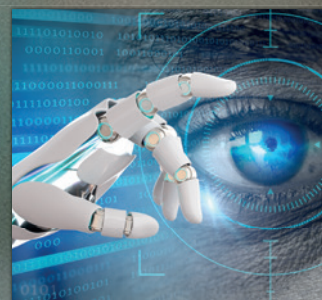


# EUROPE *Diplomatic*

magazine



**KEEPING  
A CHECK ON TECH**  
Does the EU's Digital  
Service Act protect freedom?



**GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE  
ME DEATH**  
Although liberty may  
lead to death

## JENS STOLTENBERG

*Nato's former detractor turned leader*

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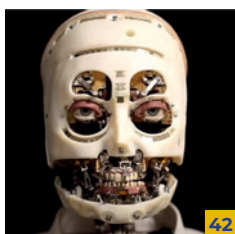


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“EUROPE DIPLOMATIC MAGAZINE” is characterized by a very open editorial line that allows it to capture all the themes that affect directly or indirectly the European political, economic, social and security issues. Whether piracy in the Gulf of Aden and its threats to the global economy, articles about political leaders, geostrategic situations or technological developments affecting our civilization, Europe Diplomatic Magazine strives to work in comparing opinions and providing an objective analysis based on extensive research. For a wide audience composed of both members of the diplomatic corps, lobbyists, international officials or academics, the magazine gives everyone the necessary and useful information about all topics that make up our daily lives. Covering sensitive issues such as nuclear, the rise of Islamism and energy dependence, the magazine opens its pages to recognized specialists who would like to express first order and exclusive information. But Europe Diplomatic Magazine is not only a source of information on recent topics. It is also addressing older facts with deep thought fur further analysis. Whether it's news, security, diplomacy, technology, energy, terrorism, European affairs, no subject is treated superficially. Europe Diplomatic Magazine is an independent media, conveying balanced ideas of openness and analysis based on almost 30 years of experience in the journalistic world.

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Nikola Hendrickx

# EDITORIAL

## A TIME TO BE RESOLUTE

The recent Russian military build-up and threatening maneuvers near the Ukrainian border are adding more instability to an already volatile situation. The negative rhetoric on Ukraine and NATO by senior Russian officials is reaching levels not seen since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine. The Russian disinformation campaign is in full swing and the battlefield for the information war is being prepared. The situation is ripe for a miscalculation that could have very grave consequences.

Is Brussels paying enough attention? What will the reaction be if Putin does invade Ukraine, as many analysts fear? Will we be able to show fortitude and resolve, or will we simply be cowed by Putin's aggressive bullying?

We are likely to see coercive measures applied to us here in Europe, with the aim of causing division in the West with regard to a potential response. This could come in the form of turning off the gas taps in the middle of winter. Much of Europe is already seeing skyrocketing gas prices. What would happen if Putin disrupts gas supplies in order to force Europe to acquiesce?

An invasion of Ukraine is all part of Putin's vision and objective of rebuilding the Soviet Empire, a topic discussed in various articles in Europe Diplomatic Magazine in recent months.

Over the last decade, Russia has reclaimed territory across at least three separate former Soviet States, including Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus. It has set up frozen conflicts in Moldova, Azerbaijan and elsewhere. Russia has invaded sovereign European states and is today continuing its efforts to expand its borders. These "conflicts" are a calculated move by Putin to regain the former glory of the Soviet Empire.

This new threat of invasion will surely create another frozen conflict just as it has done in Crimea, Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Slowly, all of Eastern Europe is being thrust into a state of continuous frozen conflict, threatening the stability of the EU. Can we stop Putin's dreams of empire? Will he forge a new Iron Curtain and force a new Cold War?

### Are negotiations illusory?

The idea that negotiation is always possible is part of common diplomatic beliefs. Certainly, in principle, negotiation is always preferable to war. However, there are many exceptions to this idea, and Vladimir Putin's Russia is a particularly dramatic one.

Since the Georgian crisis in 2008, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which began in 2014, and the unwavering support for the regime of Bashar al-Assad, followed by the direct intervention in Syria, Western countries have constantly pretended to negotiate with Russia. However, these negotiations have achieved little or nothing, and have only strengthened Russian power in its policy of aggression.

The so-called negotiations with Russia ended in a fool's bargain. In 2008, after the attack on Georgia, the negotiation resulted in the de facto annexation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, with no counterpart other than the end of hostilities; Russia had achieved its military aims.

In 2015, the so-called Minsk 2 agreements led, de facto, to freezing the Russian sphere of influence in eastern Ukraine, limiting the sovereignty of the Kiev government. The Ukrainian authorities did make it possible to reduce the intensity of the fighting and thus to spare human lives in a conflict that had already cost more than 9,000 lives.

However, in addition to the fact that the cease-fire was not entirely respected by the Russians, these agreements do not deal with Crimea, which was illegally annexed by Russia and where the new government is carrying out a policy of ethnic cleansing against the Tatar minority. Moreover, Minsk 2 does not resolve the situation in Ukraine and does not provide any guarantee of lasting security.

### Diversification of threats

The militarization of Russian diplomacy, accompanied by the systematic use of aggressive practices - including targeted assassinations as happened in Great Britain and Germany - and Moscow's desire to destabilize our democratic systems, are unavoidable realities. In fact, everything is happening as if Putin's Russia had set as its main objective to give NATO its 'raison d'être'.

In fact, faced with the multiplication and diversification of threats and challenges, from Russia to China, democratic Europe needs NATO more than ever. It is essential not to ignore the lessons of the past, in the name of a problematic present and an ideal future.

Would Soviet tanks have invaded Western Europe without the existence of NATO? It is impossible to say, just as it is impossible to say the opposite. What is certain however is that the Alliance has constituted, for most of the last seventy years, a form of reassuring life insurance for many European countries.

This has become necessary again, because of the multiplication of uncertainties and is imposed on us in the name of historical common sense and the precautionary principle.

As Putin expands Russian territory, and once his dream of a unified state with Belarus is achieved, the threat to Europe's Baltic front will become much more real. One must then ask, where will it end?

Europe cannot stand by and watch a European ally be overthrown by a tyrant. Naysayers will criticize us for making too much of Russian's bluster. For they would say that only six months ago, Russia rapidly sent forces to the border, only to pull them back.

Experts look at what is going on now and see that this build-up is different. It has the hallmarks of 2008 in Georgia and 2014 in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Only a strong European and NATO response now will prevent us from returning to this same discussion in another six months.

*Trajan Dereville*



© Nato

Virtual meeting of NATO Chiefs of Defence December 2021

## JENS STOLTENBERG

### *Nato's former detractor turned leader*

*"NATO's relationship with Ukraine is going to be decided by the 30 NATO allies and no-one else. We cannot accept that Moscow is trying to re-establish a system where great powers like Russia have their spheres of influence within which they can control what countries can or cannot do. [...] We will not compromise on the right of every nation in Europe to choose its own destiny."*

Strong words indeed, by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on 10 December 2021, when he firmly opposed any interference by Russia in relations between the Atlantic Alliance and Ukraine. He also refused to exclude a possible membership of Kiev, as demanded by Moscow.

Nothing predisposed this 62-year-old economist to become the head of the world's most powerful military alliance. And yet, Jens Stoltenberg began his career in radical anti-NATO circles, before becoming a champion of consensus. In fact, the former social-democratic Prime Minister of Norway, a country with a pacifist tradition, had never shown a particular penchant for defence and security issues.

In the 1970s, the long-haired teenager stoned the U.S. embassy in Oslo to protest the war in Vietnam. But it was under his leadership that, a decade later, the Workers' Youth League dropped its call for Norway to leave NATO.

Much later, after becoming a minister, he also protested against French nuclear tests in the Pacific by participating in an Oslo-Paris cycling relay in 1995.

Jens Stoltenberg holds a postgraduate degree in Economics from the University of Oslo. After graduating in 1987, he held a research post at the National Statistical Institute of Norway, before embarking on a career in Norwegian politics.

Born into a family steeped in politics, he became a Member of Parliament in 1991 and then Minister of Energy and Finance. In 2000, just after his 41st birthday, he became the youngest head of a Norwegian government. He held this position only briefly, but returned to it from 2005 to 2013.

Under its aegis, the Nordic kingdom participated in the war in Afghanistan and in air strikes against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's Libya.



© Wikimedia/Bjbertvedt

Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg

Norway, a country where a pacifist tradition goes hand in hand with an Atlanticist culture is, thanks to its oil wealth, one of the few members of the Alliance to increase its defence budget when the others are slashing theirs.

The ten years he spent at the head of various governments in Oslo provided him with a rich international address book and a consummate art of negotiation.

Discreet and composed, carefully weighing his words, Jens Stoltenberg contrasted his arrival at the head of the Alliance in Brussels in October 2014 with his predecessor, the Dane Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who was adept at strong words against Russia.

According to Norwegian media, it was former German Chancellor Angela Merkel who launched his candidacy for the head of NATO, which quickly garnered the support of US President Barack Obama.

## NOT A HAWK

During his long political career, Jens Stoltenberg - the first NATO Secretary General to come from a country bordering Russia - has moreover established good relations with Moscow, particularly with Vladimir Putin. This was an important asset for managing the most frosty relations between the Alliance and Moscow since the end of the Cold War, due to the Ukrainian crisis.

Since the annexation of Crimea and the offensive launched by pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine in 2014, NATO has nevertheless, under his leadership, begun a profound transformation in the face of a Russia deemed "more aggressive."



President Donald Trump & NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the White House in April 2017

*"We have seen a Russia that has invested heavily in defence for many years, acquiring modern capabilities, conventional and nuclear forces, and has shown that it wants to use force against neighbouring countries,"* he observed recently.

*"NATO has been able to respond. We are constantly adapting,"* he insisted, referring to the deployment of battalions in the Baltic States and Poland or the efforts undertaken by the Alliance to be more reactive and better equipped in case of crisis.

However, no one in Brussels considers him a "hawk", as Jens Stoltenberg, in this period of tension, tirelessly defends the need to combine a "dialogue" with Moscow, to "avoid misunderstandings", with the reinforced "dissuasion" that has been in the works for seven years.

He had to respond to another challenge, perhaps even more serious, when the Atlantic Alliance - historically dominated by the United States - was curtly called into question by former US president Donald Trump, who bluntly demanded that his European and Canadian allies increase their military budgets.

Not to mention the complicated relations with Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey since the aborted military putsch of July 2016. Turkey is considered a pillar of NATO on its southern flank, it has the Alliance's second largest army and is a regional Muslim power.

