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IN THIS ISSUE



■ RAMZAN KADYROV

Chechen strongman and Instagram starp.6

■ NEWS IN BRIEF:

From around the Worldp.14

■ PUTTING OUT FIRE WITH BLOOD

Can anyone help the beleaguered refugees of Afghanistan?p.20

■ DOING RAILS IN THE SLAMMER

The growing problem of illicit drugs in prisonp.26

■ CASTLES IN (AND ON) THE AIR

Tune In, Turn On, Wave a Flag, Get Angryp.32

■ PASHAS, PURPOSE AND PASSION

What is the ultimate goal of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan?p.38

■ RUSSIAN RESEARCH INVESTMENTS IN AI

AND AUTONOMOUS VEHICLESp.46

■ HIGHLY PROFITABLE TROLL PHASE 3 PROJECT

ON STREAM IN THE NORTH SEAp.48

■ VENTURI ANTARCTICA - THE FIRST ZERO EMISSION POLAR

EXPLORATION VEHICLEp.52

■ IT'S WINE O'CLOCK

Europe's biggest wine cellar is in Moldovap.54

■ TO VISIT

At the british museum - Hokusai the great picturebook of everythingp.58

■ TIMELESS CHIC

Standout fashion and beauty trends.....p.60

■ **Books** Our selectionp. 62



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Nikola Hendrickx

EDITORIAL

THE TALIBAN ARE BACK

Twenty years after their defeat by the United States in 2001, the Taliban have regained power in Kabul, arousing much concern in the ranks of political leaders across the globe. The international community now needs to find a way to work with those sitting in Kabul. And the European Union has already begun this process. Its foreign policy chief has revealed that it will work with the Taliban even though the Union does not officially recognise the group. The block is of course, expected to put forward conditions for this to happen. Among NATO allies in Europe, there is a feeling of 'déjà vu'. The looming threat of an Afghan exodus recalls the influx of more than 1 million refugees in 2015, most fleeing war in Syria, but many even then, from Afghanistan.

Managing the emergency

The EU as a whole does seem to agree on one thing: to do whatever is possible in order to keep Afghans in the region; the model being the agreement reached with Turkey in 2016, concerning the Syrian wave of migration to Europe. Simply put, the EU would be prepared to pay billions of euros against keeping potential Afghan refugees on the soil of neighbouring countries. Calls for humanitarian corridors and a coordinated European response by the likes of Emmanuel Macron and the outgoing German chancellor Angela Merkel are likely to meet resistance from some countries such as Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. Greece has warned from becoming again, the gateway to Europe, and Austria plans to continue deporting failed asylum seekers. EU foreign ministers meeting to discuss the crisis are nowhere near consensus.

The humanitarian response

Among the other issues to be managed is humanitarian aid on the ground and how to ensure its continuity. Especially since this aid is conditional on the new diplomatic strategy that the EU will have to develop vis-à-vis the Taliban regime. While the EU and its member states are among the main aid donors and intend to increase their support to local populations, they do not intend to support the excesses of the Taliban regime. This is a balance that the European Commission is trying to ensure. At an extraordinary G7 meeting on August 24, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen announced a fourfold increase in humanitarian aid, from 50 to 200 million euros for 2021, for the inhabitants and neighbouring states. In addition, 1 billion euros were planned for Afghanistan for the period 2021-2027. But conditioned on the respect of human rights, especially for women; this aid was frozen after the Taliban takeover.

Relations with the Taliban

The European Union has a long-term commitment to support the people of Afghanistan, and since 2002, it has provided over €4 billion in development aid, which makes the country the largest beneficiary of EU development assistance in the world. In addition, Afghanistan also receives funds from the EU thematic budgets, regional programmes and special measures. But now, with the new administration in place, this financial aid will have to be reviewed in detail. The Taliban have taken power in Afghanistan but it will be difficult for them to get their hands on the country's billions of dollars in reserves, which are largely held abroad. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the gross reserves of the Afghan Central Bank amounted to 9.4 billion dollars at the end of April 2021. About 7 billion dollars are held by the U.S. Federal Reserve, and the rest by other countries, including Germany and international financial institutions that blocked access to this money after the fall of Kabul. The Taliban are thought to be among the wealthiest insurgent movements in the world with an annual income, estimated by the United Nations to be around 400 million dollars. Among their main sources of income, there are worldwide donations through a network of non-governmental charitable organisations in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Pakistan and even Russia. The Taliban have long been involved in opium cultivation and drug trafficking as well as controlling the mining industry with the extraction of precious stones. They also control major trade routes and border crossings which gives them control of revenues from imports and exports.

Afghanistan at a crossroads

Afghanistan's economy remains fragile because of its dependence on foreign aid, suspended after the return of the insurgents. While the Taliban have engaged in a show of force since the departure of Western forces, they remain aware that they need access to the global financial system in order to remain in power, as the economic environment in the country today is different from that which prevailed 20 years ago. Afghanistan's economic future will therefore depend on a resumption of economic collaboration with the EU and the United States or the establishment of new ties with China, Russia and Iran, countries that may find it politically and geostrategically advantageous to support the Taliban.

China silently gaining ground

The situation in Afghanistan may change unexpectedly due to the overt influence of China which is placing its pawns on the world geopolitical chessboard and is seeking to ensure the diplomatic "succession" against a divided West. China has one global ambition: to set up its new Silk Roads, which from Beijing to Europe, will allow it a major economic control on all the territories where it has already injected huge amounts of capital. Be that as it may, the UN Security Council has taken a different approach, urging the international community to ensure Afghanistan does not become a breeding ground for terrorism. But the Taliban are an armed group, not a civilian political organisation capable of governing a country plagued by recurring socio-political instability and security issues. Moreover, their ties to terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, appear far from being severed. While other experts are more optimistic, believing that under pressure from the international community, the Taliban may adopt a more flexible and moderate approach, no one can predict the future of this country today, and European alliance members may now be able to do little more than watch and wait for what comes next.

Trajan Dereville



© Instagram.com/kadyrov.95

RAMZAN KADYROV

Chechen strongman and Instagram star

In June 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin encouraged the head of the Chechen republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, to run for a fourth term in September's regional elections. *"Thanks to your personal, immediate and sometimes direct commitment, Chechnya has become one of the safest regions of the Russian Federation,"* Putin said, wishing Kadyrov good luck in his re-election.

Kadyrov doesn't really need luck. With the Kremlin's blessing, his re-election will probably be a foregone conclusion; the climate of fear in Chechnya is incompatible with free or fair elections.

After having been appointed president of Chechnya by Vladimir Putin in 2007, Ramzan Kadyrov was given a second term by then-Russian president Dmitry Medvedev in 2011, followed by a unanimous vote by the region's legislature. During that term, the post of "president" was abolished and Kadyrov has since been referred to as "head" of the Chechen republic.

When the USSR collapsed in 1991, most of the republics that were encompassed by the Soviet Union declared their independence for the first time in their history and faced the challenge of creating a national identity and a strong economy, goals that many of them have yet to achieve. Russia, for its part, suffered from having lost its superpower status to the United States.

The country's strongman, Vladimir Putin, was president from 2000 to 2008 and then prime minister. His return to the Kremlin was almost certain in the March 2012 presidential election, and he

was increasingly open about his nostalgia for the USSR, which he said was nothing more than "the Great Russia".



Vladimir Putin with Ramzan Kadyrov

The USSR disappeared without any real cataclysm, but the following years were marked by the deterioration of the country's infrastructure, the impoverishment of the population and the eruption of local conflicts that cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

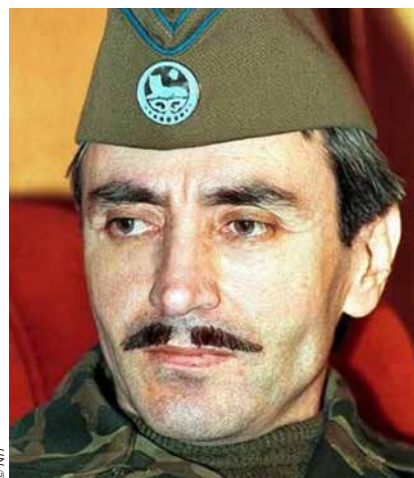
Tajikistan was the scene of a civil war against Islamists. Armenia and Azerbaijan clashed over the separatist territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia waged two bloody campaigns in its small rebel republic of Chechnya, and Georgia fought separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

But unlike Georgia, the Ukraine, Uzbekistan and other former Soviet states, Chechnya held only the barest autonomy under Soviet rule and was not considered one of the 15 official Soviet republics.

THE TWO CHECHEN WARS 1994-2009

Situated in southeastern Russia, close to the western shore of the Caspian Sea, Chechnya was conquered in the 1850s, as the Russian Empire pushed south towards the Middle East. Its largely Muslim population has always been fiercely independent and the region has been a constant thorn in the side of Russian and later, Soviet rulers.

Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, former Soviet air force general, Dzhokhar Dudayev seized power in Chechnya and refused to obey orders from Moscow. The separatists spent the next three years preparing for a possible war with Russia while the central government in Moscow showed no reaction. In fact, it acted as if nothing of significance was happening.



Dzhokhar Dudayev

In the meantime, a wave of ethnic cleansing, beyond the control of Dudayev began in Chechnya; Russians, Tatars, Ingush and other non-Chechen peoples were persecuted as the country gradually became a centre of criminal activity.

In 1993, Dzhokhar Dudayev became the de-facto dictator of Chechnya. His opponents organised the opposition movement with support from Russia, and in 1994, hostilities began.

After an unsuccessful attempt by the opposition to take the capital Grozny,

Russia decided to send troops to Chechnya. President Boris Yeltsin feared the secession of Chechnya would prompt a domino effect of independence movements within the vast Russian Federation. He also hoped to recover Chechnya's valuable oil resources. After ineffective attempts at funding Chechen opposition groups, Grozny was bombed on 1 December 1994. This event triggered what is now known as the First Chechen War.



Destroyed Russian tank T-62 after the battle of Grozny

The 'blitzkrieg' ordered by the Kremlin failed to produce the expected results; the war had already continued for two years and in 1996, Moscow was forced to sign the Khasavyurt Accord, which formally recognised the independence of Chechnya. The last Russian soldier left the territory of the republic on 31 December 1996.

However, Islamic militancy and fundamentalism began to gain popularity in a devastated Chechnya during the interwar period (1996-1999).

Many veterans and generals of the First War began to create their own military units and thus came into conflict with the president-elect of Chechnya, Aslan Maskhadov.



Aslan Maskhadov, third President of the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria

During this same period, Islamists in neighbouring Dagestan had begun intensifying their political, religious and social activities.

In 1999, encouraged by a number of other radical Muslim states, Chechen Islamists took the unprecedented and somewhat insane decision to invade Russian territory; on 7 August, they attacked neighbouring Dagestan and thus triggered the Second Chechen War.

However, the local population did not show signs of support for the Chechen Islamists who were defeated on the borders. But now, Russia had a valid excuse for sending troops into Chechnya again; the fate of the Chechen Republic and that of the Islamists had been sealed.

But the war itself did not end following the operation in Chechnya. Islamist fighters turned to guerrilla tactics and even terrorist methods of waging war which gradually engulfed the whole of the North Caucasus until 2009 when, on 16 April, the political regime in Grozny was terminated. This event signaled the official end of the Second Chechen War which put an end to all terrorist activities in the North Caucasus region.



Ramzan Kadyrov at the inauguration ceremony of the Grozny Mosque

However, as a result of the two Chechen wars, the two sides to the conflict suffered very heavy military and civilian casualties. According to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, war crimes were committed by both sides throughout the span of the two wars.

THE BEGINNINGS

In 2000, when war was still raging in Russia's separatist and Muslim majority region of Chechnya, newly sworn in Russian president Vladimir Putin was looking for allies to restore control.

Chechen separatists had left hundreds of dead in bomb attacks on civilians in Russia.

Around this time, Chechnya's spiritual leader, Akhmad Kadyrov and his son Ramzan abandoned their anti-Russian stance and swore allegiance to Putin. This decision may have been motivated partly by personal ambition and partly by a concern with the desperate condition of the Chechen population.

It was also driven by a fear of the growing sectarian Wahabi influence on the insurgency.



Kadyrovite member of the special forces in Chechnya

After the Russian forces seized control of Chechnya in July 2000, Akhmad Kadyrov was appointed acting head of the administration by Vladimir Putin and in October 2003, he was elected the first president of Chechnya.

Their militia, the Kadyrovtsy, joined the pro-Russian front and launched a brutal crackdown on the region.

Akhmad Kadyrov had escaped seven assassination attempts since July 2000.

But in May 2004, Chechnya's pro-Russian president was killed in an attack

by Islamist separatists that left at least 32 people dead in Grozny.

It was 10:35 a.m. when a bomb exploded in the centre of the Dynamo stadium stand, where Kadyrov was attending a ceremony with Russian dignitaries commemorating the USSR's victory over the Nazis in 1945. He died while being transferred to hospital.

By confirming the death of the 52 year-old Chechen president, Vladimir Putin paid tribute to a "real hero", but it is unlikely that this description was taken up in the streets of Grozny, as Kadyrov represented such a cruel embodiment of Moscow's control over Chechnya. At any rate, his demise seriously compromised the Kremlin's umpteenth strategy to bring the Caucasian Republic into line.

A PERSONAL LIFE OF THE FUTURE LEADER

Ramzan Akhmadovich Kadyrov was born on October 5, 1976, in the village of Tsentaroy, located in the Chechen-Ingush SSR. He was a second son and the youngest child of Akhmad Kadyrov who was the Chief Mufti of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in the 1990s during and after the First Chechen War.

At the outbreak of the Second Chechen War, he switched sides, offering his service to the Russian government, to later become the President of Chechnya from 5 October 2003 until May 2004 when he was assassinated by Chechen Islamists using a bomb blast during a victory parade.

In his youth, Kadyrov studied at an ordinary rural school, like all Soviet children. At the same time, he studied the military science of hillmen. Thus, from an early age, he learnt to ride and use firearms. He graduated from high

school in 1992, but did not enter college because at the time, he had to take up arms and with his father to defend the independence of Chechnya. Since that period, the biography of Ramzan Kadyrov takes a military direction.

Ramzan Kadyrov likes to project the image of a devoted Muslim and he has even gone on pilgrimage to Mecca. He closely follows Chechen traditions and regularly appears in various historical costumes and plays the role of the Chechen hero in armour. He is a keen rider and owns large a number of thoroughbred racehorses.

In 2004, Kadyrov married his childhood sweetheart, Medni Muasevna who lived in the same village. As First Lady of Chechnya, she is a philanthropist as well as a fashion designer. She launched her own brand of designer clothes called 'Firdaws' and opened a fashion house with the same name in the capital, Grozny. The couple have 10 children, including two adopted sons.



Ramzan Akhmadovich Kadyrov

According to local media, Ramzan Kadyrov's wife has nothing against the possibility of her husband having several wives, since under Sharia law Muslim Caucasians can have up to four wives, but only with the consent of the main wife.

Kadyrov has repeatedly stated that his second wife can only be a woman more beautiful than Medni, but that he has not yet met such a person.

However, there are persistent rumours that Kadyrov has a second, much younger wife called Fatima. wife. There was no official ceremony as it is not possible to legitimise this second wedding under Russian law.

Other media have reported that



Photograph taken moments after the assassination of Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov



Akhmad Kadyrov



Kadyrov has been involved in romantic relationships with a number of young women including a certain Tina Kandelaki.

THE METEORIC RISE OF RAMZAN KADYROV

The day following the assassination, Akhmad Kadyrov's 28 year-old son Ramzan was swiftly ushered to Moscow where he was welcomed by Vladimir Putin who then transformed him into the face of the pro-Russian front in Chechnya. The two men formed a tactical bond that came to define the new Chechen republic; Putin now had his dragon in the south.

At the time, Kadyrov was leading Chechen security forces and had been blamed for several kidnappings.

However, despite the allegations, Putin positioned him for leadership and he has been ruling the republic ever since 2007.

When asked how he planned to avenge the death of his father, this was his chilling reply :

"I've already killed the one I ought to kill. And those who stay hidden behind him, I will be killing them, to the very last of them, until I am myself killed or jailed. I will be killing [them] for as long as I live... Putin is gorgeous. He cares more about Chechnya than about any other republic [of the Russian Federation]. When my father was murdered, he [Putin] came and went to the cemetery in person. Putin has stopped the war. Putin should be made president for life. Strong rule is needed. Democracy is all but an American fabrication..."

First, he was appointed by Putin as the First Deputy Prime Minister of the Chechen Republic in May 2004. One year later, he announced that Europe's largest mosque would be built on the site of the demolished ruins of Grozny city centre. He also declared that Chechnya was the most peaceful place in Russia and that in a few year's time it would also become the wealthiest place in the world !

In November 2005, Chechnya's Prime Minister, Sergey Abramov was seriously injured in a car crash. Kadyrov promptly assumed the role of caretaker prime minister and very soon began to implement elements of Sharia law, banning alcohol production and gambling.

2006 saw the publication of the cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad by Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten.

Kadyrov called the Danes spies and terrorists and banned Danish citizens from entering Chechnya, adding : "The cartoonist needs to be buried alive."

In March 2006, the then Chechen president Alu Alkhanov appointed Kadyrov as prime minister. This position gave Kadyrov the opportunity to gradually strengthen his position at Alkhanov's expense and surreptitiously elaborate a personality cult within the circles of power.

Following his 30th birthday, Kadyrov was handpicked by Vladimir Putin to become president of Chechnya, despite having only a rudimentary secondary education. He was given 'carte blanche' to use whatever means necessary to eliminate resistance movements and to force the Chechen population into submission.



Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Ramzan Kadyrov in 2010

In February 2011, when Dmitry Medvedev was president of the Russian Federation, he nominated Kadyrov as head of the Chechen Republic. Naturally, he was unanimously elected for a second term by the Chechen Parliament in March 2011.

In return, the Kremlin made available huge sums of money destined for post-war reconstruction and conveniently turned a blind eye when chunks of the cash were diverted by Kadyrov for his personal use.

Kadyrov in turn, appointed his maternal cousin Odes Baysultanov as the new prime minister; this event marked the beginning of his reign as the supreme leader of Chechnya.

In order to demonstrate that Chechnya had recovered from years of conflict, he organised a football match between local team FC Terek Grozny and a Brazilian XI featuring some of its most famous footballers. He captained the home team that eventually lost 4-6 to the visitors.



ABSOLUTE POWER, NO MERCY

Among his new resolutions was the vow to put an end to all remaining guerrilla activity in the country within two months. He has acquired immense wealth, control of all media broadcasts in the region and has forced rights groups to flee Chechnya.

By 2008 Washington-based policy think tank Freedom House reported that Kadyrov had become "a law unto himself".



Dzhabrail Yamadayev, Chechen rebel field commander during the First Chechen War

In 2009, Kadyrov's former bodyguard turned critic, Umar Israilov was abducted and shot dead in Vienna. Austrian police alleged Kadyrov could be linked to the assassination, but he was never questioned.

And within two years of his nomination as head of state, his closest political rivals, the Yamadayeve brothers who were rebel commanders during the Chechen Wars had both been shot dead. Kadyrov's power had now become absolute.

For any Chechen who dared to question Kadyrov, the options were morbid; either die or run in fear. During a television broadcast to the nation, Kadyrov declared : *"Those who bring discord between people with gossip or quarrels should be stopped. Unless we kill them, put them in prison, scare them, we'll get nowhere"*.

And nowhere seems to be safe; secretive Chechen death squads hunt Europe and further afield. Critics of Kadyrov have been brutally murdered in Berlin, Vienna, Lille and Dubai. Those who have somehow survived the attacks bring back stories of horror.

Sexual expression is forbidden and women are punished for dressing



Ramzan Kadyrov giving a medal to Magomed Daudov, the second-most influential person in the Chechen Republic

inappropriately. In fact, Kadyrov has gone public with his view that married women should expect beating from their husbands. Women who flee domestic abuse are tracked down and brought back home. Forced apologies on state-run television have become a sick tradition in Kadyrov's regime.

This development is not surprising. For more than a decade, under Kadyrov's rule and with the support of the Kremlin, all forms of dissent in Chechnya have been ruthlessly suppressed.

Blatant cases of torture, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and public humiliation committed by local law enforcement and security agencies under Kadyrov's de facto control have never been properly investigated. Moscow is effectively covering up the crimes perpetrated by the Chechen authorities.

Putin's description of Chechnya as "one of the safest regions" in the country is particularly cynical.

Recently there came devastating news about the abduction by Chechen police of a young woman who had fled domestic violence and was forcibly returned to her home. Previously, Chechen security agents working with local police in a northern Russian town, abducted a key witness in an investigation into allegations of torture. Two days later, the man was in prison in Chechnya.

In February 2021, Chechen police arrested two young bloggers who had fled persecution to another part of Russia. The two young men are now in prison in Chechnya on false terrorism charges.

In September 2020, a shocking video circulated on social networks. It showed

a 19-year-old man being forced to anally penetrate himself with a glass bottle in retaliation for "spreading lies" online about the Chechen government. He was subjected to enforced disappearance, and his fate is a stark warning to all Chechens.

More recently, Kadyrov has turned his aggression into the Chechen Republic's LGBTQ+ population. Homosexuality and gender non-conformity have always been taboo in Chechnya, but in 2017 Kadyrov began what has since been described as a genocide of young men and women. It all started when sexually explicit images were found on the phone of a man arrested during a drugs raid. This unleashed a craze of state-endorsed witch hunting that continues to this day.



Action "Chechen Mothers Mourn Their Children", designed to draw attention to the persecution of gays in Chechnya. May 1, 2017. St. Petersburg

On national television, a man, whose son had allegedly committed some such offence addressed the police officers involved in the operation to arrest him : *"Today, you managed to kill this devil who was my son. You managed to kill him and Allah should be satisfied with you !"*

This became a project of eliminating every person who could possibly be suspected of LGBTQ emotions or thoughts, if not activity.

Survivors have spoken about being held in detention centres that resemble concentration camps, where they were beaten and subjected to electric shocks.



Others were freed with the understanding that their own families would punish them even more severely than the state. When the media began to report this, Kadyrov declared that gay Chechens do not exist: *"This is nonsense. We don't have such people here; we don't have any gays. Take them far away from us. To purify our blood, if there are any here, take them!"*

Survivors who have managed to escape this 'genocide' are still fearful for their lives; fearful that Kadyrov's death squads could come and find them.

As for his master Vladimir Putin, he rarely condemns Kadyrov and Russian money continues to pour into Chechnya's state coffers.

INSTAGRAM STAR AND INFLUENCER

The Kremlin funds at least 80% of Chechnya's annual budget and Ramadan Kadyrov spends that money lavishly. Not only on himself but also on construction projects he constantly promotes. He often features Akhmad Kadyrov mosque, an opulent building named after his father that symbolises both Chechen renewal and Ramzan's self-proclaimed commitment to Islam.



Akhmad Kadyrov Mosque-Grozny

He has also used the money to fund his army of loyalists, the Kadirovtsy, a militia that has roots in the security forces he ran for his father.

On Instagram, he touts their strength and discipline, offering a clear threat to insurgents. So far, his methods have delivered results and Islamist violence has significantly decreased in the country. This has solidified his authority and served as a major political victory for Vladimir Putin. Part of this strategy has been a strict interpretation of Islam.

Online, he maintains a steady stream of overtly religious posts, and in public statements he insists that women wear headscarves and has supported 'honour killings' as part of what he calls a virtue campaign.

He has also endorsed men shooting at women in the streets with paintball guns, if they are not fully covered.



Grozny

In addition to shaping his Islamic agenda, Kadyrov uses social media to craft a warrior persona that is based on historical notions of Chechen national identity. It is an identity that can be traced back to the early 20th century when Leo Tolstoy wrote about the Chechen rebellion in his book 'Haji Murad'. Ever since then, ethnic Russians have perceived Chechens as fierce warriors.

And that image has played out over the course of history, from the two Chechen wars to the more recent images of Chechens fighting alongside ISIS militants in the Middle East.

