even more than the proposed canal. Under the Montreux Convention, the Bosphorus is an international waterway; Turkey only has the right to manage it.

The Irish poet W.B. Yeats clearly imagined Byzantium as a place for pleasure, but only for the young. "That is no country for old men," is the opening line of his 1928 poem, 'Sailing to Byzantium'. "The young / In one another's arms, birds in the trees - / Those dying generations – at their song, / The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas, / Fish flesh or fowl,



The 400m-long "Ever Given", one of the largest container ships in the world that blocked the Suez Canal during six days

combined all summer long / Whatever is begotten born and dies. / Caught in that sensual music all neglect / Monuments of unageing intellect.” He was right about the abundance of fish; Istanbul is famous for it. It is celebrated in a 12th century codex, the Codex Matritensis of Skylitzes, showing men hauling in their full nets. The matter is referred to by the Roman historian Tacitus in his 1st century AD ‘Annals’: “For Byzantium has a fruitful soil and productive seas, as immense shoals of fish pour out of the Pontus and are driven by the sloping surface of the rocks under water to quit the windings of the Asiatic shore and take refuge in these harbours.” Will they take refuge as happily in the new harbours that will be created in Erdoğan’s “crazy scheme”? Given the region’s historic, even classical, connections, opposition to the canal is inevitable.



Istanbul’s Mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu

As reported on The Maritime Executive’s website, “The project’s detractors say that it would harm the marine environment in the Sea of Marmara, destroy some of the area’s last forest reserves, threaten Istanbul’s fresh water supply and heighten the risk of damage in the event of a major earthquake.” One of the most prominent of the canal’s opponents is the Mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, who dismissed the high-profile laying of foundations for a new bridge, pointing out that plans for the bridge came before any plans for a canal, having been in the planning since 2006. “The construction of a bridge here has nothing to do with the canal project. It’s something to do with the road hub,” İmamoğlu said. In

all societies, in every period of history, it seems, there is factual reporting and there is propaganda, and they are not at all the same thing.



Dr Cemal Saydam

The project is expected to be built under public-private cooperation, despite occasional problems with previous PPPs. At the meeting at which Erdoğan announced the project, he said it would be financed entirely through what he called ‘national resources’. If his predictions come true (and it’s quite a big ‘if’, according to some experts), once the tender process has been dealt with, the project is expected to be completed in six years, with around one-and-a-half-years of preparatory work followed by five-and-a-half years of construction. Six bridges will be built over the canal, “transforming Istanbul into a city with two seas”, according to the TRT World website. ‘Cities’ containing some 250,000 residences are planned to be built on either sides of the canal, so it should help answer some of the city’s housing problems.

“The mega-project, meant to prevent risks posed by vessels carrying dangerous shipments through the Bosphorus Strait” says TRT World, “was approved by the country’s Environment and Urbanization Ministry.” The controversy is unlikely to go away, but there is a discernible determination to see it through, regardless of comments from its many detractors and the doubts over how it can be financed. “This is going to be a brand-new page in Turkey’s development,” said Erdoğan. “On the path to this development, we will leap forward. This will save Istanbul’s Bosphorus waterway.” But the Mayor

of Istanbul is not the only voice to be raised in opposition, according to Voice of America. In an interview, marine biologist Cemal Saydam, claimed that the government was ignoring scientists, whose concerns are well-founded. “If you are connecting two marine bodies, you have to ask the opinion of marine scientists, which they have not done,” Saydam said. “Scientifically, it’s going to devastate the Sea of Marmara for sure, and it’s going to devastate the Black Sea for sure, and it’s going to change the whole water budget of the Mediterranean Sea, as well, because there are interconnected seas.”