But experienced in difficult negotiations, he is a master in the art of compromise, to the point that some accuse him of shunning confrontation; notwithstanding, the Allies renewed their confidence in him until 2022.

## NO NATO MEMBERSHIP FOR UKRAINE IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE

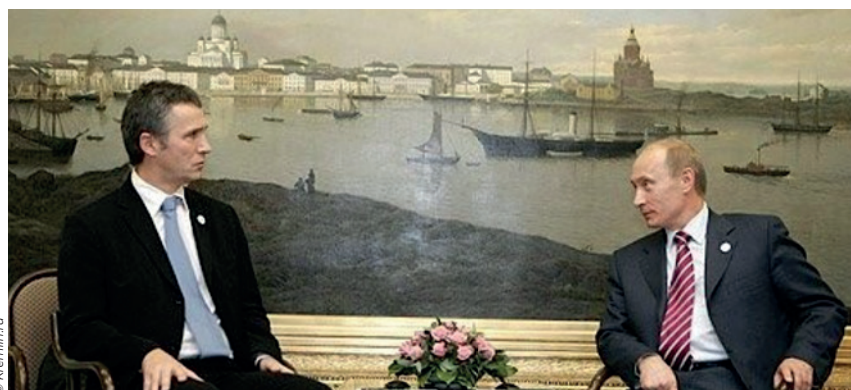
The Russian Foreign Ministry has repeatedly demanded that NATO "formally" withdraw a 2008 decision opening the door to membership for Ukraine and Georgia, which Moscow categorically opposes. During a meeting on 7 December with his American counterpart Joe Biden, Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded "legal guarantees" excluding the possibility of Ukraine joining the Alliance.



Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov meets with NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen in 2014

Accusing the West of having betrayed its promise at the end of the Cold War not to expand NATO to the east, Moscow keeps reminding them of its red lines. Russia points out that Ukraine is getting dangerously close to them by deploying Turkish-made military drones, reaffirming its ambition to join NATO and demanding more Western weapons.

However, Washington and the Europeans have repeatedly made it clear that Ukrainian membership of the Atlantic Alliance is not yet on the cards. These words have naturally annoyed Kiev greatly.



Prime Minister of Norway Jens Stoltenberg and Russian President Vladimir Putin in November 2006



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

*"President Biden told me, and said publicly, that it was not up to the Americans, Russia or the members of the Alliance, but to the Ukrainian citizens alone to make the choice of joining NATO,"* Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in an interview on national television 1+1. *"Unfortunately, he failed to add that the decision [on Kiev's membership in NATO] does not ultimately belong to Ukrainian citizens, but to all those countries I just named! We want to continue our path towards NATO, but an invisible wall is blocking us,"* he lamented.

For his part, the new German chancellor Olaf Scholz, on his first visit to Brussels expressed Germany's "deep concern" about the Russian troops massed on the border with Ukraine, calling on the EU to "maintain its firmness" against Moscow.

And again, while addressing the Bundestag, *"These days, we are watching with great concern the security situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border."*

*"We will discuss this intensively at the European Council and the Eastern Partnership Summit" of the European Union on Wednesday, 15 December,"* he added.

*"Let me, if everyone has not yet understood, repeat here what my predecessor (Angela Merkel) said: any violation of territorial integrity will have a price, a high price,"* Scholz argued, while fears of invasion by Moscow troops are growing.

Together with French President Emmanuel Macron, whom he had also met earlier that day in Paris, they showed their willingness to continue Franco-German mediation in the Ukrainian crisis, an initiative described by Olaf Scholz as a "positive basis."

The British Foreign Secretary has also warned Russia of severe consequences if it attacked Ukraine. Liz Truss made the remarks before welcoming G7 counterparts to a week-end long meeting in the English port city of Liverpool on 11 December 2021.

Truss hoped the group of the world's richest democracies could show a united front against Russia, *"If Russia were to take that action, it would be a strategic mistake and there would be severe consequences for Russia. And what we're doing this week-end is working with like-minded allies to spell this out."*

The Kremlin, of course rejects these accusations and insists on the contrary that Russia is threatened by NATO which is arming Kiev and multiplying the deployment of air and sea assets in the Black Sea region.

## NATO: THE BIRTH OF A STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was created in April 1949 by the Treaty of Washington as a military and political alliance to pool the military capabilities of Canada and the United States on the American side of the Atlantic Ocean and those of Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom on the European side.

However, the Alliance's North Atlantic identity was challenged when Greece and Turkey joined in the first enlargement in 1952. This made it clear that the logic behind the defensive alliance was not only regional but also geopolitical, as Greece and Turkey were far from the Atlantic but in strategic positions with respect to the Soviet Union (USSR). The Federal Republic of Germany joined NATO in 1955 and Spain in 1982.



Secretary of State Dean Acheson signs the Washington Treaty, April 4, 1949. President Harry Truman and Vice President Alben Barkley are standing next to him

During the Cold War, the Alliance's main function was to ensure the collective defence of its members against the threat posed by the Eastern Bloc military alliance: the USSR, and then from 1955 onwards the Warsaw Pact.

Between 1949 and 1991, when the USSR disappeared and the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, NATO played its role perfectly, despite some political crises and internal tensions linked to the sharing of responsibilities.

During the decades 1990-2010, NATO sought to adapt its missions to the new global geopolitical situation. It thus adopted in 1991, 1999 and 2010, three elements of fundamental doctrine and orientation of the defence policies of the member states of the Alliance, known as 'Strategic Concepts'.

After 1991, NATO reoriented its role towards the promotion of democracy, individual freedoms and the rule of law. This functional logic, already an integral part of the Washington Treaty (Article 2), led to the three successive enlargements of 1999-2009, but also to a relative weakening of NATO's military functions.



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg visits the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command at Camp Morehead

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the deployment of Alliance forces in Afghanistan alongside the United States led to the belief that NATO could become a security organisation with universal competence. However, some member states, such as Germany and France, opposed the idea of a global NATO and advocated a return to the organisation's original role as a defensive military alliance.



## THE WEAKENING OF THE WEST AND THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

Budget cuts and the maintenance of contingents in foreign operations (Afghanistan, Iraq, Africa), which were aimed at preventing the triumph of insurrectionary movements, have had the effect of weakening the conventional defence capabilities of a majority of Western countries.

Moreover, the focus on peacekeeping operations in the Balkans (IFOR, SFOR, KFOR) or peacebuilding operations such as in Afghanistan (ISAF) led to the adoption, in November 2010, of a Strategic Concept that reiterated the importance of collective defence while putting crisis management and cooperative security "beyond the borders" of the Alliance in the forefront. It identified ballistic missile proliferation and weapons of mass destruction, extremism and terrorism, cyber-attacks, risks to communications channels, and environmental problems as key international security issues.

However, Russia's aggression in Ukraine in the spring of 2014 is of a different nature, as it involves a major power using methods or tactics typically employed by insurgents in guerrilla warfare.

This recent development, where non-state movements such as the Lebanese Hezbollah use sophisticated technologies (drones, missiles), has led to the development of the concept of hybrid warfare which also underlines the fact that powerful states could adopt indirect tactics to counter the military and technological superiority of the United States and its allies.

Russian tactics in Crimea and eastern Ukraine fit neatly into this concept of hybrid warfare.

Moscow's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the use of asymmetric or hybrid warfare tactics by the Russian military in the eastern part of Ukraine presented a new type of challenge to the Atlantic Alliance.

Hybrid warfare combines different modes of combat including conventional weapons (tanks, missiles), irregular tactics and formations (guerrilla type) and terrorist or criminal actions aimed at creating disorder. Propaganda is also used to foster patriotic fervour and fanaticism.

During the Cold War, NATO countries invested the financial resources necessary for their armed forces to deal with the conventional and nuclear threat of the Warsaw Pact.

After 1991, the majority of these same countries, whose public finances were in deficit, made significant cuts in their military budgets while sometimes participating in "out-of-area" missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan or Iraq.

But from the mid-2000s, Vladimir Putin's Russia launched a programme to modernise its armed forces. This situation of growing military imbalance between Moscow and the European states, coupled with a lack of cohesion among the latter as well as Barack Obama's ambiguous attitude towards American involvement in European security, prompted Vladimir Putin to launch an offensive against Ukraine, beginning in March 2014.

A number of political analysts believe that without this imbalance, despite the so-called Maidan Square protest movement, followed by the overthrow of pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, Russia would probably not have taken the decision to invade its neighbour.



Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2013

## ALLIANCE COHESION IN QUESTION

Another element may have prompted President Putin to invade Crimea and later launch his troops into Ukraine. Since the mid-1990s, Western countries have intervened in various parts of the world in the name of humanitarian interventionism. But these operations have not always been perceived positively by non-Western public opinion and governments.

The intervention in Libya in March 2011, for example, was the one that probably had the most negative impact. The United States, France and Great Britain, after having indirectly obtained the consent of China and Russia at the United Nations Security Council (these two countries abstained from voting on the launch of air strikes to protect the civilian population in danger), went beyond Resolution 1973 by contributing to the overthrow of the dictatorial regime of strongman Muammar Gaddafi.

This episode marked a turning point in international relations.

Following the intervention in Libya, Moscow and Beijing felt cheated by the West, accusing it of having respected neither international law nor Security Council resolutions.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict of 2014 has had the effect of putting the cohesion and solidarity within the Atlantic Alliance to a severe test. While this internal crisis is not the first, some political analysts have voiced the concern that it could prove decisive and call into question the very existence of the Alliance.

Previous crises include the Franco-British intervention against Egypt (the



President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visiting the frontline positions of the Ukrainian army in the area of the Joint Forces Operation in Donbas

Suez crisis) in November 1956, the withdrawal of France from the integrated command in 1966-1967, the deployment of Euromissiles (Pershing and cruise missiles) in 1983, and the intervention in Afghanistan (starting in 2001), which led to institutional schizophrenia due to the opposition within the organisation between two visions of NATO's role and future: a global NATO versus a defensive North Atlantic Alliance.

## THE 1938 SUDETEN CRISIS REVISITED?

Despite the passage of 76 years, the invasion of Crimea in 2014 and its subsequent annexation by Russia, as well as the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine present a number of troubling similarities with the German Sudetenland crisis.



From left to right: Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, Mussolini, and Ciano before signing the Munich Agreement

On 29 September 1938, at the initiative of the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his French counterpart, Edouard Daladier met with Adolf Hitler in Munich for a final attempt at conciliation on the Sudetenland crisis.