Nowadays, copies of Tolstoy's novel come with a photo of a modern soldier on the cover.

The tough guy stereotype has also traveled beyond Russia; it is telling that a mobster in the film 'The Dark Knight' is known simply as 'The Chechen'.



Kadyrov clearly channels that identity with his online posts on Instagram and other social media: physical training and martial arts video clips, fitness selfies, and close encounters with threatening creatures such as pythons and his pet tiger.

But Kadyrov also poses as the benevolent leader of Chechnya who enjoys quiet moments with domesticated animals, bike rides, playing with his friends, and performing the 'Lezginka' a traditional Caucasian dance.

He also poses as Chechnya's biggest advocate and has paid large sums for several Western celebrities to visit Grozny. Visitors have included the American boxer Floyd Mayweather, actors Steven Seagal, Jean-Claude van Damme and actress Hilary Swank who attended Kadyrov's birthday in 2011.

Other than hosting celebrities, Kadyrov constantly leverages his relationship with Vladimir Putin to bolster his authority. On Instagram, he regularly demonstrates his allegiance to the Russian president, but at times, his enthusiasm backfires; after calling the Russian opposition 'enemies of the state' in 2016, he posted a photo of Mikhail Kasyanov, a Putin critic, between the cross-hairs of a rifle scope. This was a reckless provocation that led some observers to wonder whether Putin might be losing control of Kadyrov.



Mikhail Kasyanov

Kasyanov was due to be named as successor to opposition leader Boris Nemtsov who was murdered in 2015 by a former ally of Kadyrov. The Kremlin however dismissed any links to the Chechen leader and Putin gave Kadyrov a state award for his "services to Russia".

This angered the Russian opposition, especially because a trail of evidence in Nemtsov's murder led straight to the presidential palace in Grozny. Zaur

Dadayev, recognised by court as the assassin was a member of a unit in the interior ministry in Grozny responsible for guarding and maintaining the security of the immediate surroundings of the Chechen leader.



Ilya Yashin

The Russian opposition could do nothing other than criticise Kadyrov and his supporters. Ilya Yashin, one of the opposition leaders in the Russian parliament had this to say during a parliamentary session : *"The responsibility for creating unmanaged modes of government in the Caucasus rests on Vladimir Putin. The main task now is to demand the resignation of Ramzan Kadyrov. Putin placed a time bomb in the Caucasus which can trigger a third Chechen war."*

But this was essentially water off a duck's back. Kadyrov is satisfied with his position as feudal overlord. For the time being, one person has iron control over Chechnya, the Russian Federation's 95th Region, and he forces the entire country to act according to his will.

These incidents and other unsavoury events did not go unnoticed; Kadyrov's nearly 3 million followers on Instagram constitute around twice the population

of Chechnya and some of his posts have already led to repercussions from Moscow.

In 2017, he posted a clip from a Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fight contest featuring a 10 year-old boy, including his own young sons who were seen exchanging violent blows and kicks. In response, Russia's ministry of sports launched an investigation into the event. This led the then-Russian finance minister, Anton Siluanov to announce possible cuts to the Chechen budget. But as expected, no action was ever taken.

Later, Kadyrov's persecution of gay people caused global protests and created fresh tensions. But by then, Putin had already summoned Kadyrov to the Kremlin for a meeting.

But whether this did anything to change Kadyrov's behaviour still remains to be seen.

For the time being, Kadyrov continues to be Putin's man in Chechnya and as long as he can keep the region stable, things will probably remain that way.

A FOURTH TERM COMING UP

Kadyrov's loyalty to Russia and especially to Vladimir Putin was demonstrated yet again when fighting erupted in eastern Ukraine, following Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Here, he showed his usefulness but also a certain degree of cynicism when he sent his security forces to fight alongside pro-Russian separatists, only to disown them later as "mercenary volunteers" who had traveled to Ukraine, without his official approval.

Kadyrov's true status as a military commander is not clearly defined; he allegedly holds the rank of an Interior Ministry major general. However he

has cemented his position as a federal politician by contributing clandestinely to Putin's strategy of slowly dismembering Ukraine, as well as his role in the release of two Russian television journalists held by Ukrainian authorities in May 2014.

The pair were arrested on charges of supplying weapons to pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Kadyrov promptly posted a statement on Instagram condemning not only Ukraine's efforts in trying to retain control of the eastern regions of its territory, but also the support shown by the international community for Ukrainian authorities, whose leadership he accused of taking "fascist measures". He also issued a stark warning : *"We have the real strength and possibilities to bring pressure to bear on those who are holding them captive, and we shall be forced to take harsh measures."*



The signing of the border agreement between the Republic of Ingushetia and the Chechen Republic in 2018. Ramzan Kadyrov, Acting Head of Chechnya (Left), Aleksandr Anatolyevich Matovnikov, Russian statesman and military leader (centre), Yunus-Bek Bamatgireyevich Yevkurov, presently Deputy Defense Minister of Russia (right)

The fact that he publicly condemned the way the journalists were forced to kneel with carrier bags over their heads was very ironic, considering that this is nothing compared to the kind of torture that some detainees are subjected to in some of Chechnya's secret prisons. He even had the gall to describe : *"Detaining people who have not done anything wrong" as "an inhuman crime !"*

In her books "A Dirty War"(1999) and 'A Small Corner of Hell' (2003), the Russian investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya chronicled the terrible suffering she witnessed in Chechen prisons. She was assassinated in Moscow in 2006, notably for her strong criticism of Russian policy in Chechnya, and especially the corruption and arbitrary brutality of the Chechen leadership.



Ramzan Kadyrov on Instagram



© Instagram.com/kadyrov95



Anna Politkovskaya

In February 2016, shortly before elections were due to be held for a new head of the executive of the Chechen parliament, Kadyrov made a most surprising statement on state-run television : *“For Kadyrov, this is the peak... My time has passed... There are lots of successors on our team. We have got very good specialists.”*

But this proved far from being the end of Kadyrov's notorious run as the region's strongman. The declaration was in fact, the beginning of an elaborate campaign to have him remain in power. There were emotional scenes of weeping women and children holding placards with pictures of Kadyrov and slogans begging him to stay on.

There was even a statement from the Rights Ombudsman's office indicating that the resignation of the head of state would be tantamount to a violation of the rights of every Chechen !

Another statement from an alleged civic group, hitherto unknown, read : *“Society sees no alternative to Kadyrov, and there can be no talk of successors.”*

As widely expected, Kadyrov changed his mind, if in fact, his intention had really been to leave office. In the event, he organised a last-minute formal campaign and won a third term in office with 98% of the vote !

Now, five years on, that term is coming to an end and Chechnya will hold elections for the head of the republic at the same time as Russia goes to the polls for its legislative elections on 17-19 September, 2021.

Unsurprisingly, Kadyrov is widely expected to win another term despite his appalling record of human rights abuses, described by Human Rights Watch as : *“egregious cases of torture, public humiliation, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings.”*

Following an event held in Grozny in June 2021 entitled ‘Global Congress



Anna Politkovskaya's Grave

of the Peoples of Chechnya, in which some 5,000 delegates from 23 countries participated, a procession headed by Chechnya's chief mufti made their way to Kadyrov's residence.

There, they urged the head of state to heed their call : *“In the name of all the clans, all the villages, and all the respected figures of Islam not to abandon them on this path.”*



Vladimir Putin and Ramzan Kadyrov

And his benefactor Vladimir Putin said : *“For my part, I wish you only success.”*

This is just one recent sample of the cynicism exercised by Vladimir Putin.

By fostering a climate of impunity, Moscow bears ultimate responsibility for the lawlessness, corruption and brutality of the Chechen political establishment.

So where does his strength lie, the strength that has allowed him to impose himself so solidly ?

The simple answer is : his thousands of armed supporters. The ‘sine qua non’ condition for amnesty for former rebels is that they join the police. They can refuse, but they will never be able to have another job.

They will not be taken on as government officials in the civil service and will never be allowed to do business. The official explanation is that the experience of

criminals is an invaluable asset in the fight against crime.

But there is another hypothesis that is more credible: Kadyrov is cultivating a nation of employees and officials on government pay. People who are entirely dependent on the local and national leadership, personal assistants in battle dress with automatic weapons, given to them so as to be able to maintain an illusory sense of dignity.

Ramzan Kadyrov, who seems unable to stand up to a strong and intelligent opponent, has devised a simple plan that can work for years, as long as the Russian federal budget feeds Chechnya to finance endless reconstruction projects and fight terrorism.

If he collects these funds in a skillful and measured way, Kadyrov can have enough resources to give the impression of a renaissance, fight the Wahhabis, pay Hollywood film stars, entertainers and international sports personalities and maintain a personal army.

One can understand Kadyrov. Under normal circumstances, he would not have had much of a chance of holding a position commensurate with his ambitions.

After all that Kadyrov has done in the last few years, he does not have much chance of surviving, once he is no longer in this position. He and his men, the Kadyrovtsy, are suspected of having participated in some of the worst abuses of the dirty wars alongside the Russian forces: kidnappings, human trafficking, raids and assassinations.

For him, the only solution is to run Chechnya for as long as possible, but not without creating discontent that will swell the ranks of the opposition forces. And this is much more worrying than the fable of a strong Ramzan Kadyrov, in the role of the benevolent despot leading a make-believe, ideal democracy into the future.

By encouraging Ramzan Kadyrov to run for yet another term, the Russian president is sending another signal to the residents of Chechnya that he has no intention of allowing them to hope for a better future, characterised by political freedom, justice and the rule of law.

Hossein Sadre

NEWS IN BRIEF

RESEARCHERS USE CERN TECHNOLOGY TO EVALUATE RISK OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION

The CERN-developed COVID Airborne Risk Assessment tool (CARA) is helping researchers from the University of Geneva assess the effectiveness of different measures to limit SARS-CoV-2 aerosol transmission in schools



Having good safety measures at schools is very important as children start going back to the classroom. But which measures are most effective at optimising health and safety conditions and preventing the spread of COVID-19 in school settings?

In a new study, researchers from various institutes including the Institute of Global Health (IGH) at the University of Geneva (UNIGE) and CERN used the CARA tool to model the concentration profiles of potential airborne viruses in a classroom of 160 m³ containing one infectious individual. A comprehensive analysis was conducted in order to find optimal solutions in different scenarios. It found, for instance, that natural ventilation – while a necessary measure – is more effective in winter than in summer.

“Our results show natural ventilation by opening windows, face masks and HEPA filtration to be most effective, when used in combination and complemented by additional measures like physical distancing, contact tracing and vaccination,” says the IGH’s Olivia Keiser, one of the researchers in the study, who has also participated in the Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force.

CARA was initially used at CERN to inform space-management decisions on the CERN sites.

“CARA is an easy-to-use tool, which CERN has made openly available. The original idea of CARA came from wanting to investigate the risks of working in shared

spaces. Over time, the tool was further optimised thanks to the expertise of different departments at CERN and with the help of worldwide experts in infectious diseases,” says Andre Henriques, head developer of CARA from the Occupational Health and Safety and Environmental Protection (HSE) unit at CERN.

CERN’s know-how was key in developing the physical model of CARA, but with institutes like IGH bringing their extensive expertise in epidemiology and public health to the table, it is possible to exploit the potential of the tool for wider applications.

“With CERN’s technological expertise and our experience in health studies, the results from the study will be highly useful in deciding on targeted technical solutions that can help balance safety with a better school going experience,” says Jennifer Villers, an MSc student at UNIGE and the main author of the study.

Besides its use in primary and secondary education settings, the CARA tool has further knowledge-transfer potential and can also be used to assess the effectiveness of mitigation measures in other settings, such as higher education institutions and other indoor spaces.

NORA KOCSIS HEADS EBRD IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Nora Kocsis has been appointed the new Head of Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovak Republic and Slovenia for the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Based in the Slovak capital Bratislava, she will lead the EBRD’s activities in this part of central Europe.

Ms Kocsis said: “I am delighted to take on this new role and look forward to making a real contribution as the economies of the region are facing the challenge to recover from the Covid-19 crisis not only swiftly, but also sustainably. The green transition is a big and urgent task ahead. We will work with our partners towards greener, more sustainable and digitalised economies.”



A Hungarian national, Ms Kocsis joined the EBRD in 2001 from ABN Amro Bank and held positions in the Financial Institutions department. She went on to senior roles, managing the Bank's operations in Bulgaria as Acting Director, serving as Lead Sector Economist and Adviser to EBRD's Senior Leadership.

Ms Kocsis holds a master's degree in finance from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

HUMAN AFTER ALL – DATA PROTECTION IN POLICING

7th EDEN Event on Data Protection in Law Enforcement

Conference 18 - 19 October 2021 in Rome

The human factor in data protection becomes more and more relevant in so many ways. Human intervention is an important safeguard not only when it comes to the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence including machine learning in law enforcement and beyond. Data protection will also only work on the ground if humans continue to believe in its added value. The human element is the building block of a healthy data protection culture in any organisation including in law enforcement. But sometimes things also go wrong. In the best case that is the moment when we can remind ourselves that we are all just humans, after all. In a bad scenario, humans have suffered serious impact on their fundamental right to data protection – or even worse.

We would like to debate these and many other exciting themes connected to data protection in the area of law enforcement with you and some of the most inspiring speakers on the planet.

The Europol Data Protection Experts Network (EDEN) is an online collaboration platform with the aim of involving stakeholders from various backgrounds e. g. law enforcement, representatives of relevant private parties, academia, NGOs, regulators, legislators etc. EDEN is a channel to present projects, best practices and events linked to data protection in a law enforcement context.

Who should attend?

This conference is targeted at law enforcement officials, data protection officers, representatives of national data protection authorities and academics who are members of Europol's Data Protection Experts Network (EDEN).

Register to the event :

https://www.era.int/cgi-bin/cms?_SID=NEW&_sprache=en&_bereich=artikel&_aktion=detail&idartikel=130784



FRONTEX TO RECRUIT NEW STANDING CORPS OFFICERS

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has just launched a new recruitment for entry-level positions in the European Border and Coast Guard standing corps, EU's first uniformed service.

The agency is looking for candidates who are interested to start their career as Frontex border and coast guards. The future officers do not necessarily need prior law enforcement experience as they will undergo 12 months of training organised by Frontex.

The standing corps officers will perform basic border management functions, such as border checks and patrols, identity and document checks, registration of migrants, countering cross-border crime.

The standing corps is composed of Frontex and EU Member States' officers, who support national authorities facing challenges at their external border.



Frontex border guards work under the command of national authorities of the country they are deployed in. They can work at the borders of EU Member States, but also in non-EU countries that signed a Status Agreement with the European Commission, such as Albania, Montenegro or Serbia. They currently support operations in Italy, Greece, Spain, the Western Balkans, Lithuania and Latvia, but they are also present at border crossing points and airports.

The future standing corps officers will start their one-year training in January 2022. The agency plans to recruit about 200 basic-level and around 100 intermediate-level officers by 2022. More information and recruitment details are available :

<https://frontex.europa.eu/careers/vacancies/open-vacancies/>.

UK SANCTIONS RUSSIAN FSB OPERATIVES OVER POISONING OF ALEXEY NAVALNY

The UK has sanctioned the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) operatives directly responsible for the Novichok attack on Alexey Navalny.

UK has announced asset freezes and travel bans against 7 Russian nationals, under the UK autonomous Chemical Weapons sanctions regime.

The sanctioned individuals are directly responsible for planning or carrying out the attack on Mr Navalny in Tomsk on 20 August 2020. These measures have been taken alongside our US allies.

This is the second round of sanctions under the UK autonomous Chemical Weapons regime. In October 2020, the UK sanctioned 6 individuals and one entity responsible for masterminding the poisoning of Alexey Navalny.

Today's sanctions are targeted towards those who carried out the attack.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said: « Since the horrific poisoning of Alexey Navalny took place a year ago, the UK has been at the forefront of the international response against this appalling act. Through our chemical weapons sanctions regime and at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, we are sending a clear message that any use of chemical weapons by the Russian state violates international law, and a transparent criminal investigation must be held. We urge Russia to declare its full stock of Novichok nerve agents.

The UK and its partners have repeatedly called on Russia to conduct a full and transparent criminal investigation into Mr Navalny's poisoning. Russia continues to ignore these calls and has failed to provide a plausible explanation into how a nerve agent came to be used on Russian territory.



UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab

These sanctions on members of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) demonstrate that the UK and its partners will continue to hold those responsible to account for their actions and uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention.

In light of Mr Navalny's politically-motivated arrest and detention and the upcoming State Duma elections, we also underline our support for democracy, including free and fair elections, the rule of law and human rights in Russia. »

OLAF'S WORK AGAINST WASTE TRAFFICKING HELPS ITALIAN AUTHORITIES STOP ILLICIT WASTE

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has recently been active in fighting illicit waste trafficking from the European Union. OLAF's alerts and intelligence have already helped the Italian authorities block the attempted international smuggling of some 800 tonnes of waste.



The Carabinieri of Environmental Protection and Ecological Transition Command checking for illicit waste

In two separate cases, OLAF helped Italian customs block attempts to smuggle plastic waste to Malaysia that was falsely declared as raw material. OLAF's support helped establish that the procedures regulating the export of waste had not been respected and that the exporters did not hold the necessary permits, as the Malaysian authorities also confirmed. Criminal reports were filed against the exporters in both cases.

In one case involving the port of Genoa, 71 tonnes of plastic scraps were seized and returned to the manufacturer for proper management; in a second case, customs officials in Naples coordinated by the Central Anti-Fraud Directorate uncovered an attempt to smuggle the waste from Naples via an intermediary company based in Hong Kong and intercepted a consignment of about 350 tonnes of plastic waste loaded on 12 containers.

In a third case, the Italian Agency for Customs and Monopolies and the Carabinieri of Environmental Protection and Ecological Transition Command were able to block 350 tonnes of plastic waste in 16 containers before they could be shipped to Turkey from the port of Genoa by a Slovenian intermediary. The waste had been produced by an Italian company. OLAF worked with the Turkish authorities and helped ascertain that the Turkish consignee could not properly manage the waste and did not have the necessary authorisations for any imports from abroad. Further action in Italy carried out by the national authorities uncovered several hundred additional tonnes of various types of waste, taking the total to 1,200 tonnes.

Ville Itälä, Director-General of OLAF, said: "International cooperation plays a key role in fighting any illicit traffic in waste. OLAF has long-standing experience in fighting fraud and smuggling of various kinds of goods into the EU – we often support national authorities by tracking suspicious activities, connecting the dots and providing an international picture of fraud and smuggling patterns. We use our knowledge to fight illicit shipments of waste, as several recent cases of excellent cooperation with the Italian authorities demonstrate."

The ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Customs Action Plan 2020-2021 adopted in October 2019 mandates OLAF to conduct joint customs operations on – among other things – illicit shipments of waste, in particular unsorted plastics and paper. Within this framework, OLAF collects and relays intelligence related to plastic, electric and electronic waste that is illegally exported

from the European Union to Asia and has established good cooperation with some Asian countries, in particular Malaysia, as two of the Italian cases clearly show OLAF is also working with several other countries worldwide on this issue.

OLAF detects and tracks suspicious shipments of predominantly plastic waste leaving the European Union and works closely with national customs authorities in the EU and in third countries to relay this information – in some cases, OLAF ensures that they are blocked before they even leave EU ports. OLAF also receives intelligence from third countries concerning companies involved in waste imports and monitors the return of containers of waste shipments refused by third countries to their country of origin in the EU.

SLOVAK PEACEKEEPERS AWARDED FOR THEIR SERVICE TO PEACE IN CYPRUS

The Minister of Defence of the Slovak Republic, Jaroslav Nad', and the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Lubomír Svoboda, along with their delegation recently visited UNFICYP where they met with the Mission's Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde. The delegation also attended the medal parade ceremony held in Sector 4. The event was organized to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Slovak contingent in UNFICYP and their contributions to the Mission in this period.



Female Slovakian peacekeepers being awarded for their contributions during a medal parade ceremony to the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus

In total, 42 peacekeepers were awarded a UN medal and a commemorative coin. On the occasion, the UN Patrol Base 104 Athienou was renamed as Camp Pribina and Camp General Stefanik received a new sign board.



Slovak peacekeepers on patrol at the UN buffer zone in Cyprus

Female Slovakian peacekeepers being awarded for their contributions during a medal parade ceremony to the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus © (UNFICYP)

"All of you gathered here today represent the very best of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. Sector 4 is geographically large and contains many politically sensitive areas. Your efforts to de-escalate tension and remain impartial during your daily interactions brings great credit to Slovakia and the United Nations. Your contributions have been essential to maintaining calm and security in the buffer zone and in supporting the mission. I know it has been a challenging and different tour. More difficult than you may be expected and hoped for, with COVID as an extra burden on you. It is a great pleasure to award your UNFICYP medal," stated Major General Ingrid Gjerde.

Slovakia continues to play a key role in UN peacekeeping since the early 1990s, with personnel serving in more than a dozen UN operations. The Slovak contingent's area of responsibility in UNFICYP is situated in the eastern part of the island, in an area which covers approximately 110 kilometres of the buffer zone. Besides preserving the area, the Slovak troops are also active in UNFICYP headquarters working at the engineering section as well as other areas.

In support of the Mission and in the service of peace, two Slovak peacekeepers have lost their lives in Cyprus.

THALES TECHNOLOGY MAKES LIGHT WORK OF HEAVY SEAS



© Thales

In the UK, Thales has been at the heart of an original and ambitious project that combines robotics, autonomy and artificial intelligence to support energy transition.

The project was led by the (Offshore Renewable Energy) Catapult centre dedicated to wind power, and wave and tidal energy, with the aim of providing maintenance for offshore wind farms, initially using human-robot teams – within the next ten years – and then robots only by the year 2050. The project is vital to the UK's ambition to reach a net-zero target by that date.

The two-year, £4 million feasibility phase – financed by Innovate UK – has just been successfully completed, allowing the team of scientists and engineers to prove the technologies that lie at the heart of this futuristic project that is like something straight out of James Bond.

This particular scenario opens with the appearance of an autonomous mothership called Halcyon, originally designed by Thales for mine countermeasures. Its onboard camera inspects the wind turbines blades, scanning the structure as they continue to turn at speeds of up to 200mph.

Scene two: As soon as the camera detects any kind of defect (cracks, traces of erosion or lightning strikes), Halcyon then signals the blades in question to stop.

Scene three: Halcyon launches a drone carrying the 'blade-crawler' robot that will then carry out the repairs.

Besides eliminating the need to send workers to wind turbines at sea – often in hazardous conditions – this scenario, according to the Catapult centre, could also a 10% reduction in the cost of the energy produced, notably by lowering production overheads by almost 30%.

When Mars inspires Neptune

The moving wind turbine inspection system was developed by Thales from world-leading optronic technology already used on submarines, tanks and armoured vehicles, combined with artificial intelligence.

Barry Connor, Innovation & Technology Manager for Optronics in the UK, says, "Thanks to Thales's experience in stabilising systems in harsh environments, the camera system is able to overcome wave motion and take stable, multiple images of the turning blades from 100 metres away."

What is interesting is that this maritime project was in fact inspired by space exploration, which is the epitome of a harsh environment. The AI system that controls how the autonomous robots work together and communicate with humans was developed by Professor Sara Bernardini, from Royal Holloway, The University of London, who has previously worked on mission planning for space operations with NASA

As she explains, "Space provides a good example of humans working with robots. The current Mars exploration programme uses a team of robots - from helicopters to rovers - that are controlled from the command centre on Earth, and which can withstand extreme conditions. Likewise, future offshore work will be about humans

being in the control room, managing and working in collaboration with robots."

Dr Paul Gosling, Chief Technical Officer for Thales in the UK, fully shared this point of view: "Increasingly we are seeing the technologies around robotics, autonomy sensing and AI providing solutions that enable activities in harsh environments to be undertaken using unmanned systems. This project is a perfect example of how a team of experts using this technology can benefit society and the environment, and I am delighted that Thales was able to be a part of its success."