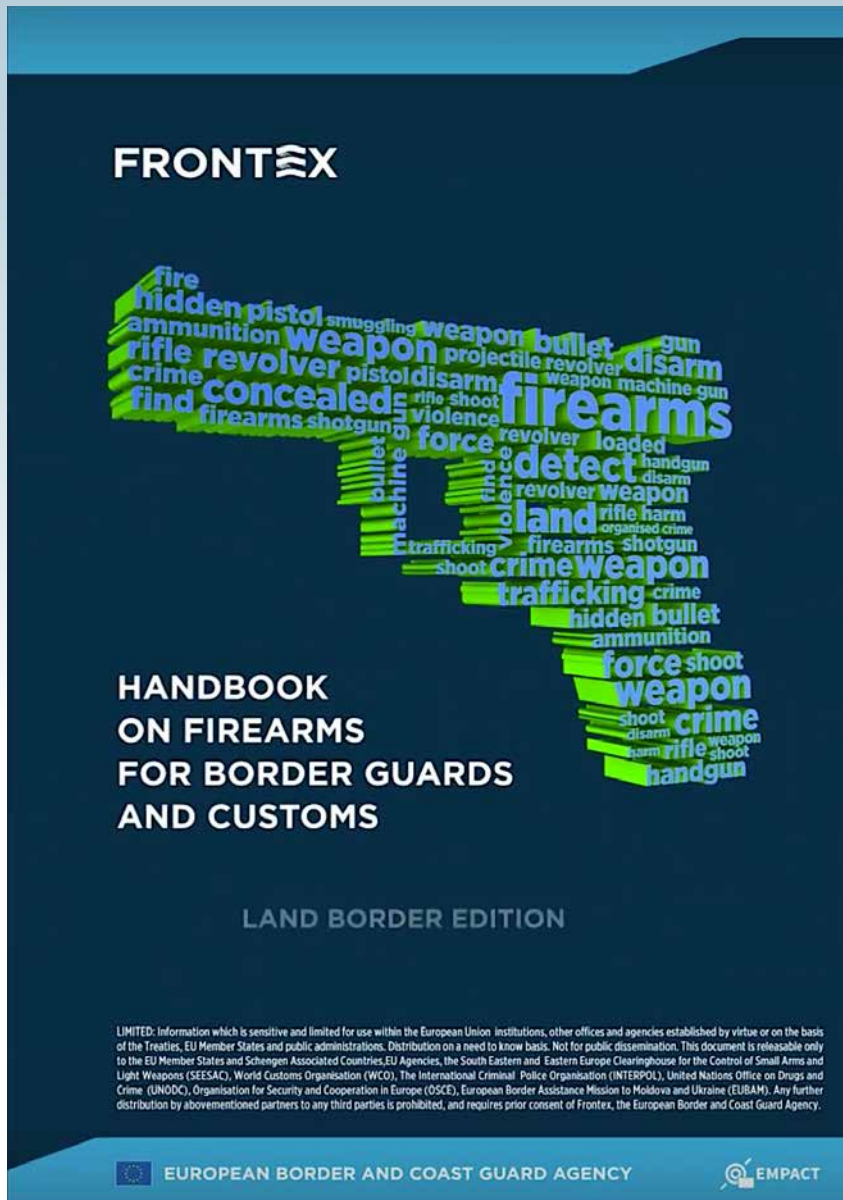
It seems most unlikely that Erdoğan will take any notice or change his mind. This is a prestige project and its successful conclusion can only boost Erdoğan’s personal prestige. It cannot be allowed to fade away. Given the sort of things that have happened in the region for more than two millennia, it is also quite likely that even “irreversible harm” can probably be reversed, given time. Anyone remember ‘Greek fire’, the superweapon Constantinople used against the ships of Arab invaders? Also known as Sea Fire, Sticking Fire or Roman Fire, it generated screaming noises, said to be ‘terrifying’ and gave observers the impression that the surface of the sea was on fire. Today, we don’t even know what it was, nor how the Greeks made it. But the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea are still there, and likely to remain so. As for the possible environmental damage, it’s hard to believe that such concerns rate highly on Erdoğan’s list of worries. When all the arguments die down, whether or not Turkey has its canal (it probably will, unless Erdoğan negotiates it away in talks with Russia), Istanbul will return to its normal way of life, where the reportedly beautiful Theodora did very naughty exotic dances (think Leda and the Swan) and slept around among all the visiting officials in order to uncover their military plans and secrets. It was tough on Constantinople’s enemies: defeated by Greek Fire and Theodora’s bed.

