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EXCLUSIVE

The thoughts and experiences of Poland's former Foreign Minister, Witold Waszczykowski



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If truth is the first casualty of conflict, freedom follows close behind

GODS AND MONSTERS

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Nikola Hendrickx

EDITORIAL

In 2012 and with great promise of potential for Central and East European countries, the Cooperation framework between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEEC Group) with 16 nations that came to be known as the 16+1 group was inaugurated.

This was expanded to 17+1 with the addition of Greece in 2019. What was hailed as a broad programme of trade, finance, and investment schemes to build infrastructure, revive ailing factories and industries that failed to attract Western investment and boost trade with China, instead turned out to be a highly imbalanced agreement in favour of China.

It is now viewed by many as an insidious scheme to grow China's soft power and 'divide and conquer' Europe through expanded Chinese influence. The February 2021 meeting of 17+1 nations saw the group shrink to 16+1 with the departure of Lithuania. Europe is now beginning to realise that relations with China are complex, imbalanced in favour of China, and often fail to bring anything more than Chinese soft power.

In February 2021, the Lithuanian parliament agreed to leave what was previously China's 17+1 format. Foreign minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said the cooperation between Beijing and Vilnius has brought "almost no benefits".

The 17+1 group has failed over the last decade due to China's failure to deliver on any of the promises. There has been little benefit to European nations in the group and instead most of the benefits have gone to China with a larger trade imbalance than before the agreement.

Member nations of the 17+1 group have seen more Chinese soft power than economic benefits. Benefits from the relationship over the last nine years have been overwhelmingly in China's favour with the trade imbalance only growing, and barriers to entry to the Chinese market failing to ease. It now seems preferable that more European nations follow Lithuania's lead and reconsider their approach to China in the 16+1 agreement.

At the core, the European system of liberal democratic values is essentially incompatible with CCP-style authoritarianism. Human rights and liberties such as freedom of speech, democracy, and privacy form an integral part of the EU, and the EU should no longer ignore these rights when dealing with China.

European leaders must not decouple economic relations with China from human rights and other thorny issues, but instead must make respect for human rights and civil liberties an integral part of any negotiation with China.

China uses trade as a weapon. Their heavy-handed tactics to suppress criticism and force compliance as a condition of access to the Chinese market is incompatible with European values. Complying with Chinese coercion only weakens Europe's hand and plays into the Chinese strategy of 'divide and conquer' Europe.

Another issue that must be mentioned is the AUKUS pact. This trilateral security agreement between Australia, the UK and the US aims to help Australia take up security challenges that will present themselves in the Indo-Pacific in the next decades. Australia will be given access by its two partners to nuclear submarines, as well as to capabilities such as artificial intelligence and quantum technologies. Although not spelt out explicitly, this pact is meant to counter Chinese military brinkmanship from the South China Sea to the border with India.

Following Australia's cancellation of a conventional submarine deal worth some 56 billion Euros, the French foreign minister described the pact as a "stab in the back" and France recalled its ambassadors to Washington and Canberra.

While we in Europe should be upset over being left out of this new security arrangement, we cannot let French anger distract us from the real threat - China. At least we can say that these three allies are doing something to confront China. What action has France taken against China? Why aren't we in Europe doing more to counter this growing threat ?

Trajan Dereville



President Rafael Correa participates in farewell honors to the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping

GODS AND MONSTERS

How Xi Jinping is ascending the heavenly throne

You find heaven wherever you choose to look in China. 'Tiān' (天) means heaven – more-or-less – just as the word 'heaven' in English can mean either the firmament (home to the sun, stars and cosmos) or the dwelling place of a god or gods. The whole vast pantheon of Chinese deities is perplexing; there are so many gods and monsters involved. As a child, I used to love visiting the house of my cleverest relative by far, my great uncle, who, together with his equally clever French wife, had lived in Singapore and other parts of the Far East, amassing a vast collection of books, many of which he kindly gave to his schoolboy nephew (me) to aid with my studies and varied interests. But his house was also full of what must be called 'Chinese art', I suppose: wooden and ivory sculptures of deities and demons, which I found somewhat intimidating and rather scary, at least when I was very small. Sadly, his son, a New York-dwelling but much-travelled writer, threw them all out in a fit of pique when he died, which was a shame. I would have liked to have kept at least one small one as a memento. Let's just take a brief look at China's gods, however, many of whose names include the word Tiān (天).

There's Tiāndì (天帝), which means God or emperor of Heaven. How about Tiānzhǔ (天主), which used to be, it seems, regarded as the title of the first god from whom all the others evolved or descended (or whatever it is gods are supposed to do). There's another separate deity name, Tiānhuáng (天皇), which could be interpreted as 'King of Heaven', and more that are similar: Tiāngōng (天) the "Duke" or "General" of Heaven, Tiānjūn (天君), meaning "Prince" or "Lord" of Heaven, and so on and so forth; you get the drift, I'm sure. And that most famous

of Beijing landmarks, Tiānānmen Square, means 'The Square of the Gate of Heaven.



Tiananmen Gate seen from the square across the street

It could be argued that in 1989 quite a few protestors against the Chinese government of the time found their way to Heaven there, or perhaps to Hell, helped on their way by the 5.8mm rounds of the People's Liberation Army Kalashnikov-based assault rifles. The various gods differ in terms of importance for those Chinese people who believe in them at all (religion is discouraged in secular China), forming a complicated hierarchy, not unlike, one could say, the hierarchy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Now the current leader, Xi Jinping, has joined the ranks of the CCP's own

hierarchy, alongside Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. They're not quite seen as gods in this secular, atheistic country, but their status is remarkably similar.



© UN Photo/Loay Felipe
Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China

In fact, Xi Jinping has organised a clamp-down on religion in China, although its replacement – officially-approved thought – is somewhat like Christianity was during the religious purges of the early middle ages or like Islam, as practised by the Taliban today. There's no leeway given for individual interpretation: Xi's word is law! He is currently engaged in trying to purge China of capitalism's more extreme sectors. But he has certainly turned quite hostile towards freedom of religion. Various methods of suppression are being deployed, such as compelling independent churches to join religious organisations that are run by the CCP. The government also tries to suppress the transmission of religious education from one generation to another, whilst seeking to isolate Chinese Christians from like-minded followers in other countries.



© Wikicommons
Detainee in a Xinjiang Re-education Camp located in Lop County listening to "de-radicalization" talks

It is also illegal to see the Bible there. Being religious in China isn't easy: in August 2021, both the pastor, Wang Xiaoguang, and preacher Yang Rongli at the so-called Golden Lamp

Church in Linfen, a Christian place of worship in the province of Shanxi, were arrested by police. This came shortly after a thorough investigation by China's Rights Defence Network of the church, its members and its leadership. The church, it seems, had repeatedly declined to put itself under the control of the government-approved Three-self Patriotic Church, a supposedly Protestant body but under strict CCP control. Just to emphasize the governmental grip on matters spiritual, pensions and health insurance payments for the church's leaders have been withheld. Back in May 2021, Zhao and his wife Li were summoned by police and charged with 'religious fraud', while their mobile phones and other personal items were taken away. Li was released after questioning, but Zhao was given 15 days of 'administrative detention'. There are plenty of other examples of China's attempts to suppress religious faith, and in a number of places children are forbidden to attend church or other organised religious activities, including summer camps. In a speech he gave in 2016, Xi called on the government to 'manage' religion by persuading the faithful (of whatever faith) to love their country more by giving greater support to the CCP and Socialism.

DRAGON HUNTING

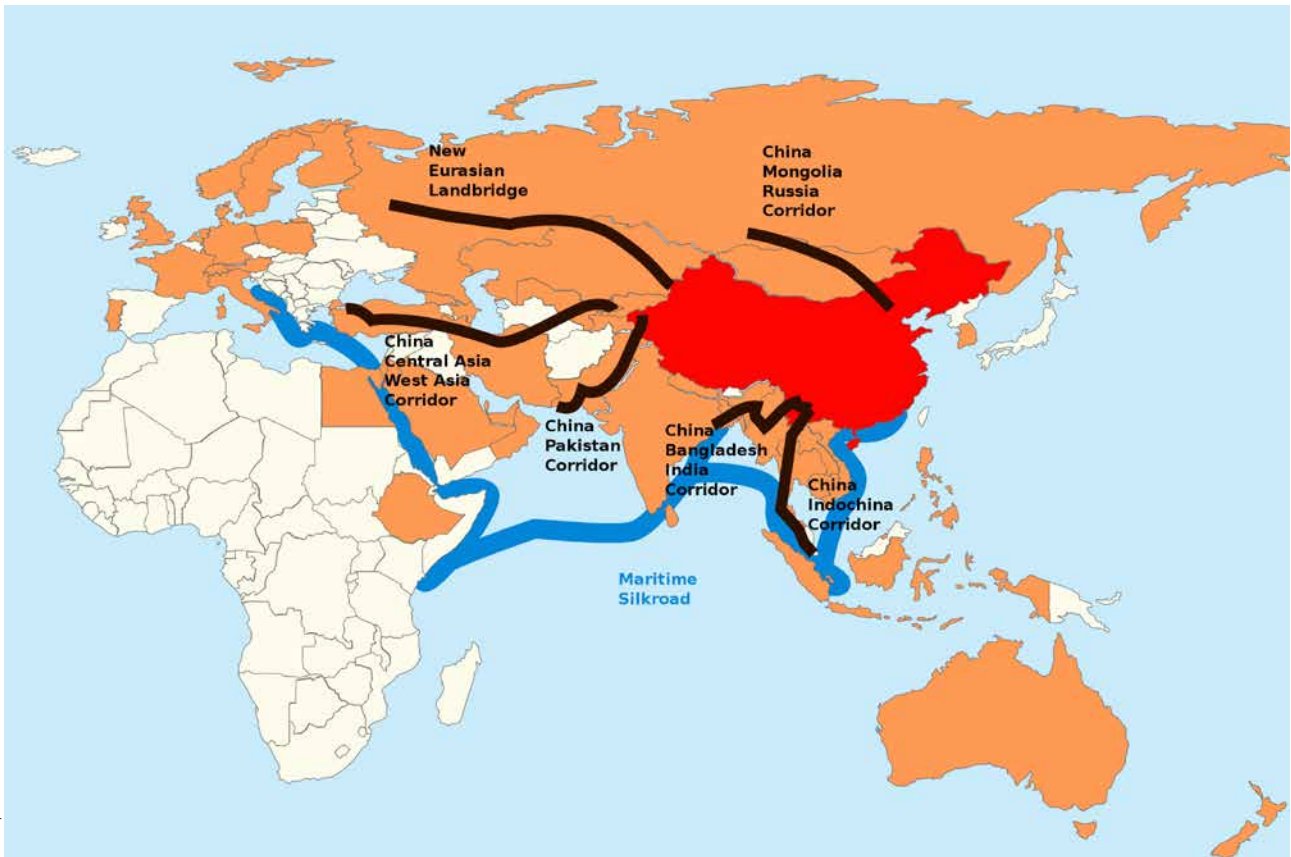
What about dragons? Chinese leadership has long been associated with these legendary and mystical creatures. In old paintings, of course, they look very different from the dragons of western mythology, with long, sinuous bodies, the dragons themselves coming in nine varieties. Long ago, Chinese emperors were closely identified with dragons and were even referred to as "sons of dragons" (women had to manage without one, it seems). Even dragons were guilty of sexism. Back then, only emperors could wear clothing that bore a dragon emblem. Ordinary people were not considered important enough. That has to mean that even Xi Jinping must have a dragon symbol of some kind. With nine types of dragon to choose from (or seven or twelve, depending on what work of reference you choose), what variety would most suit this most honoured of leaders? It's worth examining a list of types.



© Wikipecdis
The bixi at Lingyin Temple, Hangzhou, with the characters "Lingyin" (靈隱) written on the stele

Xi could hardly be Bixi, a turtle-shaped dragon with sharp teeth, mainly associated with graveyards and tombstones. Qiúniú would seem inappropriate, too. He (it?) is a yellow scaly dragon that likes music. Perhaps we're getting close with Yázi, with his leopard-shaped head and snake belly, who is keen on fighting and killing. For a more adventurous (and less single-minded) dragon, how about Cháofēng, an adventurous dragon whose image often adorns palace roofs? I think we can forget Púláo, who is associated with loud crying, which is why he's often seen on bell handles. Chīwěn also has a harsh voice but lives in the sea, although he likes to devour other creatures, so he's a strong candidate. Even Bì'àn must be in the running, with his love of legal process and lawsuits. The lion-shaped Suǎnní is probably not a candidate, sitting cross-legged as he is often pictured, and smelling of incense. He's popular at Buddhist temples, while Fùxì invented writing, according to legend, as well as fishing and the domestication of animals. I think that leaves us with Xi being some sort of hybrid, perhaps between Yázi (睚眦) and Chīwěn (螭吻): an aggressive chap, keen on fighting, who also likes to devour his foes. How one can square his leopard head and snake belly with being aquatic in nature – a marine creature, indeed – I'm not quite sure.

The main concern in the West is that Xi's ambitions seem to stretch beyond the boundaries of China itself. Some expert observers suggest that China is



© Wikipedia

Proposed Belt and Road Initiative. China in Red, the members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in orange. The proposed corridors in black (Land Silk Road), and blue (Maritime Silk Road)

making use of the divisions in Europe to strengthen its own position. It's a matter of concern because Europe needs inward investment (what country doesn't?) but where China is involved, this invariably comes at a price.

Xi is still very keen on his One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, aiming to construct a modern version of the Silk Road, linking East and West, and to that end in 2012 Xi launched what he called "17+1", although it has now shrunk to "16+1". Launched (surprise, surprise) in Budapest, it's aimed at promoting the OBOR scheme. In March 2021, Lithuania withdrew from the scheme, arguing that it could see no benefit in continuing to play a rôle. The scheme aimed to develop closer ties commercially and culturally, although it looks to outsiders suspiciously like Beijing trying to buy influence in countries uncertain about their own futures.

Among the schemes that China looked likely to help finance are the Budapest to Belgrade railway line, the E763 highway project in Serbia, running from Belgrade to Bijelo Polje in Montenegro, and the China-to-Europe land-sea Express Line as well

as providing Chinese assistance with Croatia's Pelješac Bridge through a consortium headed by the China Road and Bridge Corporation, inevitably linked with the OBOR scheme. Meanwhile, Chinese companies acquired the civil engineering machinery division of Huta Stalowa Wola as well as KFLT Bearings, another Polish company.



© Putevi/Srbijers
Construction of motorway E-763 section, Preljina-Požega

Such inward investment is obviously very tempting for countries that are not exactly rolling in development cash. Some are wondering, though, if this doesn't hand a little too much power and influence to Beijing. As it is, a book about China's European ambitions, "China's Offensive in Europe" has just been published, jointly written by Philippe Le Corre, a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institute, and an Associate Research Fellow at IRIS (Interdisciplinary Research & International Strategy Institute), Alain Sepulchre. They write that China finds Europe a tempting target because it is politically divided and yet still far from China's main competitor for global influence, the United States.

KEEPING THE RED FLAG FLYING

Le Corre and Sepulchre point out that China has already offered to participate in the European Strategic Investment Fund, a European Commission scheme to help fund a relaunch of European infrastructure and China's contribution looks like becoming the ESIF's largest non-European component. However, the

authors argue that there is a serious and on-going attempt by China to cause further division in Europe. Wall Street Journal, quoting an interview with the authors recorded in 2016, point out that: “A typical example is the ‘16+1’ group created by China and sixteen Eastern and Central European countries in 2011,” they replied. “Once a year, leaders of these countries meet with Chinese premier Li Keqiang. Last year (2015 in this instance) in Suzhou, they also met with President Xi Jinping. Seven countries signed memoranda of understanding with China on ‘one-belt, one-road’. Three of them hosted Mr. Xi recently and were offered substantial Chinese investment promises.” These are the sorts of promises that relatively poor Central and Eastern European countries can scarcely afford to ignore. Philippe Le Corre and Alain Sepulchre authors of “China’s Offensive in Europe” reassured the Wall Street Journal that there is no ‘master plan’ for China to take over Europe but its help in the past has paid dividends. During the Euro-debt crisis of 2008-2009, China started buying into European infrastructure projects, such as Athens’ vital Piraeus Harbour. It now controls it. With OBOR, China is buying influence in Europe, one country at a time while offers of inward investment are hard to resist, the downsides often hard to spot. It’s worth remembering that having subtly encouraged the UK to split away from the EU with vague promises of financial partnership and investment, China now find the UK of much less interest to Beijing than the rest of the bloc (and its 450-million consumers, of course) from which it is now divorced.



Ant Group and Ali Baba founder Jack Ma

Within China itself, Xi is waging a war of his own against capitalism’s excesses. Increasing debt, he believes, comes about through financial speculation and is fed by billionaires, which China lacked until relatively recently. Xi seems to fear another monster from Chinese mythology: the Taotie (饕餮), or the glutton, which would eat anything within its sight, including its own body. That’s why it is normally depicted as nothing more than a big head and a large mouth but with no body. According to mythology, it ate so much that it killed itself through over-eating and is now used as a symbol for greedy people. On the surface, Xi’s campaign looks to be soundly based, moral and wise. For instance, his officials began by blocking a public offering by Ant Group, which is connected with the tech giant, Ali Baba. Then the ride-hailing service Didi listed its shares in America, for which it was punished. A large property developer that was already in debt is now being pushed towards defaulting (more on that later).

Xi banned trading in cryptocurrencies, while on-line gaming is being rationed for children because Xi thinks it’s a dangerous pastime. Abortion is being firmly discouraged because China needs larger families, while male rôle models have to be manly and its celebrities must be patriotic. “This,” writes The Economist, “comes on top of an already brutal authoritarianism. As president, Mr. Xi has purged his rivals and locked up over a million Uyghurs.” The Economist poses the question, whether Xi is “an ideologue bent on grabbing power for himself, even if it slows growth and people suffer, or whether he is a strongman willing to

temper dogma with pragmatism.” On that point, the jury is still out, it seems. Only future generations will be able to judge Xi’s overall performance fairly.

The ban on trading in cryptocurrencies is especially odd, because China has now adopted one as its official currency. China, in an unprecedented move, just announced that it is officially adopting a certain cryptocurrency as China’s official coin, according to Forbes. “A major worldwide government,” the website proclaims, meaning China, “has just bestowed a huge vote of confidence and legitimacy onto the world of cryptocurrencies. China, in an unprecedented move, just announced that they are officially adopting a certain cryptocurrency as China’s official coin!” Forbes urges everyone to buy into it. Backed by mighty China, it can only rise. “The government of China,” it says, “just informed that they have chosen a preferred firm for the purchase and marketing of their new coin - YuanPay Group. The sales of China’s coin officially started October 3 of 2021 and currently these coins can be bought only from YuanPay Group. In fact, China deputy minister of finances, Liu Kun, informed that their new official coin stating price is just CNY 0.12!” (One Yuan is worth €0.13 at time of writing). It’s predicted that purchasers could become quite obscenely wealthy very quickly. Buying into it sounds sensible but Xi is an unpredictable man whose actual motives are generally very hard to judge.



YuanPay coin

In fact, it’s been said by some observers that Xi is trying to transform China’s entire economy into something Mao Zedong would recognise and of which he would approve. It’s a tactic that is scarcely worry-free, however. Brave and charismatic Mao may have been,



Chinese employees work at the shipyard of Piraeus Port Authority (PPA) in Perama, Greece

but he was no economist and Xi's latest actions would seem to pose risks to investors because, it's alleged, of a lack of any suitable rule of law and legal protection for property and private capital. Some, including the Maritime Fairtrade website, claim that Xi "is making the already-tense economic situation even worse." However, Xi seems determined to put an end to inequality, a goal of which Mao would surely have approved. Xi's slogan is "common prosperity", although it's not really very common anywhere. According to Maritime Fairtrade's website, "He (Xi) is weaponizing a new generation of Red Guards to attack foreign interests and domestically, he uses Maoism to rally the people behind him to eradicate rivals and to consolidate his political power. In Xi's narrative, only another revolution can rescue China from 'imperialists' and 'domestic exploitation' by foreign businesses." It's an ambitious programme, but Xi seems as immovable and as implacable as Mao, his expression just as unreadable.

China seems to have looked carefully at the European market and noted its difficulties, especially those that have created niches for Chinese manufacturers. Take the arrival of electric vehicles, for instance. What puts off many potential European buyers is the enormous purchase price. According to Yahoo! News finance, the average price of a vehicle in Europe has increased from a little over €33,000 in 2012 to more than €42,500 this year, an increase of 28%. Meanwhile, the average price of a new electric car in China has gone down over the same time period by around 47%, from almost €42,000 to just €22,000 over the same period. Europeans are also worried by the relatively small range that electric cars can go without being recharged and also the relative shortage of available charging points. China spotted a business opportunity and is exploiting it.

Individual countries in Central and Eastern Europe have never been of much concern to Chinese foreign policy but taken together they form a useful foundation for increased Chinese presence in Europe as a whole. The Belt and Road project has boosted those links since its launch in 2013. They may not be vital to Beijing's interests on their own, but Belarus,



The Chinese electric NIOeT7

Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia are all playing pieces in a long-term game, and China is playing them subtly and cleverly, as a means of weakening the influence of the United States. Xi is clever enough to play the long game, placing his pieces with care in order to undermine the West's influence and power. The Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) suggests that the West should be concerned. "Europe has emerged as a key battleground in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) global campaign for political influence," it writes in a report on growing Chinese influence. "This study adds to the budding literature on CCP influence in Europe by focusing narrowly on one element of the Party's multifaceted worldwide campaign: the role of friendship groups. 'China friendship groups' vary in composition and mission. In general, they are associations comprising political, business, and other elites within a defined foreign territory that seek to promote closer bilateral relations with China." The concept of 'Friendship groups' sounds innocent enough.

"To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war," said Sir Winston Churchill in a 1954 speech at the White House, as reported in the New York Times. However, the CSBA warns that these groups may not be quite so innocent as the context suggests.