In addition to Thales, the project team includes Plant Integrity, Wootzano, Bristol University, Manchester University, and the Royal College of Art.

UKRAINE JOINS COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S DRUG POLICY COOPERATION PLATFORM THE POMPIDOU GROUP

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba has delivered a letter to Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić informing her of his country's decision to join the Pompidou Group as of January 2022.



Dmytro Kuleba

The participation of Ukrainian experts in the work of the Group will help with the creation and implementation of programmes for treatment of addictions, care and rehabilitation of people with substance use disorders, and exchange of information on trends related to drug trafficking and drug use, said Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe Borys Tarasyuk.

The decision follows 10 years of fruitful cooperation between Ukraine and the Pompidou Group.

Ukraine joined the Council of Europe in 1995 and has made many commitments to the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Joining the Pompidou Group is a further step in addressing drug-related challenges based on Council of Europe values, notably through integrating human rights into all stages of drug policy making. A strengthened focus on human rights is one of the key elements of the Pompidou Group's renewed mandate adopted in June 2021 on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, which was also extended to addictive behaviours related to licit substances (such as alcohol or tobacco) and new forms of addictions (such as Internet gambling and gaming).

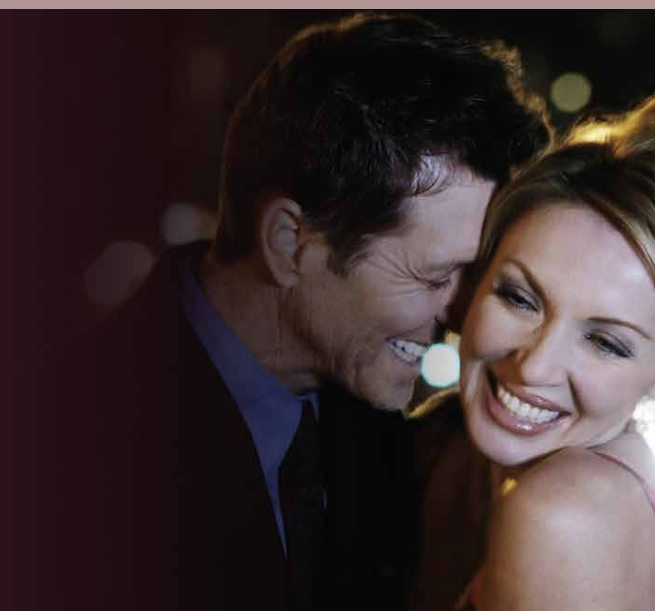


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Afghan refugees

PUTTING OUT FIRE WITH BLOOD

Can anyone help the beleaguered refugees of Afghanistan?

“*D*on't try to put out a fire
by throwing on more fire!

Don't wash a wound with blood!”

Those words were written by the 13th century Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi Balkhi, still much admired and frequently quoted in Afghanistan. Yes, even admired by the Taliban, who both write and publish poetry, which may come as a bit of a surprise to many in the West. It certainly did to me. They may even write it in Persian, too: despite the use of Pashto, Farsi is the lingua franca of Afghanistan and is the second language spoken by an estimated 90% of Afghans. When I was there back in 1989, our team's cameraman, Hossein, was Iranian, so his native Farsi came in very handy, allowing me to interview members of the Mujahideen. Poor old Afghanistan has had more than its fair share of blood-soaked wars and has suffered innumerable deaths at the hands of various invaders and of its own countrymen, so keen on enforcing their views on everyone else that they are indifferent to killings. Invaders have come in a variety of flavours.



Tamim Ansary

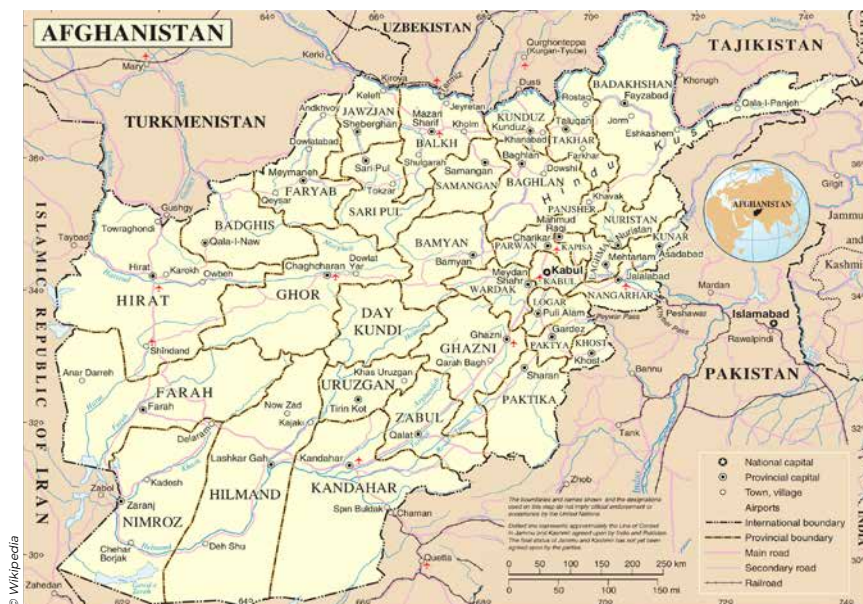
For a mind-boggling guide to this unfortunate country's violent history, I would recommend Tamin Ansary's excellent book, 'Games Without Rules', which opens with a very apposite quotation of its own, this time from "House of Lamentation" by the more recent Afghan poet, Khalilullah Khalili (1907-1987):

*"Night and day our people's lamentations
reached the skies*

*and no-one asked 'Whose voice is that,
uttering those cries?'"*

That would be a hard question to answer for a country that has suffered five invasions by various 'Great Powers' over two centuries. As Ansary noted, the problem – and the reason why their invasions did not succeed, or not for long – was the total failure of the invaders to learn the lesson of the previous invasion and to find out why that one failed, too.

Afghanistan is a landlocked mountainous terrain bordered by Iran to the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north, India to the east and Pakistan to the south, so the histories of those countries have left their indelible imprint on Afghanistan itself, too often in blood. As to the country itself, some 2,500 years ago, it was just part of the Achaemenid Empire, also known as the First Persian Empire, founded by Cyrus the Great. It was a place on the way to somewhere else; even Alexander the Great and his Macedonian army marched through in around 330 BCE. The Achaemenid empire ended in the Battle of Guagamela, which left the way open for a number of other imperial powers (at least, imperial in their ambition and in their own minds)



Afghanistan

to establish capitals there. They included the Greco-Bactrians, the Indo-Sassanids, the Kabul Shah, the Saffarids, the Samanids, and the Ghaznavids, who are described on-line as “a Persianate Muslim dynasty of Turkic mamluk origin, ruling, at its greatest extent, large parts of Iran, Afghanistan, much of Transoxiana and the northwest Indian subcontinent from 977 to 1186”. Before they came along, there were the Kushans, who ruled a vast territory from around AD 30 until AD 375, although they moved west towards the Hindu Kush mountains when the Chinese province of Gansu expanded, pushing them in that direction. They ended up in Bactria, more or less where Afghanistan meets Turkistan and Uzbekistan. Once there, they adopted the Greek alphabet from the Greco-Bactrians and, as they expanded into Gandhara in India, they also adopted the predominant religion, Buddhism.

iconoclastic Taliban. It was because of the Kushans that Buddhism was adopted by China's Han dynasty.



More than 400 families from Kunduz, Sar-e Pol and Takhar provinces have taken shelter in a high school in southern Kabul

Then you can add the Ghurids, the Kartids, the Timurids, the Hotakis and the Durrani. Who? You may well ask. Let's take one example. The Timurid dynasty, self-designated as Gurkani, was a Sunni Muslim dynasty or clan of Turco-Mongol origin descended from the Turco-Mongol warlord Timūr Gurkānī. The word "Gurkani" derives from "Gurkan", which is a Persian form of the Mongolian word "Kuragan", meaning "son-in-law". There's nothing like keeping it in the family. In English, Timūr was misnamed Tamburlaine, who was the eponymous hero figure in a two-part play by the great Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe, written in the late 1580s and thought to have changed the direction of theatrical writing at the time.



Sultan Bajazeth imprisoned by Tamburlaine (1878) by Stanislaw Chlebowski

They left behind archaeological remains and even written material, but what wasn't looted during the many and various wars was subsequently destroyed by the

It was called 'Tamburlaine the Great', and it portrayed the central figure as having risen from being a simple Scythian shepherd-turned-nomadic-bandit, although in reality he was a member of the Turco-Mongolian nobility. He and his followers were also Sunni Muslims, which sets them apart from today's Iranians, who are, of course, Shiite. Towards the end of the play, Timūr commits a dreadful sin which will earn him eternal damnation by burning a copy of the Qur'an and declaring himself to be greater than God. He never did in reality, of course, although Marlowe's play may well have influenced a young William Shakespeare.

BITTER FRUIT

So, Afghanistan is a country that many different people have fought to win or to control, but on previous occasions it has tended to emerge more-or-less unchanged, albeit sometimes many years later. This time, with the Taliban in charge, things may be different. Certainly, a lot of Afghans fear the extreme views of their new overlords and their willingness to use violence.

"I am the bitter fruit falling upon the earth.

Thus in the clutches of time I remain,"

wrote Khalilullah Khalili.

"O spring of liberty! Your grace, what else it could be

But to render this bitter fruit sweet?"

The question now for those hoping to flee the feared brutality of the Taliban and their suppression of women is: how can I get away? And if they succeed in escaping, where can they go? The options are few and seem to be diminishing.



According to the international children's charity UNICEF, hundreds of Afghanistan's children have been killed and more than 1,000 injured, with more and more being left in urgent need of food, water and medical supplies. Most Afghans would like to return to their homes in peace and security, although for too many that may not be possible, now or ever. In 2020, over 2 million refugees from Afghanistan sought refuge in Pakistan and Iran (1.5-million in Pakistan and almost 800,000 in Iran, according to the UNHCR), while some 200,000 settled in Germany, Austria, France and Sweden. The United Nations has warned that up to half a million Afghans could flee the country by the end of this year, assuming they can get across borders that are being closely guarded by the Taliban, and it has called upon neighbouring countries to keep their borders open.

There are already around 2.2-million Afghan refugees living in neighbouring countries and 3.5-million people have been forced to flee their homes within the country's borders. More than 120,000 people were airlifted out of Kabul by US and allied forces once the Taliban took control at the end of August. The US later said that it had flown out nearly 80,000 civilians and of those, about 5,500 were Americans and more than 73,500 were either Afghans or other foreign nationals.



A U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster III safely transported approximately 640 Afghan citizens from Hamid Karzai International Airport Aug. 15, 2021. At first it had been reported that the crew took 640 Afghans out of Kabul but the true number was 823 and includes 183 children whose presence on board wasn't previously accounted for

The Taliban now controls all the crossing points into neighbouring countries and are only allowing through official traders and those with approved travel passes which most Afghans do not have, of course. Despite the UN's urging, Uzbekistan has closed its land border with

Afghanistan for 'security reasons', while at Torkham – where I crossed from Pakistan all those years ago – Pakistani troops are said to have shot dead two Afghans trying to cross over illegally. People started trying to escape to other countries before the Taliban takeover, mainly to escape drought and famine. That is in addition to being what the Institute for Peace and Economics described as "the world's least-peaceful country", an unwanted title formerly held by Syria.



Taliban entering Kabul

Afghan refugees are well aware that nobody really wants them. Amnesty reports the case of Taibeh Abbasi, who was studying in Trondheim, Norway, when she and her brothers were deported to Afghanistan, a country she had never known, having sought asylum when the Soviet Union invaded her country on Christmas Eve, 1979. She was a mere babe in arms at the time. Afghanistan was her place of birth but not somewhere she could remember having lived. She hoped to become a doctor but the Norwegian authorities informed her family that they were to be deported. Taibeh's friends and neighbours organised a campaign to let her remain in Norway and many people in Trondheim joined. Her best friend, Ingjerd Jepsen Vegge made sure Taibeh's case was publicised, but the deportation went ahead. "This is a principled fight," Vegge told Amnesty before her friend and her family were sent away. "We are shedding light on Norway's dysfunctional policies. We have supported Taibeh and her family throughout this ordeal, but there are so many other stories just like Taibeh's that stay secret. The government's actions are sad, frustrating and disappointing." Despite this, Taibeh's story may yet have a happy ending. When the family arrived in Afghanistan, the authorities there refused to accept them and sent her back to Norway.



Taibeh Abbasi, Norway 2017

What a tragic way to treat a young woman who simply dreams of becoming a doctor. As the poet Khalilullah Khalili wrote:

"What, alas, has been my joy from the cup of life?

Like a candle burning in the blowing wind,

I tremble, I burn, ... I die".

GETTING ONE'S GOAT

Violence is endemic across the steppes of Afghanistan. When I was there, one could see occasional groups of men walking over the grey, barren land, usually in single file and always carrying firearms, usually Kalashnikov AK47s or locally-made copies thereof (there is a thriving industry of making replication (but still working) firearms at Brah Darra, in Pakistan's tribal territories. Someone there tried to sell me one but the gunmaker had not mastered the Kalashnikov's complex mechanism and had replaced it in his version with a simple Mauser-type bolt action. I didn't buy it. It's an unwise man who walks about the Hindu Kush unarmed, however. And yet there is kindness beneath the surface, even if most Afghans see precious little of it. In a rough, dangerous society people know they must also look rough and dangerous, too.



An Afghan school for girls before the Taliban occupation

There is a game played there and nowhere else. Beautifully described in Tamim Ansary's book, it's called *buzkashi* and it involves men on horseback trying to snatch the body of a dead goat, first

from the ground, then from each other, and then try to get it to one of two posts that can be any distance apart. It is played at the gallop and there are no referees because there are no rules, merely 'traditions' and any number of players can take part, just as there is no 'correct' size for the field of play. The players can do anything they like in order to grab the dead goat, including unseating a rival or two, because they are playing just for themselves. There are no teams, the glory of the individual is everything. It was especially popular a couple of centuries ago, around the time of the first British invasion or slightly earlier. Since then, it has been Afghanistan itself that has played the rôle of dead goat, with the various powers, both great and less so, trying hard to grab it. Understand that and you can begin to understand a little about the views and attitudes of Afghans themselves.



© Nrf

UK Home Office minister Victoria Atkins

In the UK, the Home Office has announced that Afghan refugees who worked for the U.K. military and government can permanently stay in Britain. According to the Politico website, Home Office minister Victoria Atkins told Sky News: "They've done right by us, we want to do right by them." 8,000 Afghans were eligible under Britain's Afghan Relocation & Assistance Policy scheme. The UK government has pledged £12-million (€14-million) for education efforts, £3-million (€3.5-million) for healthcare needs and £5-million (€5.8-million) for housing, and those eligible can move to the UK permanently under the government's "Operation Warm Welcome" (it could be warmer). Atkins also promised to exert what pressure is possible to make sure the Taliban keeps its promises on human rights for those left behind. Atkins said that the U.K. "will use every lever at our disposal" to ensure the Taliban lives up to its commitments towards other eligible Afghans who could not leave the country.

However, Britain's Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab was unable to give a firm figure on how many people were still in Afghanistan who may be eligible to come to the UK.



© UNHCR/Chris Luffi

Some 400,000 Afghans have been forced from their homes since the beginning of the year

The EU is worried about another refugee surge like the one that followed the war in Syria and has been keen to avoid another painful deal with Turkey to keep them out of Europe. Instead, EU ministers are said to have pledged €300-million to help Afghanistan's neighbours accept them and care for them. It's a position that has alarmed some member states, like Ireland, who fear that EU leaders are putting security (and popularity in countries inclined towards populism) ahead of humanity. In a statement, EU home affairs ministers said that they must avoid creating "incentives to illegal migration". Instead, they decided to guard Europe's external borders against unauthorised entry, stressing the importance of maintaining security checks on anyone trying to get in. Whilst pledging that Ireland would 'play its part', Ireland's Minister of State at the Department of Justice, James Browne, issued a statement after the Brussels meeting: "In addition to the humanitarian and migration dimensions, we are all concerned by the increased security risks posed by developments, but it was clear from the discussions today that it is necessary for member states to act in a coordinated manner to manage this growing threat. Along with partners, we will pursue all efforts to ensure that the Taliban regime ceases all ties with international terrorism and that Afghanistan does not become a sanctuary for terrorist and organised crime groups."

REASSURING VOTERS, NOT REFUGEES

The EU is unusually reticent, it seems, when it comes to promising any kind

of direct help to Afghans who fear an uncertain future. The best they can come up with is an offer to help and to part-finance other agencies. "As an immediate priority," says a statement issued after the meeting of Ministers in Brussels at the end of August, "the EU will continue to coordinate with international partners, in particular the UN and its agencies, on the stabilization of the region and to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the vulnerable populations, in particular women and children, in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries. To this end, the EU and its Member States will step up financial support to relevant international organisations." For those Europeans more concerned about their own security now that the Taliban have taken charge in Afghanistan, the statement included this reassurance: "The EU and its Member States will do their utmost to ensure that the situation in Afghanistan does not lead to new security threats for EU citizens." If I was an Afghan, I think that sentence would worry me, especially when another clause says: "The EU and its Member States, with the support of Frontex, remain determined to effectively protect the EU external borders and prevent unauthorized entries, and assist the most affected Member States."

This urgent gathering of EU member state ministers will not, of course, be the end of things, much as its participants may hope it will be. The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) has clearly stated that the entire exercise of entering Afghanistan in the first place had been shown to have been folly that has left a lot of questions for European governments. "In the first instance these revolve around the best ways to get their citizens, and those who worked with them, out to safety. But, further ahead, they must consider the lessons of the Afghan experience for their policies on security, stabilisation, relations with the US and other regional powers, and migration, among other areas." In other words, a lot of talking lies ahead – much of it disputatious – if not much effective action.

There will certainly be some vicious arguments inside the EU. Luxembourg's foreign minister, for instance, has already criticized Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa for their refusal to take in Afghan refugees ahead of the European Union Interior Ministers' conference. A Turkish news website reports that when talking

to the German daily Die Welt newspaper, Jean Asselborn, a former Deputy Prime Minister in Luxembourg under Jean-Claude Juncker, said: "I hope that there is resistance to Mr. Kurz from Austria and Mr. Jansa from Slovenia who are both clearly and definitely in line with Orban, Salvini, and Le Pen. They all reject direct human solidarity at this extremely dramatic moment with the tortured people in Afghanistan."



Afghan Refugees in Belgium

Asselborn fears that the EU has taken a more right-wing position than the European Commission expected. "The European Union should be ready to provide 40,000 to 50,000 resettlement places for Afghan refugees," Asselborn said. "With this we would bring girls, women, former judges, human rights activists or other people whose lives are in immediate danger to the EU in a legal and safe way in cooperation with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)."



Evelyn Regner

The charity Save the Children is outraged by the EU's inaction: "Instead of agreeing to unconditionally support Afghan refugees coming to Europe and to protect their human rights, EU-delegations focused mainly on keeping people fleeing for their lives out of Europe." An online article on the charity's website attacks the EU ministers' decision to outsource care for escaping Afghans to the country's neighbours, two of which have already said they will not offer sanctuary. "They already host the largest Afghan refugee communities, and are already struggling to provide safety, food, shelter and an education for Afghan children and their

families," said Anita Bay, Director of Save the Children Europe. "As a result, too often children are forced to skip school and go to work, to help provide for their families. Girls often end up abused and victims of child marriage." Many MEPs share that view and feel that the EU should be doing more.

"The future is dark, really very dark," said Austrian Socialist Evelyn Regner, who chairs the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality at the European Parliament. "Taliban means for women and for girls to be completely pushed away from the public: from schools, from universities, from the official governments, it means false marriages, it means violence. To be a woman, to be a girl in Afghanistan means that it is really dangerous and that your life is in danger."



Former Afghan king's reconstructed palace in Kabul

Afghanistan has, in the past, flirted with a more western-style democracy that offered greater equality to women. Ironically, it was under King Amanullah, the man who had declared the country's independence from Britain, becoming a national hero in the process. Amanullah announced his country's independence at a Kabul Mosque in front of the British envoy and an official representative of Russia's new Bolshevik government. His wife, Soraya, made a point of gathering influential women around her and arguing for their greater freedom and independence.

She also pointedly removed her veil during an official function, outraging clerics. Meanwhile, under his new book of rules for governance, the Nizamnama, Amanullah banned torture and forced entry into a private home and began to tackle corruption, taking his lead from Kemal Attaturk in Turkey. However, he further drew the anger of Afghanistan's stern clerics by guaranteeing freedom of religion, which would breach Sharia law. The new rules also decreed that the wearing of the burka must be optional. Amanullah and Soraya believed the country would fall into line with his new style of government if they were better

educated, so schools were built for both boys and girls. The Royal couple went on a European tour and received adulation almost everywhere. Even Vladimir Lenin gave them a warm greeting, which was an unusual thing for a Marxist leader to do for a Royal couple.

THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS NOW

According to the UNHCR, there are nearly 6-million Afghans who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Of those, 3-million are displaced inside Afghanistan; 2.6-million are Afghan refugees living in other countries. The remainder are people of concern, including those who have returned to Afghanistan and are being assisted by UNHCR. People have been fleeing the country since the war with the Soviet Union and along with Somalia and Syria, Afghans make up more than 50% of the world's refugees. Those who get away face an uncertain future in Iran, where guards regularly round them up and deport them back to their homeland.



Dunja Mijatović

The current situation, with many relatively wealthy western countries doing little or nothing to help those trying to escape, has disturbed the Council of Europe, too. "Member states should unequivocally commit to handling the arrival of persons fleeing the horrendous situation in Afghanistan in accordance with their human rights obligations," said the Council's Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović. She is upset that some seemingly civilised member states have been citing their fears of another refugee crisis, such as the one that occurred in 2015, to justify their actions. "Various governments and local authorities in Council of Europe member states have set a positive example by pledging to host people fleeing Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover of that country," she said. "Regrettably, however, many member



Paratroopers from XVIII Airborne Corp supporting the Non-combatant Evacuation (NEO) mission in Afghanistan, August 21, 2021

states have also hinted at, announced, or taken steps towards border closures, the building of walls and fences, restrictions on asylum applications or pushbacks. These and other measures ostensibly aimed at 'preventing irregular migration' may result in people being prevented from seeking asylum on the territories of our member states, unlawfully turned back at borders or left without access to protection anywhere along their routes while seeking safety."

While supporting legal migrations as the ideal, Mijatović pointed out that it's extremely difficult for an Afghan citizen to obtain legal papers, making regular migration impossible. "Member states must therefore strictly refrain from penalising persons seeking protection for arriving irregularly, or from denying them access to asylum procedures because of the manner of their arrival or solely because they travelled through other countries before reaching their territories." She reminded everyone that Council of Europe member states are under a kind of moral obligation.



Afghan migrants waiting for offers of daily wage labour along a central road in Istanbul's Küçüksu area in October 2020

They not only face a moral and legal imperative to treat Afghans seeking protection fully in line with their human rights obligations, she pointed out. They also have the capacity to do so. They have, but they seem remarkably reluctant to offer substantive assistance that could include a safe place to live.

It's worth remembering that both Germany and France face general elections in the coming months and politicians are becoming more 'populist' in their approach to the crisis. Agreeing to accept more refugees would not be a vote-winner for any party. They know that people living in most European countries are not keen on accepting more refugees of any nationality. A recent report on BBC television included a round of 'vox pop' interviews with passers-by. Few were willing to countenance giving asylum to the terrified Afghans, with one woman saying: "Britain is full; there's no room for any more people", which is patently untrue, as a single train journey up or down the country would conclusively prove. There are lots of empty spaces, open countryside, and relatively uncongested towns where a few Afghans would probably go largely unnoticed. Indeed, some local authorities in the UK and elsewhere have been appealing for such things as furniture and bedframes, along with new mattresses, bookshelves, curtains and small appliances, such as toasters, microwaves and vacuum cleaners to help in their efforts to resettle the Afghans. There are also appeals for school places and for medical care, even allowing for the fact that with Afghanistan on the corona virus red list, any Afghans arriving will have to isolate in hotels for ten days. However, as the New York Times reported of the governments themselves: "Afghans are facing a compassion deficit in Europe that may be insurmountable." Turkey, which ended up taking in the majority of refugees from Syria during the previous crisis – albeit at a price – has said it's unable to help on this occasion.