Anthony James

FRONTEX TO HELP AUTHORITIES FIGHT GUN SMUGGLING

Illegal weapons play a key role in many of the most violent crimes in our societies. This is why combatting this crime is one of the key priorities for all law enforcement authorities in their duty to protect EU citizens and tackle serious and organised crime.

To effectively fight against criminal networks, law enforcement officers need to constantly improve their skills and stay up-to-date with the latest information on the ways the criminals operate.



experience and expertise of EU and international partners and contains information related to firearms, their parts and ammunition, associated documentation, and the phenomenon of firearm trafficking itself.

The initiative was supported and guided by the European Commission, both DG HOME and DG TAXUD, but also co-led by the European Firearms Expert Group, Poland, Slovenia and Romania. Other European and international organisations which supported the creation of the handbook include the Customs Cooperation Working Party, Europol, Cepol, Interpol, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, World Customs Organisation, OSCE, SEESAC and the EU's Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine.

The handbook was developed under the umbrella of the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) Firearms driven by Spain. It brings together police and law enforcement authorities of EU Member States, European agencies and international organisations to jointly strengthen Europe's borders and internal security.

FIREARMS SMUGGLING

Weapons trafficking is a global threat that impacts society in multiple ways. It is a major security concern and is thus central to law enforcement efforts and activities.

Firearms fuel armed conflicts and terrorism. The most common form of gun trafficking involves small arms and light weapons, but the trade varies significantly from region to region due to the various firearms legislation in different countries.

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, decided to help national border guard and customs authorities to fight arms-related crime and created the Handbook on Firearms for Border Guards and Customs Officers in cooperation with the border guard and

customs community, as well as EU and international partners.

The handbook provides the latest information on firearms trafficking, tactics and equipment to be used during border checks. It builds on the



Seized smuggled weapons

Illegal firearms enable other forms of crime by means of coercion and intimidation. Recent terrorist attacks in the EU, as well as accompanying seizures of firearms during various cross-border and inland operations, demonstrate the multidimensional and multi-criminal nature of this phenomenon.

In Europe, the predominant type of firearms smuggling is the so-called 'ant trade' (cross-border smuggling of relatively small numbers of firearms and ammunition mostly using passenger cars), carried out by both organised crime groups and individuals, and often originating from post-conflict countries. Other trends have been increasingly observed in recent years, including the smuggling of easy-to-convert blank firing weapons or the online purchase of gun parts and components, delivered by postal services.

In 2020, firearms smuggling was, like other fields of cross-border crime, affected by limited cross-border flows and changes in the intensity of checks. Most detections took place on entry, at land borders, in cars or hidden in travellers' luggage. The majority of ammunition and weapons seizures hence were not related to large-scale trafficking.

With the limitation of non-essential movements and stricter controls, such incidents declined in 2020 – a side effect of the pandemic. Besides firearms and ammunition, seizures of cold arms, prohibited pepper sprays, electric shockers and other weapons were also frequently reported.

While significant amounts of firearms are usually trafficked by sea, only minor detections were reported in 2020. Moreover, seizures on international

flights were limited, since the risk of detection of such weapons at airports is higher due to the use of metal detectors, x-rays and explosives trace-detection (for both passengers and their luggage).

The land borders with the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova and Turkey remained the border sections most at risk from firearms smuggling. While increased seizures by national authorities in neighbouring post-crisis areas might indicate that the EU's external borders are facing a greater threat, the same volume of smuggling could not be confirmed through detections at these borders.

The situation on the EU's external borders is in line with the general global development. Several trends identified globally will pose challenges for border authorities. For example, the smuggling of firearms broken down into components is much harder to detect, and such smuggled special components and accessories can significantly alter the lethality and use of a firearm.



Seized smuggled weapons

Smuggled components can also complete a set of 3D-printed parts. Shipping by fast parcels further adds to the problem. The WCO report for 2019

highlights that 82% of all detections made by customs officers were based on risk profiling, while routine controls accounted for around 15%, but generally led to larger volumes of seizures. Such conclusions once again underline the significance of cooperation with all EU and international partners, as well as with border guard and customs authorities, bridge existing information and intelligence gaps, and ensure an appropriate, comprehensive and tailored response to transportation at the borders through detailed checks of travellers based on profiling.