"This report contends that friendship associations are front organizations, entities tied to the Party via both direct and indirect channels. These fronts act as mouthpieces and intermediaries for advancing China's domestic priorities and foreign policy goals," which looks a lot more worrying. "They rely on co-opted elites drawn from Europe's political class and business community to lead and to fill their ranks. The friendship groups are often disguised as homegrown organizations run by the host countries' own citizens, including former and active politicians." It basically suggests that China, by offering some little titbits along the way, is buying influence and that it may – and almost certainly will – call in the debt at a future time. "This study finds that the co-opted foreigners, who enjoy influence,



18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China



PhotoXinhua

Chinese President Xi Jinping and French President Emmanuel Macron before their talks in Beijing, capital of China, Nov 6, 2019

convening power, and connections, serve the CCP's aims in several ways, subtle and otherwise." The report goes on to explain how. It makes chilling reading. "Co-optees parrot the Party's talking points, deflect narratives harmful to Beijing's image, host public events that showcase the Party's virtues, promote trade and investment, encourage technology transfers, and voice support for changes in European policies favourable to China." The CSBA believes that Europe, especially a divided Europe for whom the EU is proving less than overwhelmingly popular, makes an idea battleground for an aggressively expansionist China.

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

Back in March 2021, the EU, together with the United States, Canada and the UK, imposed sanctions on China over human rights abuses. Beijing retaliated immediately. As always, it denied the alleged abuses, but it also imposed sanctions of its own that blocked approval of an investment deal between the EU and China that had only just been agreed.

The EU's influence has been further weakened by the agreement of the United States, Britain and Australia over the supply of nuclear submarines, thus subverting an agreement for France to supply conventionally-powered submarines to Australia. This was clearly an English-speakers' deal, excluding those seen as "foreigners". Emmanuel Macron

was, understandably, furious, but we are left to wonder why the English-speakers should seek to weaken a 'club' on which some western countries rely, just in order to be linked with other English-speakers. Does a weaker Europe, for instance, boost the UK's global standing? The deal, known as AUKUS (Australia, UK, US) has had the strange effect of giving China and France common cause, albeit from diametrically opposed viewpoints. Xi will be delighted to see a former bastion of Western trade and prosperity so brutally undermined from within. Perhaps it serves as a reminder of how the teaching of modern languages in the UK has deteriorated. It also gives China yet another excuse to flex its muscles and display its anger on a global scale.

Certainly, the AUKUS deal shows a shift in policy that could have serious repercussions. After all, it comes shortly after the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, while both Britain and Australia have been showing signs of concern over Chinese ambitions in the Asia-Pacific region. AUKUS is not just about submarines. According to some observers, it's about closer cooperation among the three allies on such topics as artificial intelligence, cyber intelligence, quantum physics research, underwater systems, and long-range strike capabilities. It has generated an enormous amount of commentary, much of it somewhat florid and over-heated. There are straightforward logistical reasons for Canberra to drop its €77.5-billion submarine deal with French-owned Naval Group (quite apart from the delays and frequent price-hikes) such as the fact that nuclear-powered subs have a longer range and can stay at sea for longer. Australia, after all, is a long way from anywhere else. Even one of its nearest neighbours, Indonesia, is 3,455 kilometres away, so long-range warships are essential. Papua New Guinea, just 150 kilometres away, is not exactly a world power.

"Since assuming power in 2012," said Patricia Kim, in a prepared statement to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence at a US House of Representatives hearing on China back in 2018, "President Xi Jinping has clearly articulated his vision of the 'Chinese dream'



Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS

习近平主席同德国、欧盟领导人共同举行视频会晤 China-EU Leaders' Meeting via Video Conference



President Xi Jinping co-hosts a China-Germany-EU leaders' meeting in Beijing, September 14, 2020, via video link with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen

which seeks to achieve the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.' Xi has vowed to 'restore' China's historical influence and status by transforming China into a moderately prosperous state by 2020 and a rich, strong, and fully-developed great power by 2049." China's aggressive expansionist policy is causing a great deal of concern in such places as Japan and Taiwan. Over recent months, the United States has made more frequent transits through the Taiwan Strait, just to show that the island remains important to Washington and that the US is still committed to the island and a peaceful resolution of the tensions between Beijing and Taipei over Taiwan's future. Deputy US Secretary for Defense Kathleen

Hicks pointed out that Australia, with its own worries about an expansionist China, has no interest in using the recent AUKUS agreement as a way to develop its own nuclear weapons. She said the Australians view the agreement as 'a means to improve their submarine fleet through nuclear propulsion', which will give it greater range and more stealth, matching the growth in China's own attack and ballistic missile submarine fleet. Recently, China sent military aircraft into Taiwan's air defence identification zone, in what was the third largest incursion of the last two years. Among them were four H-6 bombers, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, and an anti-submarine aircraft.

China is pledged to reuniting China into one single country, with Taiwan as just one part of it, despite it currently having its own government, currency and armed forces. It was to Taiwan that the Kuamintang nationalist forces withdrew following their defeat by Mao's People's Liberation Army and Xi has promised to get it back, by force if necessary. Taiwan's defence minister, Chiu Kyo-cheng, has said that China will be ready to make a full-scale invasion by 2025 and meanwhile China's provocative incursion will continue, partly to scare the Taiwanese, partly to stress Taiwan's air force. The US has pledged to defend Taiwan, but relatively few countries recognise



Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen observing a military maneuver

its full independence. Attempts at brokering a peaceful solution continue, more in hope than expectation, with Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi scheduled to meet US national security advisor Jake Sullivan in Zurich. At the time of writing, no firm date has been fixed, although the Chinese delegation has already arrived in Zurich, so it should be soon. Xi Jinping will not be happy until his (and Beijing's) dream of 'one China' is fulfilled.

For the first time, On July 3rd 2018, soldiers of the Chinese People's Liberation Army participated in the traditional military parade to celebrate Independence Day along with Russian servicemen. Image onliner.by

Meanwhile, despite its rapid trade growth, not everything in China's economic garden is coming up roses. There are plenty of weeds, such as the huge property developer, Evergrande, which seems to have badly overstretched itself, tapping into the world's bond markets some forty times over the last four years, amassing hundreds of billions of yuan in bank loans it may never be able to repay. It now risks going under with debts of US\$37-billion (€32-billion) and earning itself the unenviable title of the world's most indebted property developer. The company once hired the martial arts star Jackie Chan to help it to sell its mineral water, but it will take more than a few drop kicks and cries of "Aiyee!" to get it out of its current mess. The European Court of Auditors, an EU body, has its worries about China's ambitions, partly because of China's rather secretive approach.



Two J-20s, new generation stealth fighter jets independently developed by China

"Different sources indicate that Member States often act bilaterally with China according to their own national interests and without always informing or coordinating with the Commission where necessary," says the latest report. "As a result, it is in certain areas difficult for the EU institutions and Member States to have a coordinated response."

Beijing not only plays with its hand kept hidden close to its chest, it sometimes seems to pretend it's not even in the game at all. "Chinese economic and trade policies are characterised by several strategies for development where state-driven investments have enabled China to become a global player in economic terms," the report says. "These encourage Chinese enterprises to invest abroad, especially in strategic sectors (e.g. energy, telecom and railway systems), with State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) benefitting from Chinese public financing. This can distort competition notably in the

EU's internal market as China's SOEs are not subject to EU's state aid rules. The EU is committed to ensuring that there is a level playing field for EU companies that have to compete with Chinese companies." And that's without mentioning the Belt and Road Initiative.

DUNGEONS AND REAL DRAGONS?

The popular board game Dungeons and Dragons first saw the light of day (or the gloom of the supernatural) in 1974, since when it has inspired movies and worldwide cross-border competition among its millions of fans. It's all about players choosing a character and then embarking on fantastical adventures, one against another, with no real "outright winner". It's just the enjoyment of taking part, for the real aficionados. However, if we're talking about the competition among nation states as they struggle to assume a superior position vis-à-vis their opponents, then winning matters and winners are easily identified. Where does that position our Yázi-Chīwěn (睚眦-螭吻) hybrid dragon, Xi Jinping's very own, tailored to match his character type? I have no idea. We should recall that a game of Dungeons and Dragons may not have any clear-cut ending at all, just a lot of posing and waving the latest weapon about, which is pretty much what happens in international diplomacy, after all. I reckon that the British fantasy writer J.R.R. Tolkien has a lot to answer for, don't you, Bilbo?

Toby Bowman-Grant



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping

NEWS IN BRIEF

COUNCIL OF EUROPE BODY CONCERNED BY THE NON-IMPLEMENTATION BY RUSSIA OF ITS PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLICE COMPLAINTS MECHANISM AND ON ABOLISHING THE SO-CALLED “GAY PROPAGANDA” LEGISLATION



© Council of Europe - Ellen Wulfbaux

The Russian Federation has not implemented the priority recommendations made in March 2019 by the Council of Europe’s commission against racism and intolerance (ECRI) to set up a body independent of the police and prosecution authorities to investigate all complaints against the police, as well as to abolish the legal ban on the provision of information about homosexuality to minors.

In response to a long-standing recommendation by ECRI to set up an effective police complaints mechanism in the framework of combating racial discrimination in policing, the Russian authorities informed ECRI that they consider control of the police to be already sufficiently carried out by the relevant bodies, in particular the Prosecutor General and subordinate prosecutors, as well as by public associations and bodies, such as the “Public Chamber of the Russian Federation” and public monitoring commissions. “The authorities therefore do not think it necessary to implement ECRI’s recommendation,” the conclusions say.

ECRI regrets this view and underlines the need for a fully independent, professional and trusted police complaints mechanism.

Secondly, ECRI recommended that the Russian authorities abolish the legal ban on the provision of information about homosexuality to minors (legislation on the so-called “promotion of non-traditional sexual relations among minors”), in line with the 2017 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *Bayev and others v. Russia*.

The authorities informed ECRI that they consider this recommendation to be “absolutely irrelevant to the legislative system of the Russian Federation”. They have referred to the Constitution of the Russian Federation mentioning the “support, strengthening and protection of the family, [and] preservation of traditional family values” as one of the tasks of the government. In the authorities’ view, “the notion of ‘traditional family values’ obviously does not include the promotion of homosexuality among minors”.

Although ECRI has been informed by civil society groups that the ratio between the number of convictions (payment of fines) and the number of cases opened under Article 6.21 of the Administrative Offences Code has continued to decrease in recent years (according to the Supreme Court, there was one conviction in 15 cases during the first six months of 2020, as compared to four in 20 in 2019), ECRI considers that the ambiguity, potential broad reach and chilling effect of this legal provision continue to be a problem.

Moreover, ECRI is especially concerned about the Russian authorities’ view of this recommendation as “irrelevant”, given the fact that the recommendation is based on a judgment against Russia by the European Court of Human Rights.

The conclusions published by ECRI concern only the two specific recommendations for which priority follow-up was requested; and do not aim at providing a comprehensive analysis of all developments in the fight against racism and intolerance in Russia. This will be the focus of the next full monitoring report expected in 2024.

EMSA’S REMOTELY PILOTED AIRCRAFT ARE ASSISTING SPANISH AUTHORITIES IN ACTIVELY MONITORING SULPHUR EMISSIONS FROM SHIPS TRANSITING THE BUSY STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR

Over the summer EMSA’s remotely piloted aircraft have been monitoring the level of sulphur oxides released by ships transiting the Strait of Gibraltar, one of the world’s busiest shipping lanes. The operation carried out by the Spanish General Directorate of Merchant Marine – under the direction of the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda – marks the first time these emissions have been monitored by drone outside the special designated emission control areas in Northern Europe. The flights have been in operation since mid-July from a base in Tarifa and will continue until the end of October

The project designed to test the effectiveness of drones in measuring pollutant emissions from ships was set up by the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda (MITMA), in collaboration with the Algeciras Maritime Captainty and the General Directorate of Merchant Marine.



© Nordic Unmanned

Using EMSA's remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS), the goal is to detect sulphur oxide emissions above a certain level indicating a possible breach of the International Convention on Maritime Pollution (MARPOL – Annex VI). The current limit for sulphur oxide in ship fuels is 0.50% by mass.

The aircraft used is a CAMCOPTER® S100 and it is under contract to EMSA from the consortium of Nordic Unmanned, Norce and UMS Skeldar. It has several features making it a useful tool for the service, including the ability to take off and land vertically from an area less than 25 square meters, flight endurance of over six hours and a range of more than 100 km. To help detect the gases generated by fuel combustion and expelled through ship funnels, the aircraft is equipped with gas sensors and cameras that cover both optical and infrared spectral ranges.

Since 12 July, the RPAS has been carrying out daily two flights with an average of ten inspections per day. Current figures show that of 294 vessels controlled some 27 were found in possible breach of the limits of sulphur content in their fuel. The measurements and records are automatically encoded in the information exchange system which triggers an alert in the EMSA THETIS-EU database. While this does not confirm non-compliance directly, it does help port authorities target ships for inspection and proceed with the lab testing necessary for any eventual sanctions.

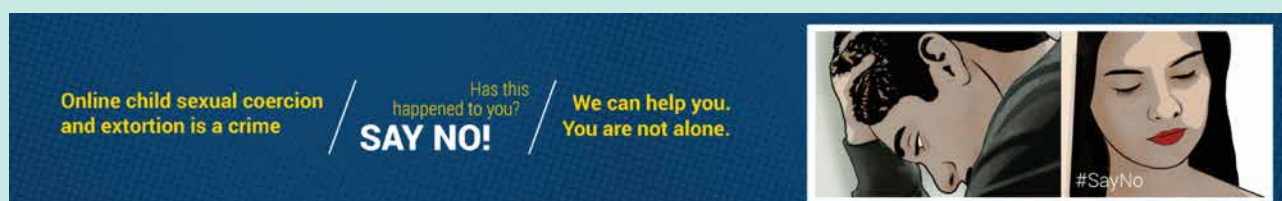
ABOUT RPAS

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

ABOUT EMSA

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

EUROPOL'S 'SAY NO!' CAMPAIGN TRAVELS TO THE WESTERN BALKANS



A simple photograph could turn into a never-ending cycle of blackmail for money, sex, or worse. Youngsters across the Western Balkans will now have access to Europol resources in their own language to recognise and protect themselves against this worrying online phenomenon, sometimes referred to as sextortion.

In the framework of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), Slovenia, Croatia and Europol's European Cybercrime Centre have teamed up to establish an expert network in the Western Balkans with the goal to strengthen cross-border cooperation in the fight against child sexual abuse. A strategic report is being drafted on the state of play of the fight against this horrendous crime in the region.

To complete the efforts, Europol's 'Say No!' video has been translated into the national languages of Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The video will there be shared with parents, children and teachers to raise awareness in the Western Balkans about child sexual abuse.

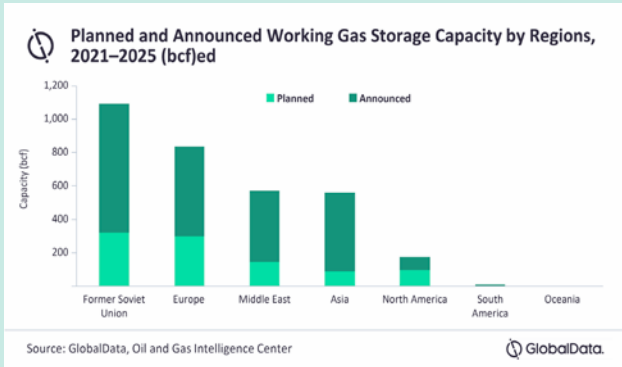
This 10-minute video portrays two teenagers, a boy and a girl,

being exploited online by a criminal organisation for financial gain and by an individual online sexual offender seeking further sexual material, respectively. The video includes advice as to how such crimes may be reported to law enforcement and how to avoid falling victim in the first place.

The #SayNo! campaign was launched in 2017 by European law enforcement to provide advice to those who have been, or are likely to fall victim to online sexual coercion and extortion and to strengthen reporting and support mechanisms.

The video is now available in the languages of the following 29 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

FORMER SOVIET UNION EXPECTED TO LEAD GLOBAL WORKING GAS CAPACITY ADDITIONS BY 2025



The Former Soviet Union (FSU) is expected to lead the global planned and announced working gas capacity additions, contributing approximately 34% of the total global capacity additions by 2025, says GlobalData, a leading data and analytics company.

The company’s report, ‘Global Capacity and Capital Expenditure Outlook for Underground Gas Storage, 2021–2025 – Gazprom to Drive Global Working Gas Capacity Growth’, reveals that the FSU is expected to witness the highest capacity additions globally from planned and announced projects during the outlook period 2021 to 2025 with 1.1 trillion cubic feet (tcf).

Bhargavi Gandham, Oil and Gas Analyst at GlobalData, comments: “Russia and Uzbekistan primarily drive working gas capacity additions in the FSU by 2025. Both countries are building the underground gas storage sites to effectively meet domestic peak natural gas demand. The proposed projects also help them to increase gas exports as well through pipelines.”

GlobalData identifies Europe as the second highest contributor to global working gas capacity additions, accounting for around 26% of the total additions by 2025. The Deborah depleted oil and gas field in the UK drives the planned working capacity in the region with 174.5 bcf by 2025. Eni SpA is the operator as well as 100 percent equity holder of the project.”

The Middle East ranks third globally contributing roughly 18% of global working gas capacity additions during the outlook period. Tuz Golu II in Turkey drives the planned working gas capacity additions in the region with 148.3 bcf by 2025.

COMPUTERIZED FACIAL RECOGNITION IS A RELATIVELY NEW TECHNOLOGY, BEING INTRODUCED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AROUND THE WORLD IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY PERSONS OF INTEREST

The Interpol Face Recognition System (IFRS) contains facial images received from more than 179 countries which makes it a unique global criminal database.

Coupled with an automated biometric software application, this system is capable of identifying or verifying a person by comparing and analysing patterns, shapes and proportions of their facial features and contours.

Almost 1,500 terrorists, criminals, fugitives, persons of interest or missing persons have been identified since the launch of Interpol’s facial recognition system at the end of 2016.

Factors in facial identification

Unlike fingerprints and DNA, which do not change during a person’s life, facial recognition has to take into account different factors, such as:

- Ageing
- Plastic surgery
- Cosmetics
- Effects of drug abuse or smoking
- Pose of the subject

Working with good quality images is also crucial. Low or medium quality images may be not searchable in the IFRS system and, if they are, the accuracy of the search and the results themselves can be significantly affected.

An ICAO standard passport photo would be ideal, since this is a frontal image of the subject that has even lighting on the face and a neutral background.



How does it work?

When a facial image (probe image) is entered into the system it is automatically encoded by an algorithm and compared to the profiles already stored in the system. This results in a ‘candidate’ list of the most likely matches.

A manual process is always carried out, known as Face Identification, to verify the results of the automated system. Qualified and experienced Interpol officers examine the images carefully to find unique characteristics that can lead to one of the following results: ‘Potential candidate’, ‘No candidate’ or ‘Inconclusive’.

This information is then passed on to the countries that provided the images, and to those that would be concerned by the profile or a match. All information is handled in line with Interpol’s Rules on the Processing of Data.

Cross-checking with INTERPOL Notices

All face images in Notices and Diffusions requested by member countries are searched and stored in the face recognition system, provided they meet the strict quality criteria needed for recognition.

Member countries can also request a 'search only' in the face system, for example, to carry out a check on a person of interest at airports or other border crossings. The results are returned quickly to enable immediate follow-up action, and images are not recorded in the system.

Bringing experts together

As this computerized biometric comparison technology is still in its infancy in most countries, standards and best practices are still in the process of being created, and Interpol is contributing to this.

Held every two years, Interpol's International Fingerprint and Face Symposium provides an opportunity for experts from around the world to share best practice and latest developments.

We also host meetings of the Face Expert Working Group twice a year. This is Interpol's advisory group for new technology, identification procedures, training needs and for producing official documents to assist member countries in this field.

The Expert Group produced a best practice guide for the quality, format and transmission of facial images to promote accurate and effective recognition. We strongly encourage our member countries to use the facial recognition service and to follow the recommendations.

Developing best practices

While facial recognition systems have huge potential for national safety and security, they require a robust governing structure in order to protect human rights and personal data.

Interpol, along with the World Economic Forum (WEF), the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and Netherlands Police, co-designed a policy framework to promote the responsible and transparent use of facial recognition technology in law enforcement investigations.

The result of a global, multi-stakeholder consultation, this white paper was published in October 2021. Interpol will raise awareness of the initiative via its global membership and the framework will be tested by law enforcement agencies in the first quarter of 2022.

NEW OPERATION TO PROTECT NEXT GENERATION EU RECOVERY FUNDS

Launched at Europol, Operation Sentinel will contribute to a concerted response to an expected fraud wave

A new EU-wide operation will target fraud against COVID-19 EU recovery funds being offered under the framework of the NextGenerationEU initiative. Operation Sentinel, launched on 15 October 2021 at Europol's headquarters, involves the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), Eurojust, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and 19 EU Member States*. The activities will run for at least a year and will focus on proactive intelligence sharing, information exchange and supporting the coordination of operations to tackle fraud against COVID-19 EU recovery funds.

Europol's Executive Director Catherine de Bolle said: 'The



COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected our social and economic structures globally. NextGenerationEU, part of the largest stimulus package released in the European Union, will support Member States adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Preventing serious cross-border crime is at the heart of Europol's mandate, and we are fully committed to supporting the Member States in fighting any attempt by organised crime to infiltrate the EU legal economy and the NextGenerationEU fund. Our message is clear: any threat to the NextGenerationEU is a direct threat to the financial well-being of the European Union and its people. Operation Sentinel will strengthen our joint response to fraud and protect the reconstruction of our communities.'

Ensuring the € 806.9 billion fund is directed towards resilience

Through NextGenerationEU, the European Union will release a total of € 806.9** billion to support EU Member States in repairing the negative economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The larger part of this funding, equivalent to € 723.8 billion, will be released in loans and grants to support investments focused on greener, more sustainable and more resilient societies. Recent experience from the evolution of the criminal landscape during the COVID-19 pandemic suggests these efforts will attract criminal groups active in the European Union and beyond. Criminals have shown themselves to be quick in adapting to the pandemic and its impact, and they are using every opportunity to maximise illegal profits. Therefore, Europol has set up Operation Sentinel to anticipate the expected wave of fraud against these recovery funds. For this purpose, Europol will establish a dedicated internal mechanism to process operational data, steer information exchanges and support ongoing cases. The joint activities will target fraud, as well as tax evasion, excise fraud, corruption, embezzlement, misappropriation and money laundering. Four EU entities and authorities from 19 EU Member States have joined forces as part of Operation Sentinel to ensure the recovery funds are directed towards strengthening our economies and the resilience of our communities.