A report for Britain's House of Commons library in early September pointed out that there has been a: "rapid escalation of violations against children." On 9 August,



Ahmad Massoud, Son of Ahmad Shah Massoud

it reported that 27 children had been killed and 136 injured in the previous 72 hours. More than 1,000 people were killed or injured due to "indiscriminate" attacks against civilians in Helmand, Kandahar, and Herat between 9 July and 9 August.

The Taliban does not control the entirety of Afghanistan. In September, fighting between the Taliban and forces in Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley under Ahmad Massoud reportedly intensified. If you recall, that meeting of EU ministers called for donations to help fund humanitarian aid for the refugees whilst simultaneously closing Europe's borders to them. That money seems to be slow in arriving, despite some 17-million Afghans being "food insecure". The UK House of Commons library report explains: "The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) in Afghanistan has called for US \$1.3-billion (€1.1-billion) of funding to support its humanitarian activities in the country. Currently, this is 40 percent funded, with US \$772-million (€650-million) still required. The UK has provided US \$20.6-million (€17.35-million), or 4.1%. In 2020, the OCHA had only 52% of its appeal met."



Blackhawk helicopter captured by Taliban

Apart from sporadic shows of sympathy and support for the displaced Afghans and for those now fearing the anticipated brutality of a Taliban government, one thing you can be sure of: there will be no shortage of debates, of words spoken, of reassurances given, however worthless and ultimately unhelpful they may prove to be. Europe may be short of sympathy and practical help, certainly short of a general welcome, but it's never been short of words. And words are cheap.

Anthony James

DOING RAILS IN THE SLAMMER

The growing problem of illicit drugs in prison

You may not know what it means to have a woolie or a lucy or to be offered a wrap. If, however, you were in the chokey, it would soon become clear. Of course, you could be taking a bang with a booshwa. It's all prison slang, as used in UK prisons, at least, especially in the area surrounding Birmingham in the British West Midlands. Most countries have their own versions. In the UK, a 'bang' is an injection and a 'booshwa' is a syringe. 'Rails' are lines of cocaine, 'woollies' are marijuana cigarettes laced with cocaine, while a 'lucy' is LSD (presumably from the old Beatles song about the drug, Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds). A 'wrap' is the sort of small quantity of drugs sold by street dealers in small paper or foil packets, often bought by youngsters, some of them not yet in their teens.



© Wikimedia

Lines of cocaine

Heroin, also known as 'smack' is made from morphine, derived from the opium poppy. The 'slammer', of course, is the prison itself, but it could also be called the 'chokey' (from an early 17th century Anglo-Hindi word, *cauki*), while serving time there is 'doing bird'. There are many other expressions in use by the prison's inmates but quite a few of them don't really bear repetition in a respectable journal. There's also the ever-present risk that you may suffer 'kwef' (violence), possibly a 'bagging' (stabbing in the lower body) which could turn into a 'dupying' (killing) if you're not careful. And if you turn out to be a 'snitch' (informer), somebody may 'nank' (stab) you. Not pleasant places, prisons, according to a few old gaolbirds I've met, none of whom seemed keen to go back 'inside', although few of whom took the logical step of 'going straight'

(staying within the law) in order to avoid the risk of a penal sentence. On one of my reporting jobs, I was hosted for tea and biscuits, along with my cameraman and sound recordist, in the Turkish prison of Nevşehir, in the picturesque and very historic region of Cappadocia.



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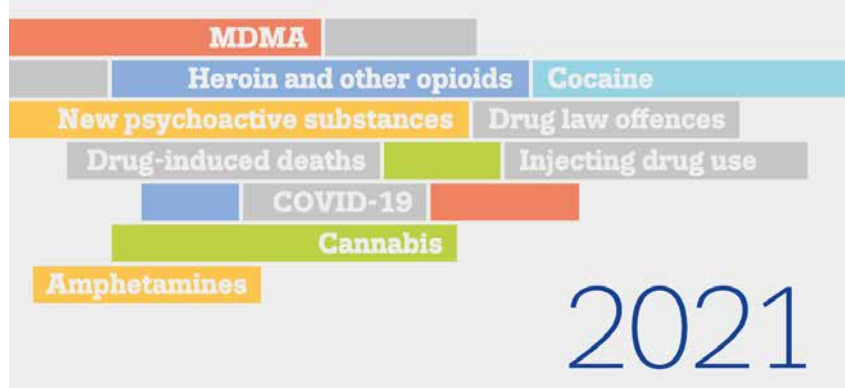
Turkish prison of Nevşehir

In one large cell, there were three prisoners acting as our hosts. One of them was clearly the 'leader'. He had been a major drugs dealer in the Netherlands. The youngest of the three went down to an underground kitchen to fetch our refreshments, which we drank and ate in cheerful conversation with the prisoners, via an interpreter. Later, I asked the prison governor what crimes had got them into prison and it turned out that the one who had made our tea and brought our biscuits was a notorious poisoner, doing time for murder.

According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), on any normal day in Europe there are some 856,000 people serving prison sentences. Across the globe in 2019, the figure rose to 11-million people, but I'm going to concentrate on Europe. In this context, Europe includes the 27 member states of the European Union plus Norway, Turkey and the UK. Most of them have experienced higher levels of drug abuse before they were caught and sentenced, mainly heroin, cocaine and amphetamines. Prison doesn't stop them from taking drugs, although it very often stops them from taking precautions. For instance, people who would never choose to share a hypodermic needle under normal circumstances may find they have little choice if they want to 'shoot up' with something chemical (also dangerous and highly illegal) in prison. As a result, the spread of infectious diseases is likely to increase.

European Drug Report

Trends and Developments



The EMCDDA report points out that: “The lifetime prevalence of substance use before and during imprisonment varies by country and is influenced by differences in prison organisation, drug policy and drug use prevalence in the community, as well as differences in survey methodology. Women in prison are reported to be particularly vulnerable and at risk of problematic drug use.” In fact, according to research by Medcraveonline.com, more than 40% of women admitted to prison already had a drugs problem, compared with only around 26% of men. A relatively smaller proportion of both genders developed their addiction inside prison. The EMCDDA report highlights a particular challenge in recent years: the increasing use of new psychoactive substances in prison, particularly synthetic cannabinoids. “The initial undetectability of these substances in routine urine testing is thought to be a main contributing factor”, it says.

A wide variety of methods have been tried in a bid to cut down on drug use and drug availability in prisons. Expert groups have examined the scale of the problem, assessing the scale of the

problem within the prison population, giving advice and health warnings to prisoners, pharmacological treatments, making opioid substitutes available (it's called opioid substitution treatment or OST), as well as tackling infectious diseases spread through drug use. It's an uphill struggle. You would be excused for believing that a prison is such a tightly controlled environment that it would be difficult to smuggle things in, but the dealers, pushers and friends of inmates can be very creative.



In the UK, drones are a popular method. In 2016, seven people were charged with smuggling drugs with a street value of £500,000 (more than €580,000) into prisons all over the UK. The gang had

made some 55 deliveries using drones in what police described as the biggest drone delivery system they had ever uncovered in Britain. The seven involved are now serving prison time themselves. Less technically creative gangs have been known to use large catapults to get their contraband over the wall. Drones have the advantage, however, because gangs can use them to ship not only drugs but also mobile phones and other items to their friends inside. In New Zealand, drugs were discovered inside the bodies of dead birds that friends of certain inmates had thrown over the prison yard wall. In the United States, with its religiously-inclined population, one inmate was sent a bible, which may or may not have aided his devotions.

The bible's pages had been soaked in sufficient heroin for up to 40 'hits'. Prison guards spotted that the pages were stained and thus uncovered the subterfuge. The man would presumably pray for a mild punishment.



The Szczecin prison in Poland

NO HIDING PLACE?

What about 'all-white bricks', 'nose whiskey' or 'white chalk'? They're all slang terms for cocaine and demand for it is high inside. It can involve different words and phrases, according to The Children's Society in the UK, who asked youngsters from the Birmingham Disrupting Exploitation Programme (BDEP) to bring them up to date on currently popular drugs slang, and I should mention that words well understood in Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Coventry may be quite different from those used in, say, Glasgow, London or Newcastle, and certainly different from similar terms in Chicago, Paris or Bratislava. However, cocaine (and other substances forbidden to prisoners) can also be called 'chicken', which strictly speaking means a kilo of cocaine.



Prison in Fresnes France

In some places, it means a kilo of crack cocaine, with a kilo of ordinary raw powdered cocaine being known as a 'bird'. Elsewhere, 'flippin a chicken' means buying a kilo of ordinary cocaine and cooking it up to turn it into crack, which also increases its weight and volume. So how do you get that inside? One solution is known as 'bottling': hiding the drug in a container which is then concealed up the carrier's vagina or anus (although drugs hidden in one's anus are known in the UK's West Midlands as 'kester plant'. It's done in the United States, too, where a Michigan woman was found to have 80 prescription drugs hidden in her vagina. The person doing the carrying is usually called a 'mule'. Back in the US, the very helpful website 'DrugAbuse.com' cites the case of three New Jersey prisoners who dissolved Suboxone, which is a strong analgesic used as an opioid substitute by addicts, into a paste they subsequently painted into a colouring book with "to Daddy" written on the cover. Prison authorities recognised what it was straight away and confiscated it. Not all of these tricks work in the prisoners' favour, either. In Kentucky, one prisoner who was out on remand, returned to custody with underpants soaked in methadone. He overdosed on it and died. However, prison visits are still the source of many of the drugs smuggled inside to inmates.

In a report prepared for the Medcrave website (Medcraveonline.com), Andrew O'Hagan and Rachel Hardwick of the Department of Science and Technology at Nottingham Trent University in the UK, point out that the trade is not exactly altruistic. Some people may try to help a friend or relative inside but the main motive, as in so many things, is money. "A good example is the case of Charlotte Millward, a 35-year-old mother of two," O'Hagan and Hardwick write, "who was seen reaching inside her undergarments and handing 10 tablets to her boyfriend during a visit at Holme House Prison in 2014. The tablets, worth around £2 each

(€2.33) outside of prison, were worth £40 (€46.7) inside the prison. For this offence, Charlotte received a six-month suspended prison sentence." Of course, prisons do use sniffer dogs to detect suspicious packages, but drugs that give off an odour are often smothered in Marmite, the yeast-based vegetarian food spread popular with vegetarians but hated by some. It has a strong smell that can cover the smell of some drugs. The ingenuity of the smugglers is impressive. For instance, report O'Hagan and Hardwick, drugs can be sprayed onto otherwise innocent-looking paper, such as children's drawings. "In a Scottish Prison, inmates are no longer allowed to receive their children's artwork or drawings," reads their report, "after an incidence when powdered Valium was found in the paint. Staff at HMP Shotts in Lanarkshire found the Valium had been painted onto the artwork which inmates would cut up and eat." The drug known as 'spice', which is synthetic cannabis, can be sprayed on to children's drawings and then smoked. It is not detectable by X-ray, nor by smell. Inside prison, one sheet changes hands for approximately £50 (€58.3).

Prison staff are not above suspicion, either. One officer was given £1,000 (almost €1170) for slipping an ounce of crack cocaine past his fellow-guards, whilst another received £500 (almost €584) for bringing in a package that contained whatever the recipient had ordered from outside, including drugs and mobile phones.



The Wandsworth Prison, in South West London

Staff have even helped prisoners to run a £30-million (€35-million) drug dealing operation from inside their cells. In Wandsworth Prison, in South West London, prisoners made use of computers provided by Britain's Ministry of Justice, linking them to internet sites, along with mobile phones provided by guards, and put £30-million (€35-million) of illicit drugs onto the streets of London between 2010 and 2013. Rehabilitation of offenders is made harder by their dependence on drugs.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) in Europe reminds us that: "According to

data from the Council of Europe, about 635,000 people were estimated to be in penal institutions in the 28 EU member states and Norway on 1 September 2010." Its website explains the figures and what they mean in terms of actual people: an average of 135 prisoners for every 100,000 population in European states. The rates are different, though, in different countries. "It ranges from 60–70 per 100,000 population in Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden to over 200 in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. This figure is lower than in some large countries, for example 620 in the Russian Federation and 740 in the United States." It explains why Johnnie Cash got the blues in Folsom Prison, anyway.



Cannabis is still the commonest drug of choice among life-long users who have ever taken an illicit drug, ranging from 12% to 70% of prisoners who've tried it. It's also still the most popular drug among the public at large, although rates are lower than those that pertain in prisons, with 1.6% to 33% among people aged 15 to 64. The popularity of cocaine depends on the country where it's used: 6% in Romania to 53% in Spain. Among the wider public, cocaine use ranges from 0.3% in Malta to 10% in Spain. According to EMCDDA data, "Lifetime prevalence of heroin use among the prisoners who have ever used any illicit drugs ranges from 8 to 39%, with 8 out of 13 countries that were able to provide information reporting levels in the range 15 to 39%.



Seized drugs in a UK prison

Amphetamine experience among prisoners ranges from 1% to 45%, whereas among the general population, the range is from 0% to 12%.” The EMCDDA also gives us a timely reminder of a societal fact in its report that we would do well to bear in mind: “Drug users form a large part of the overall prison population, with studies showing that a majority of prisoners have used illicit drugs at some point in their lives and many have chronic and problematic drug use patterns. Because of the illegality of the drugs market and high cost of drug use, which is often funded by criminal activity, the more problematic forms of drug use are accompanied by an increased risk of imprisonment.”



disadvantage that too many of them suffer: they get very little sympathy from the wider public, making medical and psychological interventions harder to apply. “People who are detained are often subject to stigmatisation due to their dependence. The fear of being caught for drug possession, as well as backlash from other inmates often prevents drug-dependent detainees from seeking help or complying with their drug treatment.” Progress may be relatively slow but it is still progress. “The first in-prison Therapeutic Community in the Republic of Moldova was officially opened in Pruncul prison in November 2018. Today, “Catharsis” is home to 25 residents coping with drug problems, who are learning skills there that will help them to live a healthy and stable life after release from prison.”

Europol, the EU’s cross-border law enforcement agency, has reported that the drugs market in Europe as a whole has been changing and not just in its prisons. “Organised crime benefits significantly from the drug trade,” reads a Europol report on the issue, “but more worryingly, these criminals have shown determination and ruthlessness in trying to grow their market share. The direct impact of these developments is to be found in the number of fatal drug overdoses, of which there were 8,238 in the EU in 2017, and individuals seeking help from treatment providers or emergency services.” Research suggests that the issue of drug addiction is getting worse. “In Germany, prison sentences for drug offences rose from 10.8 percent in 1971 to 31.5 percent in 1976,” wrote

Sonja Snacken and Kristel Beyens in the European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research back in 1994; “in the Netherlands the proportion of prison sentences for drug offences is six times higher than the average.”

The scientific skills of the drug criminals has been becoming more sophisticated, too. In Hungary, there has been a large increase in the numbers injecting new psychoactive substances (NPS), according to a 2016 report in Science Direct. This coincided with decreasing efforts at harm reduction and rising cases of HIV infection. The article concludes: “NPS injectors in Hungary are at severe risk of blood-borne infections due to high levels of injecting and sexual risk behaviours within a high-risk environment.” The EU has funded projects aimed at reducing the damage done through taking drugs, often including drugs of dubious provenance and purity, for several years.

“The Joint Action on HIV and co-infection prevention and harm reduction (HA-REACT) project, which took place between 2015 and 2019, addressed existing gaps in the prevention of HIV and other co-infections, especially TB and viral hepatitis, among people who inject drug,” the EMCDDA explains in its report on the latest drug reduction programme.



“Among the areas covered by the project, prison health is central. One of the HA-REACT project’s outputs, a toolbox on how to advance harm reduction in prison settings, is available on a dedicated web platform (hareact.eu). Among the tools available are information, education and practical implementation materials targeting healthcare professionals operating in prison settings, prison



Detainees from Moldova, each with a personal history of drug abuse, have undergone a rehabilitation program in the Therapeutic Community “Catharsis”, a revolutionary project for the penitentiary system of the country

HELP NO-ONE ASKS FOR BUT GETS ANYWAY

Many countries have run schemes aimed at weaning the prison population off narcotics and the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe has seen some positive results, one of which is quoted on the Group’s website: “Since I turned 13 years old, I used to turn off my feelings by using drugs, I turned off my fears. I was just taking drugs and living in my own world. Now I feel very well, I started feeling emotions that bring me joy and make me happier.” So said a resident at the in-prison Therapeutic Community in the Republic of Moldova.

The Group also reminds us that: “People who are incarcerated often come from poor and deprived segments of the population and include migrants, ethnic minorities, people without employment, people with substance use disorders or sex workers. Many diseases concentrate in these vulnerable and underserved groups.” I could point out another



New psychoactive substances (NPS)

administration and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. community-based organisations): materials are oriented towards implementing interventions such as OST and prison needle and syringe programmes, condom distribution and provision of take-home naloxone.” Whilst addressing the issue of drug taking inside prisons, nobody seriously imagines a route out of the problem that will ever eradicate it altogether. In any normal society, money is the most effective motive, but when prisoners are prepared to pay many times the street price for narcotics, (remember prisoners paying almost €47 for drugs selling outside for €2.33?) it doesn't seem to work in this case. It all comes down to supply and demand. In prisons, the demand is huge, while the supply, despite the efforts of gangsters, family members and corrupt guards (known as ‘screws’ in UK slang) is limited, and the toughest prisoners, by and large, control access.



KNOW YOUR OFFENDER

The actual prison population varies across Europe, although there are some common factors. Women represent around 5% of the prison population (around 41,000), varying from 3% in Bulgaria to 5% in Cyprus. According to the EMCDDA, the prison population has an estimated mean age of 37 years, ranging from 33.6 years in Denmark to 41 in Italy. “An estimated 11% of people in prison in Europe are foreign nationals, with considerable national variation — from 0.2% in Germany to 74% in Luxembourg,” says the report. “Around one fifth of people in prison have not received a final sentence, ranging from 8.4% in Czechia to 48% in Luxembourg.” The report also explains other essential facts about the European prison population. “More than half (52%) of people in prison are sentenced to 5 years or more, with 37% sentenced to between 1 and 5 years and 11% sentenced to less than one year. The main offences



for which people are given prison sentences are property crimes such as theft and robbery (32%), drug offences such as possession and trafficking (18%) and homicides (12%).”

Whatever the crime, though, prisoners are supposed to be treated alike. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the health of prisoners is an important matter. “In 1995 the WHO Regional Office for Europe set up the Health in Prisons Programme (HIPP) to encourage and support WHO Europe countries to address the higher prevalence of health problems in prison. Since its inception HIPP has developed to become a crucial international movement to promote health in prison settings. HIPP's main activity is to give technical advice to member states on the development of prison health systems and their links with public health systems and on technical issues related to communicable diseases (especially HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and tuberculosis), illicit drug use (including substitution therapy and harm reduction) and mental health.”

The EMCDDA admits that data on access to drugs in prison are scarce and frequently based on anecdotal information. This lack of factual data, now and in the past, means it's virtually impossible to track trends in drug use among prisoners. It's worth remembering, however, that many of the crimes that landed people in prison were to fund a pre-existing drug habit or else were committed while under the influence of drugs. People in prison are far more likely to have used drugs and to have to used

them regularly, including suffering drug-related problems, than other people in the community. Worldwide, it has been estimated that 30% of male prisoners and 51% of women have some sort drug use disorder. At European level, studies have shown that between 30% and 75% of people with problematic drug use have been in prison at some time in their life. The high prevalence of drug use among people in prison reflects, and is reflected in, a number of social factors. For one thing, nobody likes or wants to be in prison and if they cannot get out any other way, at least drugs allow them to escape in their minds.

Sometimes, of course, it's an escape route that can prove permanent: there were 8,238 fatal overdoses recorded in the EU in 2017, according to Europol. For Europol, the switch to the kinds of narcotics that can be cooked up in somebody's basement laboratory is making the job of policing their use harder. “Problems attributable to synthetic cannabinoids appear to be growing,” says Europol's 2019 report, “as their relatively low cost, easy availability and high potency are factors in increased use among marginalised groups, including the homeless and prison populations. In addition, new synthetic opioids are a growing cause for concern, with a rapid increase seen in the number of fentanyl derivatives, substances particularly associated with health problems, including fatal poisoning.” Fentanyl is a narcotic analgesic with a potency at least 50 to 100 times that of morphine. No wonder it's popular, although despite its undoubted power, its effect is short-lived: just 15 minutes

or so, compared with 45 minutes for morphine, although fentanyl's effect on respiration can outlast its analgesic effects. With a little skilled tweaking of the fentanyl formula, it can be turned into carfentanyl, which is supposedly 10,000 times as potent as morphine. That might gain the user a considerable escape from reality.

The alteration to the drug would have to be carried out by a very skilled biochemist, however, although it seems that Europe's drug gangs can easily afford such expertise.

A Fentanyl analogue known as "china white" (α -methylfentanyl) was first reported in California in 1979. In 1984, another illicit designer drug, 3-methylfentanyl, appeared as a street drug in the state, and it also became linked to fatal drug overdose. Three deadly poisoning cases involved 3-methylfentanyl. Fentanyl and its derivatives (Alfentanil, Sufentanil, Remifentanil and Carfentanil) are used as anaesthetics and analgesics in both human and veterinary medicine (Carfentanil). They are subject to international control as are a range of highly potent non-pharmaceutical fentanyl (NPF) derivatives, such as 3-methylfentanyl, synthesised illicitly and sold as 'synthetic heroin', or mixed with heroin. Mixing it with heroin would make it an extremely potent narcotic and hard to break from if ever a user should become addicted to the stuff.



The variants, like fentanyl itself, are usually administered intravenously in single doses. Originally, its short period of action on (and in) the body was thought to be the result of its rapid removal from the body. However, as clinical experience increased, it was realised that if multiple or larger than normal doses were used during narcotic-based anaesthesia, it sometimes led to delayed recovery

and prolonged respiratory depression, suggesting that the action's duration was limited by redistribution within the body rather than removal from it.

Opioid	FDA	Relative Potency	Lethal Dose
Morphine	✓	1x	1 Pea
Heroin	✓	2x	1 Sunflower Seed
Fentanyl	✓	100x	1 Sesame Seed
Sufentanil	✓	500x	1 Grain of Sand
Carfentanil	✗	10,000x	0.5 Grains of Salt

The National Library of Medicines writes that: "Renal excretion accounts for up to 10% of the dose; the remainder of the clearance would appear to be predominantly hepatic, but with contributions from other tissues. Continued clinical developments of narcotic-based anaesthetic techniques have resulted in high doses of narcotic being used, with oxygen, as the sole anaesthetic agents." At present these techniques are usually based on fentanyl, and the technique is frequently called 'stress-free anaesthesia' because of the effects in reducing the sensitivity of tissues in the target area, the 'stress response' caused by surgery (elevation of plasma concentrations of cortisol, glucose, ADH, etc. in the intra- and post-operative period) and the lack of deleterious effects on the cardiovascular system.

ONE CRIME LEADS TO ANOTHER

As well as its effect on the health of inmates, criminals often use drugs to establish their authority within the prison system 'pecking order'. This leads inevitably to assaults, blackmail and quite a lot of violence, not just between prisoners, but also against prison staff. The medcraveonline.com report points out that: "Violence protects the credibility, profits and reputation of their (the drug dealers') business. Inmates are hired to accumulate payments and intimidate, threaten and be physically aggressive towards debtors." The result is perhaps not so surprising: the most ruthless and violent prisoners rise to the top, to run

certain prison 'wings' as their private fiefdoms, and to control their fellow inmates, organising riots, for instance, to help facilitate an escape. They have also been known to force weaker, more vulnerable prisoners to take drugs (and pay for them, of course) in order to create a drug dependency and hence a reliable source of future income.