In the early hours of the morning, faced with the threat of war, Daladier and Chamberlain gave in to the Führer's demands and accepted the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and the annexation of the Sudetenland by Germany.

The Sudetenland question, that part of Czechoslovakia populated by a German majority, had become explosive since Adolf Hitler came to power. Supported by the Nazis, the Sudeten Germans demanded autonomy and put forward other demands, which Prague could not satisfy. After remilitarising the Rhineland, then annexing Austria in 1938, Hitler demanded that the Sudetenland become part of the Third Reich.

Great Britain and France, although linked to the Czechs by a defense treaty, wanted to avoid an alliance with the Soviet Union and opted for a policy of appeasement towards Germany. But despite the efforts of the British Prime Minister, Berlin conceded nothing; war seemed inevitable.

At the last moment, in Munich, the democracies backed down again and handed over Czechoslovakia to the Führer in the hope of maintaining peace in the West. When they returned, Daladier and Chamberlain, were acclaimed by the waiting crowd, convinced that the Munich Agreement had saved Europe from war. In France, only the communist parliamentarians refused to ratify Hitler's diktat, while in England it was the conservative Winston Churchill who spoke out against Munich. One year later, Germany invaded Poland and started the Second World War.

## CRIMEA ANNEXATION: A CHALLENGE TO THE EUROPEAN SECURITY SYSTEM

Of course, Vladimir Putin is not Hitler, Russia is not Nazi Germany and the world does not face the same apocalyptic scenario that unfolded in 1939. But today, Russia has launched the same genuine and serious challenge to the European security system. The destruction of the state of Austria and Czechoslovakia at that time marked the beginning of the destruction of the European system in general. The occupation of Crimea and attempts to split Ukraine is a challenge for Europe. This crisis is not only about the Ukrainian issue; it is about the future of Europe as it was conceived.

In terms of comparisons, the most obvious is the presence of an expatriate majority in the occupied zone. Russians make up some 60% of Crimea's 2 million inhabitants, and many are more closely connected to their "motherland" than to Ukraine. Similarly, the 3 million Sudeten Germans felt much more loyalty to Germany than to Czechoslovakia, and the majority agreed to be incorporated into the Third Reich.

And Putin's pretext for the occupation and annexation seems to be more or less the same as Hitler's; that is, to protect the local population. Until recently, Putin had showed little interest in Crimean



Adolf Hitler with his troops in Franzensbad Sudetenland

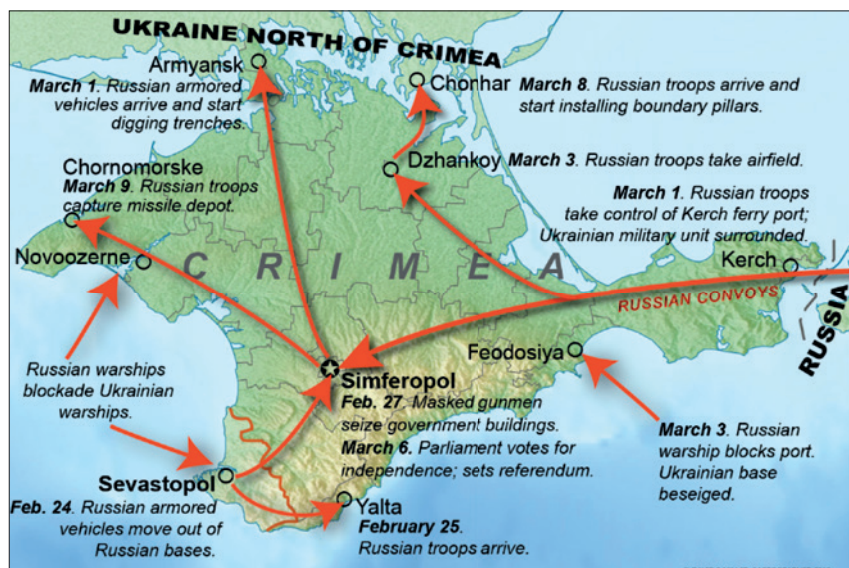
affairs, except to renew the lease of the Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol. But since the Ukrainian revolution, the alleged vulnerability of the local Russian population to "fascists" has become an iconic issue - and an excuse for Russian military intervention. Hitler used a similar pretext to demand the transfer of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia.

Many in Moscow, including Vladimir Putin himself consider that there is no real Ukrainian nation, referring to it as part of the "Russian world". For Hitler, Czechoslovakia was also an unnatural assortment of divergent nations and regions.

This represents a real danger. During the clashes in Ukraine, Putin failed to maintain the pro-Russian regime of Viktor Yanukovich in power and it was after this failure that Russia attacked Crimea. Except that the occupation of Crimea did not change the policy of the new Ukrainian authorities. Thus, Moscow is trying to destabilize the situation in eastern Ukraine and each defeat inspires the next escalation.

Hitler's aim was to destroy Czechoslovakia. Six months after separating from the Sudetenland, he abrogated the Munich Agreement by occupying all of Bohemia and Moravia and making the Czech lands a German protectorate, while installing a puppet regime in a nominally independent Slovakia.

If Putin has similar intentions, having already annexed Crimea, he will want to ensure there is a direct military presence in eastern Ukraine where Russian troops are massing on the border, and eventually go for some kind of partition in the longer term.



Russian Invasion of Crimea in 2014

## THE WEST AND NATO: THE URGENT NEED TO ACT

Western leaders seem to be presenting a united front in anticipation of the Biden-Putin talks. But will actions stand behind words?

The threat of war in Ukraine can only worry Europeans, who will be the first to be affected in the event of a conflict. Ukraine borders Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland and it is a traditional transit country for Russian gas which is an important source of supply for Western Europe.

However, there is no consensus on the likelihood of a large-scale Russian attack on Ukraine. The fact that Russia is displaying its forces, maneuvering up to 100,000 troops according to some estimates, seems to be more a prelude to a negotiation than a preparation for war, from which neither side could really win.

The Europeans have widely expressed their concern on the mobilisation of Russian forces on the Ukrainian border. They have not, however, drawn the direct conclusion that an invasion of Ukraine is imminent.

From this point of view, there seems to be a discrepancy in apprehensions between the American and European positions. It should be remembered that we were in a similar situation last June and that the Russians had finally withdrawn their troops following direct contact between the American and Russian presidents. Moreover, there is in all this an element of bluff where an error of evaluation or

an accident is always possible; this could lead the parties involved beyond what could have been foreseen at the outset.

Washington has already refined its strategy in the event of a conflict between Russia and Ukraine, expected by some observers in January or February 2022. It is hoping to achieve this by combining support for the Ukrainian army, strong economic sanctions and strengthening NATO's regional capabilities.

For their part, the Europeans have reaffirmed the need to defend Ukrainian sovereignty, but will not send more troops than NATO. On the other hand, it can be estimated that they will take their full part in a range of economic sanctions. On this occasion, the political orientation of the new German coalition will be tested, with a line of action that will be determined by Chancellor Olaf Scholz but probably tempered by a Foreign Minister from the ranks of the Greens, who are generally harder on Russia.

In passing, on the side of the signatories, it is striking to observe the presence



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Jens Stoltenberg

of the United Kingdom, which is no longer a member of the EU, but above all the exclusion of Poland, a country known for its hardline positions on Russia, and which is therefore not among the signatories, despite its detailed knowledge of the region. The Polish leaders are undoubtedly paying for the hostile attitude of the current government towards the EU.

It is important to note that none of the western parties have mentioned the possibility of a military response to an invasion of Ukraine, and though the Biden administration has made it clear that there will be a strong response, it will be limited to the area of economic sanctions.

Finally, we witnessed that with regard to the invasion of Georgia in 2008 as well as the annexation of Crimea, NATO remained silent.

However this does not prevent the Americans from helping the Ukrainian armed forces to equip themselves. But here too, much caution is called for.

## CONCRETE ACTION IS CALLED FOR

So, faced with Moscow's aggressiveness, manipulations and provocations, how should and can NATO react? The economic sanctions against Russia voted by the member states of NATO and the European Union will take time to be effective.

Moreover, while they may have an effect on the Russian economy, they probably will not impress Vladimir Putin. To compensate for the slow pace of sanctions, some military experts as well as analysts at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) are of the opinion that the Atlantic Alliance should focus on a graduated response over time by taking immediate and long-term military measures, ensuring



US Army Capt. Aaron Baumgartner, an advisor with Task Force Juvigny, talks to his Armed Forces Ukraine partner during battalion training at the Combat Training Center - Yavoriv, Ukraine in 2019

that it reviews its doctrinal, economic and political foundations by returning to a doctrine based on collective defence rather than all-out collective security, urging member states to respect minimum requirements in terms of defence investments and reiterating its commitment to ensuring the defence of all its members.

Doctrinally, the Alliance should perhaps revise its latest Strategic Concept to put the security of North America and Europe back at the heart of its collective defence posture.

Given Vladimir Putin's insistence on the importance of nuclear weapons in his arsenal, NATO should review the potential function of tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Europe. Finally, the next Strategic Concept should seek to develop a set of measures to effectively respond to Russia's methods of asymmetric and hybrid warfare (use

of the media for propaganda purposes, deployment of unidentified soldiers, and provision of sophisticated weapons to "surrogates" in target countries).

As immediate measures to send a message of firmness to Vladimir Putin, NATO could consider deploying ground troops supported by air and naval assets (Baltic and Black Seas) and organising joint maneuvers with its member states located near Russia.

Military aid, through the sending of equipment to non-member states that request it should also be considered. These measures would be the only ones capable of demonstrating the seriousness of NATO's response to Russia's attempts at destabilisation and of reassuring the most vulnerable of its member states.

Since the Alliance does not have its own material resources, only the member states can decide to provide aid to Ukraine in the event of the presence on its soil of destabilising elements of the "little green men" type, such as those who were deployed in Crimea and eastern Ukraine and who bore no sign of identification. These elements were in all likelihood members of Russian special forces as well as the Wagner Group, a so-called 'private military contractor' that sends mercenaries – with the Kremlin's blessings – to various conflict zones to defend Russian interests.

Some NATO members such as Estonia and Latvia announced at one point that they would take drastic measures and shoot these unidentified soldiers in order to put them out of action before

they have time to take over cities and territories as they did in eastern Ukraine.

As a matter of fact, the presence of Alliance troops, especially in the Baltic States, could influence the behaviour of the Russian minorities in these states in the event of an attempt at destabilisation by Russia.