*Participating countries

Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden

**This figure is in current prices. It amounts to €750 billion in 2018 prices.

TRIAL OPERATION UNDERWAY FOR NORTH SEA LINK

Today, trial operation begins on the world's longest subsea interconnector, the North Sea Link between Norway and the United Kingdom. This means that the two countries can exchange electricity for the first time. The interconnector will contribute to the European energy transition by facilitating for more renewable energy production on both sides of the interconnector.

From 9 am CET today, electricity will be transferred via the North Sea Link interconnector, which runs between Suldal municipality in Norway to Blyth in Northumberland, England. A three-month trial period is now starting on the 720 km long interconnector.

- This is an important milestone. The world's longest subsea electrical interconnector is starting trial operation and connects the British and Norwegian power systems directly for the first time, says CEO Hilde Tonne in Statnett.



© Statnett

The North Sea Link interconnector

- This interconnector will facilitate more renewable production in both countries. Connections between countries and areas are a prerequisite for the energy transition in Europe and improves security of supply. It ensures access to power even when there is little water in the reservoirs or when the wind does not blow, Tonne continues.

Two new cables in one year

This is the second subsea interconnector Statnett will start with transmission of power in less than a year. The NordLink cable between Norway and Germany went online this winter.

- If we are to achieve the green change of pace with increasing electrification and an increasing need for renewable energy, we will have to cooperate across national borders and take advantage of differences between our various power systems. This is the only way we can achieve a zero-emissions society based on renewable energy resources. Exchange of electricity is profitable for Norway and we have been connected with the countries around us since the 1960s, says Tonne.

North Sea Link is built for a capacity of 1,400 MW. It begins trial operation with a capacity of up to 700 MW and will be gradually phased in throughout the trial period.

- It is important that the trial operation takes place in a way that safeguards the operation of the Norwegian power system. During the trial period, we get to test the interconnector in close to normal operational conditions, as well as the market solution when the two markets are connected for the first time, says Tonne.

Interconnectors will probably on average contribute to a somewhat higher electricity price for Norway, but they also give access to more power that will improve security of supply, and in some cases curb peak prices. The price for electricity in Norway will on average continue to be lower than the price in other European countries in the years to come. At the same time, revenues from trading over the interconnector will cover investments in the Norwegian grid that would otherwise have been financed by Norwegian consumers over the grid tariffs.

REACT-EU: COMMISSION APPROVES €2 BILLION OF ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE RECOVERY IN ITALY, SPAIN, LUXEMBOURG AND ROMANIA

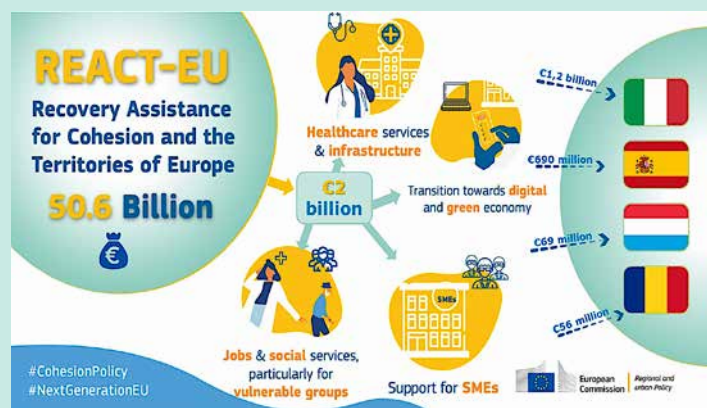
The Commission has granted €2 billion to Italy, Spain, Luxembourg and Romania following the modification of two European Regional Development Fund, one European Social Fund (ESF) and one Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived Operational Programmes (OP) under the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories in Europe (REACT-EU).

In Italy, the national OP 'Governance and Institutional Capacity' will receive a total of €1.2 billion. Of this sum, €761 million will go towards buying 68 million doses of vaccines against the coronavirus. In the Southern regions, authorities will use €374 million to hire new public healthcare workers and cover the costs of extra hours worked by workers currently in the system. €108 million will help strengthen the administrative capacity of national and regional authorities, including in the healthcare system. In Spain, 'Comunidad Valenciana' will receive additional resources of €690 million to provide, amongst others, working capital to the most affected Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, and to reinforce health, social services and investments in basic infrastructure for citizens, including in the health and education sectors.

Luxembourg will receive €69 million to support large-scale coronavirus testing and the acquisition of vaccines, and investments in sustainability such as the electrification of the national bus network.

In Romania, €56 million will be invested to provide material support for disadvantaged groups, such as hot meals, assistance to disadvantaged children with school supplies and to disadvantaged mothers with essential kits for their newborn babies.

REACT-EU is part of NextGenerationEU and provides €50.6 billion additional funding (in current prices) over the course of 2021 and 2022 to Cohesion Policy programmes.



3D TUMOUR MODELLING DEVELOPED IN ITALY, AUSTRIA FOR PERSONALISED CANCER THERAPY

Precision cancer medicine is a therapeutic approach that allows doctors to provide treatment genetically tailored to an individual patient's tumour. The PreCanMed project gathered five cancer research centres of excellence in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy, and Tirol, Austria, to establish a platform for precision cancer treatment. This is an important step towards more efficient, personalised therapies for people with cancer

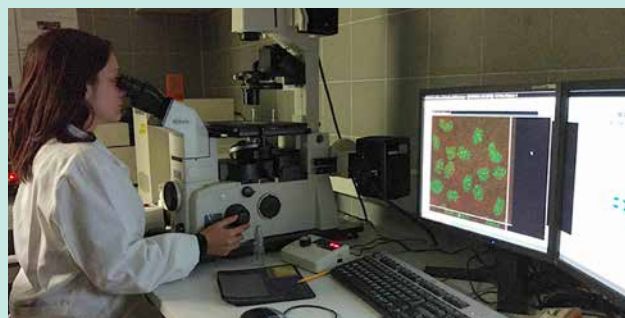


Stefan Schoeftner, Associate Professor, Department for Life Sciences, University of Trieste

PreCanMed implemented an interregional technological platform for the generation and cryo-conservation of 3D tumour organoid models from human tumour tissue; genomics analysis to reveal genetically driven tumour dependencies and vulnerabilities; testing the efficiency of therapeutic approaches on tumour organoids; and generating shared resources of SOPs, biological material and data for precision cancer medicine. "Stefan Schoeftner, Associate Professor, Department for Life Sciences, University of Trieste

The PreCanMed partners investigated patient-derived tumour organoid technology, a powerful tool that allows the study of normal and diseased cancer tissues for the development of bespoke treatments. Tumour organoids are 3D cell culture models, generated from patient tissue, that can be grown in the laboratory and precisely replicate the characteristics of the original tumour.

The project has laid the foundations for widespread future use of this technology and will accelerate understanding of multiple aspects of cancer, contribute to treatment breakthroughs and help realise the potential of personalised medicine.



While significant progress has been made in the treatment of cancer, established standard therapy protocols remain ineffective for many patients, and some tumours remain difficult to treat. This results in socioeconomic stress for national health systems and distress for patients and their families.

To address this challenge, PreCanMed researchers integrated and improved on existing knowledge in the development of patient-derived tumour organoids from breast, lung and colon carcinomas. They collected samples during surgeries and biopsies and identified the best conditions for their growth, and established a platform for generating reliable, patient-specific models of the disease accessible to the R&D sector.


Although still in an early phase of development, research on tumour organoids holds great promise. Patient-derived tumour organoids accurately replicate tumour histology, molecular subtypes and response to treatments. They can be generated and propagated efficiently, and frozen in liquid nitrogen to be recovered later for further use.

Use of genomics and tumour organoids allows scientists to test patient-specific therapeutic approaches in the lab and compare their efficiency with standard cancer therapy in vitro. The project has trained young researchers and informed experts and the public about the importance of precision medicine.

A further important aspect of PreCanMed is the creation of a living biobank of patient-derived tumour organoids. Each one represents a personal, developing model of the disease and enables experimentation at the single patient level in ways that have previously been impossible, ultimately promising more effective, personalised cancer treatment.

PRECANMED


WHAT IT DOES



It makes synergies between leading Italian and Austrian Institutions




- Centro Interuniversitario per le Biotecnologie - Laboratorio Nazionale, Trieste
- Università degli studi di Trieste
- Università degli studi di Udine
- Medizinische Universität Innsbruck
- Austrian Drug Screening Institute

Together, without borders, these five partners will tackle the cancer challenge



It develops a new enabling technology, tumor organoids, novel model systems that faithfully resemble patients' developing tumors

1. Lung, breast, and colon cancers, as well as mesothelioma, are under the lens of PreCanMed
2. A chip of diseased tissue will be taken from these tumors. The cells from these samples will proliferate in culture under peculiar conditions and they will develop 3D structures, the **tumor organoids**
3. These products will be investigated using cutting-edge omics technologies and they will be treated with different molecules to **test their drug sensitivity**

Is a project funded by the European Union, European Regional Development Fund and Interreg V-A Italia-Austria

EXCLUSIVE

SAILING HOSTILE SEAS

The thoughts and experiences of Poland's former Foreign Minister, Witold Waszczykowski, MEP

“We have had a bad experience, a bad historical experience,” Witold Waszczykowski told me when I asked him his thoughts on Vladimir Putin’s Russia, “and we consider that Russia has a very imperialistic policy that doesn’t recognise the security architecture that was developed after the end of the Cold War.” I don’t think too many people would argue with that analysis of where post-Soviet Russia stands with regard to Europe as a whole but especially those neighbouring countries where its writ once ran. Waszczykowski was speaking from personal experience, not just as a former member of his country’s Law and Justice government; he has spent half his life under Communist rule. Born in Piotrków Trybunalski, in Łódź Voivodeship, central Poland, in May 1957, Waszczykowski was clearly destined for political progress. He was an unusually intelligent child who went on to study at the University of Łódź, where he earned a Master’s degree in history. He then went on to the University

of Oregon, gaining another Master’s degree, this time in international studies. After that, he travelled to Switzerland, where he studied at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, finally returning to Łódź, where he gained a PhD in history.



Viacheslav Molotov (left) and Joachim von Ribbentrop (right) after the signing of the Treaty of Friendship between the Soviet Union and Germany (28 September 1939)

In fact, it could be argued that Poland has received the raw end of virtually every kind of deal over the years. Under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia had agreed to divide Poland between them, although

both envisaged taking the entire country for themselves. Honouring treaties and agreements was never high on either regime’s list of priorities. The Nazis invaded first, on 1 September 1939, just a week after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had been signed, with the Soviets following suit on 17 September. For the Germans, it was to acquire what Hitler, in his infamous book, ‘Mein Kampf’, had called ‘Lebensraum’ – more space for the German people. That also implied, of course, the gradual annihilation of native Poles. That began almost straight away, once the Nazis had taken total power over ‘their’ part of the country, following the defeat of the Polish forces at the battle of Bzura and subsequently at the Battle of Kock. After that, both groups of invaders simply removed border posts that had formerly demarcated where their countries ended and Poland began. In the eyes of Hitler and Stalin, Poland had simply ceased to exist. It’s easy to understand why today’s Poles view both Germany and Russia with jaundiced eyes.



© Kremlin.ru

Russian military parade marking the 76th Victory anniversary

Can Russia ever be trusted to respect Poland's borders and the sovereignty that is supposed to guarantee freedom and security? Perhaps not for many Poles. "Russia has a problem to keep to this security architecture," said Waszczykowski, "I think Putin has two plans: a 'plan maximum' and a 'plan minimum'. The 'maximum' is to come back to the position of the Soviet era back in the sixties, the seventies, maybe a little bit of the eighties, when his sovereignty was matched to the United States and the Cold War was ruled by this duopoly." Neither option looks good from a Polish perspective. "Plan minimum, or should I call it 'Plan B', says Waszczykowski, "is to recreate a 19th century concept of power and to recreate the security architecture that is going to be ruled by mighty powers, including Russia. Russia doesn't like the idea of cooperating with international structures such as the European Union or NATO or some other. No matter what we offer, how privileged its position, it still has its suspicions and Russia is probably being neglected." Waszczykowski is convinced Russia would rather, as he put it, "kick some countries" and rule there instead.

When the Second World War ended, the Polish people were left with nothing. This comment by Janina Godycka-Cwirko from 1945, describing the immediate post-war Warsaw once the troops had left, is quoted by Anne Applebaum in her excellent (albeit terrifying) book, 'Iron Curtain – the Crushing of Eastern Europe': "It seemed to me that I was walking on corpses, that at any moment I would step into a pool of blood." Long before they left Warsaw, the Nazis systematically destroyed the city's architectural heritage, dynamiting its beautiful mediaeval buildings one by one, with German architectural experts advising them on which were the most important and must, therefore, be destroyed first. It's something most people

will find hard to believe or even imagine. It goes without saying that many of the city's ancient books and paintings were destroyed, too, apart from the few looted to add to the collections of prominent Nazis. The Germans planned to remove Warsaw from the face of the Earth, replacing it with a purpose-built town created exclusively for Germans, with a nearby slave camp so that Poles could look after their needs. Of the original city, 85% was turned into blackened, burnt-out rubble.

BUILDING BACK, PLUS EXTRAS

The Poles may have many reasons not to like the Russians, either, but at least under Soviet rule, many of the historic buildings were reconstructed to match the originals that had been destroyed, much of the work being carried out by Varsovians themselves who had returned from exile overseas. To visit those parts of Warsaw today you would hardly know that so much of it is a post-war construction. Stare Miasto – Market Square – looks now much as it must have looked in the 18th and 19th centuries or even earlier. I bought a postcard there showing it as it is now and as it was just after the Nazis had destroyed it. Stalin's big gift to Warsaw was the Palace of Culture, a huge and typically Soviet showpiece of a building, tall, imposing (if you like Soviet architecture), and visible all over the city and beyond. As I was returning to Warsaw from Krakow by helicopter once upon a time, my Polish cameraman glanced out of the window and commented to me: "We must be nearly home; I can see the Palace of Culture," adding bitterly, "More's the pity!" It is not a building much loved by Poles.

Waszczykowski is keen to remind me that Poland didn't just turn its face to the West following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"We started to be part of the West eleven centuries ago," he reminded me, and being a highly-qualified historian, he should know, "when one of the first Polish rulers accepted Christianity and was baptised." That was Duke Mieszko I, and his motives were perhaps more political than faith-driven. At the height of his power, Mieszko subordinated his kingdom to the papacy in the late 10th century, largely to guarantee its ecclesiastical independence from the German empire, which later became known as the 'Holy Roman Empire'. This in itself is odd, because Mieszko already had a treaty with Otto I, the Holy Roman Emperor. Even so, it underwrote Poland's sovereignty and was a step towards having imperial power in Poland. One of the turning points was an alliance Mieszko formed with Boleslaus I, the Duke of Bohemia and a member of the Přemyslid dynasty. He went on to marry the Duke's daughter, Doubravka, and she may have been the one who persuaded him to accept baptism, although whether that was because she was a devout Christian or because she could see that it would boost his power we shall never know. Anyway, it made him, as ruler of the Polan tribe, an equal partner when he met up with other Christian leaders, so that was clearly a plus. His son Boleslaw I, became Poland's first king.



© Wikimedia

Witold Waszczykowski

"The Soviet Union's domination after the Second World War was considered by Poles to be an aberration," said Waszczykowski. "There was no discussion about the end of the Cold War, about a 'Third Way'." Waszczykowski clearly regrets that the opportunity was not seized by Poland's leaders at that time to plot a new course for the country, re-establishing its independence and its sovereignty, assuming such a move could have been possible. In 1999,

Poland started to “knock on the door” of NATO, as Waszczykowski put it, but “the US considered this a political membership”. Poland, however, has proved its worth as a full NATO member, and now hosts troops from other NATO countries, with whom Polish troops conduct frequent exercises. “So with this presence, this real presence of men and equipment,” Waszczykowski said, “we feel safer, and we feel right now that these are real security measures provided by NATO.”

THE ORCHESTRATED PROBLEM OF BELARUS

If anyone should have the experience to deal with tyrannical and – dare I say? – unreasonable leaders, it ought to be Waszczykowski. During his career he has been deputy Foreign Minister, then Foreign Minister of Poland, and he was also his country’s ambassador to Iran, whose leaders hold very different views about world affairs. So how should the EU deal with Belarus, which is pushing refugees across its border with Poland and refusing to readmit them, forcing Belarus’s neighbours to engage in what’s called “push-back”, which is not supposed to happen.



Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin

Right now, President Alexander Lukashenko is more engaged with a shootout in Minsk between an IT technician opposed to his tyrannical rule and a member of the security service, still quaintly named the KGB. The technician had been posting anti-Lukashenko material on-line, which led to the KGB raiding his apartment. In the exchange of fire that followed, both the IT technician and the KGB officer were shot dead. In Lukashenko’s Belarus, merely expressing a negative opinion about Lukashenko is considered terrorism and Lukashenko has said he will “never forget” the people responsible. He wouldn’t last five minutes in the hurly-burly of Western democracy.

I asked Waszczykowski what should be done about Belarus and its continuing threat to Poland’s security. He recalled a meeting in 2008 between Putin and the then President of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, who died together with his wife and almost a hundred senior Polish officials when a Polish Airforce Tupolev Tu-154 crashed near Smolensk in Russia in 2010.



Wreckage of Polish Tu-154M plane after crash in Smolensk, 10 April, 2010

The cause has never been fully established, although dense fog may have played a part. Ironically, they had travelled to Smolensk to mark the deaths of hundreds of Polish military officers and intellectuals at the hands of Russia’s NKVD, forerunner of the KGB. It is generally referred to as the Katyn massacre, largely because that’s where the first of many corpses were discovered in mass graves, although the killings seem to have taken place not only there but also at Russia’s Kalinin and Kharkiv prisons. It had been a shocking act of mass murder by Stalin’s forces, showing that between the Nazis and the Red Army there was little to choose in terms of cruelty and brutality, even though ironically it was the Nazis who first found the mass graves and revealed details to the world in a bid to blacken the reputation of Stalin’s army.

At the meeting in 2008, President Kaczyński had made a prediction regarding Putin’s aims and ambitions: the recovery of all the territories that had formed the Soviet Union within his megalomaniac grasp.



Former Polish President Lech Kaczyński

“Today, it’s Georgia,” Waszczykowski said, “tomorrow Ukraine, then the Baltic countries, and then my country. And this prophecy is going on right now.” Indeed, it was Georgia back in 2008, as Tbilisi fought the Russian-backed breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Putin was supporting them in the hope that a war-damaged Georgia would seek sanctuary in Russia’s arms. It didn’t. Georgia had declared independence from the collapsing Soviet Union in 1991 but Russia wasn’t keen to let it go. Putin, of course, is a puppet master, keen to let ambitious others do his dirty work to earn his favour. But Kaczyński has been shown to have been right. Ok, so how does that fit into the story of Belarus? Lukashenko was not part of that 2008 gathering (although Putin was there) but Waszczykowski told me he had been anticipating the sorts of issues now being thrown up on the Belarus border ever since. “We’ve been expecting these kind of trials ever since American troops pulled out of Afghanistan,” he said. “Putin is keen to test the commitment of NATO and America to the Eastern part of Europe.” Putin may be aiming his ‘tests’ at Washington, but Waszczykowski admits it is a worry, especially for Poland. “It’s a very, very dangerous situation,” he said, “because they are testing for this hybrid war and the commitment of Europe and NATO and of Washington especially.” Not that the EU is ignoring or forgetting the issues surrounding Belarus, even if the dispute looks increasingly like Putin setting traps for the West to see which way they will jump.



NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg @ with Polish Foreign Minister, Witold Waszczykowski in 2015

Lukashenko is an irritant for the west, which is why Putin and China’s Xi Jinping are keen to keep him in place. He is what Vladimir Lenin once allegedly described as “a useful idiot” (in reality the expression probably originated in Italy), willing to do unpleasant things for the advantage of others, whatever the cost to his own reputation. Now the European

Parliament has voted to take action of its own. Belarus's refusal to accept back refugees who have crossed into Poland is simply a bargaining chip. Lukashenko wants EU sanctions on Minsk to be lifted and will keep pushing back refugees until they are. But MEPs, among them Waszczykowski, called for firmer sanctions to punish the Belarussian leader. Waszczykowski's colleague Anna Fortyga, also a Polish MEP and the Foreign Affairs Coordinator for the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group in the European Parliament, (both are members) detects the baleful hand of Russia behind it all. "In the case of Russia," she told a full sitting of the Parliament, "we can even see incitement to the brutal suppression of Belarussian society." She believes Russia has deliberately developed Belarus into a battlefield in its hybrid war against Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. "In the event of a hybrid war," she warned the Chamber, "The EU must stop being naïve and clearly perceive aggressors and distinguish them from victims. The activity of Lukashenko is a crime that should be condemned in the international arena." As the DW news website puts it, "The West sees Alexander Lukashenko as a pariah, Moscow sees him as a wildcard, EU MEPs want to see him on trial."



© Pavel Krichko

Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya

Lukashenko may be basking in the knowledge that he has – for the moment at least – the backing of Moscow and Beijing, but he should perhaps not forget that from their perspective he is also dispensable. Were he to embarrass either Russia or China he would be gone in an instant and almost as quickly forgotten. Waszczykowski told MEPs that "it is not enough to ban flights for officials or impose limited sanctions, it

is also necessary to implement a policy of non-recognition of Lukashenko, and instead grant opposition leader Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya a special status in the EU." Given Lukashenko's attitude towards any potential rival for his leadership, that may turn out to be something of a poisoned chalice for Tsikhanouskaya.

Lukashenko believes that just to question his right to rule merits the severest punishment. "We also need tougher sanctions that will affect Belarus' policy," Waszczykowski said. "Let us remember that Belarus produces, for example, fertilizers, which are exported to Europe. We should also suspend cooperation in various institutions, in culture and in sports." So, put a step wrong, Lukashenko, and you could find yourself up to your neck in fertilizer.