Prison drug dealing is not without a financial cost for the authorities, too. "European countries have an estimated expenditure in the range of €3.7-billion to €3.9-billion on drug law offenders," says Medcraveonline.com. "Drug related crime cost England and Wales £13.5-billion and the CJS (Criminal Justice System) budgeted over £300-million (€350-million) in 2006/07 for adult drug interventions. Specifically, prison treatment in England and Wales has increased from £7-million (€8.17-million) in 1997/98 to £80-million (€93.36-million) in 2007/08." The violence is not confined to inter-prisoner relationships behind bars but it also extends to debts being enforced on the prisoner's friends and families on the outside. Additionally, profits from drug supply in prison are often used to fund criminal activity out in the wider community. Even so, treatment programmes for prisoners' drug problem only really started to be addressed as fears arose over HIV/AIDS, which are often spread by shared needles, as well as by sexual activity.

It all presents a massive problem for prison authorities. Mandatory testing would seem like a good idea, but it encourages a switch from soft drugs to harder ones. Heroin, for instance, only stays in the system for up to three days, whereas the use of cannabis can be detected for up to 14 days. It means that heroin is the safer choice, in terms of being caught out. Watch towers and a German-made drone detector are one solution that is attracting support, while a single sniffer dog at the UK's Wandsworth Prison, near London, found concealed drugs with a street value of £300,000 (€350,000) in a single year. Working out how to reduce the ingress of drugs into prisons is one solution, but it involves having to stay constantly ahead of the gangsters and their associates on the inside; a kind of narcotic arms race, if you like. It seems unlikely to end any time soon, either.

T. Kingsley Brooks



CASTLES IN (AND ON) THE AIR

Tune In, Turn On, Wave a Flag, Get Angry

“Whoever controls the media, controls the mind,” said rock star Jim Morrison in an interview for Rolling Stone magazine in 1969. Morrison, who died two years later, was the lead singer with the popular sixties rock band, The Doors. The same words, slightly altered to “He who controls the media controls the minds of the public” were later Tweeted by Noam Chomsky, who is described on line as an “American linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, historian, social critic, and political activist”. A busy chap, then, who probably has little time to watch television anyway, and is unlikely to choose to watch the sorts of programmes being exported around the world by the UK’s highly-productive audiovisual industry. Much of that output is still going to quit Europe, despite the UK voting to quit the European Union.

Why did that happen? Well, according to Paul Whiteley, who is Professor of Government at the University of Essex,

it was Britain’s failure to recover fully from the worst recession in over 70 years, which meant that many people were feeling feeling discontented and unrepresented. The media were not good at explaining how the EU worked or what it did; I remember how difficult it was to get articles accepted by news desk editors who preferred doubt to certainty. The public also believed, according to various surveys, that decisions affecting Britain should be taken in Britain (even if they didn’t know what those decisions were). This ignores the limited powers of the EU itself, of course. It’s worth noting how some countries, such as Hungary and Poland, regularly flout EU rules without suffering anything more than a lot of grumbling by other member states and occasional vague threats. And, of course, few people have seriously argued for Britain to quit NATO, although NATO really can actually order (not politely request) Britain to go to war. The problem is that the people rely for information on the media, and where the EU is concerned, news about the

EU has been scant and very often misleading. Or full of lies, to put it more accurately. The real issue seems to have been immigration: UK citizens wanted to see fewer ‘foreigners’ in their streets and supermarkets, as well as – strangely – in the National Health Service, which has long relied on them.

The continued influence of the UK audiovisual industry certainly displeases many European diplomats, for whom the market share of UK video-on-demand (VOD) programmes within the EU is considered to be too large. The consequences of the Brexit separation are still far from being fully understood. A working group of the Council of European Union judges wrote that there are too many British series, shows and films on the streaming platforms used by citizens of the 27. It is not the quality of this content that is in question, but once again the fact, seen from Brussels, that a post-Brexit production, whatever its nature, cannot be treated on the same level as previously. Or can it? Prior to Brexit, such programmes were, effectively, ‘in-house’ products; that is no longer the case. The document drafted by these European diplomats, first obtained by the British daily The Guardian, characterizes an inconsistency: “Although the United Kingdom is now a third country for the European Union,” reports the French language 24-hour rolling news channel, BFM, “its audiovisual content can still be considered as ‘works European’, as defined in the AVMS (Audiovisual



Pinewood Studios is a British film and television studio located in the village of Iver Heath, England. The studio has been the base for many productions over the years from large-scale films to television programmes

Media Services) Directive. The assessment of these European officials is therefore that the UK enjoys an undue privilege." Some would argue that it's 'undeserved' on merit grounds, too. Some of the programmes being hawked around EU countries could fairly be described as little more than Scotch mist – nothing of substance at all, really, and without artistic value, although in most cases production values are quite high.



Boris Johnson

And yet, of course, however insubstantial the content may be, the media remains strangely influential, which is why Boris Johnson, when writing for the Daily Telegraph newspaper as their Brussels correspondent, was so keen on distorting facts about Europe and making up lies about EU decisions that there have even been books devoted to listing some of the more extreme examples. According to the New Statesman magazine, "He wrote stories headlined 'Brussels recruits sniffers to ensure that Euro-manure smells the same', 'Threat to British pink sausages' and 'Snails are fish, says EU'. (It goes without saying that these stories were untrue.) He wrote about plans to standardise condom sizes and ban prawn cocktail flavour crisps." None of this was true, of course. He also wrote, among other things, that EU rules would force British trawlermen to wear hairnets while fishing. He once described what he did in a BBC interview as "sort of chucking these rocks over the garden wall and I listened to this amazing crash from the greenhouse next door over in England as everything I wrote from Brussels was having this amazing, explosive effect on the Tory party – and it really gave me this, I suppose, rather weird sense of power." A sense of power is, perhaps, not something any true journalist should relish, especially when it comes from telling lies and getting them believed.

LIES AS CURRENCY

He's not the first journalist to print lies to achieve an effect – Hitler's 1930s government did much the same to whip up hatred against Jews and to persuade Germans of their God-given destiny to rule the world – but it certainly influenced popular opinion in Britain. In the case of the UK, it didn't take much, really: many British people seem to have a deep-rooted dislike of 'foreigners,' which may not be unconnected with the difficulty many seem to have in learning languages. Some people still think of the UK as an imperialist country, or at least they wish it was. Johnson turned much of his journalistic fire on the then Commission president, Jacques Delors, and claimed credit for persuading Denmark to reject the Maastricht Treaty after claiming in a headline that "Delors plans to rule Europe".

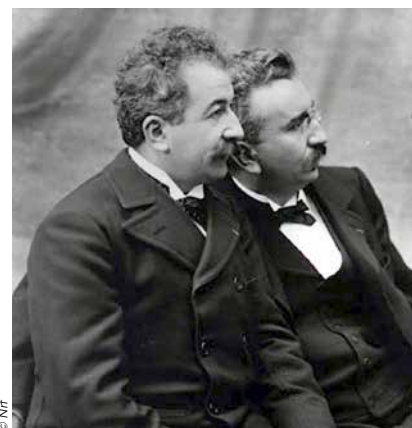


Jacques Delors

Like many of his claims, it was nonsense, as he was well aware; I knew and liked Delors, who was so 'ambitious' that he used to travel standard class on the train from Brussels to Strasbourg. He was a good man, even if he could come across as distant and reserved. As Maurice Fletcher wrote in the New Statesman, "Soon, a Europe of scheming bureaucrats plotting to rob Britain of its ancient liberties, or British prime ministers fighting gallant rearguard actions against an increasingly powerful superstate, or absurd directives on banana shapes, became the only narratives that many papers were interested in. They were narratives that exploited Britain's innate nationalism, distrust of foreigners and sense of superiority." The problem is that Johnson's columns were well-written and funny, so they became popular. Other newspapers told their Brussels correspondents to file similar stories, so they did.



Lowering editorial and programme-making standards happens in a variety of ways. It comes more from programming choices than from production standards, with British television filled with game shows these days, complete with inevitably over-excited audiences screaming at the competitors, as well as a tendency to get rid of more mature presenters, especially women, in favour of younger ones, mainly male. But this sort of problem is not the preserve of the UK alone. "The dumbing down of American is most evident in the slow decay of substantive content in the enormously influential media," wrote Carl Sagan in his book 'The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark', "the 30 second sound bites (now down to 10 seconds or less), lowest common denominator programming, credulous presentations on pseudoscience and superstition, but especially a kind of celebration of ignorance." However, it's not quality that is bothering diplomats inside the EU, so much as quantity.



The Lumiere brothers

France still sees itself as the originator (and still master) of the cinematographer's art – France was the birthplace of cinema, after all – so the flood of UK-produced programmes causes unease. After all, the idea of cinema was French, with Auguste and Louis Lumière patenting their 'cinematographe' in 1895. Then along came former stage George Méliès

magician, with special effects and his famous 'Le Voyage dans la Lune', which astounded viewers worldwide. At which point, enter Charles Pathé and Léon Gaumont, who founded the companies that still bear their names. They had the good fortune to employ Alice Guy, who started as a secretary but who displayed a huge talent for film-making, producing some 400 shorts during her startling career. She is credited with having invented the 'film narrative' and deserves much wider recognition within the industry. So, France takes a somewhat proprietorial view of cinema. France is still a major producer of films, albeit only coming in seventh in a global league table. Britain comes fourth, after the United States, India and China. Japan and South Korea come fifth and sixth.

EUROPEAN OR NOT?

The question troubling EU diplomats (and French film-makers) is how can the UK still be regarded as part of the EU when it comes to selling TV programmes and videos when in all other respects it clearly is not? The more xenophobic right-wing UK newspapers are, of course, up in arms about the possibility of there being any sort of limit on exports. Take the Daily Express, for instance, an ardently Brexit-supporting daily that seems to have a passionate hatred of anyone who isn't British. "Small minded! EU sparks fury over 'attack' on UK TV as British shows slashed," The Express screamed in a banner headline back in June. "Now, MP John Redwood has lashed out at the bloc claiming their attack on British TV shows their 'continuing contempt' for the Free Trade Agreement," it reported, going on to say that: "Mr. Redwood tweeted: 'The EU attack on UK TV programmes shows continuing contempt for the Free Trade Agreement and their own Treaty rules about relations with neighbours."



John Redwood, British Conservative MP

The UK needs to push back hard, especially on the EU attempts to stifle GB/Ni trade." It's hard to see how shipping goods across the Irish Sea enters into a discussion on movie distribution. Incidentally, the former UK Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath once described Sir John Redwood to me during a TV interview as "just a bigot". The paper then quoted the former leader of the anti-EU Brexit party (and before that the UK Independence Party), Nigel Farage. "This sums up the small-minded, protectionist club the European Union is," he is reported as having said. This rather ignores the fact that the UK was part of that same "protectionist club", presumably benefiting during that period from the protectionism it offered.

Does such reporting matter? It seems likely to influence mainly those who already share its world view, and in the case of the Daily Express, not very many of those. Looking at circulation figures in Britain, The Sun comes top with 1,371,190 sales, followed by the Daily Mail with 1,199,760. Their Sunday versions sell slightly fewer copies but still occupy the 3rd and 4th spots in terms of popularity. Both are well to the right of centre and have long been anti-EU. The similarly positioned but more strident Daily Express sells only 312,770, making it only Britain's eleventh most popular newspaper. Its line is too far to the right for many people, with little to ameliorate its anti-European, even anti-foreigner stance. All of these newspapers are strongly opposed to immigration and are against the acceptance of asylum-seekers. Many readers, of course, buy newspapers mainly for their sports content, their film and television guides and for the weather forecast, none of which are affected by neo-nationalism.

So, what British TV favourites are proving a hit across the Channel? The drama about Ukraine's nuclear disaster, 'Chernobyl', made by Sky, appears to top the list (although I should point out that different lists give the popularity in different orders and sometimes with different programmes). Netflix's 'Dracula' rides high in second place, as does 'It's a Sin', made by All 4. Then comes iPlayer's 'His Dark Materials', based on the fantasy books of Philip Pullman. Netflix is still selling the Rowan Atkinson comedy show Mr. Bean, while the little-known (in Britain) Virgin Streaming company does well with 'The Feed'. BBC 1's 'Sherlock', an updating to modern times of the Sherlock Holmes stories, is doing well, as

is the strange (and very 'male-orientated') motoring show 'Top Gear'. In Latvia, they like 'Call the Midwife' and Finland is apparently fond of 'Downton Abbey', all about a wealthy Edwardian family living in a massive country mansion with servants all over the place. As the old proverb puts it, 'there's no accounting for taste', but there again they're popular in the UK, too. There's no doubt however, that were the UK to lose its market status as an EU country, sales of its TV and video shows would suffer. Now the politicians and news outlets that most eagerly called for the UK's departure from the Union are getting angry, it seems, because the UK will no longer be regarded as a member state.



Chernobyl drama from Sky

RULES AND REGULATIONS

The EU, however, does have rules under the Audiovisual and Media Services directive. "These days we can watch our favourite programmes," explains the European Commission on its website, "not just on TV, but also online. These shows are subject to the rules of the single market." And despite what Redwood and Farage may say, the UK is no longer in the Single Market. "The EU's Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) governs EU-wide coordination of national legislation on all audiovisual media — traditional TV broadcasts and on-demand service," the Commission writes.

The latest review of the AVMSD was carried out in 2018 and guidelines have been issued and kept up to date. For instance, says the website, "Member States have to ensure that video-sharing platform providers under their jurisdiction adopt appropriate measures in order to protect minors from harmful content and all users from content containing incitement to violence or hatred and from any



© BBC

Doctor Who on BBC America

content whose dissemination would constitute an activity which is a criminal offence under Union law (namely public provocation to commit a terrorist offence, offences concerning child pornography and offences concerning racism and xenophobia.”

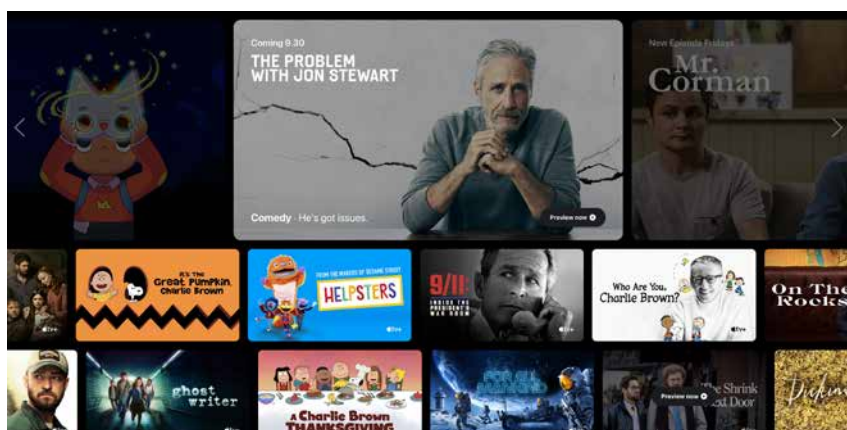
Rather more pertinent to the issue of British productions, however, is the second of those guidelines: “The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (hereinafter ‘the AVMSD’) lays down reinforced rules on the promotion of European works. Article 13(1) establishes that providers of on-demand audiovisual media services (hereinafter ‘on-demand’ or ‘video on demand (‘VOD’) services’) must ‘secure at least a 30 % share of European works in their catalogues and ensure prominence of those works.’ By ‘European works’, one has to assume the Commission and Council mean material produced not just in Europe but in the European Union itself. As you can see, it is not a blanket ban on UK-produced

material, merely an insistence that a minimum proportion of the output of any service provider is of EU origin. Nobody is calling for a ban on ‘Dr. Who’ or ‘Dad’s Army’. In fact, the regulation is further clarified on-line: “Such constraints do not apply to on-demand audiovisual media services (VOD) providers.”

The Archyde website believes that the regulations should strengthen French cinema and film production. “The birthplace of cinema, France has always been at the forefront to support audiovisual creation, foster its effervescence and defend its exceptional character around a strong conviction,” it wrote on its website in October 2020, “creation cannot constitute a simple commercial good, subject to the general rules of free trade. From it proceeds a whole part of our culture, of our very identity. In this, it deserves special attention.” Of course, it’s always hard to decide what constitutes art and one person’s Leonardo da Vinci or Pablo

Picasso is someone else’s crude graffiti-dauber. It’s a matter of taste. “Let’s reinvent our model,” the Archyde website argues, “by putting aside particular or corporate interests and promote French creation, by providing it with reinforced and lasting funding based on two intangible principles, equity and cooperation between the various players.”

It does point out, however, that “One of the conditions for success is equity. Fairness means above all correcting tax asymmetry and investment obligations with these global giants, such as Netflix, Amazon, Apple or Disney.” Making films and television programmes costs money, and with English the most widely-used and spoken language, it’s easier to market audiovisual productions made in it. To put it in context, English is the mother tongue of 1,132-million people, just ahead of Mandarin Chinese with 1,117-million. India is a major producer of movies, yet Hindi is the mother tongue of just 615-million people.



Apple TV streaming service

IS IT FAIR?

On the official website of the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO), the UK was listed as the largest market for audiovisual products, even on the eve of it leaving the EU. In terms of the supply of audiovisual services, the EAO wrote that of the 968 pay-on-demand services established in Europe, 853 were based in the EU28 and of these, just 2% were owned by public service broadcasting organisations while 1% had a mixed ownership. “The United Kingdom was by and large the most prominent audiovisual

market in wider Europe,” it said, “with 1,230 TV channels and 201 pay-on-demand services established in the country, many of which were targeting other European audiovisual markets.” It’s on that point, of course, that we start to run into difficulties. “One out of five television services established in the Europe by 2018 was accessible via digital terrestrial television (20%), and the rest could be accessed via cable, satellite, or Internet protocol television (IPTV),” according to the executive summary of the site. “Most television channels were pay/or premium services while 41% established in Europe were available free-to-air. The results were similar for the EU28 (now 27). The dominant business model for pay-on-demand services was subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) (59%), which came before transactional video-on-demand (TVOD) (41%).”

EU diplomats have met to discuss the apparent unfairness of the present arrangement. By treating UK productions as if they came from the wider EU, there was talk of the “disproportionate” prominence of UK productions that some see as a threat to the cultural diversity of the European Union. The BBC reported on its website that: “It’s a concern for Max Rumney, deputy CEO of PACT, the trade body that represents TV and film producers in the UK, who thinks the industry is being ‘lumped in with the general dissatisfaction with the British’ and Brexit, fishing and sausage rows. He fears any move to remove European status from UK programmes would make it much harder for producers to raise funding for filming.” Rumney doesn’t think that excluding UK productions from what’s seen as EU output would be counter-productive, as “people will watch what they find compelling and entertaining and will find ways of doing that - we see that with younger audiences particularly.”

If you scratch the surface of many of these disagreements and discussions, it seems likely you’ll find traces of nationalism. I was once filming some of the Scottish fishing fleet setting out from Peterhead harbour, in company with a Scottish National Party (SNP) member of the European Parliament, the late Doctor Allan Macartney, a delightful man. I asked him why so many UK fishermen seemed to be opposed to the EU (presumably not because of Boris Johnson’s hairnets) and his answer surprised me. He said it came down, at least partially, to religion. “Many



of the Scots fishermen are members of the ‘Wee Frees,’” he told me. The Wee Frees is a pseudonym for the Free Presbyterian Church, a fairly extreme Calvinist group that broke off from the mainstream in 1900 and is so strict that it doesn’t celebrate Christmas or Easter, nor permit any activity on a Sunday. They once expelled a follower for joining a golf club that permitted play on Sundays, even though the man concerned had never actually done so. Macartney went on to explain that many of the fishermen in Southwest England are members of another extreme Protestant Christian sect, the so-called Plymouth Brethren. The followers of both of these faiths reject the European Union because they see it as suspiciously ‘papist’, being based on the Treaties of Rome. They may not like Rome much but at least they don’t burn people at the stake these days.

ALLONS ENFANTS DE LA PATRIE

The Hamburgisches Welt-Wirtschafts-Archiv (HWWA) in Hamburg, Germany, and the Institute of International Affairs (IAI) in Rome conducted research into French Audiovisual Policy (FAP) because of, the researchers explained,

what they called “France’s widely held belief that the current international environment is detrimental to French interests.” The report goes on to say that France is the country with the deepest misunderstanding of what the multilateral commitments undertaken since the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) of 1947 and particularly during the updating that took place in the Uruguay Round (1986-1995) which led to the formation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) actually mean. “The many failures of the FAP are often attributed to this international legal environment,” says the report, which criticises the exceptionalism often apparent in French policy.

“France often forgets the implications of its membership in the European Community. The European Directive ‘Television without Frontiers’ (TWF) was largely drafted at French insistence and is closely in line with the main aspects of the FAP (in particular, with its quota and subsidy systems). As a result, France tends to believe that it represents the European interests.” But that was then, and this is now. The report was drawn up before the European Economic Community (EEC) turned into the European Union (EU) and long before it expanded to include 28 (now reduced to 27) member states. The aim at the time was to encourage pan-European broadcasting companies to be set up, working in more than one language. As everyone knows, that didn’t happen, or not much (with the noble exception of Euronews, which broadcasts in five languages: English, German, Spanish, French and Italian). A lot of water (much of it rather murky water) has passed under the bridge since then.

For one thing, some French thinkers believe that the EU has been a plot to impose Anglo-Saxon values on the rest



French television company TF1 tower in Paris



of Europe. Despite the ludicrous (and largely unchallenged) Euro-sceptic nonsense that appeared in British newspapers ahead of the referendum, the UK could chalk up some successes for the EU, such as peace across the continent, greater cross-border unity, the world's largest single market, the ability for people to travel freely and live in each other's member states, breaking up unhealthy monopolies and environmental improvements, to name but a few. If these were reported at all in the UK, the EU was often left out of what became a story about 'British achievements'.

"Success has many fathers, failure is an orphan," is a saying thought to have originated with Benito Mussolini's son-in-law, although John F. Kennedy used it following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, too, as, I suspect, have many others. I first heard it from the late John Hume, a former Northern Irish MEP and long-term campaigner for peace. What the British public got was a load of untrue and xenophobic nonsense, such as the claim that EU membership cost the UK £350-million (€409-million) a week; that the UK would continue to benefit from the EU's single market after leaving; that millions of Turkish citizens would be flocking to Britain

because their country was about to join the EU and – most deceitful and unpleasant of all – that immigrants from the EU were destroying the National Health Service, instead of supplying a large proportion of its skilled medical staff. I suppose we must accept that the 'journalists' writing this palpable nonsense were aware it was untrue? The UK's leading newspapers decided to whip up a frenzy of ultra-nationalism with their totally phoney patriotic fervour. Strangely, they are still pumping out anti-European nonsense, just to ensure that nobody has a change of heart.

Now those same journalists (or others like them) are up in arms that the UK's lucrative audiovisual industry may find its output not be counted as originating in the EU for much longer. It's certainly regrettable for the industry itself and for its workforce, but it shouldn't come as much of a surprise.

Bloomberg reports that a working group at the European Council, where government leaders meet, have discussed "the disproportionate presence of U.K. content in the European video-on-demand quota, and the effects on the circulation

and promotion of diverse European works." The EU's Audiovisual Media Services Directive was supposed to limit non-EU material to no more than 30% of on-demand video content. The aim was to rein in the dominance of audiovisual productions from the huge US providers, but now that the UK has chosen to pursue its path outside the EU, the rule should apply to British products, too, shouldn't it? That's the point that is unclear so far. Under the Audiovisual Media Service Directive, broadcasters must reserve a majority proportion of their transmission time for European works. The transmission time counted excludes the time appointed to news, sports events, games, advertising, teletext services and teleshopping. The question is that nobody seems certain if UK output should count as European or not. The UK is certainly outside the EU now, but it's still a signatory to the Council of Europe's European Convention on Transfrontier Television, which makes British audiovisual products European as far as the AVMSD is concerned. For the moment, then, British audiovisual productions would seem to be safe and France's concerns are not – so far, at least – giving too much rise to concern. The problem is not likely to go away, however.