ROLE OF FRONTEX

To effectively fight against criminal networks, law enforcement officers need to constantly improve their skills and stay up-to-date with the latest information on the ways the criminals operate.



Polish law enforcement agency Służba Celna and Frontex agents checking for smuggled weapons

Frontex decided to help national border guard and customs authorities to fight arms-related crime and created the Handbook on Firearms for Border Guards and Customs Officers in cooperation with the border guard and customs community, as well as EU and international partners.

The handbook provides the latest information on firearms trafficking, tactics and equipment to be used during border checks. The initiative was supported and guided by the European Commission, Member States and a number of EU and international organisations. The handbook was developed under the umbrella of the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).



© Monaco Yacht Show

COLLECTION OF SUPERYACHTS

At the 2021 Monaco Yacht Show

The Monaco Yacht Show will return this September 2021 to the quays of Port Hercule and will unveil another outstanding fleet of superyachts on display for purchase or charter by the leading names in the yachting industry.

- Superyachts and megayachts from 22 to 95 metres
- 37 new deliveries to make their world debut
- 49 metres of average length
- A longer list with additional superyachts by the show

This list should be longer by September 22, the opening day of the show, with the participation of other stunning luxury vessels that brokers will confirm in the coming weeks.

Today (as of July 26, 2021), among the sixty or so superyachts published online, 37 are 2021 new deliveries unveiled by

their builders in Monaco. Among them, 4 new models of more than 70m in length:

The megayacht Viva, from the Dutch shipyard Feadship, is announced as the largest new build of the 2021 edition with her impressive 94 metres and – key environmental feature - her hybrid propulsion system, as required by her owner.

The MYS will also display Tatiana by Bilgin Yachts (80 metres). The project is as simple as audacious: Tatiana is the first of a series of 3 superyachts under construction, which characterizes the Turkish builder's ambition to join the world's elite of yacht builders.

Rossinavi will exhibit the largest construction in its history with ice explorer Polaris, ice explorer of 70.2 metres. The Italian large vessel is aptly named, as she can travel all seas, even in the most extreme polar regions!

These launches will join the 9 megayachts over 70m that will be showcased this year.

For the moment, it is Kismet (95m, 2014, Lürssen) that will be the largest megayacht on exhibit at the 2021 MYS. The award-winning megayacht designed by Espen Oeino (exterior) and Raymond Langton (interior), will be exhibited by the US broker Moran Yacht & Ship with a selling price of €169 million.

A RANGE OF SUPERYACHTS FOR ALL TASTES!

Private owners wishing to change their yachts - or to purchase a new one! -, charterers or new hedonists tempted by a first superyacht experience, all will be seduced by the varied collection of large yachts on display in Port Hercule this year: vessels ranging from 22 to 95 metres, among which a luxury catamaran, five sailing yachts (exhibited in the brand new "Sailing Yacht Area" on Quai l'Hirondelle) and a wide selection of motoryachts with an average size of 49 metres!



© FeedShip

Viva - Image



© Bligh Yachts

Tatiana - Image



© Charli van Rooij (Superyacht Times)

Polaris - Image

LETTER TO THE EDITOR



La Embajadora de España

At. Editor EUROPE DIPLOMATIC MAGAZINE

Dear Madame/Sir,

The Embassy of Spain in Belgium would like to express its surprise and regret that some parts of the content of your article "The Reign in Spain", published in your June 2021 edition, do not correspond to reality.

We do not agree with several statements throughout the article, nor with its general

presentation of Spain, but of course, we respect other points of view, so we do not enter into judgements on this issue.

What we find more serious are the statements that are not in line with reality. The person who signs the article under the name of Henry Carruthers, states for example that today "flying Catalan flags is, strictly speaking, illegal ». This is obviously untrue. He also says that the present Head of the Spanish government refuses dialogue with the government of Catalonia. There has been a meeting between Pedro Sánchez and the President of Catalonia, Pere Aragonés, on June 29th, another meeting of the bilateral commission Generalitat/Spanish state was announced after that meeting, while a further meeting of the « Negotiation desk » is scheduled for the third week of September. A previous meeting under this format took place in February 2020, before the outbreak of Covid-19 in Europe.