Moscow's propaganda has been very active for months in Moldova and the Baltic States. Latvia would certainly be a prime target for Vladimir Putin. Russian media have already begun to hammer home the point that the Russian-speaking minority – large in this small country of two million – is being discriminated against. NATO's presence would not only send a clear signal to Moscow but also to possible local agitators and indicate that destabilisation of Latvia or any other Alliance member country would not be as easy as it has been in Crimea or eastern Ukraine.

## OPTIONS FOR A EUROPEAN RESPONSE

As far as Europe is concerned, military intervention is probably out of the question.

To intervene militarily, it would first be necessary to have a classical offensive in due form (and not a hybrid conflict), and a strategy for the defence of Europe. However, even if the Ukrainian population feels deeply European, Ukraine is neither part of NATO nor of the EU. The solidarity clauses foreseen in case of an attack cannot therefore be applied (Article 5 in the framework of NATO), even though Europeans cannot and will not be indifferent to the fate of Ukraine.

Paradoxically, one does not hear much of Russia's discourse, which mentions the purchase of Turkish-made drones by Ukraine, the growing presence of the NATO fleet in the Black Sea and the presence of American bombers a few kilometers from the Russian border, as being the reason for the maneuvers it is currently carrying out.

Nor even its suspicions of a Ukrainian offensive in the Donbas, which in its current state seems to be a largely fake threat. Yet these representations of the threat must also be taken into account, even if we do not share them.

In short, it is economic sanctions that will be at the heart of the European response.



Zapad 2021 exercises took place simultaneously on 14 fields stretching from the Baltic Sea to parts of Russia in Central Asia, from September 10 to 16, 2021. Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that Zapad 2021 was necessary in response to NATO activities near the borders of Russia and its allies.



Baltic Battalion with NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg during NATO exercise Trident Juncture.

Basically, it is quite clear that the prospect of Ukraine's integration into NATO is unacceptable to Russia. As a reminder, the invasion of Georgia took place against the backdrop of the Georgian demand for NATO integration, and we only know too well what the result was. In a recent interview with France Télévisions, the French public broadcast service, Putin's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, replying to a question regarding a possible accession of Ukraine to NATO said, *"That would be the worst possible scenario...it's a scenario that would go beyond the red lines that have been set with regard to Russia's national interests, and it's a scenario that will oblige Russia to take active measures to ensure its security...in other words, a military offensive."*

So, this question should be taken very seriously. It should also be taken into account that by insisting, the Ukrainians are running a risk that is all the more unnecessary. For one thing, their defence systems and capabilities are, according to western experts still far from the standards required for NATO certification.

The prudent course of action would therefore be to accept a status of military neutrality that does not prevent Ukraine from continuing to make the reforms that are necessary for its rapprochement with the European Union. However, this is probably easier said than done, given the status of Crimea, the situation in the Donbas as well as other areas of discord.

In the event of an invasion, the first measures will probably be targeted

sanctions, painless for the general population. If it were necessary to go further, one of the possible strong responses of the United States could be to cut Russia off from the SWIFT financial information exchange system, forcing it to do without the dollar in its transactions. This may inflict heavy financial damage on many influential economic actors in Russia, prompting moderation.

But the danger is that in the long run, this might push Russia to seek, together with China, to establish its own financial system, thus undermining the authority of the United States in this area.

Also, it should not be forgotten that a Russian invasion of Ukraine would result in a very large number of casualties on both sides and it is necessary to know whether what remains of public opinion in Russia is ready for such a sacrifice... nothing is more uncertain.

At the political level, NATO could experience an unprecedented crisis if its members fail to agree on the policy to adopt vis à vis Moscow.

France's sale of technologically advanced ships to Russia for purely offensive purposes, such as the Mistral-class assault ship in 2010, as well as the contracts signed by Berlin and Moscow to build the Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea to bypass Ukraine and Poland, can undermine trust between NATO members and European Union member states.

For example, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, fearing possible

negative effects on their economies, have opposed sanctions against Moscow. These internal divisions naturally make Vladimir Putin's task easier.

The Alliance should strive to assert a clear and coherent position through the adoption of a convincing defensive doctrine and the development or maintenance of military capabilities appropriate to the threat.

According to the theses defended by certain Western researchers and specialists, the West should stop reacting to Putin with "shock and awe" - shock that he can act with such apparent impunity, and awe at what it perceives as tactical genius. Europe and the United States have far greater influence and resources than Russia, with its atrophied political system and exhausted economic model. What they seem to lack is the willingness to accept the economic and political costs of defending the values they claim to stand for.



President Vladimir Putin joining military units of the Russian Federation Armed Forces. Troop contingents from the armed forces of Armenia, Belarus, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia cooperated in carrying out drills to repel a simulated enemy attack.

Finally, Western leaders and particularly Europeans must recognise that appeasement cannot guarantee peace and stability in Europe - not even under the guise of "engagement".

When dealing with a leader whose credo is defined by the notion that "the weak are defeated," Western governments must show resolve, without sacrificing flexibility.

Only on this basis can the crisis in Ukraine be addressed, without fundamentally compromising transatlantic security.

Hossein Sadre

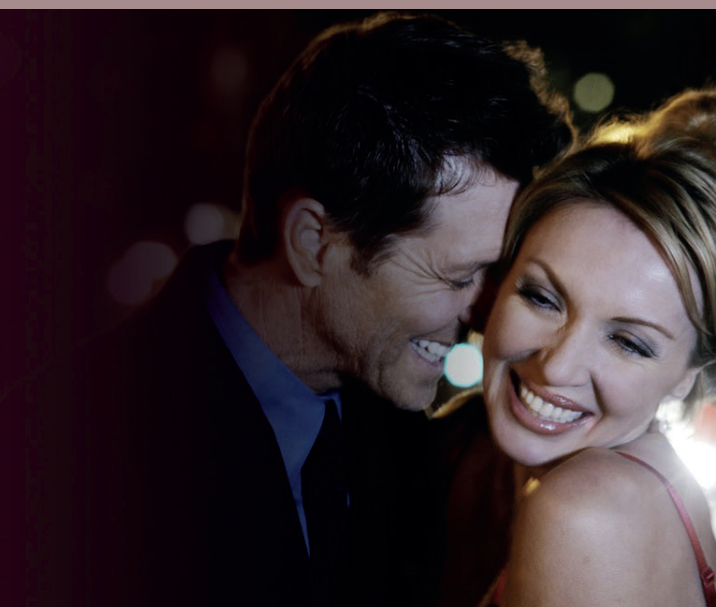


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# NEWS IN BRIEF

## EBRD STEPS UP SUPPORT FOR TOURISM AND AGRIBUSINESS IN ALBANIA

- **EBRD signs a risk-sharing facility of up to €7.11 million with OTP Bank Albania under the Albanian Agribusiness and Tourism Support Facility**
- **10 per cent investment incentive for sub-borrowers in the agribusiness and tourism sectors**
- **Joint framework supported by the European Union and Government of Albania**

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), OTP Bank Albania and the Albania Agribusiness and Tourism Support Facility are stepping up their support for companies in the country's agribusiness and tourism sectors.

Together with the government of Albania and the European Union (EU), the EBRD is committing up to €7.11 million of loans to eligible firms in the agribusiness and tourism sector, risk-shared with its partner bank, OTP Bank Albania. The funds will be provided through the Albania Agribusiness and Tourism Support Facility (AATSF), a framework aimed at improving access to finance for small and medium-sized businesses.

The facility also includes a 10 per cent investment incentive for sub-borrowers in the agribusiness and tourism sectors, funded by the government of Albania and the EU, respectively. Borrowers will receive the grant incentive once their investments have been completed and verified. The facility will also benefit from a government-backed first-loss risk cover mechanism.

Frida Krifca, Albania's Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, said: "We are fully committed to guaranteeing the functioning of all mechanisms that help reduce the gap between agricultural producers and financial institutions. As part of the €180 million fund allocated under the AATSF framework with the EBRD, the Ministry of Agriculture and Tourism has committed €36 million to first-loss cover as additional support for each sub-borrower, business or individual."

Mirela Kumbaro, Minister of Tourism and Environment, commented: "Our strategy is to offer all-season tourism and to build on the offer, including agritourism, ecotourism, sports tourism and so on. In this context, the AATSF is key to the development of the sector, providing support for farms or agritourism. Agritourism plays a vital role in the promotion of our best values, and this mechanism, through which the government provides a guarantee for the loans, is a further incentive for the sector. The initiative directs all the funds to those who have the vision and passion to invest."

Ekaterina Solovova, the EBRD's Head of Albania, said: "We are pleased to step up our support for the Albanian tourism and agribusiness sectors under this joint framework with the EU and the Albanian government and to further strengthen our excellent cooperation with OTP Bank Albania. Both the agribusiness and tourism sectors are vital to the country's economy and improving their access to finance is particularly important. We are grateful to our partners for supporting this important programme."

Bledar Shella, CEO of OTP Bank Albania, said: "We greatly appreciate this initiative of the Albanian government and the EBRD, in cooperation with the EU, all of which are engaged in further supporting the tourism and agriculture sectors, which play a very important role in the country's economy. OTP Bank Albania has an excellent partnership with the EBRD and we are very pleased to engage in financing these growing sectors. We believe that, together, we will strengthen our important role in the development of the economy and, more specifically, the sectors of tourism and agriculture in the country."

Up to €180 million has been allocated to date under the AATSF for specialised credit lines and risk-sharing facilities through local partner banks. Since its launch in 2016, more than €70 million in loans have been committed, benefiting more than 6,100 local agribusiness SMEs. The AATSF complements the EU's instrument for pre-accession assistance for rural development (IPARD), which has channelled financing to numerous beneficiaries through the AATSF.

In addition to financing instruments, the EBRD is providing technical assistance to both financial institutions and sub-borrowers through the EBRD's Advice for Small Businesses programme in Albania.

Agribusiness is a vital sector of Albania's economy. It provides employment for more than 50 per cent of the population in rural areas and accounts for around 20 per cent of national gross domestic product (GDP). Still, the



sector remains underserved by financial institutions. Tourism, meanwhile, has become a strategic sector for growth and employment and is a key factor in Albania's sustainable long-term growth and competitiveness. The sector is facing similar constraints in terms of access to finance, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the deadly earthquake of 2019.

The EBRD is a leading institutional investor in Albania, focusing on the sustainable development of the private sector, building on the strong entrepreneurial spirit in the economy, enhancing the commercialisation of infrastructure projects and promoting sustainable energy and environmentally sound investments. To date, the Bank has invested €1.74 billion in 117 projects in the country.