DANCING IN MUDDY BOOTS

We should not forget, however, that there is corollary to this development. The European Parliament also voted to urge the Commission to apply its new 'rule of law conditionality' mechanism to Poland. This follows the decision by Poland's Constitutional Tribunal that Poland's Constitution has primacy over EU law. "If European legal acts are no longer accepted," said Monika Hohlmeier, a German member of the European People's Party group, "it is questionable whether Poland can still profit from the enormous amount of EU funding it currently receives." Juan Fernando López, a Spanish Socialist and Chair of the Civil Liberties Committee, went further: "This decision of a Constitutional Tribunal that's subordinate to the PiS Government," he told the House, "crosses the final border of EU membership and violates the founding principles of EU law." It could be counted as a bold decision by the Tribunal, perhaps, but it may turn out to be a self-destructive one for Poland and its people. To a non-diplomat like me, it does seem strange to believe you can be a member of a club and yet feel that your personal opinions rate more highly than the club's rules. It's a bit like joining, say, a rugby club but choosing to believe the rule about "no muddy boots on the dancefloor" doesn't apply to you. I fear that the club's facilities could very swiftly be closed to you.



© Wikipedia

Monika Hohlmeier



© Wikimedia

Juan Fernando López

Throughout this article I have referred to the Belarus dictator as Alexandr Lukashenko, but it is also correct to spell it Lukashenka. Lukashenka would be the more correct spelling in Belarus, where in Cyrillic it is written *Аляксандр Лукашэнка*, while in Russian it should be *Александр Лукашенко*. I don't suppose the man himself cares much either way, so I shall stick to the more commonly-used Russian version except where it is a quote. He may be more worried about what's being said about his son in the latest revelations from the so-called Pandora Papers. Among the 12-million documents released to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists is a claim that Lukashenko's long-term ally, Viktor Sheiman, (once a Prosecutor General in his country and later sanctioned by both the EU and the US over the disappearance of several prominent critics of Lukashenko) has Lukashenko's son Sergei as co-owner in a shady gold mining operation in Zimbabwe. The involvement of Sergei Lukashenko is extremely complicated and hard to follow, but it uses a shell company based in the UK. It has already been described, however, as 'nepotism' and a 'conflict of interests.' As long as it is also stuffing the pockets of Lukashenko and son, we should not, perhaps, expect any action by authorities in Belarus.

DON'T SWIM ALONE AMONG SHARKS

From Poland's point of view, neighbouring Russia is, together with its puppet states like Belarus, the greatest menace, but it's not the only one. "I think that China is becoming the economic giant," Waszczykowski told me, "and of course with its large economy it is bound to have an influence on others: Asia, Africa and to some extent also in Europe. The threat is not military, but as an economic giant." Economic threat may be, but it's still a threat. "GCHQ would know what kind of technology it's trying to slip into our economy to find out what we have and to get data," warned Waszczykowski. There is also some concern over Chinese naval manoeuvres in the Baltic Sea, although an invasion of Poland or any of its neighbours would spark a global confrontation on a scale that is unlikely to favour Beijing in the longer term. "Sometimes I think that the attention and the care about China," said Waszczykowski, "is some kind of substitute, because we cannot counter a Russian threat." He believes that China could pose a greater security threat than most Western strategists imagine, including militarily, although it could all be part of Putin's game plan. "Russia is playing clever, trying to lure us into this anti-Chinese mindset," Waszczykowski warned. "Cooperation with Beijing is strong."



Russian President Vladimir Putin attending exercises of Northern and Black Sea fleets with Commander-in-Chief of the Navy Nikolai Yevmenov, (centre), and Commander of the Southern Military District Forces Alexander Dvornikov

Putin is quite clever because he's offering all this cheap energy and gas, and he's offering to mediate between the West and China, but I think it's a dangerous game with Putin." The West would do well to recall the words spoken by Viscount Bernard Montgomery, the general who routed Rommel's Afrika Korps in North Africa, in Britain's House of Lords in

1962: "Rule one on page one of the book of war is: 'Do not march on Moscow.' Rule two is: 'Do not go fighting with your land armies in China.' Perceptive, perhaps, but 'Monty', as he was known, would have also agreed with the PiS on the issue of the LGBTQI+ community."



Towers B and C of The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in Luxembourg. The Latin word "Curia" is displayed on the institution's emblem

International power struggles are not the only problem, however. The European Union itself appears to be coming apart, with the Czech Republic the latest to be talking about a referendum on quitting (would that be Czexit). "Yes, this is a growing concern in Warsaw and Poland," Waszczykowski admitted, "because we were hoping that the whole project of the European Union would fulfil its promise of everything from economic cooperation to the free market, the common market, but over these last twenty years it has tended in a political direction, delegation, and even some policies of a hegemonic character with some countries, especially Germany."

Waszczykowski is critical of the EU's direction, of the way it has become more 'political', especially its attempts to unite the various countries on a single set of rules, rather than permitting them to go their own way. "Especially the Tribunal of the European Commission," he said, "which has been 'crossing the border' and is trying to dictate European law. It's not just protecting the existing law in various countries but trying to dictate the law."

I asked him what his advice would be to the successors of former German Chancellor Angela Merkel. "Frankly speaking," he replied, "We're not going to miss Angela Merkel, because it was a myth that coming from the Eastern part of Germany, she was sensitive to the East European issues, because she was not." Waszczykowski told me that there had been recent revelations that Merkel had been running the EU in accordance with Russian sensitivities. "She was paying much more attention to Moscow, to Russia, than to the interests of the member countries of the European Union and NATO," he said, and he's not hopeful that the situation will change with Merkel gone. It is not a view widely held in Germany or much of the EU. The Elite News Press summed up reaction to her departure in the following encomium: "The Germans elected her to lead them, and she led 80 million Germans for 18 years with competence, skill, dedication and sincerity," reads the article, which would seem to be somewhat at odds with the views of Waszczykowski. It continues: "During these eighteen years of her leadership of the authority in her country, no transgressions were recorded against her. She did



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris



Poland's President Andrzej Duda and US President Donald Trump during the signing of the Joint Declaration on Advancing Defense Cooperation in September 2019

not assign any of her relatives to a government post. She did not claim that she was the maker of glories. She did not get millions in payment, nor did anyone cheer her performance, she did not receive charters and pledges, she did not fight those who preceded her and did not dissolve her." In fact, when she stepped down as Chancellor, millions of Germans went out on their balconies, onto the pavements outside their homes or into public gathering places and applauded her for six solid minutes. No former German chancellor has had such a send-off, and nor would any other EU national leader I can think of.

Incidentally, no tears over her departure were heard coming from the Kremlin, either. Hearing of the criticism, a spokesperson for the EPP group commented: "It is not surprising that Waszczykowski criticises Merkel as all the Law and Justice party politicians do with everything that comes from Germany or from Brussels. However do not be mistaken, Law and Justice belongs to ECR and not to the EPP. Outside the EPP, even some time inside the EPP, to criticise Merkel has been a sport during her 16 years of mandate. History has nevertheless reserved a place for her, something that will not happen with all those criticising her during all these years."

However, Waszczykowski firmly ruled out the possibility of Poland following the UK out of the Union in what's been dubbed "Polexit". "For eleven centuries we have been part of the West, part of Western civilisation, part of Christianity, Roman Christianity, so it's a natural part of Europe for us to live together." I asked about the idea of creating a 'European Defence Force' (EDF), with Poland already heavily involved in NATO. Waszczykowski

agreed that his country is devoted to NATO which he believes is an example of vital cooperation between Europe and the United States, but he also said: "We are not against the thinking of creating additional European defence if there is no duplication and no duplication of NATO military efforts and if there is no competition with the United States." He stressed how Poland and other European NATO members had worked in close cooperation with the United States on several occasions. "Without the Americans we cannot resolve the Russian-Ukrainian conflict." As for the proposed EDF, he wonders where the money is coming from and also pointed out that EU member states cannot even agree on what constitutes a threat. "No money, no funding, no political structure and no common definition of threat," was Waszczykowski's verdict.

Whatever he thinks about this defence force, Waszczykowski remains largely optimistic about the EU's future. "I am optimistic because I survived the Communist rule," he told me. "I am 64, so I've spent half my life under the Communists, and I was living there, I was hoping, I was waiting for the collapse of this structure. It happened, it was like a miracle, maybe because of the support of John-Paul II." It seems fairly certain that John-Paul II and his successor, Pope Francis, would agree in principle with Waszczykowski and other PiS leaders with regard to the LGBTIQI issue. Waszczykowski drew criticism for defining homosexuality as an 'ideology', although gay people I have known (of both genders) tell me the attraction they feel towards others of their gender was innate, not a lifestyle choice. The PiS is not alone in having a strong distaste for people who would identify as LGBTIQI+, or simply as gay.

Waszczykowski accepts that Poland is out of step with many other EU countries. "I think we have an ideological struggle in Europe," he admitted, "because the majority of European Union politicians, especially Western ones, belong to the liberal-left position." This sounds like an acceptance that Poland's attitude to people identifying as LGBTIQI+ is a minority one. "We have a conservative government which is alternative in conception. Not only that, but our policy is a successful policy. Our government in the last six years was very successful in running and steering the economy, and in our social programmes in Poland."

Waszczykowski is proud of his government's electoral success, too, which is in any case incontrovertible. "Over the past six years," he said, "we have won every election." They have, too, so there seems to be relatively little popular support or sympathy for the LGBTIQI+ community, but although nobody seems to be proposing a witch hunt, there is clearly a degree of homophobia in this strictly Catholic country.



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland Witold Waszczykowski and Polish President Andrzej Duda in New York in 2017

But Poland has always been a country of surprises. During the war, its Scouting movement turned into a fighting force, the Szare Szeregi (Grey Ranks), to act as messengers, operate radios, carry out nursing and even take up arms in the Home Army. Fighters as young as ten or twelve fought and died, the survivors turning up in Soviet concentration camps long after the uprising had been crushed. The message would seem to be – and I'm sure Waszczykowski would agree – never underestimate a Pole.

Jim Gibbons



RED AND GREEN SHOULD NEVER BE SEEN

Why Russia's environmental claims don't blend well with reality (or the world's colour schemes)

The expression “red and green should never be seen” originates in the British fashion industry, according to some sources, suggesting that the two colours do not go together well. There is an alternative version that goes “red and green should never be seen without a colour in between” or “red and green should only be seen upon an Irish queen.” Step forward, Queen Caoimhe (pronounced Kwee-va or even Kee-va) or perhaps Queen Niamh (normally pronounced Neev). An alternative explanation suggests a nautical origin for the saying. Vessels travelling on water or in the air should always show running lights as an aid to navigation: red for port and green for starboard. If the person on watch can see both on an approaching vessel it would mean that the ship in question is heading straight for you on a collision course, and that would be worrying. But whatever the true origin of the expression, Russia, which once boasted of being red (arguably it never

really was), is now claiming to be green, which puts it on a collision course with the truth, and also with a better global environment.

It's debatable, of course, that Russia never really reached the stage of being “red” in any sense recognisable as such to, for instance, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, authors of The Communist Manifesto, or even to Leon Trotsky, whose power base over military matters was carefully undermined by Stalin, together with Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, who feared Trotsky was getting too powerful. Stalin later attacked Zinoviev and Kamenev as part of his bid to inherit Vladimir Lenin's mantle, removing rivals. I think Lenin would have had his doubts, too; he never wanted to see Joseph Stalin in charge and had tried in the last letter he wrote before his death to have him removed as general secretary of the party.



Soviet Union stamp commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Manifesto

Published in Paris in 1848, the Manifesto was a hybrid document, marred (some would argue) by the many compromises its two authors were obliged to make with other



International leaders stand together at the gathering of COP21 in 2015

members of the Communist League at the time to ensure it got printed at all. Then, as now, any gathering of like-minded left-wingers produced a range of beliefs and policies so wide that the outcome could never be entirely satisfactory to all, or probably to any. Not all of the troubling differences make much sense to a modern reader. It's a little like that expression supposedly carved above the entrance to a Buddhist monastery somewhere in the mountains of Tibet: "A thousand monks, a thousand different faiths", suggesting a degree of tolerance for divergent views among Buddhists that 19th century Communists lacked. It may be fine for Buddhist monks but tends to work less well with the politically-minded. Politicians are seldom renowned for their political tolerance. That, perhaps, is why the closing phrase of the Communist Manifesto never came true: "Working men of all countries, unite!"

The fact is that Vladimir Putin could claim that his promise when ratifying the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement has been fulfilled, even though in reality it has not, at least not by any criteria most people would accept. Russia's pledge was to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 70% of 1990 levels by 2030. An ambitious target? Well, not really. The chosen year for comparison happened to be the year of Soviet Russia's highest CO2 output: 2.379-million tonnes, according to the European Commission. As we all know, the Soviet Union broke up into a number of newly independent countries, all of them taking away with them not just their theoretical independence and right to govern

themselves but also their carbon emission figures. Russia may have become geographically smaller but also, coincidentally, cleaner, too, if only by default.

ORWELLIAN CLAIMS



Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2015

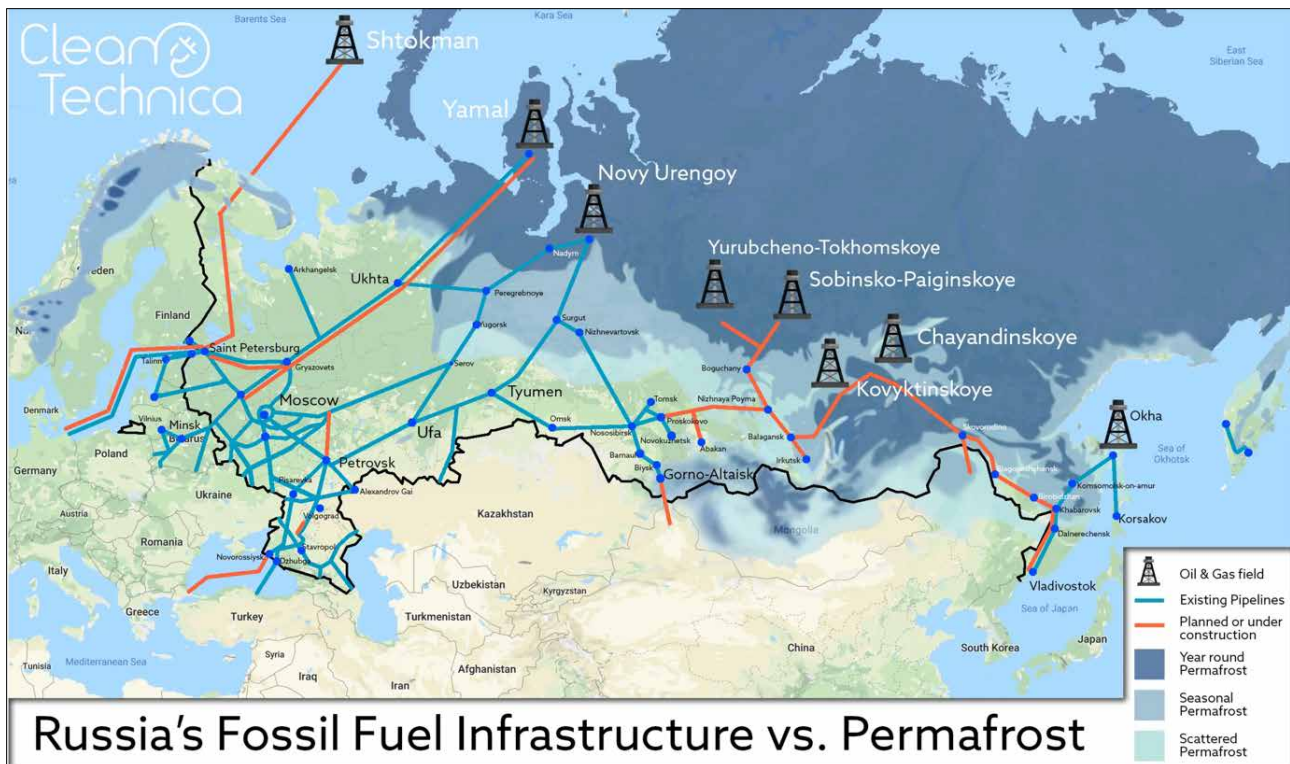
The great English novelist George Orwell wrote in his prophetic novel of a dystopian future, 1984, "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past". It seems to be a lesson Putin has taken to heart. (It has been argued that it also applies to the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, who promised that leaving the EU would make the country more 'English', without continental inclinations, although it seems to have left it instead with fuel shortages, empty supermarket shelves, a lot of panic-buying and some stretching of the truth by desperate ministers). It explains Putin's approach to curbing greenhouse gas emissions in Russia. Putin was, of course, trying to look good whilst doing virtually nothing at all.

As to how well Russia is really doing, take a look at Climate Tracker's website (<https://climatetracker.org/countries/tussian-federation/>), where the Russian Federation is rated "critically insufficient" in its actions to combat climate change. If this had been Putin's end-of-term report at the school I attended, he'd have been sent straight to the headmaster's study for a dose of the cane (yes, such barbaric practices were still the norm at my school in North East England when I was young). His parents would probably have been called in to be reprimanded, too. The website rates Russia's 'policies and actions' and also its 'domestic target' as 'highly insufficient'. Russia also gets rated 'critically insufficient' for both its 'fair share target' and its 'climate finance'.



Moscow's green bonds launched in March 2021

It's not alone in that: Climate Tracker is fairly critical of most governments. The EU as an entity, for instance, is rated 'insufficient' in its targets, policies and financing of making the Union more climate-friendly and less polluting. Or take the United Kingdom, for instance, which is rated as "Almost sufficient". Almost, maybe, but not quite. Climate Tracker writes that under its current policies it is unlikely to reach even



54%-56% of its 1990 levels. “While the UK has doubled its commitments post 2020 to £11.6-billion over 2021-2026,” the report explains, “in July 2021 it was revealed that this would not be new funding and would instead be taken from the existing aid budget, breaking a UN-brokered agreement that such funding would be ‘new and additional.’” It’s bad news, too, for the people who would otherwise have benefitted from UK aid in countries that are far less well-off. Their importance seems to have been downgraded by the present UK government in a way Orwell might have understood but would certainly not have liked. However, the UK doesn’t really stand any comparison with Russia. In its summary of Russian progress towards a zero-carbon future through its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Climate Tracker has this to say: “The ‘Critically insufficient’ rating indicates that Russia’s climate policies and commitments reflect minimal to no action and are not at all consistent with the Paris Agreement,” says the website. “Russia failed to increase its ambition when it submitted its NDC update in November 2020. We rate the updated NDC target as ‘Highly insufficient’ when compared to modelled domestic pathways and ‘Critically insufficient’ when compared with its fair emissions allocation. It is also not providing adequate climate finance, which we

rate as ‘Critically insufficient’. The weak target will be easily met under existing policies and action, which we rate as ‘Highly insufficient.’”

BAD STARTING POINT

You must know the old joke about somebody who is lost in a remote part of the rural UK. Coming across a local, he (or she, if you prefer) asks: “How do I get to...(name of place)”. The rural person, chewing on a straw, contemplates for a while then replies: “If I wanted to get there, I wouldn’t start out from here.” You get the feeling that a similar story may be relevant to Putin’s climate goals. In April 2021, Putin stated that he wanted Russia’s total net greenhouse gas emissions to be lower than the EU’s over the coming thirty years. He admitted that would be tough but said it could be done. “This is a difficult task,” he told top officials and law-makers in his annual ‘state-of-the-nation’ speech, “given the size of our country, climate and economic structure. However, I am absolutely certain that this goal, given our scientific and technological potential is achievable.” This may mean he’s one of the few people to be celebrating the fact that the EU has not managed to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by as much as it had hoped (and promised). Several EU member states have still not put in place a

phase-out plan for coal. Of those that have, a few are planning a switch to natural gas, lobbying meanwhile for EU funds to help finance the switch, even though it will hardly help with cutting greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement demands a 1.50C limit in temperature increase, while the EU’s policies seem to suggest they’ll only achieve a higher warming target of 20C, rather than what was hoped for. Furthermore, Putin has admitted that Russia, which depends economically on exports of its oil and gas, is warming at 2.5 times the global average rate, with some regions experiencing record temperatures that have contributed to forest fires throughout an area the size of Greece. This matters especially because Russia accounts for one fifth of all the world’s forests. Putin has also admitted that cities in northern Russia could face a disaster if the permafrost should melt.

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has stated that politicians and leaders in the West tend to ignore the issue of climate change, preferring to concentrate on the Kremlin’s growing authoritarianism at home, its murder and attempted murder of opposition figures, on its ever-growing nuclear arsenal and its massive cyber capabilities, which it has used to interfere in other countries’ elections, quite apart from

its military interventionism. There has been media coverage, too, of Putin's boast of having hypersonic weapons, which means those that are capable of exceeding Mach 5, or five times the speed of sound. He has even claimed that his Avangard missile can reach speeds above Mach 20. Like most hypersonic craft, it relies on a powered launch and a long, controlled glide to its target, which makes it a shorter rote from launch to target than an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) would achieve, having to do a long loop out of the atmosphere on its way. Clearly nothing could catch such a fast weapon or blow it out of the air – Putin boasted that it would be “absolutely invulnerable to any air or missile defence system” – so why isn't the West more worried? The reason comes down to physics. While Russia and China boast of their hypersonic capabilities, the West relies on the problems with drag. The United States has investigated the possibilities for hypersonic weapons for decades and decided that the old ways may be the best ways, although their research continues. Anything that flies faces the issue of drag, which increases by the square of the craft's velocity, causing it to lose energy. That means that a missile glider (all hypersonic vessels are gliders for most of their flights) travelling at Mach 5 will face 25-times the drag of one traveling at the speed of sound, Mach 1. At Mach 20, the drag will be 400 times as great, meaning that the vehicle will lose energy 8,000 times as quickly. And that's not the end of the problem. As David Wright and Cameron Tracy wrote in the August

2021 edition of Scientific American, “The kinetic energy flowing from the glider to the surrounding air transforms to thermal energy and shock waves. Some of that energy transfers back to the vehicle as heat: leading edges of boost-glide weapons flying at Mach 10 or above can reach temperatures above 2,000 kelvins (or 1726.850 Celsius) for sustained periods.” Protecting the vehicles from such intense heat is a major problem for designers, especially taking into account navigation issues and the risk of premature detonation.