The author of the article continues saying that "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". On the 22nd of June 2021, the council of ministers approved the pardon of those convicted for the events that took place in 2017 in Catalonia (which led to a unilateral declaration of independence of the region). The grace accorded is a constitutional and legal prerogative of the Spanish government. However, as in all other Western democracies with separation of powers, the government is not entitled to overturn the sentence of a judge. It is quite incredible that the author of this article ignores - or prefers not to acknowledge- this evidence.

On the other hand, in addition to including in the article a photograph of an ancient pre-constitutional Spanish flag, which is not the Spanish flag today, the author or editor also inserts a photograph of another person, called Pedro Antonio Sanchez

(https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:DHC_Dr_Pedro_Antonio_S%C3%A1nchez_Mesa_MD,

en su juventud practicando las artes marciales.jpg), who is not the President of the Spanish

government. Frankly, we have been quite shocked by this.

In the online presentation of the magazine, it can be read : « Over the years, our journalists have built an effective and highly professional working relationship with the press offices of various European Institutions. This has resulted in the regular publication of reliable and verified material in our articles ».

If this is the case, and out of respect for your readers, we think you should revise this article, or at least publish a correction of the issues we have brought to your attention in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Beatriz LAROTCHA PALMA



A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Europe Diplomatic Magazine fully adheres to all internationally accepted standards and codes of conduct for journal editors, and consequently abides by the rules and regulations governing this field of activity.

These include the two following basic obligations regarding accuracy :

- 1 - The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text.
- 2 - A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion must be corrected promptly and with due prominence, and — where appropriate — an apology published.

We have recently received a letter from Her Excellency Beatriz Larrotcha Palma, Ambassador of Spain in Brussels regarding an article published in the July 2021 edition of Europe Diplomatic Magazine that precisely emphasise and bring into play these two fundamental tenets.

We publish this letter and the author's response herewith, in complete open mindedness and in a conciliatory spirit.

To Her Excellency Beatriz Larrotcha Palma

Your Reference: BLP/abn

Dear Madam Ambassador,

Please accept my apologies for any factual errors in my article “The Reign in Spain”, printed in the June 2021 edition of Europe Diplomatic Magazine.

When I mentioned that the flying of Catalan flags is illegal, I should have made it clear that I was referring to L'Estelada Blava, not to La Senyera, which is, of course, as you rightly point out, entirely legal to fly. When I last attended a “Books and Roses” event in Barcelona, some years ago, the Estelada Blava was very much on display, often accompanied by aggressively nationalist slogans, mainly written (surprisingly) in English. I realise, of course, that the Estelada Blava flag is synonymous with Catalonia's separatist movement. The groups I saw displaying it in Barcelona boasted to me that they were consciously breaking the law by doing so.

I deeply regret not explaining in my article that it was the Estelada Blava to which I was referring, and I understand that it is still officially frowned upon in Catalonia, despite being widely available (my on-line searches came up with several places where I might buy such a flag, although I did not, of course). I know that the white star on blue has links with Cuba's fight for independence, too, which ended when the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana's harbour in February 1898 brought intervention from the United States on the rebels' side, urged on by New York-based journalist José Martí and the newspapers of William Randolph Hearst. The resemblance between the Estelada Blava and Cuba's flag is quite striking, of course.

I am delighted to learn that negotiations are continuing between the Prime Minister and the President of Catalonia. The only thing I can offer in my defence is that the writing of an article precedes its appearance in print by a certain time lag and my researches at the time of writing showed no evidence of the impending talks. Again, I can only cite the gap between the time of writing and that of publication for not mentioning that pardons had been granted to those involved in the events of 2017 in Catalonia. I fully understand that the pardons are a prerogative of the Government of Spain and not, of course, an overturning of a court judgement. I did not intend to infer otherwise and I apologise if I inadvertently did so. As to the country itself, the Encyclopaedia Britannica describes it as “a storied country of stone castles, snowcapped mountains, vast monuments, and sophisticated cities, all of which have made it a favoured travel destination.” It is, in fact, a magnificent and varied kingdom, full of legends, myths and tales of heroism. I would never wish to detract from it, nor from its huge contributions to European history in any way.