### AMERICAN AIRLINES' FUTURE FLEETS OF A321XLR AND BOEING 787-9 AIRCRAFT TO FLY WITH THALES AVANT



The Airbus A321XLR aircraft

- American Airlines' new A321XLR and Boeing 787-9 fleets will be equipped with Thales' latest AVANT solution
- American Airlines will be the first customer to fly with Thales' new line of high-performance Optiq displays, the industry's first 4K high dynamic range (HDR) seatback screens enhanced with Samsung QLED proprietary technology
- The airline's A321XLR and Boeing 787-9 aircraft are anticipated to enter service in 2023

**The world's largest airline, American Airlines, has selected Thales' latest AVANT inflight entertainment (IFE) solution to equip its new A321XLR and Boeing 787-9 aircraft for transcontinental and international travel.**

American's aircraft will be the launch customer flying with Thales' new line of Optiq displays, the industry's first 4K high dynamic range (HDR) seatback screens enhanced with Samsung QLED proprietary technology. Optiq provides passengers with the best monitor experience in the air, with an unrivaled picture quality featuring more than 1 billion colors.

The system is capable of Bluetooth connection at each seat, which allows passengers to pair their wireless headphones to the system.

Premium Class seats will enjoy 17-inch displays accompanied with a 5-inch touchscreen handset offering a true second-screen experience. Premium Economy and Economy Class will feature 13.3-inch displays and 11.6-inch displays, respectively.

AVANT will be integrated with American's high-speed connectivity system to provide digital services and real-time health monitoring & reporting.

American has also selected Thales' high-power charging solutions, which will give passengers access to both USB type C 60-watt and AC outlets at each seat in all classes. This solution is designed to meet the specific power needs of passengers, now and in the future.

Says Yannick Assouad, Executive Vice-President Avionics, Thales *"American Airlines has trusted Thales as an inflight entertainment supplier for more than a decade and now to equip its new A321XLR and Boeing 787-9 aircraft with the latest AVANT IFE solution. As air travel begins to recover, Thales continues to invest in digital innovations that create value for our customers. We're truly excited to provide these solutions to American and its customers."*

### BEWARE OF THE SIM SWAPPING FRAUD!

How do Sim Swapping attacks work and what can you do to protect yourself? Learn it all in the new technical deep dive by the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity.

SIM swapping attacks have been reported in the media since 2017. Such attacks usually target banking transactions but not only. These attacks are also perpetrated against the cryptocurrency community, social media and email accounts.

With the ENISA Report - Countering SIM-Swapping, the EU Agency for Cybersecurity gives an overview of how SIM swapping attacks work and of the extent to which Member States are affected. The Sim-Swapping Attacks also assesses services impacted and issues a range of recommendations to guide national authorities, operators, banks and citizens. (<https://www.enisa.europa.eu/publications/countering-sim-swapping>)

### What is SIM swapping?





In a SIM swapping attack, an attacker takes over the mobile phone number of the real subscriber, by asking the mobile telecom provider to link that number to a SIM card under the attacker's control.

SIM swapping procedures exist for legitimate reasons, for instance, when the SIM card is lost or damaged. SIM swapping is also used to connect mobile phones with an embedded SIM (eSIM). eSIMs are increasingly common.

In a SIM swapping attack, the attacker will convince the telecom provider to do the SIM swap, using social engineering techniques, pretending to be the real customer, claiming that the original SIM card is for example damaged or lost.

When the attack is successful, the genuine subscriber's phone will lose connection to the network and they won't be able to make or receive phone calls.

### How does a SIM swapping attack happen?

The attacker typically begins a SIM swapping attack by gathering personal details about the targeted subscriber. There are many ways personal data can be retrieved, this can be done through social engineering, phishing, malware, exploiting information from data breaches or doing research on social media.

Having all necessary information, the attacker would be able to convince the mobile network operator to transfer the subscriber's mobile number to a new SIM card under their control, or perform the process themselves online.

As a result, the attacker takes over the account and can receive all the SMS and voice calls intended for the legitimate subscriber. Fraudsters can perform online banking frauds but can also bypass the two-factor authentication (2FA) used to secure social media and other online accounts.

### Why do these attacks take place?

Specific circumstances may open the opportunity for attackers, which can be:

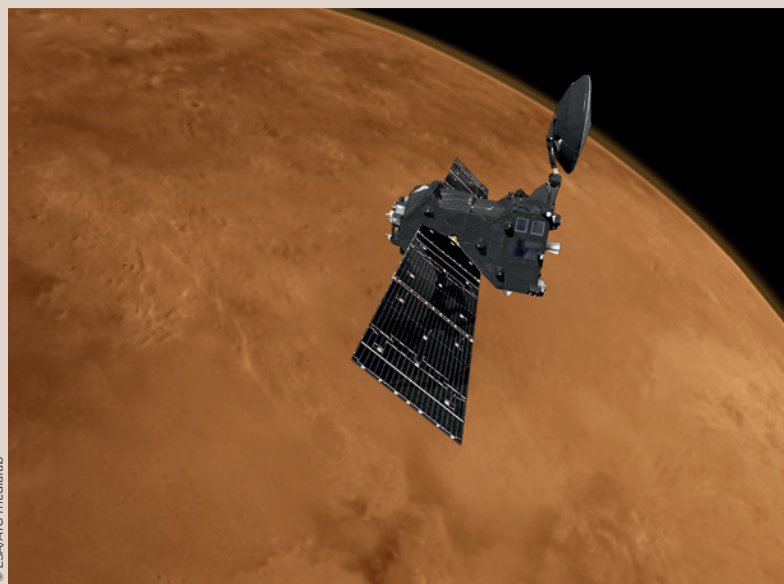
- Weak customer authentication processes;
- Negligence or lack of cyber training or hygiene;
- Lack of risk awareness.

## EXOMARS DISCOVERS HIDDEN WATER IN MARS' GRAND CANYON

The ESA-Roscosmos ExoMars Trace Gas Orbiter has spotted significant amounts of water at the heart of Mars' dramatic canyon system, Valles Marineris.

The water, which is hidden beneath Mars' surface, was found by the Trace Gas Orbiter (TGO)'s FRENDD instrument, which is mapping the hydrogen – a measure of water content – in the uppermost metre of Mars' soil.

While water is known to exist on Mars, most is found in the planet's cold polar regions as ice. Water ice is not found exposed at the surface near the equator, as temperatures here are not cold enough for exposed water ice to be stable.



Artist's impression of the ExoMars 2016 Trace Gas Orbiter at Mars

Missions including ESA's Mars Express have hunted for near-surface water – as ice covering dust grains in the soil, or locked up in minerals – at lower latitudes of Mars, and found small amounts. However, such studies have only explored the very surface of the planet; deeper water stores could exist, covered by dust.

“With TGO we can look down to one metre below this dusty layer and see what's really going on below Mars' surface – and, crucially, locate water-rich ‘oases’ that couldn't be detected with previous instruments,” says Igor Mitrofanov of the Space Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, Russia; lead author of the new study; and principal investigator of the FRENDD (Fine Resolution Epithermal Neutron Detector) neutron telescope.

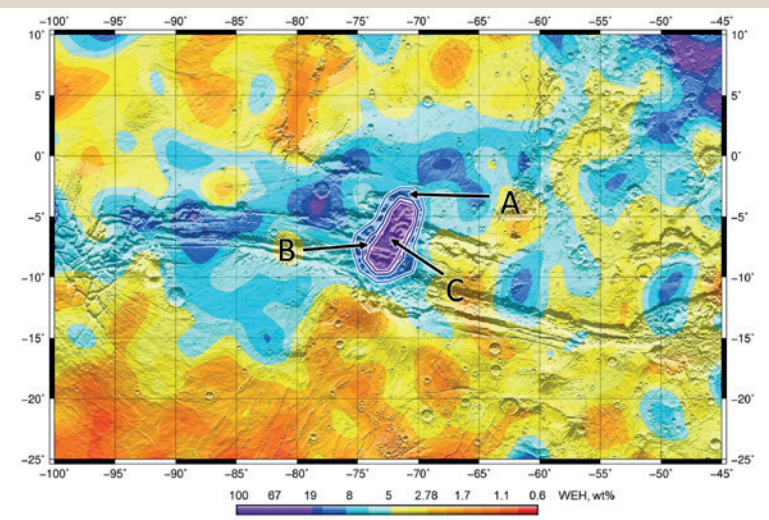
“FRENDD revealed an area with an unusually large amount of hydrogen in the colossal Valles Marineris canyon system: assuming the hydrogen we see is bound into water molecules, as much as 40% of the near-surface material in this region appears to be water.”

The water-rich area is about the size of the Netherlands and overlaps with the deep valleys of Candor Chaos, part of the canyon system considered promising in our hunt for water on Mars.

### Tracking neutrons

Igor and colleagues analysed FRENDD observations ranging from May 2018 to February 2021, which mapped the hydrogen content of Mars' soil by detecting neutrons rather than light.

“Neutrons are produced when highly energetic particles known as ‘galactic cosmic rays’ strike Mars; drier soils emit more neutrons than wetter ones, and so we can deduce how much water is in a soil by looking at the neutrons it emits,” adds co-author Alexey Malakhov, also of the Space Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. “FRENDD's unique observing technique brings far higher spatial resolution than previous measurements of this type, enabling us to now see water features that weren't spotted before.



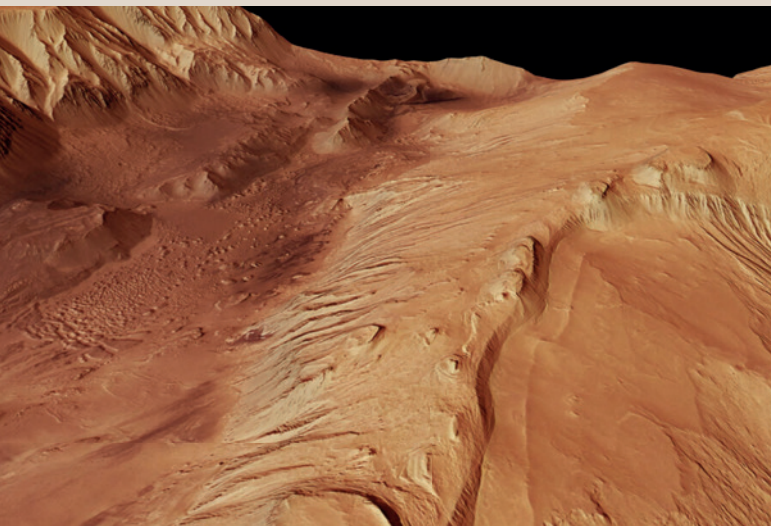
ExoMars Trace Gas Orbiter maps water-rich region of Valles Marineris

“We found a central part of Valles Marineris to be packed full of water – far more water than we expected. This is very much like Earth’s permafrost regions, where water ice permanently persists under dry soil because of the constant low temperatures.”