It's other kinds of heat issuing from Russia that are bothering scientists most. Floods in Siberia caused by global warming, for instance, have destroyed whole villages, while in 2020 Arctic Sea ice shrank to its lowest extent in more than four decades. Russia's permafrost is thawing rapidly, while the succession of rapid freezes and thaws in the subsoil is severely damaging urban areas in those cities built within the Arctic Circle. More than 2-million people live in such places, and they may be forced to flee to safer environments if it continues. Furthermore, Russia's oil and gas pipelines, some 2,000 kilometres in extent, are said to be at risk, as are road and rail links and many of both cross some of Russia's broadest rivers. The CSIS notes that a thaw in the permafrost recently caused a diesel oil storage tank to fall over near to the city of Norilsk, dumping 21,000 tonnes of diesel into the Ambarnaya river and its surrounding subsoil.



Military engineers beginning preparations for flood control works on the rivers of Siberia

GAS GUSHING GETS GREATER

And then, of course, there's methane. That's, perhaps, the biggest worry of all. China produces the greatest amount, reaching 1.24 kilotons CO2 equivalent in 2018. Russia is the second worst offender, followed by India, the United States and Brazil. To be honest, not everyone realised the danger posed by methane to begin with. In the United States, steps are afoot (tentatively, because it's difficult) to locate and cut off the leakage of methane into the atmosphere. In the Permian Basin,



Methane emissions

for instance, on the border between Texas and New Mexico, the deep oil reserves, formed between 250 and 300 million years ago now lie some 3,000 metres or more underground and account for 38% of the country's oil output and 17% of its natural gas. It's also responsible for the largest output of methane. The exploiters of the oil deposits mainly flare off the methane, but that can create smog and lead to breathing difficulties and cardiovascular illness. Furthermore, leaks can be missed in a massive oilfield and unless it's constantly monitored, the gas can continue to be pumped unintentionally into the atmosphere. The United States is trying to tackle this massive problem across the chaotic oil exploitation region of the Permian Field, aided by air-borne monitoring conducted by Scientific Aviation's small aircraft.

It's rather different in Russia, according to the Moscow Times, which reports that emissions of methane from Russian pipelines in 2020 were higher than in the previous year. Citing satellite images from a data firm, Kayrros, the European Space Agency (ESA) said that during that year methane emissions had risen by 40%, despite a 14% drop in Russian gas exports to Europe and a 10% drop in world-wide methane emissions. The Moscow Times article quoted Antoine Rostand, President of Kayrros, who described the operational practices as – arguably – slipshod. “The climate footprint of these operational practices is

enormous,” he said, equating the emissions to 3-million tons of CO₂. The newspaper reports that in 2019-2020, the analysis by Kayrros detected 46 large methane emission events along Russian pipelines carrying natural gas to Europe. Energy experts, the paper says, have attributed the spike in emissions from such practices as flaring and venting to a drop in energy prices and a failure to maintain good maintenance practices during the Covid pandemic. Where does the methane come from? Leaky pipelines and poorly maintained infrastructure, it seems, which is why the EU is considering imposing binding methane emission standards on the oil and gas it imports. Other sources of methane include agriculture and disused and abandoned coal mines.

The world's atmosphere now contains 2.5 times as much methane (CH₄) as it did before the Industrial Revolution and it's dangerous stuff. Its effect on global warming is 84 times greater than the effect of CO₂ over a 20-year period and most of it comes from leaky gas pipes. According to Climate Home News, experts are convinced that the 40% increase in methane discharges from Russian pipelines is a result of falling gas prices and poor maintenance. There have been increasing cases of methane being released through venting, flaring or simply from leakage along two of Russia's main trunk routes for piping

gas into Europe, despite (or perhaps partially because of) a 14% drop in demand. Isabel Gerretsen, writing on the Climate Home News website, says that the analysis company Kayrros detected thirteen methane emissions along the Yamal-Europe pipeline, which is 4,196 kilometres long and runs through Russia, Belarus, Poland and Germany. They also found another 33 leaks (or discharges of some sort) around the Brotherhood pipeline, which runs for 2,750 kilometres through Russia, Ukraine and Slovakia. According to Gerretsen, the operators claimed that the releases were the result of planned maintenance operations and had all been reported to the relevant authorities. That's reassuring in a way, but it rather downplays the seriousness of what has been happening. This is Earth we're talking about, not Saturn's moon, Titan.

ON ANOTHER WORLD

On Titan, one of the moons of Saturn, liquid methane forms a large part of an enormous lake known as Kraken Mare. In fact, its liquid is made up of both methane (CH₄) and ethane (C₂H₆), which surprised scientists, who had expected ethane to dominate the liquid overwhelmingly, given the moon's size and the lake's distance from the poles. Both gases are still there in liquid form, despite the expectation that with Titan's feeble amount of sunshine (a hundred times



© NASA/JPL-Caltech

This illustration shows NASA's Cassini spacecraft above Saturn's northern hemisphere prior to one of its 22 grand finale dives

less solar energy arrives there than we experience on Earth) the moon should have converted all its methane into ethane in just 10-million years. It clearly didn't; methane is still there after 4.5-billion years, so it seems that the scientists got things wrong and are keen to find out why. There are now plans (if NASA approves the enormous funding involved) to launch a submarine to explore the lake further in the 2030s and find out what is going on.

Data from NASA's Cassini mission suggest that Kraken Mare is at least 300 metres deep. That's roughly the height of New York's Chrysler building, although the radar on the Cassini probe was unable to see all the way to the bottom, so it may be much deeper still. Kraken Mare contains roughly 80% of Titan's surface liquids, according to Valerio Poggiali, a research associate at the Cornell University Centre for Astrophysics and Planetary Science. In any case, Titan's surface temperature is around -178.15 Celsius (95 kelvin) and the planet has no oxygen, orbiting its parent planet in stygian gloom because of being ten times further from the Sun than we are on Earth. Appropriately, the word 'stygian' is derived from the mythological River Styx in Hades, the underworld of Greek mythology. The surface of Titan would seem an appropriate analogy for Hell. In any case, methane is clearly part of Titan's atmosphere and therefore of its mysterious chemistry. It shouldn't be floating around on Earth.

It is, however, and it's getting worse fairly rapidly, it seems. The concentration of methane in the atmosphere has more than doubled since preindustrial times, reaching over 1,800 ppb (parts per billion) in recent years. This increase is predominantly due to agriculture and the use of fossil fuels. "Overall, the downstream segment of the oil and gas value chain is a significant contributor to climate change, predominantly due to its methane emissions," says the International Energy Agency (IEA). "Worldwide, downstream methane amounted to 16 metric tons in 2020 – more than all the oil and gas methane emissions from the continent of North America combined."

The IEA's website then adds some worrying details: "In major importing countries, including Japan and several European Union member states, the downstream segment is responsible for more than 80% of the methane emissions from oil and gas operations." The website goes on to explain how methane leaks occur through "refining, transmission, storage and distribution operations" among the major fuel importers. For countries responsible for these discharges, their first course of action must be to tackle these 'downstream' emissions, but they should also persuade the upstream suppliers to do more to tackle methane leaks. The Clean Air Task Force (CATF), using an optical gas imaging camera, have recorded methane discharges at more than a hundred sites across Europe. They have released footage from Germany, Italy and Hungary as the first stage in a campaign they are calling CutMethaneEU, with the images available on-line. They show that methane emissions have been rising much faster than was anticipated when the targets were set for the Paris Agreement. The Global Methane Assessment, a landmark study on reducing methane pollution, called for a 40% cut in global methane emissions by 2030. It would involve, say the CATF, a 65% reduction in coal, oil, and gas methane, thus avoiding warming of around 0.30 Celsius, which may not sound like much but which could be highly significant. It points out, however, that the political will to achieve it is lacking.



An oil refinery gas flare

It's all possible, as long as leading politicians avoid doing what Putin has been doing: laying claim to successes that have nothing whatever to do with a real reduction in greenhouse gas emissions but which look good on paper, especially in papers loyal to Putin himself. In reality it should not even be difficult, to quote Jonathan Banks, CATF's International Director for Super Pollutants.



Jonathan Banks

"Smart policies can reduce European methane emissions by 70% by 2025," he is quoted on the CATF website as having said. "Establishing strong methane regulation for the oil and gas sector is the lowest hanging fruit in EU climate policy." It certainly appears to be something very basic. "We're essentially talking about proper maintenance and plumbing," Banks points out. "Oil and gas companies don't do the basics because, frankly, they don't have to, so they'd rather spend the money elsewhere. Policymakers need to change that equation, both within the EU and for companies exporting fossil fuels to EU member states." One assumes that most EU citizens don't want to see their world turned into Titan, nor to go swimming in the Kraken Mare, up to their necks in liquid methane. In fact, that won't happen, of course; the sun will boil the earth as it swells towards becoming a red giant, warming even Titan enough to give it, perhaps, a balmy tropical atmosphere, albeit with no oxygen, before it freezes it, and even then not for tens of millions of years.

TAKING STEPS

The European Commission and the European Parliament's committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), want to see urgent action to curb the growth of atmospheric methane, described by a Slovakian member of the European Parliament, shadow rapporteur Martin Hojsík of the Renew Europe Group, as "carbon dioxide's evil little brother".



© europarl.eu

Martin Hojsík

The ENVI committee has begun action that should help to curb emissions by adopting a report at the end of September 2021 to cut methane emissions. Members voted in favour of a report to that effect by 61 votes to 10 with 7 abstentions. It now goes before the full European Parliament, calling for the Commission to come up with "binding measures" and methane reduction targets covering

all sectors, to bring the EU into line with the targets set in the Paris Agreement. Not before time, you may think, given that Europe is the world's largest importer of both oil and gas.

The CATF Methane Emissions Library highlighted two vents giving off 'significant concentrations' of methane over the hills of Cinque Terre in Italy in April 2021, which were coming from a Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) regasification terminal. It also lists a stack "venting a significant amount of methane from Italy's largest underground gas storage facility in Minerbio", not far from Bologna. Other vent stack operations releasing methane came from Germany's largest transmission compressor station at Mallnow, near the Polish border. And so it goes on, in one case, at Bardolino in Italy, a vent stack was releasing methane just 20 metres from where a gardener was mowing grass. If you want to know what it's like to sunbathe beside the Kraken Mare, ask him (or conceivably her).

Perhaps we should extend some sympathy to Putin over his country's methane emissions. As the Smithsonian Magazine explains on its website, permafrost covers 65% of Russian territory, but it's thawing fast, something that some scientists have described as "a methane time bomb". The rising temperatures are already releasing massive quantities of methane which had a natural origin. Published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences

journal, says the Smithsonian, satellite photographs of a previously unexplored site in Siberia detected large quantities of methane being released from exposed limestone. "A heat wave in 2020," reports the magazine, "was responsible for the emissions along two large strips of rock formations in the Yenisey-Khatanga Basin, situated several hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle." Lead author Nikolaus Froitzheim warned Tara Yarlagadda of Inverse that interpreting the data correctly "may make the difference between catastrophe and apocalypse". The release of the ancient methane deposits, trapped in the limestone for millions of years, caught scientists by surprise. They had anticipated finding trapped methane in wetlands, the magazine reports, but not in hard rock.

They are now anticipating further such releases, especially with global temperature rises suggesting that the Arctic could lose 89% of its permafrost by 2100. It's ironic, really: rising temperatures could (and, on the present showing, almost certainly will) cause temperatures to rise further and faster. Some have expressed a fear that the Arctic is heading towards what has been called "an irreversible tipping point". The temperature rise could also damage some of Russia's dams and at least one nuclear plant. Is it even possible that the ongoing increase in temperature could eventually start to evaporate our oceans, with the resulting water vapour trapping even more heat? More water vapour would be lifted into the atmosphere then, until the whole thing begins to spiral out of control

On Venus, as the temperatures rose the oceans began to evaporate, dumping a lot more of its water vapour into the atmosphere. On Earth, this water vapour would also trap heat and could, in extremis, cause the oceans to disappear even faster. With ever more water vapour in the atmosphere, more heat would be trapped there until the whole system begins to spiral out of control. Never mind poor old frozen Titan; welcome to Venus. And it wouldn't even be Putin's fault.



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Methane bubbling up through the ice from the thawed permafrost at the bottom of a thermokarst lake

Anthony James



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AS FREEDOM DWINDLES, WHAT PRICE TRUTH?

If truth is the first casualty of conflict, freedom follows close behind



© Wikimedia

Hiram Johnson

It was Hiram Johnson, a Progressive Republican from California, who is credited with stating that: “The first casualty, when war comes, is truth”. He said it during World War 1, and ironically, he died on 6 August 1945, the very day on which the United States dropped the first atomic bomb to be used in a war on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Now, it seems, the world is at war with a virus that is just 100 nanometres across (a nanometer is one billionth of a meter, 0.000000001 or 10⁻⁹ meters, so the virus measures on average 0.0000001 meters from side to side).

It’s called SARS-CoV-2 and it comes in several variant forms as it evolves (surprisingly rapidly) to survive the latest anti-viral treatment our cleverest virologists have devised. The most recent at the time of writing is the *mu* variant; I don’t know why. Not long ago everyone was talking about the *delta* variant. *Delta* is the fourth letter in the Greek alphabet, *mu* is the twelfth. So, what happened to *epsilon*, *zeta*, *eta*, *theta*, *iota*, *kappa* and

lambda, then? Well, they seem to be less worrying. The *delta* variant is apparently more dangerous, or it may be. No-one is completely sure, and research is ongoing. It contains the N501S mutation, anyway, which is similar to the mutation in the *alpha* variant known as N501Y, first identified in the UK in 2020. Some dozen or so sub-mutations have also been noted around the world, probably accounting for the missing Greek letters. In any case, SARS-CoV-2 in its various versions is not going to leave us any time soon, unfortunately. At the time of writing, there have been 219-million cases worldwide so far, and 4.55-million deaths.

This is an indisputable fact, but in some countries, it has been increasingly difficult for the media to report it. Governments in Europe and across the world have effectively been taking control of the media trying to cover the story of the disease and its inexorable spread. In Serbia, according to the World Press Freedom index, a news website reporter,

Ana Lalić was arrested at home late at night after covering the way a hospital was trying to cope with the virus.



© Ana Lalić

Ana Lalić

By doing so, she had ignored a government decree that put all reporting about Covid-19 under the control of a government department that had been given the task of handling all information about the virus. Only government officials could talk about it or write about it. The press freedom campaigning group, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), similarly cites the case of Kosovo journalist Tatjana Lazarevic, who was arrested in the street while trying to cover the pandemic's impact. Editor-in-chief of the online news portal KosSev, Lazarevic was detained by police on the road from the ethnically divided town of Mitrovica/Mitrovice to nearby Zvecan, where she planned to go to the local health centre to investigate what she said were "multiple complaints" about its readiness to deal with cases of the new coronavirus.

Governments who are already inclined to be repressive seem to believe that old saying, "no news is good news". By pretending the virus isn't there, however, it won't go away. Indeed, keeping a media silence is more likely to feed unhelpful rumours that frighten the population into believing nonsense. Furthermore, leaving it all to officialdom is seldom a recipe for wise choices. Wasn't it Donald Trump who used his presidency of the United States to recommend that people should swallow bleach to kill the virus? Swallowing bleach kills more than the virus, of course. I suppose it could be said to work in as much as you will certainly suffer no further symptoms of Covid-19 once you're dead.



The Covid-19 pandemic has, rightly, led to some restrictions being put in place to limit its spread, even if some defiantly foolish people protest and refuse to cooperate. The US recently saw the funeral of a mid-West woman whose vehicle had proudly displayed "no vaccine" and "no mask" stickers.

I don't suppose her relatives attached them to her hearse, however; she died of the Corona virus in which she did not believe.

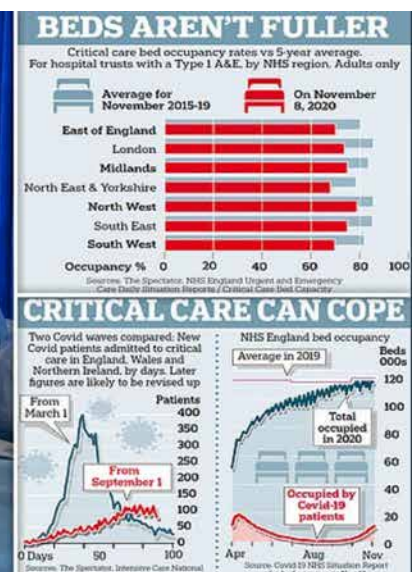
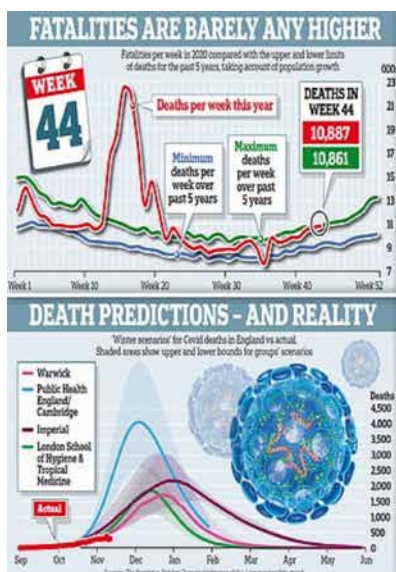
I DON'T BELIEVE IN COVID (BUT IT BELIEVES IN ME)



Viktor Orbán

It's unclear if Hungary's autocratic far-right president Viktor Orbán believes in the virus or not. He probably does, although he misses no opportunity to criticise the actions of the EU in trying to deal with this unprecedented disaster. Hungary became the first member state to order additional quantities of an anti-Coronavirus vaccine directly, rather than relying on supplies acquired centrally by the EU.

With a population of fewer than ten million, Hungary bought five million doses of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine and two million of the Russian alternative, Sputnik V. Neither of them had been approved for use by the European



COVID: WHAT THEY DON'T TELL YOU

Medicines Agency (EMA). Furthermore, that's in addition to the 12-million doses Hungary had already contracted to buy through the EU. That sounds encouraging in a way, at least for Hungarian citizens, but Orbán's 'emergency legislation' blocks public (and media) access to information and criminalises what it calls "fake news", which basically means any news about the pandemic that he or his government have not approved in advance. Unfortunately, freedom of the press is not enforced as firmly in membership negotiations as other freedoms.

In the UK, it was the government-supporting and consistently right-wing Daily Mail that was initially opposed to Boris Johnson's measures to rein in the spread of the virus. What happened next was pointed out by the Hacked Off blog and quoted elsewhere. In November 2020, the Daily Mail ran an article under the headline "what they don't tell you about Covid". In it, the paper poured scorn on government figures for infection and death rates and suggested that the measures being proposed were an unnecessary infringement on personal freedoms. The article failed to clarify that the figures they were claiming to be "an overstatement" were based on what had been predicted could happen if there were no restrictions at all.

The UK's Department of Health took the unusual step of criticising the article on Twitter, pointing out that the government's aim was to prevent illness and to save lives. The Daily Mail swung into action, playing down the Department's objections, and surprise, surprise, the government backed down without considering how such a step could undermine public confidence in the measures being taken. And yet, the article had, without justification or explanation, dismissed the government's expert projections as "unreliable", whilst employing a graphic illustration drawn up by a semi-anonymous blogger with no

medical knowledge. What's more, they suggested that the "only" people dying because of Covid were the elderly, those with pre-existing medical conditions, diabetics and so on. The Daily Mail seemed to be suggesting that their deaths didn't really count because they were close to death in any case. The "facts" the Daily Mail quoted were not facts, they were extremely selective and misleading and could have led to more deaths. The government made no further complaint about this dangerous and inaccurate article. After all, they have the Daily Mail's valuable support in other fields (the Daily Mail was an eager cheer-leader for Brexit), which they seemed unwilling to jeopardise, it seems.

There seems little doubt that, unwelcome as it clearly is, the pandemic has given governments that already have some repressive ideas and inclinations a very good excuse to clamp down more firmly. Many have done so. The four 'shining lights' of media freedom remain Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark. It's rather depressing to note, then, that four of the worst offenders – China, Cuba, Uzbekistan and Russia – have just been elected to the UN's Human Rights Council. In terms of press freedom, China comes 177th in World Press Freedom rankings, Cuba is 171st, Uzbekistan 156th, and Russia comes in at an impressive 149th. Interestingly, Europe will be represented by France (34th) and the United Kingdom (35th), despite the latter having chosen the leave the European Union. Incidentally, in the RSF's 'league table' of countries in terms of their attitudes to press freedom, most countries have either stayed where they were or else gone down during the pandemic. Between 2013 and 2020, only Slovenia's position improved, moving from 35th to 32nd, although it has since dropped back to 36th.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF), which constantly monitors the world's media and its ability to report in an unbiased and fair

way, consistently ranks Eastern Europe as the second-worst region for press freedom after the Middle East and North Africa (which count as one region). In the case of the European Union, Hungary and Poland have, unsurprisingly, drawn the most concern. Now RSF says that policies devised to defeat the pandemic – inevitably involving various restrictions designed to halt or at least slow the spread of the virus, further threaten the situation in the region, which has been almost consistently deteriorating over the past decade. It is not a pretty picture. Returning to Hungary for a moment, Orbán was granted sweeping



Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield

powers by the Hungarian parliament, known as the 'Country Assembly' or 'Országgyűlés', that criminalise the spread of information that he considers false. Journalists can face large fines and up to 5 years in prison for offending against his judgement, while they also claim that they have been denied access to hospitals and also prevented from talking to health workers, making it almost impossible to report on the issue at all. Concern about the situation has led to a delegation from the European Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee paying a fact-finding visit in late September 2021. They met with representatives of the government and opposition, and also with journalists, NGOs, and even the Mayor of Budapest. As the visit drew to a close, the delegation leader, French Greens/European Free Alliance member Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield told the media: "The last three days in Budapest have been packed but fruitful." They met with more than a hundred people with varying views about Hungary and its relations with its own media. "Their diverse accounts will help us to formulate a broadly informed view of what is happening in various aspects: justice, education, media – of the rule of law in Hungary," said Delbos-Corfield.



The November 2020 Daily Mail's article illustration

ME, ME, ME FIRST!