I am afraid I have no connection with the photographs used in the magazine, although I understand from the editor that the error was spotted and was quickly corrected in the on-line version. I should like to assure you that I had no intention of insulting or annoying you or the Kingdom of Spain, where I am pleased to say I have always been made to feel very welcome and to which my occasional visits have become, sadly, all too infrequent. Please accept my apologies for any distress or annoyance I may have caused.

Yours sincerely,

Henry W. Carruthers



Alessandro Filipepi known as Botticelli. Portrait of a young woman known as "La Belle Simonetta"
 Francfort-sur-le-Main, Städel Museum, CC BY-SA 4.0 Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

BOTTICELLI, ARTIST AND DESIGNER

From 10 September 2021 to 24 January 2022

Musée Jacquemart-André

In the autumn 2021, the Musée Jacquemart-André will celebrate the creative genius of Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) and the activity of his workshop, by exhibiting around forty works by the master, along with several paintings by his contemporaries, who were greatly influenced by him. Botticelli was one of the greatest artists in Florence, and his career attests to the economic development and profound changes that transformed the rule of the Medicis.

Botticelli is undoubtedly one of the most well-known Renaissance artists in Italy despite the fact that his life and the activity in his workshop remain something of a mystery. He consistently alternated between the production of one-off paintings and works issued in series, completed by his assistants.

The exhibition will show Botticelli's workshop strategy, laboratory of



Alessandro Filipepi known as Botticelli « Portrait of Julien de Médicis »
 Bergame, Accademia Carrara © Fondazione Accademia Carrara, Bergamo

ideas as well as a place of artistic training, characteristic of the Italian Renaissance. It will present Botticelli in his role as a creative artist and also as an entrepreneur and master (capobottega).

Arranged in a chronological and thematic order, the exhibition will illustrate Botticelli's personal

stylistic development, the connections between his work and his milieu, and his influence on his fellow artists.

The exhibition will presenting a selection of masterpieces from prestigious institutions such as the Louvre, the National Gallery in London, the Rijksmuseum in

Amsterdam, the Vatican museums and Vatican Library, the Uffizi, the Galleria Sabauda in Turin, the Galleria dell'Accademia and the Bargello National Museum in Florence, the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, the Alte Pinakothek in Munich and the Städel Museum in Frankfurt.



Alessandro Filipepi known as Botticelli and Filippino Lippi. "The return of Judith à Béthulia Cincinnati, Cincinnati Art Museum, Fonds John J. Emery, 1954.463

Opening times

The Jacquemart-André Museum is open every day from 10am to 6pm.

Late night opening on Mondays until 8.30pm during exhibitions.

Last admission 30 minutes before the museum closure.

158, boulevard Haussmann
75008 Paris

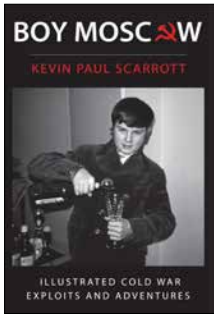
Tél. : 01 45 62 11 59

The Museum is located not far from the Champs-Élysées and the department stores.



The Musée Jacquemart-André

BOOKS



BOY MOSCOW COLD WAR EXPLOITS AND ADVENTURES

By Kevin Paul Scarrott

What's it like to be a teenager when your father works for the British embassy in Moscow during the Cold War?

Kevin Scarrott was that teenager (as were others in Moscow and other postings around the world). Where do you go to school in that situation? What's your social life like? And how do you make friends

when you and your family are always moving to the next foreign posting?

Scarrott describes what his life was like; the people he met, how it affected his relationships with his parents, what it was like exploring Moscow in the 60s and early 70s, and the different peers (and adults) he had as friends in this exciting, yet challenging time.



CHIEF OF STAFF

By Gavin Barwell

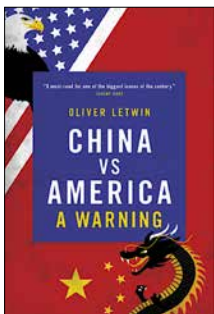
NOTES FROM DOWNING STREET

A revelatory political memoir by Theresa May's former chief of staff.