This water could be in the form of ice, or water that is chemically bound to other minerals in the soil. However, other observations tell us that minerals seen in this part of Mars typically contain only a few percent water, much less than is evidenced by these new observations. “Overall, we think this water more likely exists in the form of ice,” says Alexey.

Water ice usually evaporates in this region of Mars due to the temperature and pressure conditions near the equator. The same applies to chemically bound water: the right combination of temperature, pressure and hydration must be there to keep minerals from losing water. This suggests that some special, as-yet-unclear mix of conditions must be present in Valles Marineris to preserve the water – or that it is somehow being replenished.

“This finding is an amazing first step, but we need more observations to know for sure what form of water we’re dealing with,” adds study co-author Håkan Svedhem of



Perspective view of Candor Chasma

ESA’s ESTEC in the Netherlands, and former ESA project scientist for the ExoMars Trace Gas Orbiter.

“Regardless of the outcome, the finding demonstrates the unrivalled abilities of TGO’s instruments in enabling us to ‘see’ below Mars’ surface – and reveals a large, not-too-deep, easily exploitable reservoir of water in this region of Mars.”

### Future exploration

As most future missions to Mars plan to land at lower latitudes, locating such a reservoir of water here is an exciting prospect for future exploration.

While Mars Express has found hints of water deeper underground in Mars’ mid-latitudes, alongside deep pools of liquid water under Mars’ south pole, these potential stores lie up to a few kilometres below ground, making them less exploitable and accessible to exploration than any found just below the surface.

The finding also makes Valles Marineris an even more promising target for future human exploration missions to the planet. The largest canyon in the Solar System, Valles Marineris is arguably Mars’ most dramatic landscape, and a feature that is often compared to Earth’s Grand Canyon – despite being some ten times longer and five times deeper.

“This result really demonstrates the success of the joint ESA-Roscosmos ExoMars programme,” says Colin Wilson, ESA’s ExoMars Trace Gas Orbiter project scientist.

“Knowing more about how and where water exists on present-day Mars is essential to understand what happened to Mars’ once-abundant water, and helps our search for habitable environments, possible signs of past life, and organic materials from Mars’ earliest days.”

TGO launched in 2016 as the first of two launches under the ExoMars programme. The orbiter will be joined in 2022 by a European rover, Rosalind Franklin, and a Russian surface platform, Kazachok, and all will work together to understand whether life has ever existed on Mars.

Source: ESA

### MIGRATORY SITUATION: PERSISTING PRESSURE ON EASTERN BORDER

The number of illegal border crossings at EU’s external borders in the first ten months of 2021 rose nearly 70% to 160 000\* and 45% when compared with 2019, according to preliminary calculations.

In October, there were close to 22 800 illegal border crossings on Europe’s main migratory routes, 30% more than in 2020 when pandemic-related border restrictions were in place. It is also 18% more compared with October 2019 and the pre-COVID situation.

The most significant increase was reported on the Eastern, Western Balkan and Central Mediterranean routes and in Cyprus. The number of detections dropped in the Western Mediterranean.



© Frontex

### Eastern Borders

On the EU's Eastern frontier, the total number of detections of illegal border crossings this year amounted to close to 8 000, fifteen times more than in 2020. Main nationalities include migrants from Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria.

The EU border with Belarus remained the most affected by the migration flow in 2021. After reaching historical high of arrivals in July (climbing over 3 200), migrant arrivals on the Eastern land route decreased in the following months dropping to over 600 in October 2021.

While high level frictions between the EU and the Belarussian regime continue, the EU Member States neighbouring Belarus have all significantly strengthened their border-control measures under exceptional states of emergency. The enhanced controls prevented large-scale flows from reaching the EU from Belarus in October.

### Western Balkan route

So far this year, 48 500 illegal border crossings have been reported on the Western Balkans route. Only in October, more than 9 000 illegal crossings were detected, an increase of 140% compared with last year (3816) and an increase of 810% compared with October 2019 (1003).

That means that in October, 40% of illegal crossings into the EU occurred via the Western Balkans.

Most migrants on this route came from Syria, Afghanistan and Morocco.

### Central Mediterranean route

Between January and October, European authorities reported 55 000 illegal border crossings on the Central Mediterranean route. In October alone, 6 240 illegal crossings were reported, 85% more than in the previous year under COVID-related restrictions and 186% more than in 2019.

A significant development to in October is the growing number of migrants registered in Italy arriving directly from Turkey by sea.

The main nationalities on this route included Tunisians, Bangladeshi and Egyptians. Egyptians have become

the third main nationality registered in the Central Mediterranean, reported mainly from Libya.

### Western Mediterranean route

In the first 10 months of this year, there were 16 390 illegal border crossings reported on the Western Mediterranean route, about 14% more than last year and 23% less as compared to 2019.

In October, 1614 illegal crossings were detected, down 42% from last year.

Algerians accounted for 63% of illegal crossings on this route, followed by Moroccans (29%).

### Western African route

On the Western African route, the total number of detections this year stood at 16 710, up 46% from 2020 and an increase of 1020% compared with 2019. In October, 3515 illegal crossings were detected, 34% fewer than in the same month last year.

Most migrants on this route came from Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa.

### Eastern Mediterranean

Between January and October, 15 770 illegal crossings were registered on the Eastern Mediterranean route, down 11% from 2020 and 76% from 2019. In October, 2585 illegal crossings were detected, 40% more than in the same month last year. The overall number of illegal crossings on this route remains below last year's, with the strong increase in arrivals in Cyprus partially balancing the significant decrease in arrivals in the Eastern Aegean.

Most migrants on this route came from Syria, Turkey and Congo (Kinshasa).

### FIRST EURO-ARAB BORDER SECURITY CONFERENCE

Last December, the border management authorities of the European Union and the League of Arab States gathered in the first-ever Euro-Arab Border Security Conference in Amman, Jordan, to discuss how to strengthen dialogue and cooperation in response to global challenges.



© Frontex

The conference was a joint initiative of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, and the General Secretariat of the Arab Interior Ministers' Council (AIMC) of the League of Arab States (LAS), and was held under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Jordan, Mr Bisher Al Khasawneh, represented by Minister of Interior and the Public Security Directorate. The event brought together senior representatives from over 40 states, relevant EU and the LAS bodies, as well as representatives of international organisations.

In his opening speech, Jordan's Minister of Interior H.E. Mr Mazin Abdallah Hilal Al Farrayeh emphasised that border control is a significant common challenge and the need to galvanise cooperation within a Euro-Arab framework in addition to exchanging experiences and knowledge.

The EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Mr Olivér Várhelyi, reaffirmed the EU's continued commitment to closely cooperate with the Arab partners on border protection, fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings as well as organised crime.

In line with these priorities, the participants have gathered to build trust and expand networks between the border authorities of the two regions, especially with regards to addressing common challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and sharing experiences of the effective and efficient use of new technologies to facilitate mobility while ensuring security of our communities.

Europe and the Arab countries do not only share common borders and security concerns, but also a duty to protect our citizens and communities, - highlighted Executive Director of Frontex, Fabrice Leggeri.

H.E. Dr Mohamed Bin Ali Koman, Secretary-General of the AIMC, praised the cooperation with Frontex and EU agencies especially in the context of common criminal threats, such as terrorism, drug trafficking, and illegal migration.

The conference was organised in the broader framework of the high-level strategic dialogue to develop Euro-Arab operational cooperation on security issues. The dialogue was initiated in 2015 and reiterated during the summit in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, in 2019, where the leaders of the Member States of the EU and the League of Arab States agreed to strengthen their existing strategic partnership and cooperation.

The conference is a flagship activity of the EU4BorderSecurity project, funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and implemented by Frontex, with an objective to enhance border security and integrated border management in the Southern Mediterranean.

Source Frontex



© Fincantieri

## INDUSTRIAL OFFER FOR THE MODULAR AND MULTIROLE PATROL CORVETTE SUBMITTED

Fincantieri, Naval Group, with their joint-venture Naviris, and Navantia boost their cooperation for the Modular Multirole Patrol Corvette (MMPC) program and reaffirm their will to work together in order to develop the first common naval capability in Europe. In this context, a consortium led by Fincantieri, Naval Group and Navantia and coordinated by Naviris submitted on December 9<sup>th</sup> an industrial proposal related to the MMPC call of the European Defence Fund (EDF).

Their common assessment is that the European Union is increasingly facing many types of threats (increased tensions between great powers, illegal immigration issues, terrorism, etc.). Over the last years, and more specifically during 2021, there have been growing calls for Europeans to take responsibility for their own security both within NATO and as part of the European common security and defence policy. Several European Union member states have repeatedly underlined the need to develop common military capabilities to face common challenges.

In this respect, Fincantieri, Naval Group and Navantia acknowledge that there is a need for collaboration in the European Union naval defence sector to support Europe in dealing with these challenges and the ones to come.

As major European industrial players in the naval defence sector, they believe that this is the right time to start a real, concrete, added-value collaboration around a common program that will be the first common naval capability in Europe. This strategic program already exists: the European Patrol Corvette (EPC), the most important naval initiative within the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, the consortium led by the three industrial naval partners and coordinated by Naviris submitted the industrial proposal related to the MMPC call of the European Defence Fund (EDF) in order to develop this joint project.

The clear objective of the proposal is to maximise synergies and collaboration among European shipbuilding industrials. By developing together a new

ship, the EPC, they aim to ensure a European sovereignty in the second rank warship.

This has been made possible thanks to the participation of:

- 4 countries in EPC PESCO project (Italy, France, Spain and Greece)
- 6 countries involved in the co-founding (Italy, France, Spain, Greece, Denmark and Norway)
- 3 European Shipbuilding Industrials (Fincantieri, Naval Group and Navantia) with Naviris in charge of the coordination
- 40 companies for maritime systems and equipment

Based on a unified frame of standards and using collaborative advanced engineering methodologies, EPC will be developed in the best cooperative way from conceptual studies up to the initial design. The produced design will constitute a break-through from current warships, as it will be modular, flexible, as well as more energy-efficient, greener, safer, more interoperable, and cyber-secure. MMPC will finally be characterized to address specific national requirements, keeping the defined design as the common reference.