The Covid-19 pandemic has been the Trojan horse in which repressive (or would-be repressive) governments have slipped new rules into place, just as Greece's Achaeans put soldiers inside their "gift" to the people of Troy of a large, hollow wooden horse, in order to get into the city after a ten-year siege. And all because Paris of Troy took Helen from her husband, the Spartan King Menelaus. In the minds of the various governments facing the COVID-19 crisis, that effectively gives them control over the media. The Polish government has altered its media market by supporting only pro-government outlets while restricting others. The government and state-owned companies have brought a large number of lawsuits against journalists, with the pandemic causing a considerable increase. In the Czech Republic, journalists are increasingly concerned about the growing concentration of media ownership among a small number of capitalist moguls with close links to the government. Bulgaria, which is the lowest-ranked EU member state on the press freedom index, has brought in prison sentences for any writers of supposedly "fake news" related to Covid (basically stories that disagree with or dispute the official line), while various observers, including EU officials, have complained about increasing government pressure on journalists in Slovenia and also an increasing number of attacks on journalists in Slovakia. Leaders who believe in retaining a tight grip on their country are afraid of the media, which is why they seek so diligently to control it.

The problem is that the loss of media freedom is so widespread. According to the pressure group Freedom House, it has been deteriorating around the world for the last decade. "In some of the most influential democracies in the world," writes Sarah Repucci, Senior Director for Research



© Freedom House

Sarah Repucci

and Analysis, "populist leaders have overseen concerted attempts to throttle the independence of the media sector."

She points out that the threats are all too real but it's their potential impact on democracy itself that makes them so dangerous. "Experience has shown, however, that press freedom can rebound from even lengthy stints of repression when given the opportunity," she writes. "The basic desire for democratic liberties, including access to honest and fact-based journalism, can never be extinguished." Let's hope so, although a totalitarian government's most ardent and devoted supporters only seem to want freedom for media that support their own views. The end result is that media freedom has been declining most dramatically in Europe. Repucci points out that: "In some of the most influential democracies in the world, large segments of the population are no longer receiving

© hrcouncil.gov.ru
Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić

unbiased news and information. This is not because journalists are being thrown in jail, as might occur in authoritarian settings. Instead, the media have fallen prey to more nuanced efforts to throttle their independence. Common methods include government-backed ownership changes, regulatory and financial pressure, and public denunciations of honest journalists." At the root of much of the problem is money: powerful influencers have it and will always try to use it to earn themselves and their friends more favourable media coverage.

Freedom House's 'Freedom in the World' report shows that 16 countries have seen media freedom decline over the last five years. Take, for example, Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary and Aleksandar Vučić's administration in Serbia.

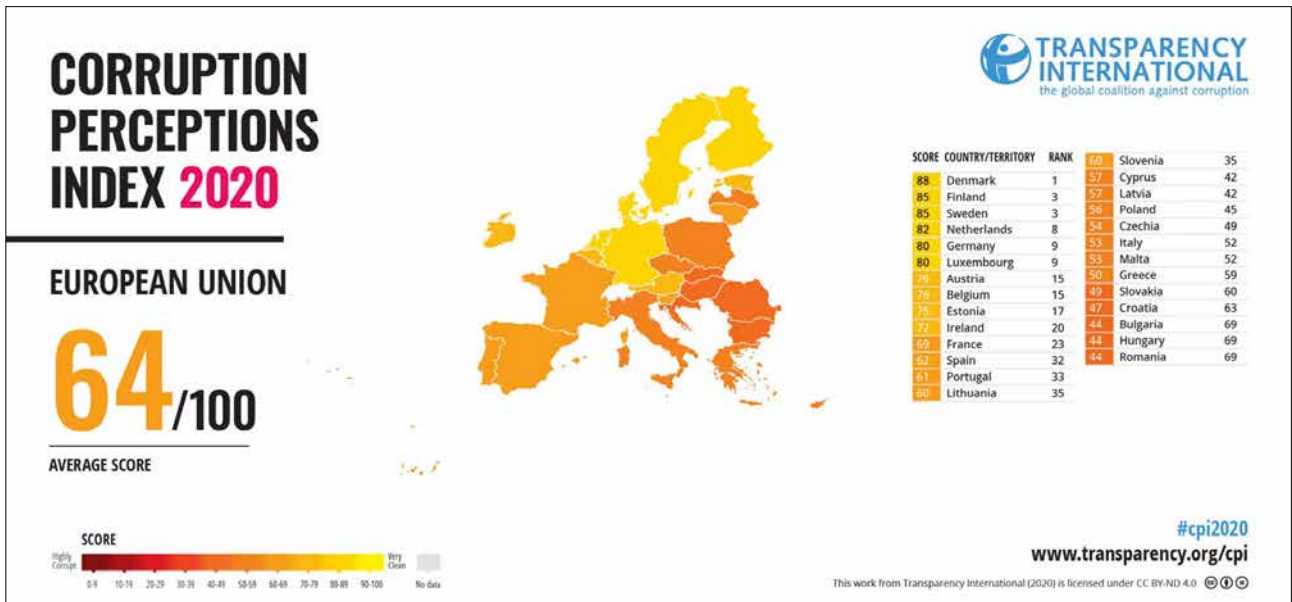
"Both have had great success in snuffing out critical journalism," reports Freedom House, "blazing a trail for populist forces

elsewhere. Both leaders have consolidated media ownership in the hands of their cronies, ensuring that the outlets with the widest reach support the government and smear its perceived opponents. In Hungary, where the process has advanced much further, nearly 80 percent of the media are owned by government allies. That is a terrifying statistic: one man's (or in this case two men's) lust for power and willingness to ignore democracy to secure it has effectively silenced those who disagree with him, however promising and well-intentioned their opponents are. "The problem has arisen in tandem with right-wing populism, which has undermined basic freedoms in many democratic countries," writes Repucci. "Populist leaders present themselves as the defenders of an aggrieved majority against liberal elites and ethnic minorities, whose loyalties they question, whilst arguing that the interests of the nation—as they define it—should override democratic principles like press freedom, transparency, and open debate." What they are really saying, of course, is: "I like power and I won't let anyone take it away from me, however badly and corruptly I run the country, however much I use to line my pockets and whoever has to suffer in order for me to retain that power." Among Free countries in Freedom House's "Freedom in the World" report, 19 percent (that's 16 countries) have endured a reduction in their press freedom ratings over the past five years. This is consistent with a key finding of "Freedom in the World"—that democracies in general are undergoing a decline in political rights and civil liberties. It has become painfully apparent that a free press can never be taken for granted, even when democratic rule has been in place for decades.

WHO WANTS DEMOCRACY?

The latest survey from Transparency International makes depressing reading (perhaps depressing for over-ambitious leaders, too). Even within the European Union, normally thought of as fairly squeaky-clean (I emphasise "fairly") in corruption terms, the latest "Week in Corruption" report says that "some politicians found new opportunities to enrich themselves or to consolidate power – often side-stepping anti-corruption measures".

The report asks its readers if they wouldn't rather see political decision-



makers putting our shared interests as citizens ahead of their own. “Even if much of this happened behind closed doors,” it says, “EU citizens were aware of resources being skewed in favour of certain powerful groups.” Transparency International took the (surprisingly) unusual step of looking into people’s perceptions of political integrity or “the extent to which EU citizens think decision-makers exercise their power for the common good.” It should make political leaders either sit up and take notice or hang their heads in shame. “We found that people perceive a widespread and systematic lack of political integrity,” says the report, “and that governments across the EU have much to do to free decision-making from undue influence. These findings also bring home the message that building political integrity requires more than fighting public sector corruption.”

The problem is that protecting a country from undue political influence is not easy. “The leader of the far-right Freedom Party of Austria,” reports Freedom House, “until recently part of that country’s ruling coalition, was caught on video attempting to collude with Russians to purchase the largest national newspaper and infuse its coverage with partisan bias.” Is there no end to the degrees of corruption some politicians will pursue in their bids to take the top seat (and make the most money), regardless of its effects on everyone else? Apparently not. Consistency of beliefs is not important, it seems. A few years ago, I covered the visit to Brussels of a Scottish Independence Party politician who was

talking about withdrawing from the United Kingdom. British Conservative politicians, along with Labour (Socialist) and Liberal Democrat MEPs, argued fiercely that they would then be outside of the EU and that they would find it hard to get back in, whilst being outside would in itself be economically damaging. Those same Conservatives who later argued for the UK to withdraw in its entirety were, at that time, pointing out the disadvantages for Scotland of not being in the EU. One assumes they believed that and have simply changed their minds, although it’s hard to see exactly why.



The Fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989

In too many countries, the game in political leadership is to buy influence, through whatever corrupt methods are available, even if on closer examination they may appear treasonous. Reductions in the Press Freedom Score have been linked to economic manipulation of media—including cases in which the government directs advertising to friendly outlets or encourages business allies to buy those outlets that are

critical in order to silence the criticism.

“They were more common across Europe over the past five years than in other parts of the world,” says Freedom House. “Such tactics of influence and interference are a relatively recent phenomenon on the continent, which has generally displayed strong support for press freedom since the fall of the Berlin Wall 30 years ago.” That was then, this is now, and not all the bullying political bodies are on the other side of a wall. Erich Honecker East German’s communist leader would have understood it very well.

Global press freedom declined to its lowest point in 13 years in 2016, according to Freedom House. There have been unprecedented threats to journalists and media outlets in major democracies as well as new moves by authoritarian states to control the media, including beyond their borders. Only 13 percent of the world’s population enjoys what Freedom House recognises as a truly Free press: “That is, a media environment where coverage of political news is robust, the safety of journalists is guaranteed, state intrusion in media affairs is minimal, and the press is not subject to onerous legal or economic pressures.” Sound like a Utopia? Not so long ago it sounded like Europe. Of course, Europe is very far from being the worst. “The world’s 10 worst-rated countries and territories were Azerbaijan, Crimea, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.” Bear that in mind when you book next year’s holidays, especially if you work in the media. I

should imagine that we can all forget media freedom in Afghanistan too, sadly. The Afghans are very fine, brave people and deserve better.

DISEASED MEDIA

This article is intended, however, to be about the degree of freedom being allowed to journalists to report on the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a matter of increasing concern to EU institutions. The European Parliament writes on its website that: “This threat to media freedom is often attributed to the recent rise of populist and authoritarian governments, with many world leaders – including leaders of major democracies – increasingly seeming to view free media as an opponent, rather than a fundamental aspect of a free society.” The sad fact is that at the end of this road lies an unfree society we are unlikely to like, where the views of journalists and eventually of all of us are scrutinised to ensure they meet the ‘one-size-fits-all’ opinions of dictatorial governments.

The Covid pandemic makes things worse. “Media freedom proponents have warned that governments across the world could use the coronavirus emergency as a pretext for the implementation of new, draconian restrictions on free expression, as well as to increase press censorship,” warns the European Parliament. “In many countries, the crisis has been exploited for just such reasons, with political leaders using it as a justification for additional restrictions on media freedom.” The press release is concerned that the pandemic has offered an excuse for clamping down on what we can do or say. “Earlier this year, the Association of European

Journalists (AEJ) voiced concern over the decline in media freedom that has occurred within the EU in recent years and called on Europe’s political leaders to do more to reverse the trend, in order to protect and reinforce media freedom and uphold the Union’s long-held commitment to a free press.” it says. “Outside the EU, independent media have come under pressure in democracies such as Israel, India and the United States of America in recent years, where journalists critical of the government have been intimidated, threatened and scapegoated by government politicians and their supporters.” Of course, some people view repressive governments as ‘strong’ governments, which they rather like, thus offering a form of support to playground bullies masquerading as politicians. In other words, the pandemic is not only ghastly but is being used as a fig-leaf to cover actions governments don’t want us to notice.



COVID-19 Anti-Lockdown Protest in Vancouver, May 17th 2020

“In some cases,” the Parliament argues, “intense information suppression, narrative control and disinformation campaigns – often carried out in conjunction with highly visible, staged global health assistance – seem to be aimed at covering up government



Italian journalists demonstrating against violent attacks and threats to journalists and media workers covering protests against the government’s pandemic-related measures

failures and conveying the message that authoritarian nationalism is the most viable answer to the pandemic, as well as that societies must choose between freedom and security.”

The Council of Europe has also expressed deep concern about the erosion of media freedom since the start of the pandemic. It has produced a report that shows a growing pattern of intimidation to silence journalists on the continent. “The past weeks have accelerated this trend,” it warns, “with the pandemic producing a new wave of serious threats and attacks on press freedom in several Council of Europe member states. In response to the health crisis, governments have detained journalists for critical reporting, vastly expanded surveillance and passed new laws to punish ‘fake news’ (*news that departs from the official line*) even as they decide themselves what is allowable and what is false without the oversight of appropriate independent bodies.” The Council issued a warning to its member states about the worsening situation, to which 60% of member states responded. However, Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, three of the worst offenders in terms of media freedom, chose to ignore the reports, as did Bosnia and Herzegovina. Justice seems to have been set aside by governments that believe their own overweening power is more important than their country’s health. “At the end of 2019, the Platform recorded 105 cases of journalists behind bars in the Council of Europe region, including 91 in Turkey alone,” the Council reports. “The situation has not improved in 2020. Despite the acute health threat, Turkey excluded journalists from a mass release of inmates in April 2020, and second-biggest jailer Azerbaijan has made new arrests over critical coverage of the country’s coronavirus response.”

DEMOCRACY AT RISK: THREATS AND ATTACKS AGAINST MEDIA FREEDOM IN EUROPE



It's not just the sufferers who are sick, it seems, it is the governance of the offending countries. In a surprisingly wide range of countries, "expanded surveillance measures threatening journalists' ability to protect their sources," says the report, "including in France, Poland and Switzerland, as well political attempts to 'capture' media through ownership and market manipulation, most conspicuously of all in Hungary. These threats, too, are exacerbated by the actions taken by several governments under the health crisis, which further include arbitrary limitations on independent reporting and on journalists' access to official information about the pandemic." It makes for depressing reading.



Elena Milashina

KILL OR CURE

In Russia and China, restrictions are especially severe. The Kremlin insists that "anyone who spreads false information about COVID-19 risks fines of up to €23,000 or prison terms of up to five years." "False news" in this case, means anything that contradicts the Kremlin's own "official" view. Media outlets disseminating information the Kremlin disagrees with could be fined €118,000.



Frontline staff in Fiji wait for the first distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in March 2021



"On 22 April 2020, Russia's Supreme Court specified that the punishments also apply to people who 'not only use mass media and telecommunication networks, but also speak at meetings, rallies, distribute leaflets and hang posters,'" the European Parliament statement says. "In Chechnya, President Ramzan Kadyrov issued death threats against Russian journalist Elena Milashina over her reporting about human rights violations in Chechnya under the pretext of combating the pandemic."

Mystery still surrounds the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and that has helped to muddy the waters around media freedom. It has effectively given governments a free pass to tell whatever lies they want and arrest anyone who disagrees with them. Voice of America (VOA) has catalogued a shocking range of measures used by repressive governments to silence journalists critical of their anti-Covid responses.

It points out that in some countries, among them Poland and Hungary, governmental authorities effectively blacklisted any media that criticised them, favouring instead those media outlets seen as 'sympathetic'. In other cases, such as in Turkey and Russia, the authorities sought instead to monopolize media outlets, putting everything into the care of media companies that could be said to be 'on

their side'. A new report prepared by the Association of European Journalists also highlights such tactics as bogus but expensive lawsuits to discourage dissent.

They're commonly known as 'strategic lawsuits against public participation', or SLAPPs. There has also been a growing trend towards online harassment, especially against female journalists (these brave pro-government spooks prefer to frighten women; it's safer). "They are increasingly victims of sexist insults and threats. There are cases in Serbia, Spain, in a context of total impunity," said Ricardo Gutierrez, general secretary for the European Federation of Journalists. "Our report denounces the passivity of online platforms and public authorities in the face of these threats," he said.

As yet, we do not know what the final outcome will be when – if – the pandemic comes to an end, apart from a long list of fatalities and lasting symptoms. It seems, though, that the body-politic has acquired what, in medical circles, would be called an "auto-immune disease", parts of the body turning against its other parts, placing the ailment right up there alongside similar medical complaints, such as hives, lupus, graves' disease and primary biliary cholangitis. The difference is that whereas the medical profession is very often unable to trace how a particular disease started, we know only too well in the case of COVID-19: a suddenly-appearing disease without obvious origin or explanation and a determination by corrupt governments to deny any culpability for the resulting disaster, whilst seeking ever-greater power for themselves. That is not a cure; it is a way of prolonging harmful symptoms for personal gain. Hypocrites would have been horrified.

T. Kingsley Brooks

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LIFE IS NOT A GAME

Virtual reality is not life

Today, video gaming has become an increasingly popular activity. In October 1958, American physicist William Higinbotham created what is thought to be the first video game. From that simple computer tennis game to today's elaborate and extremely realistic video games, this industry has developed dramatically; it is now estimated at more than 250 billion Euros, according to a new report by Accenture, and an annual growth rate of 2.29% is predicted for the next five years.



William Higinbotham

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, people have stayed at home for longer periods and that is one of the reasons why online gaming rapidly became one of the most popular activities during lockdown in the last two years. Besides the domestic use of video games and such similar entertainment, there is also the corporate activity in video gaming, e-sports, cloud gaming and online competitions that have all contributed to this industry's growth and success. Today, there are international e-sports competitions with fabulous prizes and huge audiences.

Proof of the increasing popularity of gaming throughout the world is also the fact that large cable and streaming networks, as well as giant tech companies such as Netflix or Amazon, have all made their expansion into the gaming market a priority by acquiring video gaming companies.

Video games take their users to an imaginary world, excite their senses and capture their imagination. Elements that have contributed to their immense success are, of course, the modern technologies of virtual reality that

sometimes make it hard to distinguish real life from virtual reality. With this success came the debates related to the consequences of this activity.

Some video games are designed to be educational. They teach and can even improve certain skills in children and teenagers, who are their principal users. Video games can change the brain regions responsible for attention and visuospatial skills and make them more efficient, as well as reducing the risk of developing dementia.



Tennis For Two on a DuMont Lab Oscilloscope Type in 1958

Over the past years, several pilot studies have shown some encouraging results concerning computer games especially designed to help children diagnosed with autism. These studies have demonstrated that some games improved certain abilities such as balance, attention, concentration and focus in these patients.

Furthermore, a new study recently conducted at Hospital de la Paz in Madrid, Spain, found that video games can help children overcome pain caused by cancer treatments and also help with their recovery.



© Sergey Galvontkin/Wikimedia

During this study, doctors analysed pain levels in children going through chemotherapy and discovered that their suffering could be relieved with the help of some specific video games.

Ignacio Gonzales, Chief Medical Officer at MDoloris Medical Systems added : *"They found out that due to these video games, they were able to reduce by half the amount of opioids that these children receive, as well as the total amount of opioid that they receive per day. [sic] So, it was a great success."* (Source: Euronews.com)



Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2



© Dana-Farber

The Jimmy Fund supports Boston's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute raising funds for adult and pediatric cancer care and research to improve the chances of survival for patients around the world

Many online games have helped develop children's ability to solve problems, to think strategically and to prepare moves in surprising situations. In other words, they increase children's cognitive skills. Also, in a world where the internet plays a major role and online activities are increasingly important, knowing how to navigate and use these modern devices at an early age could surely be an advantage for later on in life, even for a future profession. After all, the world is full of examples of young entrepreneurs becoming billionaires or launching highly successful IT-related start-ups. The last two years, during which people who were forced to distance

themselves physically needed to be connected, have definitively proved that the internet is essential in the 21st century. It has to be admitted that playing video games with friends that couldn't be met in person offered a small comfort to children during the Covid pandemic.

However, researchers have also shown that video games and excessive screen time can affect the quality of sleep, cause violent behaviour in some cases and bring about changes in the social habits of people abusing the use of video games. The implication is that these could be causing a 'media addiction' and a change in one's behaviour, which may signal some

even more serious problems. Thus, the urgent need to step in and take decisive measures and to limit the damage.

Today, there are useful and widely used applications that limit exposure and time spent in front of the computer screen, filter the choices or block access to specific content in terms of age, parental guidance and attitudes towards various subjects.

Evidently, there are two sides to the problem : the time spent in front of a screen and too much exposure to violent video games.

A study run by Ohio State University demonstrated that after exposing children to a violent game (with the use of guns and swords) for only twenty minutes, these children manifested an increased willingness to touch and even use real weapons. This is quite alarming, especially in the USA, where access to fire arms is fairly easy and where tragic shootings involving teenagers and even school children are regular occurrences.

It is precisely the high quality and realistic graphic depiction of reality in these modern games which worries researchers. They believe that at some point, the accurately replicated virtual reality on the screen may be mistaken for the real world.

China has recently imposed a new policy regarding the use of video



© almostmag.co

games for people under eighteen years of age. From now on, young people will be allowed to play video games for no longer than three hours per week; one hour in the evening, from 8pm to 9pm, and only on Fridays, weekends and public national holidays. This rule took effect in early September 2021, but its benefits or consequences will probably be analysed later, over the next few years. The new rule places the responsibility of enforcing this policy on the video gaming industry. They must see that the time limits are not exceeded, while individual gamers will not be sanctioned for non-compliance to these new rules imposed by China's National Press & Publication Administration (NPPA), the agency responsible for regulating video gaming activity in the country. On the world's largest computer gaming market, where the Chinese government has studied and long worried about the effects of video games on young generations, such drastic measures have not surprised many. For years, specialists have stressed that excessive screen time and playing video games may cause eyesight problems, as well as physical and mental issues. State



© smartparents.sg

media reports have shown that 63% of Chinese minors play online games regularly, with about 13% playing more than two hours daily.

In fact, some steps towards reducing access to video gaming for minors were taken in China as early as 2017, with the initiative of Tencent Holdings to limit access for young users to its own highly popular video game 'Honor of Kings'.

In 2019, new governmental regulations came into place, limiting playing time to one hour and a

half per day, with a maximum of three hours on weekends. They also limited the amount of money that minors could spend on buying virtual items used while playing.

But in a country such as China, the 2021 ruling is far more restrictive since it affects about 268 million people (China's under-18 population). This raised controversy and opposition to its implementation. Some argued that one is allowed to work from the age of sixteen but limited to playing video games with no restrictions until one is eighteen. Others questioned the real motives behind the new regulations and denounced the necessity to register with real names to log in to play. Despite that, many parents welcomed the state initiative, by emphasising that henceforth, their children's time could be better spent by exercising outdoors or studying more.