Once a more sedate affair, since 2016, British politics has witnessed a barrage of crises, resignations and general elections. As Brexit became logjammed, Theresa May's premiership was the most turbulent of all. In her darkest hour, following the disastrous 2017 election, she turned to

Gavin Barwell to restore her battered authority. He would become her Chief of Staff for the next two years - a period punctuated by strained negotiations, domestic tragedy, and intense political drama.

In this gripping insider memoir, Barwell reveals what really went on in the corridors of power - and sheds a vital light on May, the most inscrutable of modern prime ministers. He was by her side when she negotiated her Brexit deal, met Donald Trump, heard about the poisoning of the Skripals in Salisbury, responded to the Grenfell Tower fire, met Jeremy Corbyn and Keir Starmer to broker a cross-party Brexit agreement - and ultimately made the decision to stand down as Prime Minister. Revealing how government operates during times of crisis, this will become the definitive record of a momentous episode in Britain's recent political history.



CHINA VS AMERICA

By Oliver Letwin

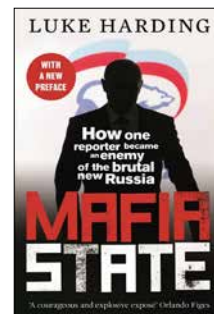
A WARNING

China's rise as a global superpower has completely reshaped the landscape of international politics. As the country's authoritarian regime becomes increasingly assertive on the world stage, the United States grows ever more hostile to its Asian rival. Repressive moves by China in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, military activities in the South China Sea and Western measures against Chinese companies have

only exacerbated tensions. While the great powers of East and West battle over hegemony, the world is being led inexorably towards a new Cold War.

During his time as a Cabinet minister attending National Security Council meetings, Oliver Letwin realised that there was no agreement among Western politicians and academics on how to conduct a peaceful long-term relationship with China. *China vs America* traces the contours of history, both ancient and modern, to explain how China has emerged as a challenger to American power in the twenty-first century and why this has created such uneasiness in the West.

In this robust and controversial assessment, Letwin argues that the international rules-based order is completely ill equipped to foster a positive relationship between China and the United States and that the global community must act now to correct the collision course these two behemoths are currently on before it's too late.



MAFIA STATE

By Luke Harding

Award-winning journalist and bestselling author Luke Harding's haunting, brilliant account of the insidious methods used against him by a resurgent Kremlin which led to him becoming the first western reporter to be deported from Russia since the days of the Cold War. Featuring a new foreword from the author.

In 2007, Luke Harding arrived in Moscow to take up a new job as a correspondent for the British newspaper the Guardian. Within months, mysterious agents from Russia's Federal Security Service - the successor to the KGB - had broken into his flat. He found himself tailed by men in cheap leather jackets, bugged, and even summoned to Lefortovo, the KGB's notorious prison.

The break-in was the beginning of an extraordinary psychological war against the journalist and his family. Vladimir Putin's spies used tactics developed by the KGB and perfected in the 1970s by the Stasi, East Germany's sinister secret police. This clandestine campaign burst into the open in 2011 when the Kremlin expelled Harding from Moscow.

Luke Harding's *Mafia State* gives a unique, personal and compelling portrait of today's Russia, two decades after the end of communism, that reads like a spy thriller.



RED KNIGHT

By Michael Ashcroft

Sir Keir Starmer has played many parts during his life and career. He went from schoolboy socialist to radical lawyer before surprising many by joining the establishment, becoming Director of Public Prosecutions, accepting a knighthood and then, in 2015, standing successfully for Parliament. At Westminster, he was swiftly elevated to the shadow Cabinet, and in April 2020 he became the leader of the Labour Party.

Michael Ashcroft's new book goes in search of the man who wants to be Prime Minister and reveals previously unknown details about him which help to explain what makes him tick.

Starmer was the architect of Labour's second-referendum Brexit policy, which was considered a major factor in its worst electoral defeat for nearly a century. Is he the man to bring back Labour's lost voters? Is he the voice of competence and moderation who can put his party back on the political map? Or is he just a member of the metropolitan elite who is prepared to say and do whatever it takes to win favour?

This meticulous examination of his life offers voters the chance to answer these vital questions.

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THE FUTURE
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