This proposal constitutes the first essential step towards preparing the future production of the vessel in the scope of a second call under EDF in the multi-annual perspective. In this context, the promotion of the program to other European Navies, with a joint action of Nations already part of PESCO program, will strengthen the European industry, increasing cooperation, efficiency and lowering duplication in defense spending.

### OLAF IN OPERATION AGAINST COUNTERFEIT MEDICINES

Under Europol's Operation SHIELD II, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) led an enforcement action targeting counterfeit and substandard hormonal substances, food supplements and medicines for erectile dysfunction. European consumers were protected from hundreds of thousands of dodgy tablets and vials.

OLAF investigators facilitated the cooperation and activities of customs and police authorities of 17 EU Member States that took part in the targeted action. Together, OLAF and national authorities found various irregularities and intercepted 254,731 tablets and 131,027 vials of various medicines and 278 kg of food supplements. The participating countries were: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.

OLAF's targeted action was part of Europol's Operation SHIELD II. In the course of six months – April to October 2021 – Europol, OLAF and the countries that participated in SHIELD II looked to bust misused or counterfeit medicines, doping substances, illegal food or sport supplements and counterfeit COVID vaccines, sanitary products and medical devices.



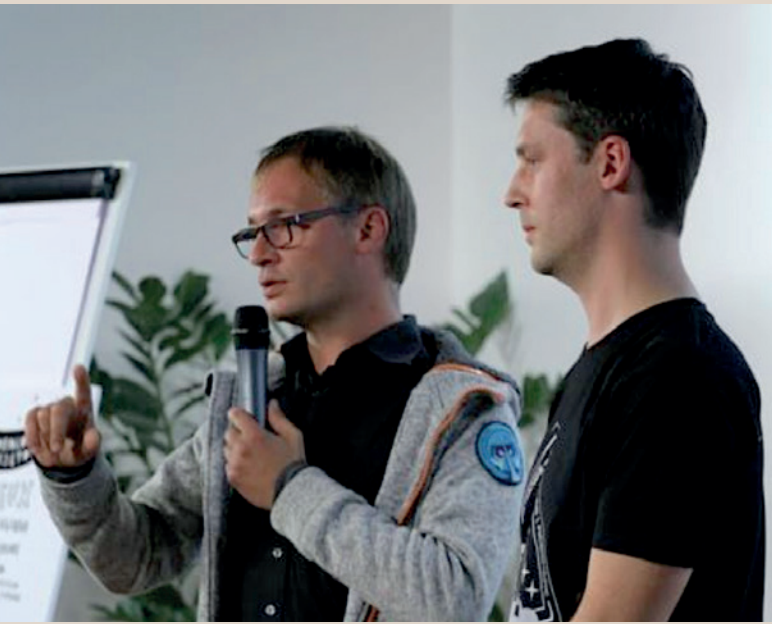
OLAF Director-General Ville Itälä said: *"This is the second year of Operation SHIELD and the second year that OLAF participates and leads a targeted action. It is quite sad to see how criminals will not hesitate to put people's health on the line to make profit. Thankfully, we could get in their way by joining efforts with Europol and national authorities like we often do. We best protect EU citizens from dangerous or ineffective products when we work together, and I am proud whenever OLAF can act as a bridge between the different national authorities. Sharing intelligence is also key – that is why OLAF put its information-sharing platform AFIS at the service of this targeted action."*

### NEW SYMPHONIE CONSORTIUM WINS CONCEPT STUDY FOR THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO SHAPE FUTURE GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY BY SATELLITE

The European consortium led by UNSEENLABS and EUROCONSULT has won a concept study for the European Commission aiming to leverage disruptive ideas for an innovative European broadband constellation.



New Symphonie, the recently established consortium of 22 European companies, has won the European Commission call for tenders entitled "New Space solutions for long-term availability of reliable, secure, cost-effective space-based connectivity".



Clément and Jonathan Galic

Selected for its exceptional innovation and familiarity with leading-edge technologies, the consortium led by UNSEENLABS and EUROCONSULT will be awarded a six month study contract for a total amount of 1.4m euros. Through the study, the consortium members will investigate and recommend to the European Commission the most optimal infrastructure for secure connectivity markets. The study aims at defining the secure connectivity requirements that could be addressed by a European multi-orbit satellite system to be conceptually designed with innovative technologies for an attractive business plan.

Boasting 22 members from no less than 8 countries, New Symphonie is founded on a resolutely multinational approach at European level. The consortium blends the wealth of experience brought by incumbents UNSEENLABS and EUROCONSULT with the disruptive business models and use cases of small and medium sized businesses driving the advent of “New Space”. The consortium will leverage the new ideas prevalent in the commercial space ecosystem with the technical expertise and market awareness of UNSEENLABS and EUROCONSULT, respectively, to define an innovative EU Space-based Global Secure Connectivity System.

This undertaking stems from the European Commission’s ambition to develop secure and resilient global connectivity in response to a rapid digital transformation and to the corresponding rise of cyber threats. This strategic objective was outlined by European Commission President von der Leyen in her State of the Union address of 2020.

Clément and Jonathan GALIC, Co-founders and respectively CEO and CTO of UNSEENLABS, stated “We are delighted that our proposal was accepted and that we can move this work forward together with this great team of innovative companies. The creation of a European

leadership in the New Space sector requires on the one hand the collaboration of innovative companies between them, and on the other hand the confidence of the institutions in the innovative capacity of European startups and SMEs. This project meets these conditions, which is why we look forward to turning the New Symphonie vision into reality.”

Pacôme REVILLON, Euroconsult Group’s CEO added, “NewSpace, at its core, is about adopting a collaborative, dynamic approach to delivering benefits to the society using space technology. I have no doubt that the New Symphonie consortium reflects the industry we serve and embodies that sentiment. On behalf on the 22 members, we look forward to working with the European Commission on this project and playing our role in an increasingly connected, autonomous and secure European Union for all member states.”

Inspired by Symphonie, the first operational communication satellite launched in 1974 under Franco-German cooperation, the New Symphonie consortium claims its place as the rightful heir of the tradition of technological pioneering and multinational collaboration at the foundation of Europe’s leading role in the global space sector.

The entire list of New Symphonie participants represents a diverse, pan-European mix of organizations; AEROSPACE LAB (BE), ANYWAVES (FR), AVIO (IT), CAILABS (FR), DE-CIX (DE), EXOLAUNCH (DE), EXOTRAIL (FR), FRESNEL ALLIANCE (FR), GOMSPACE (DK), GREENERWAVE (FR), AAC HYPERION (NLD), INTEGRASYS (ES), KSAT (NO), LOFT ORBITAL (FR), QEST ANTENNA TECHNOLOGY (DE), SATCONSULT (FR), SECURE-IC (FR), SENNER (ES), SITAEL (IT), TESAT (DE), TRANSATEL (FR).



Pacome Revillon

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# 2022: A NOT SO CRYSTAL BALL

## *The views of many as the new year starts*

Erasmus Desiderius was the late 14<sup>th</sup> century scholar, born the illegitimate son of a Rotterdam priest but who went on to study in Paris. He travelled widely around Europe, talking and corresponding with many other scholars and making good use of his travels and his conversations. It was this experience that led him to write “quot homines, tot sententiae”, literally: “there are as many different opinions as there are people”. It is very, very rare to find a lot of people in agreement. Some would say that it's what makes politics interesting; it's also what tends to make universal dictatorships time-limited, as populist leaders lose their popularity. Nothing changes in that respect. It was the American industrialist Henry Ford, after all, who wrote: “No two men are just alike. Every new life is a new thing under the sun; there has never been anything like it before, and never will be again.” So, in looking ahead to 2022 I have spoken to a wide range of people with starkly different views on political matters. Oddly, though, on many points, they seem to agree.



Citizens of Tournai bury plague victims. Detail of a miniature from "The Chronicles of Gilles Li Muisis" (1272–1352)

2021 was a shocker for many of us. Some of Donald Trump's supporters stormed the US capital in January and in that same month, COVID-19 deaths worldwide reached two million. Myanmar saw a military coup in February and the imprisonment of state counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi. The COVID death

toll reached three million in April and new US President Joe Biden withdrew US troops from Afghanistan. In July the president of Haiti was assassinated, then before the year's end Angela Merkel stepped down from being Federal Chancellor of Germany after 16 years. The world changed, as it tends to, but

the global pandemic continued and the outlook as 2021 closes is somewhat bleak. I asked a range of people from a variety of backgrounds how they foresaw the year ahead. Some were politicians, holding a wide range of views. Some were political analysts or even leaders of campaigns. Despite some negative signs, no-one was writing off 2022 before it has started, so perhaps neither should we. Here are their views, multifarious but never negative or hopeless. Let's agree with Erasmus: “Quot homines, tot sententiae”.

### **PART ONE: “GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEATH” - ALTHOUGH LIBERTY MAY LEAD TO DEATH**

An historian might wonder whatever happened in the 21st century that allowed a disease to spread so widely through a world that could be described as scientifically aware and (largely) medically competent. The SARS-CoV-2 virus has proved just how backward our world is when faced with disaster, rushing to panic and despair rather than considering the possibilities in the light of reason and reacting accordingly. One of the few consoling features is that it hasn't led to the ghastly pogroms and murderous hysteria that characterised the Black Death of the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. Back then, before we'd heard of viruses and bacteria and thus ascribed huge and fatal events to heavenly (or even diabolical) intervention, the chief reaction was hysteria, with people fleeing the cities in



a panic, even abandoning their families, and thus helping to spread the contagion ever further, to the furthest reaches of the remotest villages.

Yes, there were doctors and priests who stayed with those who were suffering, although neither achieved much to halt the disease. Too many others, however, refused to look at those seeking help or even to give the last rites to the dead and dying. You could argue that the plague, whichever variety it was that arrived in 1347 (it was probably a mixture), showed up human nature all too cruelly. It claimed an estimated 20-million lives in Europe, possibly more, with Paris losing half its population and great cities like Venice, Hamburg and Bremen losing even more. The plague bacillus may still exist (some scientists believe it has died out), but in any case these days we can use such remedies as streptomycin, tetracycline, and sulfonamides to treat it, rather than having sufferers bathing in urine, rubbing onions or vinegar on the buboes or sitting in excrement, which were among the recommended remedies that (of course) didn't work.