However, some media experts claim that this new policy is in fact, an attempt by the Chinese government to gain even more control on people's personal lives and activities. They argue that the state is actually trying to diminish the growing influence of technology in the lives of ordinary Chinese people, far from government influence and strict control. On the other hand, Chinese officials say that video gaming is highly addictive and call computer games 'electronic drugs'.

Indeed, if we take a global look, screen time addiction seems to be a universal problem today. A quick search on the internet allows one to find answers to questions such as : 'how do you digitally detox a

GAMING ADDICTION

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PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS:

- Nausea
- Physical illness (fever, cold, allergies)
- Restlessness
- Headache

PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Feeling of emptiness
- Irritable
- Insomnia

BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS:

- A disruption in sleep patterns
- Fantasies & dreams about the game
- Preoccupied thoughts
- Playing games to feel better
- The urge to go back and take control of the game

SOCIAL EFFECTS:

- Anger & verbal abuse
- Lack of motivation
- Difficulty in performing tasks
- Social Isolation
- Lack of interest in work /school

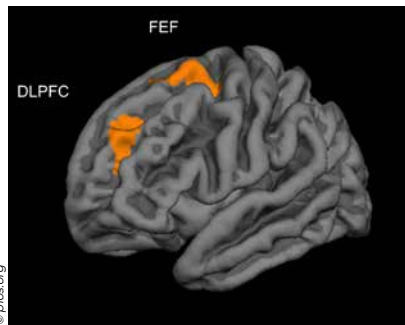
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child?’ or ‘how can I help my child with electronic addiction?’ Some answers are : ‘encourage sports and physical activity’, ‘talk to your child about what they enjoy most about video gaming and why they want to game regularly’. The internet is full of tips and advice on how to address this 21st century issue that is real and of concern. There is also a plan called ‘take 90 days off gaming’ available online which has inevitably led to a whole industry on how to efficiently detox after one has abused screen time. On Gamequitters.com, one can read that after quitting playing computer games, ‘for the first few days, you tend to have no energy and your mood sucks. You may get irritated easily, experience headaches and even dream about video games. The brain includes several distinct dopamine systems, one of which plays a major role in reward-motivated behaviour.’

It is scientifically proven that gaming causes rapid dopamine release in gamers’ nervous systems. This explains the fact that while playing video games, the type of nervous stimulation one receives is so much different than what one might experience while doing other types of activities.

But research has also shown that rapid dopamine release can be dangerous. One cannot become addicted to dopamine but it plays a major role in motivating people to seek pleasurable experiences all the time, capable to constantly keep their dopamine level high. Dopamine helps the brain sustain attention and focus and is self-reinforcing.



Significant clusters of the cortical thickness correlation with hours of video gaming per week in the left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC) and left frontal eye fields (FEF) (multiple comparison corrected)

Basically, the more interest one shows, the more dopamine is released into the system.

Dopamine also increases tolerance over time, so that one will need more and more in order to feel the same effects. The more dopamine the brain releases, the more pleasure one will feel and the greater the need for longer playing times. Every game’s ability to keep one close to the screen for yet another round is already documented and it ensures the game’s success and high revenues for its creators.

Do these symptoms sound vaguely familiar, or alarming ? It has to be admitted that they seem terribly similar to drug addiction.

The American Academy of Paediatrics suggests that time allowed for video gaming should be no longer than sixty minutes per day on weekdays and no more than two hours on weekends. Healthy alternatives to increasing dopamine levels include activities such as

listening to music, meditating , playing outdoor sports and adequate sleep.

A few weeks ago, an event made the news headlines all over the world. A Spanish teenager who had been playing a popular video game (with 350 million registered accounts worldwide) for more than 20 hours per day, went through a hospitalised digital detox. ‘Doctors noted how the 15 year old boy stopped sleeping properly and even attending to basic personal hygiene, so he could play the game. He was absent from school and paid little attention to his studies’ (**Source: TheIndependent.co.uk**). The website also cited Dr. Matias Real-Lopez who conducted the study and detox operations : “*The addiction became similar to addiction to heroin, cocaine and other chemical substances*”. The teenager gradually isolated himself socially and his school performance rapidly deteriorated. These alarming signs prompted the parents to seek help.

This was the first official case of ‘video games addiction’ treated in a hospital, where the teenager received treatment for two months. His playing times have been limited and he was encouraged and helped to set new healthier daily routines. This event occurred in 2019 but the study was initially published in 2021 in a psychiatric journal.

The general opinion is that video games are not dangerous in themselves, but that there is a high risk of addiction when they are played for excessively long periods. Dr. Real-Lopez’s advice for parents is to establish “*clear and well defined limits*” for the use and access to screen time.

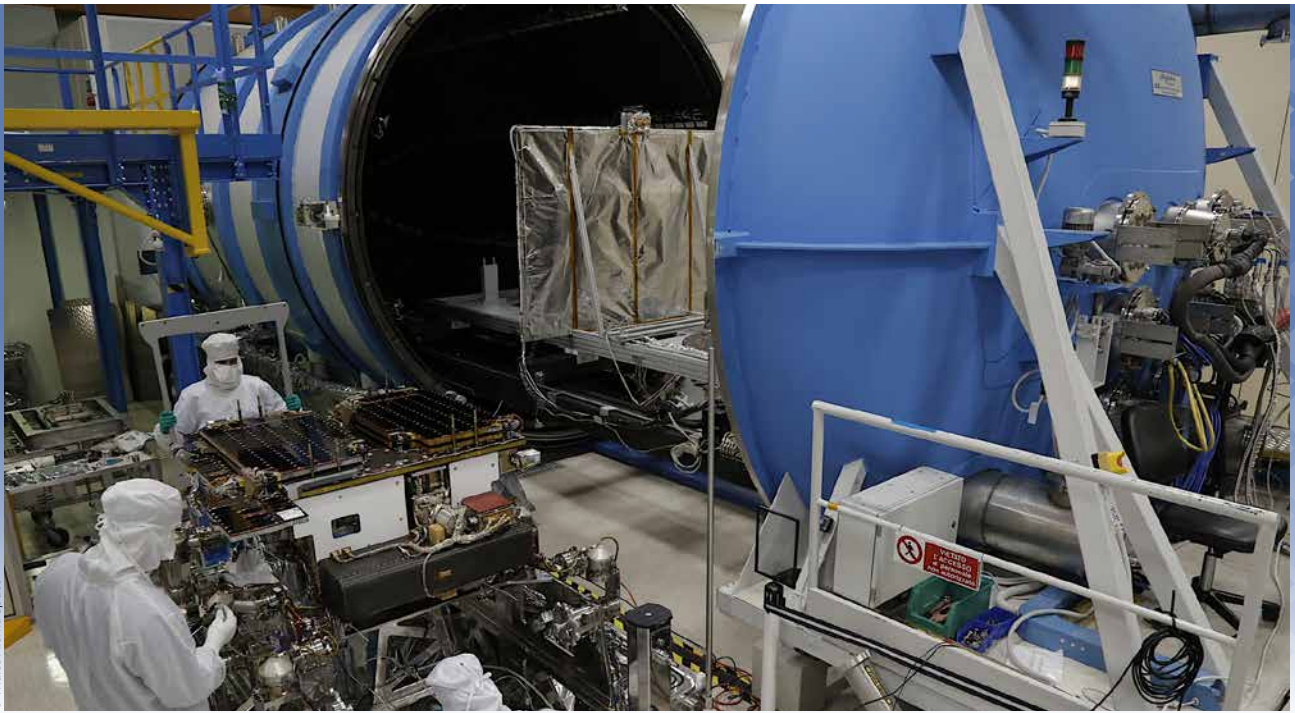
Beyond all the discussions, the controversies and financial interests related to video gaming, there is one clear conclusion. No matter how good, useful or harmful some video games may be, users and especially children should not substitute them to real life and to true human interaction. They must not misuse them and must not mistake the world of video gaming for reality.

Life is not a game, live it responsibly!



Children playing video games inside a video game truck

Alexandra Paucescu



© Thales Alenia Space

PREPARING ROSALIND FRANKLIN TO DISCOVER MARTIAN LIFE

The ExoMars 2022 mission is designed to find traces of past or present life under the Martian soil. Leading this search is the Rosalind Franklin rover, which features the Analytical Laboratory Drawer. The ALD is a sophisticated micro-laboratory capable of processing on-site the samples collected by a drill that penetrates the Martian soil down to a depth of two meters. It can detect organic contaminants which could be considered “living matter”.

To safeguard this quest for traces of “Life on Mars”, the rover has to avoid any external contamination, which means that the rover lab is within an ultraclean zone, free of particles or spores originating in the integration process on Earth.

The entire rover and especially the ALD were of course assembled in an ultraclean environment under strict planetary protection rules. But to make sure that the Rosalind Franklin rover, built by Airbus Defence and Space in UK, was perfectly clean, it was first checked out by Thales Alenia Space in Turin and is now inside the clean

rooms of the company site in Rome for the so-called “bake-out” tests.

The rover is currently positioned inside a vacuum chamber and subjected to high heat, up to the maximum temperature it can stand. This type of test ensures that even the smallest and most hidden contaminants will evaporate away.

Throughout the entire test process, the rover’s ultraclean zone will be maintained at a pressure higher than the external environment. Contamination will be measured using quartz micro-balances, capable of detecting contamination down to the nanogram level.

Any potential residual contamination will be deposited on the balances (kept at a temperature of minus 40°). The test will take a month, when contamination emissions will reach a plateau.

In the meanwhile, the rover’s “Earth Twin” (ground test model) has been undergoing tests in the Rover Operational Center at Altec in Turin.

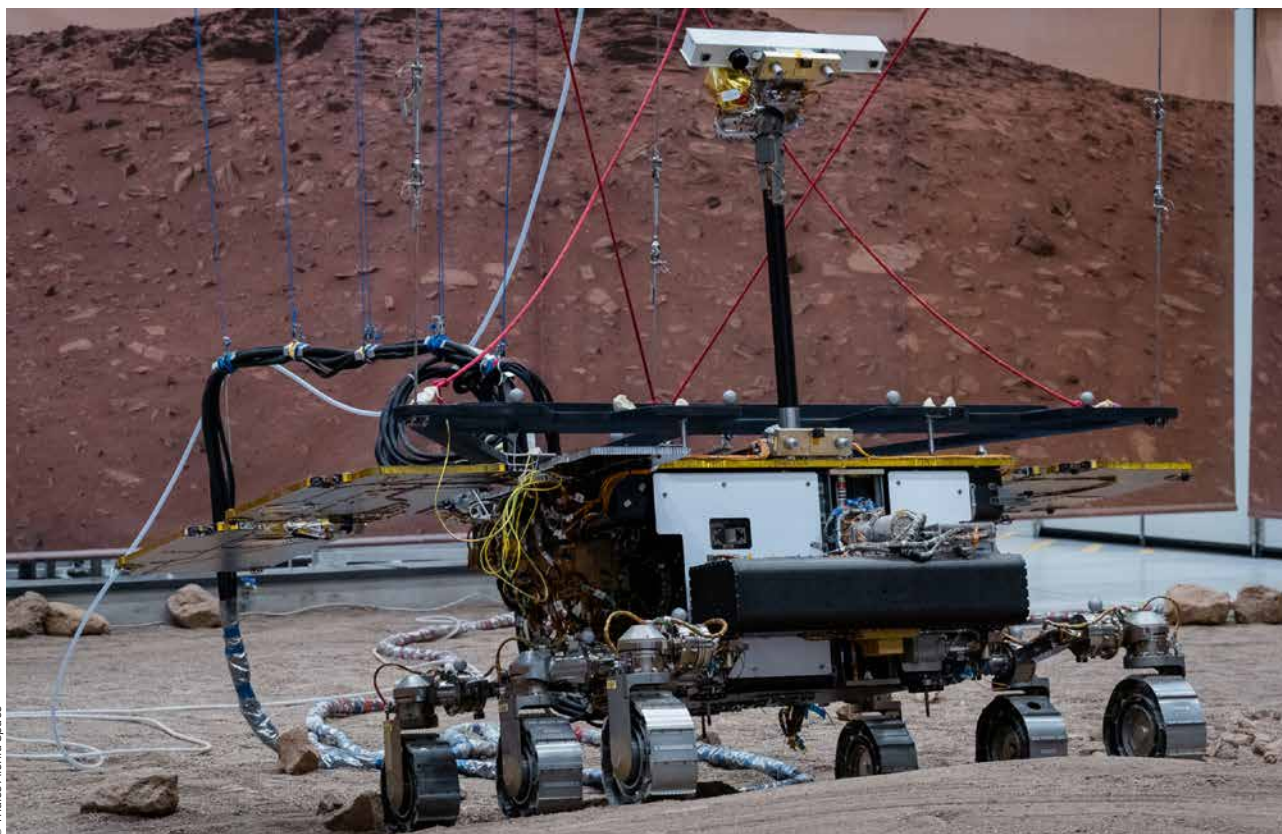
Recent tests to drill and collect a sample at a depth of 1.7 meters and store it in the Analytical Laboratory Drawer for further analysis were successful.

Thales Alenia Space’s Turin facility has completed maintenance and calibration operations on the landing platform’s scientific instruments, inside an ultraclean room. The complex process of checking all spacecraft functions continues, managed by an updated version of the software that is continuously adapted to the 2022 mission requirements.

MISSION BACKGROUND

ExoMars 2022 is a European Space Agency program in conjunction with the Russian space agency Roscosmos, and with contributions from NASA.

Thales Alenia Space is in charge of the design, development and verification of the entire system, the development of the Carrier Module navigation and guidance system and EDL/GNC development. It’s also in charge of the Rover system, including the Analytical



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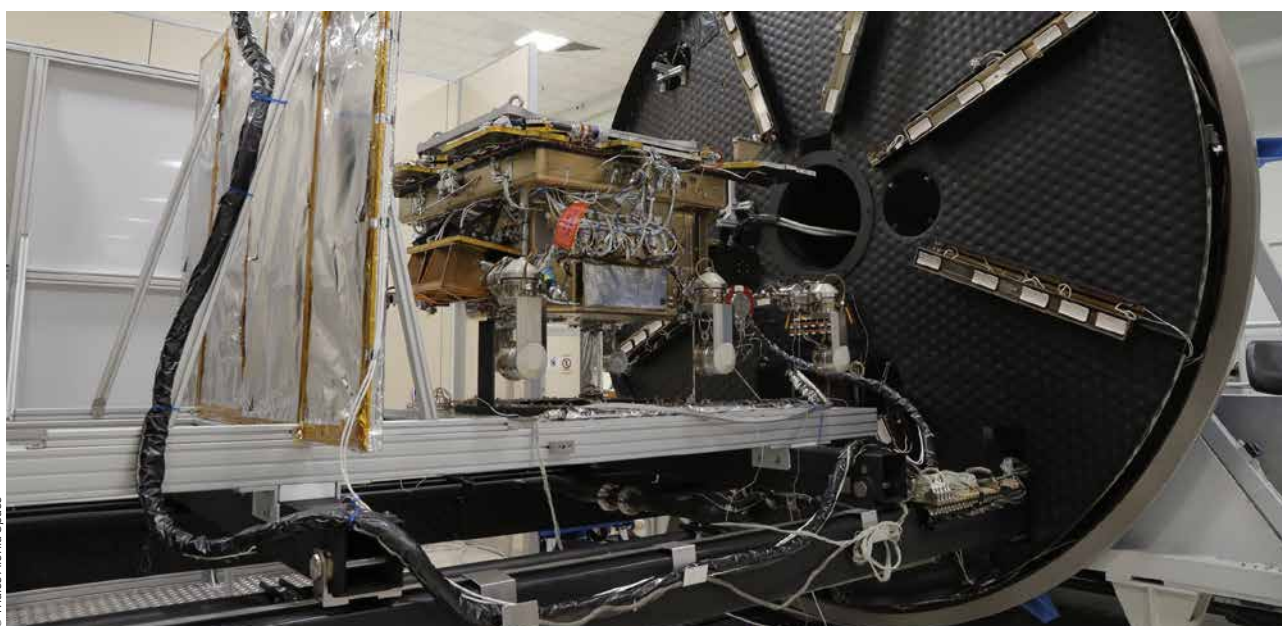
The ExoMars twin rover exploring a Mars-like terrain

Laboratory Drawer (ALD), as well as supplying basic parts of the Kazachok descent module, including the radar altimeter. Thales Alenia Space in Italy has formed a technical partnership with Lavochkin of Russia for the development of the descent module. OHB is in charge of developing the carrier module (CM), as well as supplying some ALD subsystems (SPDS mechanisms, structure and harness). The rover itself is provided by Airbus Defence and Space in

the UK. Leonardo is developing the ExoMars drill, plus the drill and ALD mechanisms control unit and software. Altec (Aerospace Logistics Technology Engineering), a joint company between Thales Alenia Space in Italy (63.75%) and the Italian space agency ASI (36.25%), is responsible for the design, development and maintenance of the Rover Operation Control Center (ROCC) and for controlling the rover on the Martian surface

The Thales Alenia Space-built Trace Gas Orbiter (TGO), from the first ExoMars mission, is already in orbit around Mars. In addition to studying trace gases in the Martian atmosphere, whether of biological or geological origin, it will also act as a data relay for communications from the ExoMars 2022 rover and surface science platform, as well as from rovers deployed by partner agencies.

Source: <https://www.thalesgroup.com/en>



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UNDERSTANDING THE INCREASE IN SUPPLY CHAIN SECURITY ATTACKS

The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity mapping on emerging supply chain attacks finds 66% of attacks focus on the supplier's code
 Witold Waszczykowski, MEP

Supply chain attacks have been a concern for cybersecurity experts for many years because the chain reaction triggered by one attack on a single supplier can compromise a network of providers. Malware is the attack technique that attackers resort to in 62% of attacks.

According to the new ENISA report - Threat Landscape for Supply Chain Attacks, which analysed 24 recent attacks, strong security protection is no longer enough for organisations when attackers have already shifted their attention to suppliers.

This is evidenced by the increasing impact of these attacks such as downtime of systems, monetary loss and reputational damage.

Supply chain attacks are now expected to multiply by 4 in 2021 compared to last year. Such new trend stresses the need for policymakers and the cybersecurity community to act now. This is why novel protective measures to prevent and respond to potential supply chain attacks in the future while mitigating their impact need to be introduced urgently.

Juhan Lepassaar, EU Agency for Cybersecurity Executive Director said: *“Due to the cascading effect of supply chain attacks, threat actors can cause widespread damage affecting businesses and their customers all at once. With good practices and coordinated actions at EU level, Member States will be able to reach a similar level of capabilities raising the common level of cybersecurity in the EU.”*



© ENISA

Juhan Lepassaar

WHAT IS A SUPPLY CHAIN?

A supply chain is the combination of the ecosystem of resources needed to design, manufacture and distribute a product. In cybersecurity, a supply chain includes hardware and software, cloud or local storage and distribution mechanisms.

WHY IS A GOOD LEVEL OF CYBERSECURITY NOT GOOD ENOUGH?

Composed of an attack on one or more suppliers with a later attack on the final target, namely the customer, supply chain attacks may take months to succeed. In many instances, such an attack may even go undetected for a long time. Similarly, to Advanced Persistence Threat (APT) attacks, supply chain attacks are usually targeted, quite complex and costly with attackers probably planning them well in advance. All such aspects reveal the degree of sophistication of the adversaries and the persistence in seeking to succeed.

The report reveals that an organisation could be vulnerable to a supply chain attack even when its own defences are quite good. The attackers explore new potential highways to infiltrate organisations by targeting their suppliers. Moreover, with the almost limitless potential of the impact of supply chain attacks on numerous customers, these types of attacks are becoming increasingly common.

In order to compromise the targeted customers, attackers focused on the suppliers' code in about 66% of the reported incidents. This shows that organisations should focus their efforts on validating third-party code and software before using them to ensure these were not tampered with or manipulated.

For about 58% of the supply chain incidents analysed, the customer assets targeted were predominantly customer data, including Personally Identifiable Information (PII) data and intellectual property.

For 66% of the supply chain attacks analysed, suppliers did not know, or failed to report on how they were compromised. However, less than 9% of the customers compromised through supply chain attacks did not know how the attacks occurred. This highlights the gap in terms of maturity in cybersecurity incident reporting between suppliers and end-users.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS, IN A NUTSHELL:

Apply good practices and engage in coordinated actions at EU level.

The impact of attacks on suppliers may have far reaching consequences because of the increased interdependencies and complexities of the techniques used. Beyond the damages on affected organisations and third parties, there is a deeper cause for concern when classified information is exfiltrated and national security is at stake or when consequences of a geopolitical nature could emerge as a result.

In this complex environment for supply chains, establishing good practices and getting involved in coordinated actions at EU level are both important to support all Member States in developing

similar capabilities – to reach a common level of security.

The report issues an extensive number of recommendations for customers to manage the supply chain cybersecurity risk and to manage the relationship with the suppliers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CUSTOMERS INCLUDE:

- identifying and documenting suppliers and service providers;
- defining risk criteria for different types of suppliers and services such as supplier & customer dependencies, critical software dependencies, single points of failure;
- monitoring of supply chain risks and threats;
- managing suppliers over the whole lifecycle of a product or service, including procedures to handle end-of-life products or components;
- classifying of assets and information shared with or accessible to suppliers, and defining relevant procedures for accessing and handling them.

The report also suggests possible actions to ensure that the development of products and services complies with security practices. Suppliers are advised to implement good practices for vulnerability and patch management for instance.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPLIERS INCLUDE:

- ensuring that the infrastructure used to design, develop, manufacture, and deliver products, components and services follows cybersecurity practices;
- implementing a product development, maintenance and support process that is consistent with commonly accepted product development processes;
- monitoring of security vulnerabilities reported by internal and external sources that includes used third-party components;

- maintaining an inventory of assets that includes patch-relevant information.

BACKGROUND

The cyber threat landscape is constantly evolving. Both policy makers and practitioners need to have access to up-to-date and accurate information on the current threat landscape, supported by threat intelligence. To respond to this need, the ENISA Threat Landscape has been published on an annual basis since 2012. These reports are based on publicly available data and provides an independent view on observed threats, threat agents, threat trends and attack vectors.