The whole affair begins to be reminiscent of Miguel de Cervantes' early 17th century romance, *Don Quixote*, in which the eponymous hero charges at windmills with his lance, believing them to be giants. Ever since, the expression "charging at windmills" has come to mean in English a pointless act of bravado that could well go wrong, as indeed it did for the deluded knight when his lance caught in a rotating sail. In this case, however, it's hard to tell if France is *Don Quixote* or a windmill and imaginary giant. Time will tell, I suppose. I can well understand the frustration of French audiovisual companies and their political representatives but there's no easy way to sidestep the Council of Europe's European Convention on Transfrontier Television. It looks like being one audiovisual event that may run and run with no guarantee of a happy ending for either party.

Jim Gibbons



PASHAS, PURPOSE AND PASSION

What is the ultimate goal of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan?

There is no doubt that Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is an ambitious man, but is he ambitious for his country or for himself? Does anyone really know what his ultimate goal is? Does he? There is no doubt that he has caused huge ripples in his home waters and made Western governments sit up and take notice, mostly in some alarm. Erdoğan is known to be an admirer of the late Enver Pasha, who was Minister of War under the Ottomans during World War I.

It was he who, in 1918, created the "Islamic Army of the Caucasus" in order to drive out Armenian forces in the South Caucasus. His aim was to unite all Turkic nations in the entire region under the banner of Islam and to seize Azerbaijan's lucrative oilfields at Baku. Enver became a lynchpin of regional politics around the Caspian Sea and Erdoğan would like to play a similar rôle today, but with greater power and on a far wider front. In today's messy political picture, it's not easy, although Erdoğan has certainly got the world's attention.



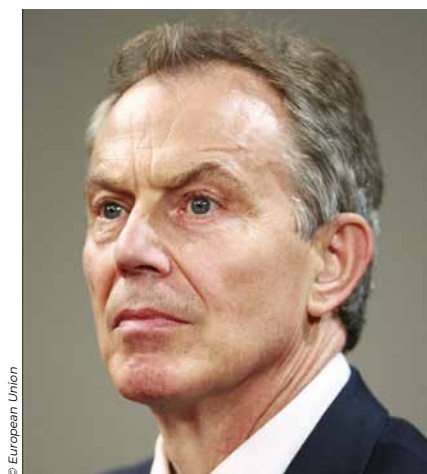
Enver Pasha

Enver clearly caused some awkward readjustment of alliances: the Bolsheviks wanted to prevent the Ottoman Turks from getting their hands on Baku and its oil, so they did a deal with Germany to let them take the railway line and pipeline that ran from Baku to Batumi in exchange

for recognising the independence of Georgia, albeit under a German protectorate. The Germans also got a proportion of the oil. The Turks abandoned their plans to take the railway and pipeline, concentrating instead on Baku, which was seized by the so-called "Army of Islam". Armenia has long argued, with some pretty persuasive evidence to back the claim, that this led to the Turks massacring many Armenians as well as the Bolsheviks who were there at the time. Enver Pasha's hopes, however, were dashed by the war coming to an end and by the resulting surrender of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey, of course, continues to deny allegations of a massacre by Ottoman forces.

It all looked so hopeful at the European Union summit in Helsinki, back in December 1999. It was extremely cold there and the conference venue hosted a massive ice sculpture to decorate its main entrance. We journalists, by and large, loved it, despite the outcome turning out to be yet another messy compromise (they usually are). Things

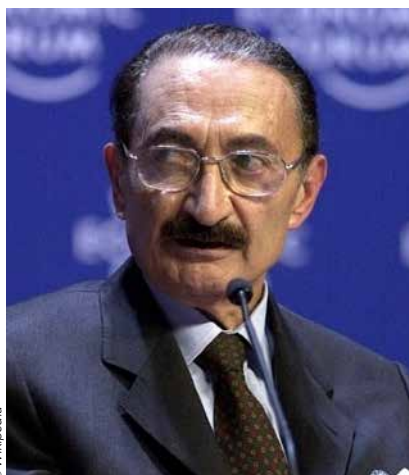
had changed for Turkey, however, for years always the bridesmaid and never the blushing bride. Its supposed aim of joining the Union (genuine at the time) led to this statement in the summit's official conclusions: "The European Council welcomes recent positive developments in Turkey as noted in the Commission's progress report, as well as its intention to continue its reforms towards complying with the Copenhagen criteria. Turkey is a candidate State destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States." The high hopes of a couple of decades ago have certainly faded since then, dwindling effectively to zero. In most places, the thaw in relations with Turkey was welcomed.



Former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair

In his first House of Commons appearance after the Helsinki summit, the British Prime Minister Tony Blair said: "Turkey is of great strategic importance and an ally in NATO. A more constructive relationship between Turkey and the EU is long overdue, but we now have secured that. Turkey is now a candidate country, destined to join the European Union on the same basis as the other candidates." To which it might be best to add the warning: "don't hold your breath".

At the time, everything looked hopeful. I recall how I and other journalists crowded around the entrance to the room in which the then Turkish Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit, was being greeted by EU bigwigs. It had been a last-minute invitation and Ecevit arrived very late in the proceedings, looking somewhat shell-shocked, but we all wanted to share this supposedly historic moment.



Former Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit

Ecevit himself issued a statement upon his return to Ankara. "The official recognition of Turkey's candidate status for full-membership to the European Union is a landmark event not only for Europe," he said, "but for the world as well. This candidacy, and in due time, full-membership to the European Union is Turkey's birthright by virtue of Turkey's historical development, its geography, and its present-day attributes as well as the provisions of the 1963 Association Agreement." He also recalled what was, in reality, a rather disquieting fact: "Moreover, for the last four years, Turkey has been the only country to have effected a customs union with the European Union without becoming a full member."

HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF

Erdoğan, however, is not like Ecevit, and relations between Turkey and the EU are no closer now than they were when that summit began, with the atmosphere as chilly as Helsinki's ice sculpture. It still comes down, at least in part, to relations with Greece. It's as if the Trojan hero Paris is still considered a hate figure for running off with the wife of the Spartan King Menelaus, the much-lauded (and supposedly lovely) Helen. Her face, it seems launched not only a thousand ships, as the old saying puts it, but also thousands of years of subsequent hatred and distrust. It was Menelaus's brother, Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, who led the Greek invasion force into a Bronze Age war that supposedly lasted for ten years (nodding on towards 4,000).

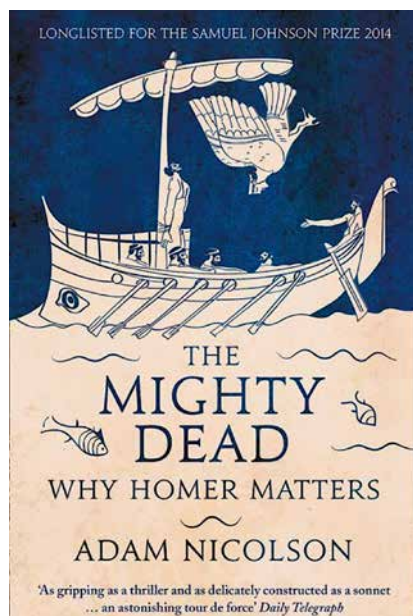
The Greeks and their EU partners, as well as the Turks, are still on the look-out for suspicious-looking wooden horses, it

seems. It was, of course, Agamemnon's Greeks who reportedly built the wooden horse, filled it with shock troops, then staged a pretended withdrawal to lull the Trojans into a false sense of security and into claiming the horse as a prize of war. Homer may have started the whole thing with his *Iliad* and then his *Odyssey*, about Odysseus's journey home to Ithaca, (although the stories, as retold by professional story-tellers long before they were written down, were known to have been extant before Homer – if he existed – was born) but mankind's willingness to hate, fight and kill ensures its endurance.

The Trojan war is still being fought in the *realpolitik* of today, whether or not any of it has a basis in truth. Today's leaders might do well to recall the words of Homer in the *The Iliad*: "Hateful to me as the gates of Hades is that man who hides one thing in his heart and speaks another." Yes, but that's how politics works, isn't it? We mustn't underestimate or forget the importance of Homer's deathless tale. In his book *The Mighty Dead*, the historian and author Adam Nicholson writes that in his view Homer dates from a millennium earlier than is generally reckoned and that the world he depicts is the result of a coming together of two ancient cultures: "His power and poetry derive not from the situation of a few emergent states in the eighth century Aegean," Nicholson suggests, "but from a far bigger and more fundamental historic moment, in the centuries around 2,000 BC, when early Greek civilisation crystallised from the fusion of two very different worlds: the semi-nomadic, hero-based culture of the Eurasian steppes to the north and west of the Black Sea, and the sophisticated, authoritarian and literate cities and palaces of the Eastern Mediterranean."



Mask of Agamemnon



Greekness – and eventually Europeaness – emerged from the meeting and melding of those worlds.” Nicholson goes further in seeking to understand the continuing culture clash we see today. “Homer’s urgency,” he writes, “comes from the pain associated with that clash of worlds and his immediacy from the eternal principles at stake: what matters more, the individual or the community, the city or the hero?” Or could it even be, perhaps, the politician’s legacy?

Where does this leave Recep Tayyip Erdoğan? It’s not an easy question to answer. Certainly, he has Islamicised his country, wherever possible, but he has also presided over its economic decline. “Inflation is nearly 12%,” reports the BBC, “and the Turkish lira has slumped against the dollar. Coronavirus is

exacerbating Turkey’s economic woes. When he became Turkish leader back in March 2003 the lira rate was 1.6 to the dollar – now it is above 8.0.” To retain his popularity among traditional Muslims, mainly in the country’s more rural areas, he oversaw the conversion of the Hagia Sophia, that beautiful and historic tourist magnet, into a functioning Mosque, much to the annoyance of Istanbul’s non-Muslim citizens.

It was originally built as a Christian cathedral, then turned into a Mosque by the Ottomans before the country’s greatest moderniser, Kemal Attaturk, turned it into a museum. It was a museum when I visited it a few years ago and it is a stunning building, worthy of being seen by anyone with an interest in history and beautiful architecture.

NO CRYSTAL BALL

Erdoğan’s political fortunes have waxed and waned in unexpected ways. In 2020, his AKP party, which is a strongly Islamist creation, won local elections across Turkey – but not in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. Ankara matters most in theory, being the country’s capital city. Losing Istanbul, though, may come as the bitterest blow for Erdoğan: he was mayor of the city in the 1990s. He was elected prime minister in 2003, a position he held for 11 years before being elected in 2014 to what had been a purely ceremonial rôle: the presidency. Ceremonial it may have been once upon a time, but it certainly isn’t any more. It is now his power base and it’s one he has consolidated.



Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

Mustafa Kemal Attaturk had banned the wearing of headscarves by Turkish women, in an attempt to modernise the country, but Erdoğan has reversed that ruling. He has also tried to establish “alcohol-free zones” and has told Turkish families to abandon any thoughts of family planning, arguing in 2016 that “We will multiply our descendants.” Women may not have had as much say in that as most in the West believe they should, either: he has strongly criticised feminism and has said that men and women cannot be treated equally.

With support for his party falling to 36%, according to polls, he has been examining ways of ensuring the political supremacy of his party and its allies. “We are starting extensive work regarding changing political party and election regulations,” he told the media, “to improve democratic participation.” However, the public are growing wary of his government and the odd slant the ruling party put on events such as the forest fires that destroyed buildings, including hotels and holiday accommodation in southern Turkey during a record heatwave. The government said the fires were started by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which is regarded as a terrorist group by both Turkey (or at least by its government) and the United States. However, they also criminalised an on-line group trying to raise money to rebuild, using the hashtag #HelpTurkey, with Erdoğan arguing that it made the government look weak, creating instead a rival website that praised the brave response of Erdoğan’s government and officials.



The Hagia Sophia mosque in Istanbul



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

But in politics, it's not always possible to predict the future in such a way as to allow for prompt and effective measures. For instance, inflation hit a 2-year high of 18.95% in July, largely driven by a rise in food inflation caused, at least in part, by the drought and high temperatures associated with climate change. It means that Turkey's Central Bank was obliged to continue its 'tight money' policy until inflation comes down (as it is forecast to do). Erdoğan had hoped that a borrowing scheme he created would help stave off a slump in the value of the Turkish lira through domestic borrowing in gold and hard currency, but it failed to deliver the hoped-for results and also more than doubled what the Turkish Treasury would have paid if it had borrowed in liras instead.

It was Turkey that pushed at the Council of Europe for the so-called Istanbul Convention against domestic violence, which was opened for signature at the Council of Europe during Turkey's presidency of the organisation in May 2011. It entered into force three years later, in August 2014, once ten countries had ratified it. The aim was to save women from being beaten

up by their husbands or boyfriends. The Turkish government of the time lobbied hard for the Convention to be adopted, putting pressure on other member states. Now Erdoğan has withdrawn his country from it by presidential decree, following the wishes of his supporters who favour what they term "traditional family values" above a woman's right not to be beaten up. According to his party, the sole purpose of a woman is to bear and raise her husband's children. Domestic violence has soared in Turkey since Erdoğan came to power.

It would appear that he had counted on a victory for Donald Trump in the US elections and the appearance of Joe Biden in the White House is not to his liking, nor has it boosted his chances of retaining power when he comes up for re-election in 2023. Close observers claim that Erdoğan used to make mobile calls to Trump on the golf course during a game and viewed himself and the US president as members of a team of 'strong presidents' who could run the world and right its wrongs. He clearly has no such relationship with Biden.

NEW REALITIES

The question now arises of where exactly Erdoğan stands in relation to the victorious Taliban. Their victory over the United States has certainly strengthened their political hand (while weakening the mighty image of the US) and is unlikely to have caused too much distress inside the Turkish embassy. Erdoğan has already held his first talks with the Taliban in Kabul, and at a time when most countries are pulling out their diplomatic missions in Afghanistan, the Turkish embassy has gone back to its usual building

in Kabul (it had been temporarily rehoused in a building at Kabul Airport), announcing that it will maintain its diplomatic presence.

Turkey has congratulated the Taliban on its "moderate" statements following the withdrawal of the US and its allies and said his government is open to working with the militant Islamists. Those 'moderate' statements have not been borne out in practice everywhere in Afghanistan. Erdoğan has made no mention of possible retaliation for the deadly suicide bombs near Kabul Airport.



Turkish President Erdoğan (right) and former Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani

Biden has vowed to retaliate, saying that he will 'hunt down those responsible and make them pay'. In a speech at the White House, he told the media that the bombings were carried out by the Islamic State in Khorasan Province, ISKP (ISIS-K), ISIL's affiliate in Afghanistan. Quoted on Al Jazeera, Biden said: "To those who carried out this attack, as well as anyone who wishes America harm, know this: We will not forgive; we will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay. I will defend our interests in our people with every measure at my command." Given Turkey's close proximity to Afghanistan and its diplomatic ties to the Taliban, Erdoğan seems unlikely to echo that sentiment. It goes without saying that Republican politicians are calling for Biden's resignation (seemingly a daily occurrence) for the attack that no-one, including the most ardent Trump supporters, foresaw.

According to Al Jazeera, ISKP had claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement that identified the bomber by name and referred to the Taliban as "apostates". ISKP seems to regard the Taliban as not severe enough in their application of Sharia law. It's doubtful



Donald Trump and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan



Turkish President Erdoğan meets with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg

if many Afghan women would see it that way, but there again ISKP doesn't seem to regard the opinions of women as being a matter of concern. US forces are said to be coordinating with the Taliban to address the "extremely real" threat of further attacks by the extremists. Al Jazeera pointed out that Bob Menendez, the Democratic chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had previously warned against trusting the Taliban. "As we wait for more details to come in, one thing is clear: We can't trust the Taliban with Americans' security," Menendez wrote in a Tweet. Biden defended working with the Taliban as a matter of expedience, rather than trust.

Turkey, which is part of the NATO mission, had been responsible for security at the airport for the last six years. "We have held our first talks with the Taliban, which lasted three-and-a-half hours," Erdoğan said, adding that: "If necessary, we will have the opportunity to hold such talks again." Meanwhile, two officials said Turkey will not help to run Kabul airport now that NATO has pulled out unless the Taliban agree to a Turkish security presence, following the suicide bombings outside the airport. That seems unlikely. However, there are advantages to be sought for Erdoğan in the current chaos, especially as Turkey comes under increased scrutiny from its NATO colleagues for its record in Libya, Iraq and Syria. The news website FirstPost says that: "Erdoğan is also cozying up to the Taliban in an attempt to limit the flow of irregular migrants to Turkey." Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has already said that Turkey cannot be responsible in the event of a new wave of migrants from Afghanistan. Addressing the media,

Cavusoglu had said, "As Turkey, we have sufficiently carried out our moral and humanitarian responsibilities regarding migration. It is out of the question for us to take an additional refugee burden." Turkey already hosts around 3.7-million Syrian refugees, bringing the world's largest refugee population to 4.9-million, in addition to about 300,000 Afghans. It has been reinforcing its measures along its eastern border to prevent further crossings in anticipation of a new migrant wave from Afghanistan. Anti-migrant sentiment is running high in Turkey and Erdoğan wants to seize the opportunity with the Taliban to block this migration and help boost his image as well as his popularity among his own people. He also hopes that a strong presence in Afghanistan will help him to balance his diplomatic efforts with Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

All of this does not mean, of course, that Erdoğan trusts the Taliban.

"The Taliban's statements have been moderate but doubts still persist," Erdoğan told the media while stressing that Ankara is ready to provide various types of support to Afghanistan. Speaking to the media, he underlined that Turkey's main concern in Afghanistan is to ensure the country's quick recovery. "We have given Afghanistan all kinds of support, including infrastructure and superstructure for 10 years," he said. "However, the Taliban have caused serious damage in the north of Afghanistan," hinting that any sort of help offered or given to Afghanistan may be predicated upon doors being opened for Turkey. Somewhat ironically, it could be argued, he suggested that Turkey could help Afghanistan over the issue of women's rights. "Regarding Afghan women, we see them as we see the women in our country," he told the media, "and can take steps for Afghan women to live with the same rights. But, as you know, we cannot evaluate the conditions in Afghanistan the same as in Turkey." No-one seems quite sure what that means, exactly.

Turkey had more than 500 non-combatant troops stationed in Afghanistan as part of NATO's now-abandoned mission there. Turkey has been in the country for two decades and has been involved in consultancy efforts, reconstruction, and maintenance, as well as operating the airport. According to Turkish officials, the Taliban have asked Turkey for 'technical help' to run the airport after the foreign forces have left but had insisted that Ankara's



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Pakistan

military also withdraw, along with US forces and their allies, by the end of August deadline. The Taliban said that they would take over security of the airport itself. Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid said the group sought 'good ties' with Ankara. "We want good relations with Turkey, the Turkish government and the Muslim people of the 'Turkish nation,'" he said. "As for Turkish forces stationed in Afghanistan, we are not in need of them in our country and once the evacuation is completed, we will secure the airport by ourselves".

PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Taliban has been trying to get across a new image for itself since its forces marched into Kabul and took control of Afghanistan. The behaviour of its more militant members, however, has fallen well short of the promises. A Taliban spokesperson vowed that no one would be harmed in Afghanistan, but within a day, Taliban militants had opened fire on a protest in Jalalabad against their rule, killing at least three people. There have also been reports on The Insider website of Taliban militants harassing people as they made their way to the airport in Kabul, despite promising to provide a safe passage to civilians. The UN's refugee agency, the UNHCR, points out that Turkey has legal obligations towards migrants: "The Republic of Turkey is a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol," the UNHCR website explains, "maintaining the geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention, thus retaining resettlement to a third country as the most preferred durable solution for refugees (who have) arrived due to the events occurred outside of Europe."

According to Al Jazeera, the refugee situation in Turkey is at crisis point, leading some local leaders to take unusual steps to stem the flow. "When a mayor in Turkey's northwest this week announced plans to charge 'foreigners' 10 times more for water and waste services, his words were applauded by many across the country," the website says, somewhat worryingly.

Tanju Ozcan, the mayor of Bolu who comes from the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), explained that his comments referred solely to



Turkish soldiers patrol at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul Afghanistan

refugees. "This hospitality has gone on too long," He told Al Jazeera, adding that Turkey had "become a dump for migrants". It's not only Turkey, of course, that is concerned about the threat of further mass migration. Ali Hekmat, co-founder of the Afghan Refugee Solidarity Association based in Kayseri in central Turkey, said many new arrivals were people who had worked for the Kabul government or foreign organisations and who had the most to fear from a Taliban takeover. Meanwhile, the EU, whose deal with Turkey saw millions of Syrian refugees settle there instead of pressing on into Europe, is getting nervous. It's increasingly clear that most Turks would rather the refugees went away, perhaps even to the very places they had hoped to reach in the first place. You may recall that back in 2016, Turkey agreed to accept the Syrian refugees heading for Europe, in return for EU concessions and €6-billion euros in aid to help them cope with the Syrians.



Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz

The situation has not been helped by comments made by the Austrian Chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, who said that "states like Turkey" are definitely

a better destination for refugees than Austria, Germany or Sweden. It drew a comment from Turkey's Foreign Ministry to the effect that: "Turkey will not take a new wave of migration." Austria's neighbours may be wishing that Mr. Kurz had kept his mouth shut.

Turkey is keen to deflect a possible wave of migrants entering through Iran. They are unlikely to want to stay there because of their preferred branch of Islam, which differs from Afghanistan's Sunni branch. One Turkish woman, Randa Habib, told the world what's happening in a Tweet. With a photograph to support what her words, she said "Turkey is building a wall along its border with Iran to prevent a new influx of refugees, mainly from #Afghanistan as the Taliban take over the country. For now, a 5km section is under construction but Turkey is aiming to build a 295km-long wall." The website InfoMigrants doesn't think it's having the deterrent effect that Turkey clearly hoped for: "On the border between Iran and Turkey, a new wall has been built to deter migrants from crossing irregularly. Yet some manage to sneak around it at night -- the only traces the migrants leave are empty bottles or fresh footprints, AFP reports. Turkish armored vehicles patrol the border in the early morning hours."

It looks disturbingly like a huge pot that is coming towards the boil with a lid firmly fastened down and no safety valve. An explosion is inevitable, yet many EU politicians would seem to be sitting on their hands with their eyes tightly closed and humming loudly so that they won't hear anything they'd rather not. For Erdoğan, of course, the EU's problems are of little concern. Perhaps he has studied the works of Niccolò Machiavelli, the Renaissance diplomat



InfoMigrants is a news and information site for migrants to counter misinformation at every point of their journey: in their country of origin, along the route, or in the places where they hope to start a new life. InfoMigrants is available in five languages: French, Arabic, English, Dari and Pashto. InfoMigrants is a collaboration led by three major European media sources: France Médias Monde (France 24, Radio France International, Monte Carlo Doualiya), the German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle, and the Italian press agency ANSA. InfoMigrants is co-financed by the European Union

of 15th to 16th century Florence, who wrote in his famous guide for leaders, *'The Prince'*: "Everyone realises how praiseworthy it is for a prince to honour his word and to be straightforward rather than crafty in his dealings; none the less, contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly, who have known how to trick men with their cunning, and who, in the end, have overcome those abiding by honest principles."



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Slovenia's Minister of the Interior Aleš Hojs

It's all very cunning, if you're interested in discovering who, in the great political machine that is Europe, is winning or losing. The biggest losers, of course, are the refugees themselves, while Europe's political masters squabble over who is doing most and who should be doing more to ease the current crisis. As to how well the various competing political voices are faring, it's not easy to tell. As Al Jazeera points out: "European politicians have done relatively little to help Afghans in view of their moral responsibility for their plight. France and the United Kingdom have gone only as far as proposing the creation of a United Nations-run safe zone in Kabul for those wanting to flee Taliban rule, while

Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, has said evacuations, immediate humanitarian aid, longer-term development aid were discussed at a G7 meeting." French President Emmanuel Macron told a meeting in August that France should 'anticipate and protect itself from a wave of migrants' from Afghanistan. Of course, he faces an election in May 2022.