ENISA set up an Ad-Hoc Working Group on Cyber Threat Landscapes in order to interact with a broad range of stakeholders and to receive advice in designing, updating and reviewing the methodology needed to draw cyber threat landscapes, including the annual ENISA Threat Landscape. The Agency provides threat analysis on a range of emerging technologies and challenges including recent threat landscapes on Artificial Intelligence and 5G.

On the issue of supply chain attacks, ENISA released the Supply Chain Integrity Report in 2012 (and updated in 2015) which identifies the nature of these threats and examines the possible strategies to counter them.



ABOUT ENISA

The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, ENISA, is the Union's agency dedicated to achieving a high common level of cybersecurity across Europe. Established in 2004 and strengthened by the EU

Cybersecurity Act, the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity contributes to EU cyber policy, enhances the trustworthiness of ICT products, services and processes with cybersecurity certification schemes, cooperates with Member States and EU bodies, and helps Europe prepare for the cyber challenges of tomorrow.

Through knowledge sharing, capacity building and awareness raising, the Agency works together with its key stakeholders to strengthen trust in the connected economy, to boost resilience of the Union's infrastructure, and, ultimately, to keep Europe's society and citizens digitally secure.



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Ephrussi de Rothschild Villa and Gardens

VILLA ET JARDINS EPHRUSSI DE ROTHSCHILD SAINT-JEAN-CAP-FERRAT, FRANCE

Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, also called **Villa Île-de-France**, is a French seaside villa located at Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat on the French Riviera.

The villa was designed by the French architect Aaron Messiah, and constructed between 1905 and 1912 by Baroness Béatrice de Rothschild (1864–1934).

A member of the Rothschild banking family and the wife of the banker Baron Maurice de Ephrussi, Béatrice de Rothschild built her rose-colored villa on a promontory on the isthmus of Cap Ferrat, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. The Baroness filled the mansion with antique furniture, paintings by Old Master, sculptures, *objets d'art*, and assembled an extensive collection

of rare porcelain.

The gardens are classified by the French Ministry of Culture as one of the Notable Gardens of France.

On her death in 1934, the Baroness donated the property and its collections to the Académie des Beaux Arts division of the Institut de France and it is now open to the public.

The villa is surrounded by nine gardens, each on a different theme: Florentine, Spanish, « à la française », exotic, a stone garden, a Japanese garden, a rose garden, Provençal and a garden de Sèvres. They were created between 1905 and 1912 under the direction of landscape architect Achille Duchêne.

The garden was conceived in the form of a ship, to be viewed from the loggia of the house, which was like the bridge of a vessel, with the sea visible on all sides. It was inspired by a voyage she made on the liner *Île de France*, and the villa was given that name. The thirty gardeners who maintained the garden were dressed as sailors, with berets with red pom-poms.

The Garden à la française is the largest garden and occupies the area behind

the villa. Next to the villa there is a terrace with a formal French garden and topiaries. Beyond the terrace is a park with palm trees and a long basin, ornamented with fountains, statues, and basins with water lilies and other aquatic plants. On the far end of the

park is a hill covered with cypress trees, surrounding a replica garden of the Temple of Love at the Petit Trianon palace. The slope below the temple has a cascade of water in the form of a stairway, which feeds into the large basin.

A stairway from the French garden descends to the circle of gardens on the lower level. The Spanish garden features a shaded courtyard and fountain, with aromatic plants, Catalan amphorae, and a Gallo-Roman bench. The Florentine garden, facing the harbour of Villefranche-sur-Mer, has a grand stairway, an artificial grotto, and a marble statue of an ephēbe. Beyond the Florentine garden is the lapidary, or stone garden, with an assortment of gargoyles, columns, and other architectural elements from ancient and medieval buildings. The Japanese garden has a wooden pavilion, a bridge, and lanterns. The exotic garden features giant cactus and other rare plants. A rose garden with a statue surrounded by columns adjoins it, where pink, the favourite colour of the owner, is predominant. On the east side of the villa is a garden of native plants of Provence and a garden with decorations of Sèvres porcelain.

The villa was registered as a historical monument in 1996.

THE VILLA : PAST AND PRESENT

1864

Béatrice de Rothschild is born

Béatrice was the daughter of the baron Alphonse de Rothschild, a banker and renowned art collector. At the age of 19, she married Maurice Ephrussi, a Parisian banker of Russian origin, 15 years her senior, and a friend of her parents. The marriage quickly turned sour for Béatrice. She contracted a serious illness from Maurice, which prevented her from having children. Maurice was a gambler and in 1904, his debts totalled over 12 million gold francs, the equivalent of 30 million euros today.

1904

Maurice and Béatrice divorce

Worried about the future, the Rothschild family decided to bring

Maurice to court in order to file for a divorce. They won the case and in June 1904, after 21 years of marriage, the divorce of Béatrice de Rothschild and Maurice Ephrussi was officially pronounced. Béatrice then turned her attention to one of her great passions: collecting art. Béatrice had inherited her keen eye and her taste for beautiful objects from her family, renowned for the remarkable collections built up by several of her relatives over the years. Her motto was '*Ars Patriae Decus*': '*Art is the honour of the fatherland*'. She acquired many items a Tiepolo ceiling, eighteenth-century furniture, a games table that had once belonged to Marie Antoinette, and a rug commissioned by Louis XIV to furnish the future villa.

1905

Beatrice discovers Cap Ferrat

Béatrice's father died in 1905 and the Baroness inherited his immense fortune. That same year, she decided to construct her dream home in Cap Ferrat. When she first discovered this plot of land, she was immediately seduced by the beauty of the surroundings. However at the time, the site was rather inaccessible it was little more than a barren rocky area traversed by a mule track. When she learned of the sale of the terrain and that the Belgian King, Léopold II, was also interested in it, she purchased it without hesitation.

1905

Work begins on the gardens

Work on the gardens began immediately and took seven years to complete. The Baroness called upon the talents of several renowned personalities such as Harold Peto and Achille Duchêne, highly prized landscape architects in Europe and the United States at the time. The site chosen for the Villa was not particularly conducive to the creation of a garden. Indeed, creating a park on a rocky promontory covered with trees and exposed to strong winds was quite a tour de force. The Baroness had the ground dynamited and large quantities of earth were brought in to level the surface. Hundreds of Italian workers were hired for these large-scale levelling works.

1907

Work begins on the Villa

Béatrice Ephrussi was especially fastidious when it came to the choice of an architect. She refused projects submitted by a dozen or so leading architects, considering them as 'idiotic'. The projects proposed by Claude Girault, architect of the Petit Palais and Henri-Paul Nénot, recipient of the Grand Prix de Rome and designer of the new Sorbonne, were also rejected. Architect Jacques-Marcel Auburtin was eventually entrusted with the design of the Villa, having scrupulously met all of Béatrice Ephrussi's requirements. He was assisted by Aaron Messiah, an architect from Nice who would go on to build several villas for the aristocracy.

1912

Landscaping the gardens

When the Baroness moved into the Villa, four hectares of the gardens were still to be landscaped. The Baroness had given priority to those areas of the grounds visible from the house, i.e. the French formal garden.

She spared no expense or effort when it came to landscaping the grounds of the Villa, and even created a veritable mobile and living decor in her endeavour to design the French formal garden. It was not uncommon to see her employees hidden in pyramids of green cardboard, representing cypress trees, or manoeuvring long strips of silver, grey and green fabric in an attempt to determine the exact location of the ponds, driveways and flower beds...

1912

The Baroness moves into the Villa

Béatrice made the Villa her winter residence and came here regularly for a period of ten or so years, dividing her time between Paris, Monaco and Deauville.

The Baroness Ephrussi de Rothschild made her Villa a true haven for art collectors with porcelain, furniture and paintings by the Great Masters. The Villa was decorated in the Rothschild style, i.e., with the best from each era, resulting in a somewhat eclectic mix!

The Baroness furnished her Villa directly at the Gare de Beaulieu. A train would arrive from Paris, loaded with furniture and works of art. The Baroness would select the artworks for her Villa on the platform of the train station! Those works not selected for the Villa Ephrussi would furnish her villa in Monaco.

1933

Béatrice bequeaths her collection to the Académie des Beaux-Arts

A year before her death, Béatrice bequeathed her Villa and the entirety of its collections to the Académie des Beaux-Arts. The Académie also received the 7 hectares of land and some 5,000 works of art.

1934

Béatrice Ephrussi de Rothschild passes away

Suffering from tuberculosis, Béatrice retired to Davos in Switzerland where she passed away. One of her relatives would describe Béatrice on her deathbed in the following words: *'she was still beautiful, with the snowy halo of her hair surrounding the deathly pallor of her face'*.

That same year, the landscape architect Louis Marchand was entrusted with designing the themed gardens of the estate: a Spanish, Florentine, Japanese, and Mexican garden. Such variety would surely have pleased the first occupant of the premises. He also had water put in the fountains and renovated the French formal gardens.

1945

Following the Second World War

During the war, Cap Ferrat was deserted by its inhabitants and the area was mined. The Villa remained unattended and the gardens abandoned for two years. When Louis Marchand returned to the Villa after the war, he quickly began work on the badly neglected gardens, soon restoring them to their prewar splendour. The building was also renovated, and a new colour scheme chosen for the facades: once ochre yellow, the Villa was painted in reddish-pink hues, providing it with a Venetian air.

1985

A harsh winter

This year was marked by a particularly harsh winter. As the Villa's lavish

gardens are more exposed to the cold wind than other gardens on the cape, the estate lost many of its tall, beautiful trees and almost all of the Mexican garden.

The Marnier Lapostolle family, who lived in the neighbouring villa and were friends of the former head gardener and the owners of a remarkable collection of cacti and rare plants, offered many of the plants from their own collection to the Villa Ephrussi in an effort to restore the devastated Mexican garden, today referred to as the 'exotic garden'.

1991

Culturespaces named delegatee

The Académie des Beaux-Arts entrusted the management of the site to Culturespaces. The latter has overseen the renovation of the Villa's interior, and the restoration of the gardens, respecting the original plan designed by Louis Marchand. Culturespaces is responsible for organizing several events at the site, including the Fête des Roses et des Plantes (Rose and Plant Festival) showcasing the Villa's splendid gardens.

THE VILLA

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except:

July and August:
from 10 a.m to 7 p.m

From November to January:

Monday to Friday
from 2 p.m to 6 p.m.
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from 10 a.m to 6 p.m.

Last admission
30 minutes before closing.

THE CULTURAL GIFT SHOP

is open during
the Villa's opening times.

THE TEA ROOM

is open only on weekends
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TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman

3 beauty and fashion essentials you need this autumn



Cable Knit Wool
Cotton Oversized
Sweater

**(Burberry spotted
on debijenkorf.nl)**

Oversized wool tote bag
with check pattern
(woolrich.com)

Suede Calfskin and knit
ankle boots
(chanel.com)

Cosy lounge socks
in a super soft
fuzzy fabric
(abercrombie.com)

A «cabincore» look

It's time to welcome one of the biggest fashion trends of the moment: the "Cabincore" aesthetic which romanticises the life of residing in a cabin.

Don't overthink it! Cabincore is an embodiment of the classic fall styles and textiles we all know (wool, flannel, tweed...) and love (cosy wool knits, flannel jackets, hiking-style boots, fuzzy socks...). It's not surprising this trend has appeared in anticipation of the cooler months.

Believe in serendipity

Take pleasure in the Ritual's brand-new limited edition, Serendipity.

A range of body care products, also designed to nourish the soul with the bliss of unexpected joy. Body scrub, body cream, foaming shower gel, shower oil... each key product in the range is a true elixir of 10 sacred oils.

Among them, you will find:

Evening primrose oil (for a more even skin tone), **Perilla oil** (helps to restore the skin), **Sandalwood oil** (skin-soothing benefits), **Moringa oil** (promotes a natural glow) or even **Tsubaki oil** (helps to improve skin elasticity).

A watch for switching to winter time



(balmainwatches.com)

Visit Balmain, whose Flamea collection features natural stone dials, a specificity that has made the brand famous since its inception.

Or fall for this quartz watch with its unusual execution of the dial made of natural Tiger Eye. For those who believe in the hidden powers of stones and crystals, this stone brings strength, power and protection. But it will undoubtedly attract the admiring glances of those around you.



(rituals.com)

TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman

These boots are made for walking

Every season has its own boot trends.

From classic knee highs to the dominance of chunky soles by way of rain boots, we've narrowed down the choice of best boots from the ready-to-wear collections.

Chunky boots

I love chunky boots. You love chunky boots. She loves chunky boots. We all love chunky boots! They are one style that has been a huge trend in recent years, and continues to be a popular look for autumn/winter 2021-2022.

How to wear them?

With an "opposites attract style", pairing them with a mannish blazer over a slip dress, or with a flower print dress. With these kinds of boots, the rule is to show them off. So, make sure you're either tucking your trousers (jeans, leather pants, leggings, sweat pants, etc.) in, or rolling up the cuffs to meet the top of the boots.

Chunky leather Chelsea boots
([Tod's, spotted on fafetch.com](#))



Leather knee-high boots
([Paris Texas spotted on mythereasa.com](#))

White boots

If you're wondering whether white boots are still in style for 2021, the answer is "yes, absolutely"!

How to wear them?

They look fresh, clean, bright and match perfectly with a blue jean or any dress or skirt.

Coloured boots

Lollipop pink, soft yellow, lilac, lime green... coloured boots embody a concentrate of femininity and glamour with a wow effect.

How to wear them?

With jeans, a midi or mini skirt/dress, it's up to you. Choose a colour that will go with the contents of your wardrobe.

Rain boots

The revival of the rain boot as fashionable footwear is one that we've embraced since the Betty rain boot by Chloé (see photo). Fashion influencers began to conquer the elements in these square-toe rain boots with a chunky block heel and lugged platform for added stability.

How to wear them?

A trench coat of course, with a short dress or jeans tucked into them. Avoid suits, and or anything that says "business" or "formal".

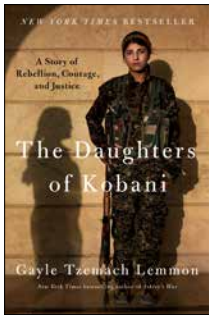


PVC rain boots
([chloe.com](#))



Leather high heel boots, available in 11 colours
([liu jo.com](#))

BOOKS



THE DAUGHTERS OF KOBANI

By Gayle Tzemach Lemmon

A STORY OF REBELLION, COURAGE, AND JUSTICE

The extraordinary story of the women who took on the Islamic State and won. “*The Daughters of Kobani* is an unforgettable and nearly mythic tale of women’s power and courage. The young women profiled in this book fought a fearsome war against brutal men in impossible circumstances and proved in the process what girls and women can accomplish when given the chance to lead.

Brilliantly researched and respectfully reported, this book is a lesson in heroism, sacrifice, and the real meaning of sisterhood. I am so grateful that this story has been told.” Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Big Magic* and *Eat, Pray, Love*. “Absolutely fascinating and brilliantly written, *The Daughters of Kobani* is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand both the nobility and the brutality of war. This is one of the most compelling stories in modern warfare.” Admiral William H. McRaven, author of *Make Your Bed*.

In 2014, northeastern Syria might have been the last place you would expect to find a revolution centered on women’s rights. But that year, an all-female militia faced off against ISIS in a little town few had ever heard of: Kobani. By then, the Islamic State had swept across vast swaths of the country, taking town after town and spreading terror as the civil war burned all around it. From that unlikely showdown in Kobani emerged a fighting force that would wage war against ISIS across northern Syria alongside the United States. In the process, these women would spread their own political vision, determined to make women’s equality a reality by fighting house by house, street by street, city by city the men who bought and sold women. Based on years of on-the-ground reporting, *The Daughters of Kobani* is the unforgettable story of the women of the Kurdish militia that improbably became part of the world’s best hope for stopping ISIS in Syria. Drawing from hundreds of hours of interviews, bestselling author Gayle Tzemach Lemmon introduces us to the women fighting on the front lines, determined to not only extinguish the terror of ISIS but also prove that women could lead in war and must enjoy equal rights come the peace. In helping to cement the territorial defeat of ISIS, whose savagery toward women astounded the world, these women played a central role in neutralizing the threat the group posed worldwide. In the process they earned the respect and significant military support of U.S. Special Operations Forces. Rigorously reported and powerfully told, *The Daughters of Kobani* shines a light on a group of women intent on not only defeating the Islamic State on the battlefield but also changing women’s lives in their corner of the Middle East and beyond.



IMPERIAL INTIMACIES

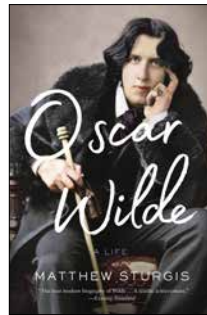
By Hazel V. Carby

A TALE OF TWO ISLANDS

A haunting and evocative history of British empire, told through one woman’s family story.

“Where are you from?” was the question hounding Hazel Carby as a girl in post-war London. One of the so-called brown babies of the Windrush generation, born to a Jamaican father and Welsh mother, Carby’s place in her home, her neighbourhood, and her country of birth was always in doubt.

Emerging from this setting, Carby untangles the threads connecting members of her family in a web woven by the British Empire across the Atlantic. We meet Carby’s working-class grandmother Beatrice, a seamstress challenged by poverty and disease. In England, she was thrilled by the cosmopolitan fantasies of empire, by cities built with slave-trade profits, and by street peddlers selling fashionable Jamaican delicacies. In Jamaica, we follow the lives of both the “white Carbys” and the “black Carbys,” including Mary Ivey, a free woman of colour, whose children are fathered by Lilly Carby, a British soldier who arrived in Jamaica in 1789 to be absorbed into the plantation aristocracy. And we discover the hidden stories of Bridget and Nancy, two women owned by Lilly who survived the Middle Passage from Africa to the Caribbean. Moving between Jamaican plantations, the hills of Devon, the port cities of Bristol, Cardiff, and Kingston, and the working-class estates of South London, Carby’s family story is at once an intimate personal history and a sweeping summation of the violent entanglement of two islands. In charting British empire’s interweaving of capital and bodies, public language and private feeling, Carby will find herself reckoning with what she can tell, what she can remember, and what she can bear to know.



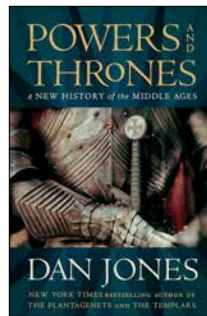
OSCAR WILDE

By Matthew Sturgis

A LIFE

Drawing on material that has come to light in the past thirty years, including newly discovered letters, documents, first draft notebooks, and the full transcript of the libel trial, Matthew Sturgis meticulously portrays the key events and influences that shaped Oscar Wilde’s life, returning the man “to his times, and to the facts,” giving us Wilde’s own experience as he experienced it.

Here, fully and richly portrayed, is Wilde’s Irish childhood; a dreamy, aloof boy; a stellar classicist at boarding school; a born entertainer with a talent for comedy and a need for an audience; his years at Oxford, a brilliant undergraduate punctuated by his reckless disregard for authority... his arrival in London, in 1878, “already noticeable everywhere”... his ten-year marriage to Constance Lloyd, the father of two boys; Constance unwittingly welcoming young men into the household who became Oscar’s lovers, and dying in exile at the age of thirty-nine... Wilde’s development as a playwright... becoming the high priest of the aesthetic movement; his successes... his celebrity... and in later years, his irresistible pull toward another double life, in flagrant defiance and disregard of England’s strict sodomy laws (“the blackmailer’s charter”); the tragic story of his fall that sent him to prison for two years at hard labor, destroying his life and shattering his soul.



POWERS AND THRONES

By Dan Jones

A NEW HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE AGES

When the once-mighty city of Rome was sacked by barbarians in 410 and lay in ruins, it signaled the end of an era—and the beginning of a thousand years of profound transformation. In a gripping narrative bursting with big names from Sts Augustine and Attila the Hun to the Prophet Muhammad and Eleanor of Aquitaine Dan Jones charges through the history of the Middle Ages. *Powers and Thrones* takes readers on a journey through an emerging Europe, the great capitals of late Antiquity, as well as the influential cities of the Islamic West, and

culminates in the first European voyages to the Americas. The medieval world was forged by the big forces that still occupy us today: climate change, pandemic disease, mass migration, and technological revolutions. This was the time when the great European nationalities were formed; when the basic Western systems of law and governance were codified; when the Christian Churches matured as both powerful institutions and the regulators of Western public morality; and when art, architecture, philosophical inquiry and scientific invention went through periods of massive, revolutionary change. The West was rebuilt on the ruins of an empire and emerged from a state of crisis and collapse to dominate the world. Every sphere of human life and activity was transformed in the thousand years covered by *Powers and Thrones*. As we face a critical turning point in our own millennium, Dan Jones shows that how we got here matters more than ever.



TAKING PARIS

By Martin Dugard

THE EPIC BATTLE FOR THE CITY OF LIGHTS

May 1940: The world is stunned as Hitler’s forces invade France with a devastating blitzkrieg aimed at Paris. Within weeks, the French government has collapsed, and the City of Lights, revered for its carefree lifestyle, intellectual freedom, and love of liberty, has fallen under Nazi control perhaps forever. As the Germans ruthlessly crush all opposition, a patriotic band of Parisians known as the Resistance secretly rise up to fight back. But these young men

and woman cannot do it alone. Over 120,000 Parisians die under German occupation. Countless more are tortured in the city’s Gestapo prisons and sent to death camps. The longer the Nazis hold the city, the greater the danger its citizens face. As the armies of America and Great Britain prepare to launch the greatest invasion in history, the spies of the Resistance risk all to ensure the Germans are defeated and Paris is once again free. The players holding the fate of Paris in their hands are some of the biggest historical figures of the era: Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, General George S. Patton, and the exiled French general Charles de Gaulle, headquartered in London’s Connaught Hotel. From the fall of Paris in 1940 to the race for Paris in 1944, this riveting, page-turning drama unfolds through their decisions for better and worse. *Taking Paris* is history told at a breathtaking pace, a sprawling yet intimate saga of heroism, desire, and personal sacrifice for all that is right.

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