EU leaders are in rare agreement with each other, according to Al Jazeera: "The European Union ministers of home affairs expressed similar concerns during their extraordinary meeting on the situation in Afghanistan on August 31. They made it clear that their main priority is preventing 'illegal immigration' The ministers issued a statement after the meeting, in which they made clear their determination to avoid an influx of refugees: "Based on lessons learned, the EU and its Member States stand determined to act jointly to prevent the recurrence of uncontrolled large-scale illegal migration movements faced in the past, by preparing a coordinated and orderly response. Incentives to illegal migration should be avoided." In other words, "migrants not welcome". Statements by individual ministers and leaders have been perilously close to those coming from Europe's parties of the far right, never famed for their humanitarianism. Aleš Hojs, Slovenia's Minister of the Interior said: "I am very pleased that today we have shown unity and agreed a joint statement on the EU's common response to the situation in Afghanistan. The EU remains committed to support vulnerable Afghans, and in particular, women and children, both in Afghanistan and in the region. At the same time, we are determined to

prevent smugglers and human traffickers from exploiting this dire situation by coordinating our response to any illegal migration movements and protecting the EU external borders."



Turkish President Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin

"Exporting the migration crisis to third countries and adopting anti-migrant rhetoric may provide quick political gains for European leaders," says a clearly angry piece on the Al Jazeera website. "But such strategies, as seen many times in the recent past, will not pay off in the long run. Attempts to build 'Fortress Europe' does not keep the EU safe and prosperous, but instead fuels ethnonationalism and hate within the bloc's borders. Moreover, it isolates Europe from the rest of the world." Welcome to the new Europe: locked doors, chained gates and large "Keep Out!" signs included. I'm not sure former Commission President and committed humanitarian Jacques Delors would recognise it. It looks increasingly, however, like a world in which Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is likely to feel very much at home.

Toby Bowman-Grant

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RUSSIAN RESEARCH INVESTMENTS IN AI AND AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES

A high degree of state control, cutting-edge investments in AI and robotics and close connection to the battlefields in Syria and Ukraine. These are some of the lessons learned from a study of Russian military research presented in the report *Russia's Military R&D Infrastructure – A Primer*



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Russian Uran-9 combat unmanned ground vehicle

This investigation into how Russian military research is organised was conducted by Johan Engvall, at FOI (Swedish Defence Research Agency), on behalf of the Swedish Ministry of Defence.

“The Russian military research infrastructure covers the entire chain, from research to development and production,” says Johan Engvall, a deputy research director in FOI’s Defence Analysis Division, in Kista.

Three types of organisations are engaged in research and development.

“Firstly, there are research institutes that primarily conduct applied research for military purposes. Then, there are the so-called design bureaus, which can be said to be the next link in the chain. They design and develop prototypes that can then go on to production. The third type, scientific production organisations, combines R&D activities with their own production capacity in an effort to streamline and reduce the gap between research and production.”

Overall, there are about 600 different R&D organisations. Since the first decade of this century, the

Russian leadership has tried to make this large number more vertically integrated.

“Quite a few institutes and development organisations are part of larger state-controlled holding companies,” says Johan Engvall.

It is complicated to find out exactly how much Russia invests in military research. The figures are part of the defence budget, which is increasingly surrounded by secrecy. What can be deduced is that at least 10 per cent of the defence budget is earmarked for applied research for the needs of national defence.

What are the pros and cons of the military research model that Russia has chosen?

“In this report I haven’t conducted a major assessment, but it is clear that this is an environment characterised by an extremely high level of state control. This also applies to civilian research, where the private sector and the market don’t play the same role as they do in the West. I believe there’s a sense in the Russian system that unless the state sets clear directives, nothing will be produced. This creates a fairly rigid structure.”

Johan Engvall says that there have been ambitions for military research to function as a locomotive for civilian development as well, but that this has proven to be exceedingly difficult.

“Military research operates under certain rules, for example high secrecy, so extensive technology transfer from military to civilian use should probably be seen as rather unrealistic,” he believes.

Such ambitions exist, however. A target has been set for 30 per cent of the products of defence industry companies to have civilian use by the middle of the 2020s, and 50 per cent by 2030. This is because the period of growth in defence procurement is expected to stabilise

and in some cases even fall.

The report divides military research into seven main areas, which largely corresponds to the categories used in Russia itself.

“There has been a fairly constant division since Soviet times. A number of newly prioritised areas have been added, which can be said to be organised more horizontally, such as robotics and AI. Breakthroughs in these fields require a lot of basic research, to which funding has been contributed. Russia is investing in certain cutting-edge technologies and among other things has established a military research complex, still under construction, on the Black Sea coast,” says Johan Engvall.

What’s your assessment of how Russian research will develop in the future?

“Together with two colleagues, I am currently conducting a new study that delves into Russian technology development. What we are able to see is that since Russia doesn’t have the same resources as for example the US or China, the government needs to prioritise certain areas.”

This applies above all, says Johan Engvall, to AI and hypersonic systems. Russia previously lagged behind in terms of UAVs, or drones, but has now made substantial

progress. Several projects involving autonomous underwater vehicles and unmanned robotic tanks are also underway.

CLOSELY CONNECTED TO REAL BATTLEFIELDS

Russia has the ambition of covering the entire chain from basic research to production within its own defence industry. The reason, among other things, is the deteriorating relations with the West and Russia’s policy of strategic solitude. Because of sanctions, it is not as easy to import certain technologies, which increases the need to be self-supporting and independent in the technology area. A potential bottleneck, however, is that Russia lags behind in the critical electronics industry.

“An interesting aspect is how Russia uses and integrates the real battlefield in the R&D process, both in Syria and Ukraine. Several robotic systems and certain military AI applications have been tested and evaluated there in order to be able to develop them further. By being inventive in this way, Russia might be able to compensate for a lack of resources,” concludes Johan Engvall.

The report : <https://www.foi.se/report-summary?reportNo=FOI-R--5124--SE>



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Students of the military innovative technopolis Eira



TROLL PHASE 3 PROJECT COMES ON STREAM

On Friday 27 August 2021 at 21.25, production started from the highly profitable Troll phase 3 project in the North Sea. The project has a break-even price below 10 dollars and CO2 emissions of less than 0.1 kg per barrel oil equivalent. The new wells are tied in to the Troll A platform and Troll phase 3 will extend the platform's life past 2050.

Recoverable volumes from Troll phase 3, which will produce the Troll West gas cap, are estimated at as much as 347 billion cubic metres of gas. Converted into oil equivalent this amounts to 2.2 billion barrels. Investments are approximately NOK 8 billion.

Arne Sigve Nylund, Executive Vice President of Projects, Drilling and Procurement declared : "Troll phase 3 is one of the most profitable projects throughout Equinor's entire history, while at the same time featuring production with record-low CO2 emissions. This is thanks to large gas reserves and a development solution mostly based on existing infrastructure, such as pipelines, the processing plant at Kollsnes and, not least, the Troll A platform which receives power from shore. The project has been executed without serious injuries, which is extremely important."

The Troll partners are Equinor, Petoro, Shell, TotalEnergies and ConocoPhillips.

Troll has generated substantial revenues for 25 years and will continue to do so for many years to come. Annual state revenues from the Troll phase 3 project alone are estimated at an average of more than NOK 17 billion (2021).

The Troll phase 3 project consists of eight wells in two templates, a new pipeline and umbilical connecting the templates to Troll A as well as a new gas processing module on the platform.

Around 70 percent of the deliveries to the Troll phase 3 project come from Norwegian suppliers.

The annual export volume from Troll is equivalent to approximately 8% of the EU's gas consumption,

and the further development of the Troll field also reinforces Norway's ability to secure gas deliveries to Europe in the coming decades.

Over the course of 25 years, Troll A has contributed to transforming the energy consumption in Europe from coal to gas, with far lower greenhouse gas emissions. It was also the first platform on the Norwegian continental shelf to be electrified, as early as in 1996.

"Troll phase 3 will extend the life of Troll A and the Kollsnes processing plant beyond 2050, and the plateau period by 5-7 years. This will help secure jobs offshore, at Sandsli and at Kollsnes for both Equinor and its suppliers for several decades into the future," says Kjetil Hove, Equinor's executive vice president for Exploration and Production Norway.



© Øyvind Gravås and Even Kleppa, (Equinor)

Troll A with new Troll phase 3 module

Like several other projects, Troll phase 3 has also felt the effects of Covid-19. The original start-up date for the project was in the second quarter of 2021, but pandemic-related labour shortages and infection control measures have delayed start-up somewhat.

"I want to thank our own employees, our partners and suppliers who have done a fantastic job during difficult times. We've made this happen together," Nylund concludes.

GAS FROM TROLL HAS BEEN IMPORTANT FOR EUROPE FOR A QUARTER OF A CENTURY. WHAT ABOUT THE NEXT 25 YEARS?

Since 1996 the Troll field has been an essential exporter of gas to Europe. But why are Equinor and Norway still betting on gas when we know that the world needs more renewable and less fossil energy?

Jalal Fahadi, platform manager on Troll A has the answer : "Well, it's because gas is a source of energy that a lot of people in the world need every day. And they'll continue to need it for a long time to come. Gas is user-friendly, moderately priced and releases 50 per cent less CO₂ than coal."

Gas is the form of energy that can phase out coal power fastest and easiest, such as in the UK, for example, which now has the lowest CO₂ emissions it has seen in more than 100 years.



Jalal Fahadi, Platform Manager on Troll A

In simple terms, gas is used to generate power, in heavy industry like steel and cement, and as a raw material to make mobile phones and medicines, among other things.

GOOD REASONS TO BE OPTIMISTIC

Troll is the largest gas discovery made on the Norwegian

continental shelf (NCS) by far, and currently supplies as much as seven per cent of Europe's total need for gas. This is the equivalent of the power consumption of more than 50 million European households. In comparison, there are less than 2.5 million households in Norway.

Incredibly enough, after nearly 25 years of production, more than half of the Troll gas is still in place, and this is one of several good reasons for us to be optimistic about the next 25 years as well.

Because the energy equation can't be solved without gas:

The global population keeps growing, and we are all using more and more energy. At the same time, we're moving toward a low-carbon society. This means that the world needs Norwegian gas if we're going to have enough energy in the years to come. This is because renewable energy sources like solar and wind are dependent on the right weather to generate power.

WHAT WOULD BE THE FEAT OF THE CENTURY THESE DAYS?

Many would say succeeding in the energy transition.

As the first installation on the NCS, Troll A was electrified with power from shore from the very start. This has resulted in very low emissions from production. In addition to being the world's largest offshore gas platform, it was also the heaviest mobile man-made structure when it was built in the mid-1990s. Troll A was actually named the "century's greatest feat of Norwegian engineering" in 1999.

The energy transition is a gradual pivot to energy sources, products and services that together have fewer negative consequences for the climate and the environment.

According to the European Commission, the energy transition can be achieved by turning the current climate and environmental challenges into opportunities for sustainable economic growth and development. This is the basis for the European Green Deal, which is Europe's joint strategy to be the first net-zero continent by 2050.

Once Europe bands together to achieve net-zero by 2050, what role will Norwegian gas play moving forward? Because, eventually, all fossil fuels have to be removed from the energy mix.

Gunnar Egge is the production manager at Troll A: "This also includes gas, at least the way we use it today. But gas can be reformed into hydrogen, which could be very important for the energy transition."



Gunnar Egge, Production Manager, Troll A

THIS IS WHY HYDROGEN IS IMPORTANT

Heavy industry, like steel, cement and concrete, and industries such as transport and maritime, do not currently have adequate battery technology or sufficient opportunity to generate electricity through renewable energy systems. This is one of many reasons why hydrogen is important for the world to reach its climate goals; in fact, hydrogen can be stored and used when there is a need for energy.

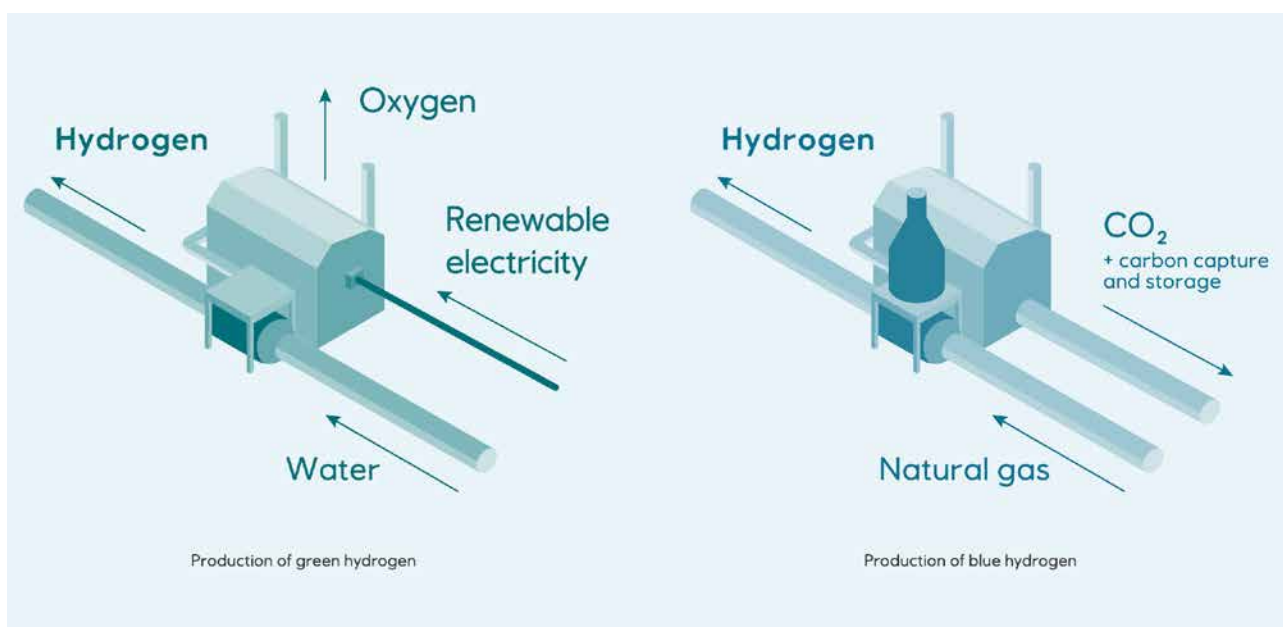
In simple terms, there are two forms of hydrogen; blue and green, and we need both to reach our climate goals. This is because both blue and green hydrogen are emission-free at combustion, despite being created in different ways:

Blue hydrogen is made by reforming gas in a process where CO₂ is captured and then stored under the seabed through carbon capture and storage (CCS). This reduces the carbon footprint by as much as 95 per cent. Green hydrogen is made by using renewable energy, and is therefore entirely emission-free, even in production.

"There's a huge volume of gas left in the Troll field and other fields. But if we're going to be a long-term and reliable future supplier of blue hydrogen, we have to continue to explore for even more gas on the NCS" says Gunnar Egge, production manager, Troll A.

Gunnar Egge believes the energy transition is already well under way in the North Sea. He can clearly see this in his work in the Troll area, which is now also exploring opportunities to electrify the Troll B and Troll C platforms.

According to Gunnar Egge: "The energy transition isn't a switch you can just flip, it's several important steps. We have to continue the effort to reduce emissions in production, while simultaneously contributing to reduce emissions in consumption, for example by reforming gas into hydrogen."





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VENTURI ANTARCTICA

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H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco and Gildo Pastor

A MONEGASQUE STORY

In April 2006, Prince Albert II of Monaco became the very first head of state to reach the North Pole after a gruelling four-day expedition across the frozen wastes of the Arctic. Under extreme climatic conditions, he travelled some one hundred kilometres by dog sled from the Russian drift station Barneo Ice Camp, to the North Pole.

The Prince's mission was two-fold : to pay tribute to his great-grandfather, Prince Albert I who led four polar exploration missions, including the one that took him to Spitsbergen in 1906, exactly 100 years before the Monegasque expedition. The other important aim of Albert II's expedition was to raise public awareness of the devastating impact of global warming, especially in the vulnerable polar regions.

After planting the Monegasque and Olympic flags in the frozen ground, Prince Albert II declared : *"I'm delighted to have achieved the goal I*

set myself and to have arrived, safe and sound, with my entire team, at the North Pole. The exceptional human adventure we have just undertaken must not make us forget that our planet is in grave danger, and that we need, more than ever, to take action to safeguard it."

In 2009, accompanied by the Swiss explorer Mike Horn, Prince Albert reached the South Pole after completing another very difficult journey in harsh conditions. He thus became the world's only head of state to have visited both poles.

It was upon his return from this particular mission that the Prince decided to launch the first project to put to the test, environmentally-friendly vehicles to replace combustion-powered vehicles and be able to operate in the extreme climates of Antarctica. The development of a zero emission vehicle, able to carry personnel and equipment to and from various polar research stations has been entrusted by the Prince Albert II Foundation to the Monaco-based

Venturi electric automotive specialist.

After three successive versions, the next generation of the all-terrain vehicle was presented to the Sovereign on June 1, 2021 at the company's headquarters by Gildo Pastor, the CEO of Venturi, who declared : *"With the Venturi Antarctica, scientists are getting an efficient, easy-to-handle vehicle with very good performance. They will be able to carry out their research in optimum conditions, without polluting sites where the quality of analyses needs to be accurate down to the last molecule. We are proud to have developed a technological solution that fulfils the remit given to us by the Prince Albert II Foundation."*

On 1 June 2021, during his visit to see the next generation Antarctica for the first time, Venturi presented H.S.H Prince Albert II with a gift of the original prototype that he drove in Canada, in March 2019 to navigate part of the 42 kilometre mountainside route between Dease Lake and rsTelegraph Creek, on the lands of the Tahltn people.

The aim of that expedition was to put the machine through a series of tests in climatic conditions similar to those at the South Pole. On Telegraph Creek Road, considered to be one of the world's most dangerous highways, three drivers climbed aboard Antarctica : H.S.H Prince Albert II of Monaco, the Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield and the President of Venturi North America, Xavier

Venturi Antarctica, the world's first zero emission polar research vehicle will be stationed at Belgium's Princess Elisabeth Research Station in Antarctica on 1 December 2021. Much attention has been paid to the design which, although futuristic, has clean lines.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Antarctica's bodywork was designed by Sacha Lakic, with whom Venturi has worked closely for many years. His vision cleverly sidesteps the technical constraints imposed by the research and development department. Most of these concern the vehicle's thermal insulation, the size of the battery and the tubular structure of the chassis.

Sacha Lakic has also succeeded in the challenge of developing a design that is both versatile and provides the level of comfort necessary for the passengers. Antarctica is the encapsulation of Venturi's technological expertise. The Research & Development teams – already working on the Voxan and Venturi world speed records programme – have created a completely unique vehicle, equipped with cutting-edge technological solutions that are both bold and clever.

The vehicle can carry up to six passengers on its fold-down bench seats, including equipment and a second battery that can increase its initial range of 50 kilometres at a top speed of 25 kilometres per hour.

Venturi Antarctica weighs 2 tons and can withstand temperatures as low as -70°C without adverse effects on the battery's performance. It has opted for two electric motors of 60 kW each, with the possibility of charging from both a power socket and solar panels. Charging times range from 2 to 18 hours, depending on the power source.

To optimise energy management, Venturi is also using parts taken from Formula E, such as the vehicle's control unit which manages all of Antarctica's functions, and uses programmes developed in the world of motorsport, particularly for managing power flows.

THE VENTURI GROUP

From its origins as a modest constructor founded in western France in the 1980s, the firm underwent a radical transformation in 2000, after Gildo Pastor bought the business and moved its headquarters to the Principality of Monaco, where he made the strategic choice to focus on electric motors; the pioneering company thus became a world expert in electric mobility and the design and manufacture of high-performance electric vehicles. Whether through world records, expeditions on hostile terrain, the creation of the first electric sports car, the development of innovative vehicles or its involvement in the Formula E World Championship, the Venturi Group embodies and demonstrates all the capabilities of the electric vehicle on 2 or 4 wheels.

Olivier Wenden, Vice-President and Chief Executive of the Prince Albert II Foundation expressed

strong admiration for Venturi, following the agreement with the automotive company : *"It remains a source of great pride for the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation to work alongside intrepid and visionary entrepreneurs like Gildo Pastor, making sustainable innovation not just the core of their R&D, but using it to further the cause of science and preserving our planet. This new Antarctica vehicle is itself a magnificent example of the feats we are capable of, and I am sure it will be a real asset for the scientists at Princess Elisabeth Antarctic Research Station. The polar regions, particularly fragile and vulnerable, must be the focus of all our attentions. They are on the front line of the devastating effects of climate change. To improve our knowledge without disturbing ecosystems, using a zero emissions vehicle capable of withstanding extreme conditions, is a major step forward."*

A series of other thorough tests will be undertaken to verify the efficacy of the insulation and other parameters including the response of the on-board instruments at extreme temperatures. Only then will Antarctica continue its journey to distant lands, and the polar exploration bases that are its ultimate destination.



Venturi Antarctica



Cricova cellars' genuine underground town covers an area of 53 hectares, and the underground galleries transformed into streets, have a total length of 120 kilometres

IT'S WINE O'CLOCK

Europe's biggest wine cellar is in Moldova

“Wine is one of the most civilized things in the world and one of the most natural things of the world, that has been brought to the greatest perfection” were some of Ernest Hemingway's words.

Indeed, if we take a look back in history, we can trace the art of wine making to about 9,000 years ago. The oldest evidence for producing this alcoholic beverage, made mainly from grapes, but sometimes also with fermented rice and honey, comes from China. Two thousand years later, the seeds of the European winemaking tradition were sown in western Asia, where the ancestor of the European wild grape (*Vitis vinifera sylvestris*) originated between the Mediterranean Sea and Caspian Sea.

In Europe, extensive proof of early wine making activity was discovered in Greece, at Dikili Tash including relics such as a clay cup containing both grape juice and grape pulp, dating between 4400–4000 BC. A wine production installation has also been

discovered in Armenia. A platform for crushing grapes, an ingenious method for moving the grape juice into storage, as well as evidence of the fermentation process were examined and dated to around 4000 BC.



The analysis of residues collected from ceramics at the site of Dikili Tash (Kavala, Eastern Macedonia, Greece) suggests that wine was made in Europe as early as the 5th millennium B.C.

Later, by Roman times, wine became a highly valued economic as well as social and cultural product. Not to mention that Christianity also recognised the importance of wine

through the very first recorded miracle in the New Testament (John 2: 1-11), when Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding.

A long tradition of wine making was developed on European soil and later on, by the mid-19th century, with the colonisation of California, European grapes flourished in its mild climate, launching the American wine industry. It is now one of the top five wine producers in the world.

Wine has been appreciated, recognised and highly valued for a long time now. The most expensive wine ever sold was a bottle of French Burgundy, which fetched the record sum of 558,000 USD at an auction in 2018. A bit too pricy this wine, I would say!

Martin Luther once said that “beer is made by men, wine by God”. Could that be the reason? This is a personal opinion, but I have always considered wine (and champagne) much more refined and appropriate for elaborate soirees and high-level events.



This bottle of 1945 Romanee-Conti was sold for \$558,000 at Sotheby's auction house in New York

Nowadays, Italy is the leading wine producer in Europe with a yearly production of approximately 49.1 million hectolitres. France comes second with 46.6 million hectolitres, followed by Spain. These three countries are also the world's top three wine producers, with Europe producing about two thirds of the world's precious beverage.

According to the US-based market research and consulting firm, Grand View Research, the global wine market was valued at about 417.85 billion USD in 2020 and is expected to expand at an annual growth rate of 6.4% from 2021 to 2028. The increasing adoption of wine by all age groups, from the younger generation to the elderly across the globe is the key factor for market growth. (Source [grandviewresearch.com](https://www.grandviewresearch.com)).

Although there has lately been a decrease in sales in the hotel and restaurant sectors due to the Covid-19 pandemic, online liquor stores have flourished and sales are booming. So, there is no need to worry about the industry. Europe is the most established market for wine with countries like Italy, France, Spain or Portugal having the highest per capita wine consumption per year.



Four wine tasters in a cellar, mid-19th century

With such a long tradition in the field and predicted increasing demand, it is only natural that many countries in

Europe have, over the years, mastered the art of wine making and are now competing fiercely on the European and global market. Large or small, wine production in these countries has developed steadily and now, old and new names are both on the market, competing for wine trophies.



Moldovan grapes

Cricova is the biggest wine cellar in Europe. It is also the most prestigious brand, as well as the largest company in the Republic of Moldova. It produces wines according to the classic French method of the famous monk Dom Pierre Perignon - "Méthode Traditionnelle", through a process that involves secondary fermentation in the glass and subsequent cuvée aging for one to three years.

The history of the Cricova Associated Wine Factory begins in 1952. According to their official website, there had been a shortage of facilities for the storage and aging of wines at that time in the Republic of Moldova. Following long searches, two outstanding personalities of Moldovan winemaking, Petru Ungureanu and Nicolae Sobolev suggested that an underground network of cool, dry galleries be used as warehouses for the storage of wine. These hollow spaces had resulted from the extraction of vast amounts of limestone.

Before long, it turned out that the wines produced at the Cricova Associated Wine Factory, and aged in the stillness of these underground galleries possessed exceptional qualities.

This vast land of the wine god Bacchus, covers about 680 hectares in the vicinity of the country's capital, Chisinau. It is also near some of the most imposing natural and historical attractions - the natural forest reserve of Codrii and the archaeological complex of Old Orhei. The country's favourable climate, with mild winters and long, sunny summers, have offered Cricova the best production conditions.

The company's range of products is outstanding, both in terms of quality and diversity. Muscat, Pinot Noir, Cabernet, Sauvignon, Merlot as well as Pinot, Sauvignon, Rkätiteli and Aligote are all produced at Cricova. The total production is currently around 10 million bottles per year.



Old Orhei

But of course, one of the most remarkable products offered by the Cricova Associated Wine Factory is the classic 'Methode Champenoise' sparkling wine.

Furthermore, Cricova manufactures sparkling wines obtained by secondary fermentation in stainless steel vats. The resulting sparkling wine possesses a full fruity taste and freshness. This method enables the preservation of all the qualities of a re-fermented wine.



Cricova Gallery

The official website, (cricova.md) goes on to explain that the originality of Cricova wines is due to the conditions of storage in the underground cellars, where the so-called wine-making stage takes place. Cricova cellars provide the ideal conditions for the success of this process in as much as the average temperature is +10°C to +12 °C and the relative humidity of the air is 97-98% all year round. The latter indicator is of particular importance: the higher the relative humidity level, the lower the risk of wine loss.

Unlike many winemaking companies, Cricova wine storage facilities do not use artificial air conditioning or ventilation systems. A unique microclimate has been created here by nature itself, just perfect for the production and maturation of high quality wines.

The long galleries at Cricova were formed as a result of mining and extraction activities. Many buildings in Cricova, Chisinau, Balti and other towns in Moldova have been built with the limestone extracted here. This activity is still ongoing in some ramifications of the galleries, thus contributing to the ever-growing cellar space.

On a tour of the Cricova cellars, one can easily appreciate that they are truly unique in the world. Believe it or not, they are basically an underground town, covering a total area of 53 hectares. All the old galleries have been transformed into streets, with a total length of 120 kilometres, reaching 80 metres in depth in some places. As in a real town - but a subterranean one - Cricova has streets, traffic lights and road signs, to the immense delight of tourists, some even children, who come to visit. The streets of this original labyrinth have rather unusual names :

'Cabernet', 'Dionis', 'Feteasca', 'Aligote', 'Sauvignon'; each street bearing the name of the wine stored on the sides of the galleries. The temperature and humidity levels in these underground galleries remain constant all year round, thus enabling the preservation and proper aging of the wines which thus acquire their authentic character.

One can also visit the Underground Complex and experience a wine tasting session in one of the five large, spacious and imposing halls, decorated with stained glass, tapestries, and wooden sculptures, combining classic architectural elements with modern ornaments. Whether it is the stained glass windows of the famous 'European Hall', which presents the four seasons of the year, the wall sculptures of the 'Presidential Hall', the comfort and coziness of the 'Fireplace Room', the decorated walls of the 'Great House' with traditionally embroidered towels and woven wool carpets, all embellished with geometric and floral elements, or the spectacular 'Sea Bottom' room with its limestone ceiling in natural raw form, reflected as in a mirror in the marine decor with blue-green shades and symbolising the depths of the Sarmatia Sea that existed here 12 million years ago, they all attract visitors, whether they be wine lovers or just passionate and curious tourists.



Cricovas' European Hall

The Underground Town also hosts a museum with exhibits of all times; from ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, describing the history of winemaking in detail. Among the exhibits of the Cricova Museum, there is a vine imprint dating back to the 5th century BC, proof that wine has been produced in Moldova since very old times indeed.

Furthermore, there is a modern screening room on the 'Lumière Brothers' Street within the stone tunnels, that can accommodate up to 40 people and where interested visitors can watch a documentary film, presenting the history of the vineyard.



The Cricova cellars host a remarkable wine collection - the 'Oenotheque' - dating from 1954. The precious wine collection contains almost 1.3 million bottles of wine, each with its own exceptional qualities and particular history. This liquid treasure has been collected over the years from different corners of the world. But the most special one is 'Easter Jerusalem', a red dessert wine. This is the only bottle in the world, out of the 400 initially bottled in 1902, that has survived. Another unique specimen is a Jan Becher liqueur, produced in 1902 in the Czech Republic, containing extracts from 27 medicinal herbs.

The most valuable collection of the 'Oenotheque' is considered to be the one that belonged to Hermann Göring, the commander-in-chief of Hitler's air force. Almost two thousand bottles of premium wines, such as Mosel, Bordeaux, Porto, Tokay and Chablis, produced from grapes harvested in the 1940s had been captured by the Nazi commander in the countries occupied by Germany during World War II. After the war, the wines were first taken to Moscow by Soviet soldiers as a military trophy, who then drank most of it. But the remains of this huge collection can now be found at Cricova.



© Cricova

The testing laboratory at Cricova ensures full control of all the technological processes taking place at the wine factory

Cricova has stood out due to its advantages of complete production cycles and its own raw materials. Control at every stage of the production process, from planting the grapes to the delivery of the finished goods has enabled the company to maintain the quality, authenticity and originality of its wines.

Denis Sovă, General Manager at Cricova says : “Our oenologists still use the method of manual peeling of grapes for the production of certain types of wines. We also borrowed from the old Italian grape processing method, called ‘appassimento’. It is a meticulous process, where each grape is processed by hand, stored in special boxes equipped with heat, ventilation and humidity regulation. The grapes turn into raisins and catch a noble mold. This way, they lose a certain amount of water and become sweeter, richer in trace elements and flavours. Later on, we turn them into exceptional wines such as Amplius”.

Bio wines are also trending now and Cricova intends to extend production into this market as well.

All these efforts have inevitably brought world recognition: a gold medal in 2020 at the most prestigious ‘Effervescent du Monde’ competition for the Cricova Pinot Noir Blanc de Noirs sparkling wine. A gold medal at the ‘Mondial des Pinots 2021’ for its Grand Vintage, another gold at ‘Gilbert Gaillard International Challenge 2021’ for Cricova Brut. A silver medal at ‘Concours Mondial de Bruxelles 2021’ for Pinot Meunier, a gold at ‘Vinarium International Wine Contest 2021’ for Classic Rose Brut and Rara Neagra Limited Edition. These are just some of the latest achievements.

Meanwhile, Cricova is the first and only company awarded with the highest state distinction, the ‘Order of the Republic’. The company’s motto is in fact ‘Nomen est omen’ meaning ‘the name speaks for itself’.

‘Cricova’ Associated Wine Factory has also been declared a National Cultural Heritage. This honour is fully deserved for a small country such as Moldova, especially in view of the international recognition and fame that its wines have

brought home and which have served as a valuable promotion tool for the country.

Denis Sovă goes on to add : “It is no longer a novelty that the name Cricova is recognised in more than 37 countries. The best example would be the Chinese market, where we are not as well-known as a country, but the wines produced by Cricova are on many tables. Success comes but slowly. It is like wine that matures over time and becomes more intense and aromatic. You just have to be patient.”



© Cricova

Cultural diplomacy is recognised today as one of the most widely used and powerful tools, national branding is of outstanding importance and wine is something that goes rapidly to the hearts of people, when it is of great quality.

As the American poet E.E. Cummings used to say: “His lips drink water, but his heart drinks wine..”

Alexandra Paucescu



© Cricova



© Cricova



"Fumei Chojā and the nine-tailed spirit fox" (1760-1849)

AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Hokusai the great picturebook of everything

Discover a collection of rare drawings by Katsushika Hokusai – one of Japan's most celebrated artists, best known for his iconic print, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, popularly called *The Great Wave*.

In a global first, this exhibition will display 103 recently acquired drawings by Hokusai, produced in the 1820s–1840s for an illustrated encyclopedia called *The Great Picture Book of Everything*. For reasons unknown, the book was never published, presenting the opportunity to see these exceptional works which would otherwise have been destroyed as part of the woodblock printing process.

Depicting scenes from Buddhist India, ancient China and the natural world,

the brush drawings not only showcase Hokusai's inimitable style and skill, but also reveal a version of 19th-century Japan much more intrigued by the wider world than previously thought.

As well as offering the unique chance to study Hokusai's masterful brushwork directly, the show shines a light on the last chapter of the artist's career and life, uncovering a restless talent that burned brightly into his final years.

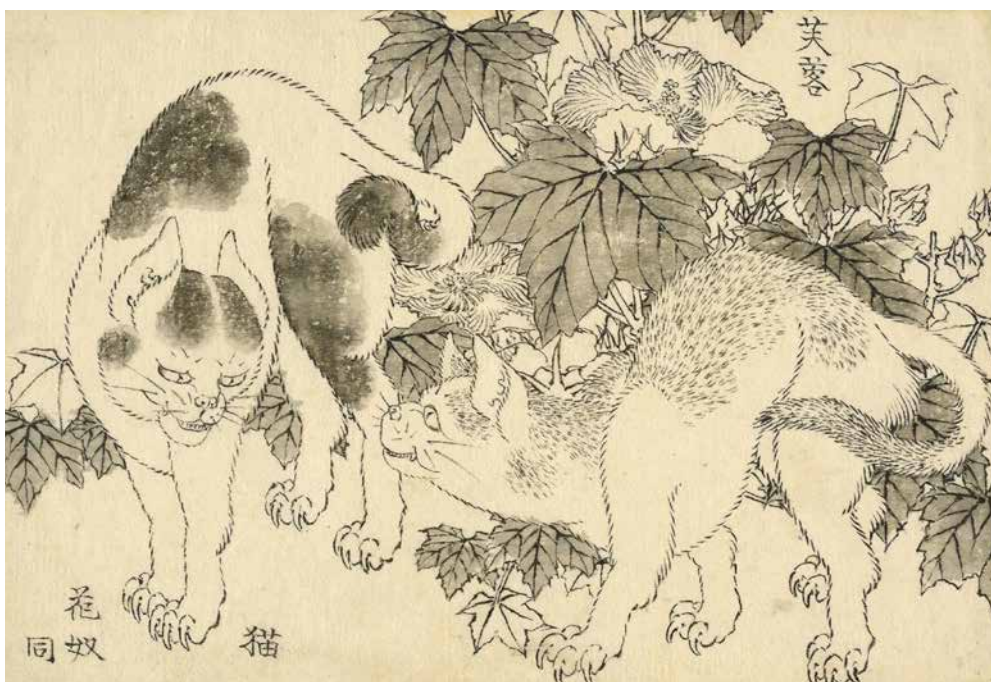
In addition to the original brush drawings, the exhibition showcases Hokusai's masterpiece *The Great Wave*, alongside objects that give further insight into his working practices and demonstrate the intricate process by which his woodblock prints were created.

Katsushika Hokusai, known simply as **Hokusai**, was a Japanese artist, ukiyo-e painter and printmaker of the Edo period. Hokusai is best known for the woodblock print series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* which includes the internationally iconic print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*.

Hokusai created the monumental *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* both as a response to a domestic travel boom in Japan and as part of a personal obsession with Mount Fuji. It was this series, specifically *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* and *Fine Wind, Clear Morning*, that secured his fame both in Japan and overseas. While Hokusai's work prior to this series is certainly important, it was not until this series that he gained broad recognition.



"Under the wave off Kanagawa" (The Great Wave)



"Cats and hibiscus" (1760-1849)

EXHIBITION SUPPORTER

The Asahi Shimbun Company

The Asahi Shimbun Company is a longstanding corporate sponsor of the British Museum. The Asahi Shimbun is a Japanese leading newspaper and the company also provides a substantial

information service via the internet. The company has a century-long tradition of philanthropic support, notably staging key exhibitions in Japan on art, culture and history from around the world. In addition to supporting Hokusai: The Great Picture Book of Everything, The Asahi Shimbun Company also supports

The Asahi Shimbun Displays in Room 3 and is a committed supporter of the British Museum touring exhibition programme in Japan. They are the funder of The Asahi Shimbun Gallery of Amaravati sculpture in Room 33a of the British Museum, and a supporter of the iconic Great Court.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Great Russell Street | London | Exhibition | 30 Sep 2021 - 30 Jan 2022

TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman

Let's kick off autumn

Summer isn't quite over yet, but we're already looking ahead to the season of elegant colours and cosy clothes to wrap ourselves in. These 3 fashion trends will rule Fall 2021.

1. Sequins 24/7

Some call it «revenge dressing»: we haven't been out and about in over a year and now it's more than time to make up for lost time. Let's shop or pull out the most glittering and shiny metallic pieces from our wardrobes, and wear them whenever we want to.

How to wear them?

The best way to make these statement materials work is by pairing them with super casual basics, such as a T-shirt, a trench coat or blue jeans.



© PRADA

Sequined and leather bag
(prada.com)



© BALMAIN

Sequin-embellished striped blouse
(balmain.com)



© SALVATORE FERRAGAMO

Black leather sequined sandals
([salvatoreferragamo](https://salvatoreferragamo.com) spotted on farfetch.com)

2. Ready or knit

Welcome to the most comfy-chic trend! Cashmere and wool dresses, sweaters or cardigans are endlessly flattering for an evening in or out.

How to wear them?

Next to the skin, as soon as chilly autumn evenings set in, or with soft, warm and fuzzy materials (suede boots, velvet pants...).



© ALEXANDER MCQUEEN

Asymmetric cashmere minidress
([Alexander McQueen](https://alexandermcqueen.com) spotted on mytheresa.com)



© ERIC BOMPARD

This «second skin» cashmere dress has a bohemian charm and delicate ribbing
(eric-bompard.com)



© ANINE BING

Mohair wool-blend cardigan
(eu.aninebing.com)

3. Lavender for ever

Of course, fall and winter are typically reserved for deeper, richer colours, while spring and summertime tend to welcome pastel hues. Therefore, it was surprising to discover an avalanche of lavender, lilac and derivative colours during the Fall/Winter Fashion Weeks.

How to wear it?

Pick up one or two statement pieces, such as a lavender blazer, hoodie, a pleated midi skirt or a bag and then mix them with classic basics, such as jeans or a white T-shirt.



© INSTAGRAM @LEONIEHAN

The German Fashion Blogger Leonie Hanne has mastered the art of wearing bright colourful outfits. So chic!



© BOTTEGA VENETA

Washed cupro scarf neck top
(bottegaveneta.com)



© GIULIANO GALIANO

High heeled leather ankle boots
([Giuliano Galiano](https://giulianogaliano.com) spotted on farfetch.com)

TIMELESS CHIC

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By Clara Bauman



© UNIQLO



© UNIQLO

When Uniqlo meets Inès de la Fressange

Since 2014, the Japanese brand that inspires the world to dress casual, has been collaborating with the French fashion icon Inès de la Fressange, reflecting her «chic and effortless French style».

The inspiration for this 16th collection is the Swiss village of Rossinière, beloved by artists for its beautiful mountain scenery, but also where Inès spends her Christmas holidays. And the result of all this? Well, 55 items expressing a «cozy atmosphere» such as cashmere blend knit ponchos, knit dresses with a simple, yet shapely and attractive silhouette, or even a characteristically Ines style of masculine jacket.

This is definitely a smart collection that adds a touch of cool to everyday life. (uniqlo.com).

Vibrant tribute to Klimt

If you love symbolic art as much as luxury jewellery, then this collection is definitely for you! The Austrian brand Frey Wille – specialising in artistic and precious fire enamel jewellery – has launched a new collection entitled 'Dreams', an artful tribute to Gustav Klimt.

Here is a list of what you can find in this collection: rings, bracelets, earrings, pendants and watches featuring intense shimmering colours, paired with dashes of pure gold. The most difficult part is choosing an item.

(shop.freywille.com)



© FREYWILLE - GUSTAV KLIMT



« Show me your green side »

This is the challenge that was met by Fratelli Rossetti, one of the major 'Made-in-Italy' luxury shoe producers. And they proved it with their new collection entitled «GreenSide», which is the start of a journey towards environmental respect and sustainability.

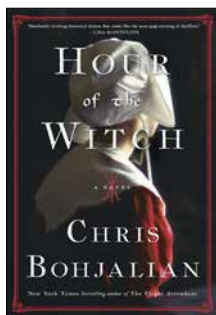
These are some of their manufacturing secrets :

- soles are made of natural latex
- uppers are made of high quality suede, produced using an eco-friendly manufacturing process
- linings are composed of natural bamboo fibre fabric

Embracing the cross-over between wardrobes, GreenSide is available for both men and women.

(fratellirossetti.com)

BOOKS

**HOURLY OF THE WITCH***By Chris Bohjalian*

A NOVEL

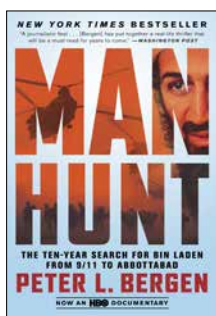
A young Puritan woman faithful, resourceful, but afraid of the demons that dog her soul—plots her escape from a violent marriage in this riveting and propulsive novel of historical suspense from the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Flight Attendant*.

Boston, 1662. Mary Deerfield is twenty-four-years-old. Her skin is porcelain, her eyes delf blue, and in England she might have had many suitors. But here in the New World, amid this

community of saints, Mary is the second wife of Thomas Deerfield, a man as cruel as he is powerful. When Thomas, prone to drunken rage, drives a three-tined fork into the back of Mary's hand, she resolves that she must divorce him to save her life.

But in a world where every neighbor is watching for signs of the devil, a woman like Mary a woman who harbors secret desires and finds it difficult to tolerate the brazen hypocrisy of so many men in the colony soon becomes herself the object of suspicion and rumor. When tainted objects are discovered buried in Mary's garden, when a boy she has treated with herbs and simples dies, and when their servant girl runs screaming in fright from her home, Mary must fight to not only escape her marriage, but also the gallows.

A twisting, tightly plotted novel of historical suspense from one of our greatest storytellers, *Hour of the Witch* is a timely and terrifying story of socially sanctioned brutality and the original American witch hunt.

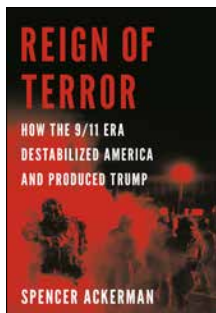
**THE TEN-YEAR SEARCH FOR BIN LADEN FROM 9/11 TO ABBOTTABAD***By Peter L. Bergen*

NOW AN HBO DOCUMENTARY

In *Manhunt*, Peter Bergen delivers a taut yet panoramic account of the pursuit and killing of Osama bin Laden. Here are riveting new details of bin Laden's flight after the crushing defeat of the Taliban to Tora Bora, where American forces came startlingly close to capturing him, and of the fugitive leader's attempts to find a secure hiding place. As the only journalist to gain

access to bin Laden's Abbottabad compound before the Pakistani government demolished it, Bergen paints a vivid picture of bin Laden's grim, Spartan life in hiding and his struggle to maintain control of al-Qaeda.

Half a world away, Bergen takes us inside the Situation Room, where President Obama considers the courses of action presented by his war council and receives conflicting advice from his top advisors before deciding to risk the raid that would change history—and then inside the Joint Special Ops Command, whose “secret warriors,” the SEALs, would execute Operation Neptune Spear. From the moment two Black Hawks take off from Afghanistan until bin Laden utters his last words, *Manhunt* reads like a thriller.

**REIGN OF TERROR***By Spencer Ackerman*

HOW THE 9/11 ERA DESTABILIZED AMERICA AND PRODUCED TRUMP

An examination of the profound impact that the War on Terror had in pushing American politics and society in an authoritarian direction

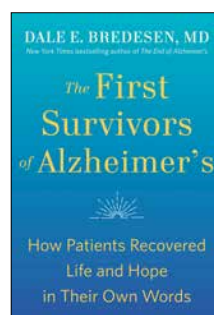
For an entire generation, at home and abroad, the United States has waged an endless conflict known as the War on Terror. In addition to multiple ground wars, it has pioneered drone strikes and industrial-scale digital surveillance,

as well as detaining people indefinitely and torturing them. These conflicts have yielded neither peace nor victory, but they have transformed America. What began as the persecution of Muslims and immigrants has become a normalized, paranoid feature of American politics and security, expanding the possibilities for applying similar or worse measures against other targets at home. A politically

divided country turned the War on Terror into a cultural and then tribal struggle, first on the ideological fringes and ultimately expanding to conquer the Republican Party, often with the timid acquiescence of the Democratic Party. Today's nativist resurgence walked through a door opened by the 9/11 era.

Reign of Terror will show how these policies created a foundation for American authoritarianism and, though it is not a book about Donald Trump, it will provide a critical explanation of his rise to power and the sources of his political strength. It will show that Barack Obama squandered an opportunity to dismantle the War on Terror after killing Osama bin Laden. That mistake turns out to have been portentous. By the end of his tenure, the war metastasized into a broader and bitter culture struggle in search of a demagogue like Trump to lead it.

A union of journalism and intellectual history, *Reign of Terror* will be a pathbreaking and definitive book with the power to transform how America understands its national security policies and their catastrophic impact on its civic life.

**THE FIRST SURVIVORS OF ALZHEIMER'S***By Dale Bredeesen*

HOW PATIENTS RECOVERED LIFE AND HOPE IN THEIR OWN WORDS

A First person stories of patients who recovered from Alzheimer's Disease—and how they did it.

It has been said that everyone knows a cancer survivor, but no one has met an Alzheimer's survivor – until now. In his first two books, Dr. Dale Bredeesen outlined the revolutionary treatments that are changing what had previously seemed like the inevitable outcome of cognitive

decline and dementia. And in these moving narratives, you can hear directly from the first survivors of Alzheimer's themselves—their own amazing stories of hope told in their own words.

These first person accounts honestly detail the fear, struggle, and ultimate victory of each patient's journey. They vividly describe what it is like to have Alzheimer's. They also drill down on how each of these patients made the program work for them—the challenges, the workarounds, the encouraging results that are so motivating. Dr. Bredeesen includes commentary following each story to help point readers to the tips and tricks that might help them as well.

Dr. Bredeesen's patients have not just survived; they have thrived to rediscover fulfilling lives, rewarding relationships, and meaningful work. This book will give unprecedented hope to patients and their families.

**THE LAST GIRL***By Nadia Murad - Foreword by Amal Clooney*

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

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

• In this “courageous” (*The Washington Post*) memoir of survival, a former captive of the Islamic State tells her harrowing and ultimately inspiring story.

Nadia Murad was born and raised in Kocho, a small village of farmers and shepherds in northern Iraq. A member of the Yazidi

community, she and her brothers and sisters lived a quiet life. Nadia had dreams of becoming a history teacher or opening her own beauty salon.

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

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

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

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