The massive death toll meant there were fewer people to work the land, so food supplies dwindled and those still fit for work asked more money for their labour because they found themselves in demand. The ruling classes in the UK weren't having that and passed laws to keep wages down and to prevent labourers from moving to better-paid employment. It didn't work; even kings and lords, however mean-spirited and cruel, can't buck the law of supply and demand, so the most positive outcome of the Black Death was a more mobile workforce, earning wages dictated by circumstances and not by the rich tyrant who owned the land. Capitalism emerged, helped by a



MEP Gunnar Beck



MEP Seán Kelly

bacillus. As we can see, the first reaction of those in authority was to preserve that authority; their right to lord it over the poor came before saving lives. There may be little similarity between the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, (believed to have been largely responsible for the Black Death), and the virus, SARS-CoV-2, but in terms of human reactions there is a disturbing parallelism.

We have hostile agencies in some countries spreading lies and rumours to cause confusion further and to raise the death toll, we have the largely ill-informed helping to spread the rumours, apparently believing they are in possession of some sort of "secret inside knowledge" denied to others, and we have governments clamping down on media freedom in order to retain control of the flow of information. So, as we look ahead to 2022 the one point upon which virtually all the people I spoke to agree, is that we are looking to a world in which journalism is somewhat constrained and more journalists are likely to be silenced, by jail or by a bullet. "Throughout the West and beyond," said Gunnar Beck when I asked him if the Covid pandemic had made governments more inclined to forego normal human rights, "governments have become far more overbearing, willing to interfere with civil and individual rights, so yes, we've effectively moved from restrained government to overbearing government." Welcome to the brave new post-pandemic world. Beck is a member of Germany's right-wing Alternative für Deutschland party, part of the Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament. He was the first to mention to me this threat to media freedom but there was a surprising consensus among those I interviewed, from whichever side of the political fence.

Take Seán Kelly, for instance, who, as a member of the Fine Gael party, sits with the largest group in the European Parliament, the centre-right European People's Party. "Naturally, there has to be less freedom," he said, "because of the pandemic, because it needs to be controlled, so once governments have explained that to people, the more people have understood it and accepted it." He added a proviso at this point, which again proved uncontroversial: "Obviously it's something that couldn't go on indefinitely and I think if we didn't find the vaccine we'd be in big trouble because people are so used to their freedom that after a while we have to go back to normality and take our chances." Let's hope that applies to journalists, too.

There cannot be very many people today (although I'm sure there are a few) who see the disease, caused by a virus that is only between 50 and 140 billionths of a metre (nanometre or nm) across, as a "judgement from God", however sinful we all are. One might imagine that such a judgement would be imposed by means of a thunderbolt or a massive meteorite, like the one whose crater was recently discovered under Antarctica and that may have been as much as 50 kilometres across (eight times the size of the ones that did for the dinosaurs), possibly causing the Permian-Triassic extinction some 250-million years ago, long before the first dinosaur even hatched from its egg. It's thought it could also have caused the breaking up of the massive continent



Cell phone tower

of Gondwana. It wiped out almost all life forms on Earth, though fortunately not quite all; after all, we're still here. It's hard to imagine what terrible sins could have been committed by edaphosaurs, gorgonopsias, amynilyspes or trilobites to merit such extreme retribution from an angry deity. Neither, of course, is the virus caused by the use of the new 5G communications standard, despite protests in parts of Eastern Europe demanding a stop to vaccines and the removal of 5G masts, which Europe's enemies and commercial rivals would love. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), "A large number of studies have been performed over the last two decades to assess whether mobile phones pose a potential health risk.

To date, no adverse health effects have been established as being caused by mobile phone use." The same goes for those using hand-held devices to send and receive texts, only even more so, because the device is then held further from the user's head. Needless to say, research continues into possible risks as the use of mobile devices accelerates, but the WHO remains fairly confident: "A number of studies have investigated the effects of radiofrequency fields on brain electrical activity, cognitive function, sleep, heart rate and blood pressure in volunteers. To date, research does not suggest any consistent evidence of adverse health effects from exposure to radiofrequency fields at levels below those that cause tissue heating." Furthermore, transmissions on a radio frequency cannot, as some allege, 'create' a virus. No-one can, whatever method they try, including in a laboratory with rare and expensive chemicals and the help of someone called Igor. Not even Baron Frankenstein could manage that. As the WHO research shows, "Tissue heating is the principal mechanism of interaction between radiofrequency energy and the human body. At the frequencies used by mobile phones, most of the energy is absorbed by the skin and other superficial tissues, resulting in negligible temperature rise in the brain or any other organs of the body." And I must stress again, it is incapable of creating a virus.

## SCIENCE FICTION

But if we cannot manufacture viruses or any other life form in an artificial and scientific way (straightforward biological multiplication notwithstanding), neither, it seems, can we totally eradicate them.



Professor Stefan Schennach

"This virus may never leave us, so we have to live with the virus," I was told by Professor Stefan Schennach, who sits with the Socialists, Democrats and Greens group in the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), representing Austria. "We can only protect ourselves and our surroundings with vaccination," he pointed out. "This virus is not like the Black Death. Some of the sicknesses we have banned from the world, but we cannot ban SARS-Covid." Well, not yet anyway, which limits our choice of actions. "The race is now on to ensure that we all have booster vaccines that will be effective over a period of time," Seán Kelly said, "and I think we will expect and demand our freedoms back, which will be essential." "We can only hope," said Professor Schennach, "that the people will have the vaccination for 90% plus of the population." We have to assume, unfortunately, that their number will not include the Covid sceptics, of which there are a surprising number, albeit still a minority, but it's their choice. It's one choice they may eventually regret exercising in the way they have, possibly not for long, their period of regret unfortunately curtailed by their premature demise.

Gunnar Beck, while critical of the EU response to the pandemic (and especially critical of Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, for being slow to act, unlike governments in China and the Far East), was quick to praise the British government's roll-out of vaccines. "I think there's no question that the UK has managed the vaccine roll-out much better and much faster than the EU," he said. "There is not the slightest question. The EU has now caught up, but that was after a delay of three or four months, when the UK was well ahead." Before we all pat ourselves on our collective backs

at our triumph over a sub-microscopic quasi-living entity, we need to think carefully. "Now there's a second question, which is entirely different and separate," warned Beck, "namely how good these vaccines are. Here the news is distinctly murkier. From what we are learning now, these vaccines are a lot less useful anywhere – not just the UK ones – than first anticipated." Attitudes to these matters intrigue me, although I cannot pretend to understand the doubters. I have had my jabs – Pfizer for the first two, followed a few months later by a Moderna booster. Unlike the two Pfizer originals, the booster did have side effects which weren't much fun (like feeling excessively tired and slightly confused) but which certainly beat dying of Covid-19 in my view. As my old mother used to say very late in her life: "growing old is a terrible thing, but it's better than the alternative."

It is arguable that vaccines should never be compulsory, although some European authorities are effectively making it so. It was the American statesman Patrick Henry who first used the expression "give me liberty or give me death", when citizens of the new country were offered the choice between remaining subjects of the British crown or striking out on their own for independence. We all know what happened next; liberty is never the easy choice, although it tends to win out in the end. As a viable alternative, the law could always clamp down on the spreaders of false narratives about the virus, but many of those stories were dreamed up and first disseminated far away, perhaps in some propaganda mill or other rumour factory whose task it is to cause us harm. But for those who pass on what are clearly falsehoods there could, perhaps, be some form of retribution. We are certainly seeing our freedoms eroded as governments seize the opportunity to roll



Moderna Covid 19 vaccine

back on them. “We have to be careful,” Schennach warned me, “because civil rights are in danger and whatever we are doing to fight against the pandemic, we should never forget that when we take away civil rights we have to bring those civil rights back and I’m very worried that some countries are not taking so much care for civil rights and human rights and it’s understandable that for a short while if necessary you limit the civil rights but every measure you set up needs an ending so that after the fight against the pandemic, the full civil rights are back in force.” In the interim, there will be scarcely any limit to the numbers dreaming up and disseminating false narratives about the pandemic, invariably coming from that oracle of infallible knowledge so often cited, ‘a man in the pub’. “One has to admit,” Gunnar Beck said, “that the Far Eastern governments have managed things infinitely better, and in fact the restrictions of liberty are no more far-reaching than those we have in effect now. In fact, nowhere are the restrictions worse than they are in Western and Southern Europe. No-one would have thought, two or three years ago, that it would be conceivable that people wouldn’t be allowed to go to work if they don’t get a vaccine. It’s almost tyrannical, it’s turning people into paupers because they don’t want to get vaccinated, it means people are getting vaccinated simply to get their basic rights, the right to work, and not for medical reasons.”

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF VACCINATION

We get into interesting philosophical realms here, according to Tiny Kox, a Dutch Socialist politician, if one person’s perception of their rights runs up against someone else’s, whose own rights are threatened by that first person exercising



© Wikimedia/Goverf de Pocos

Tiny Kox



theirs. “Yes, it is an affront against the human rights of the person who wants to go to work,” Kox told me, with regard to the demand that they must be vaccinated first, “but of course there are other people who are working there and who could say – and do say – if someone comes here who is not vaccinated he could harm our fundamental rights, like the right to live.”

Kox cited the 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who pointed out that our freedoms can be limited by the freedoms of others, “for each may seek his happiness in whatever way he sees fit, so long as he does not infringe upon the freedom of others to pursue a similar end,” he wrote. In other words, we can’t limit the freedom of one in favour of the freedom of the other. And if after that you’re still not sure, although “the greatest good to the greatest number” would seem to be a reasonable guide. It’s the basic tenet of utilitarianism, the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophy dreamed up by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. It was Bentham who wrote: “The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.” It sounds a bit outmoded today but in essence, you must admit he had a point.

In today’s world of falsehoods put forward as deep and meaningful truths, the more outrageous the belief being touted, the more credence it seems to gather. Tiny Kox recalled to me how in his youth he would buy newspapers outside church on a Sunday. They were mainly Belgian because the languages of Belgium’s Flemish population and Netherlands Dutch differ mainly in pronunciation – the letter ‘g’ is harsh in Dutch but soft in Flemish – but also in certain words and the positioning of prepositions in a sentence. The Belgians are also less likely

to “borrow” convenient words from other languages. These were only minor matters, so the Belgian papers supplied news, otherwise unobtainable on a Sunday, where in the Netherlands the presses were silent on a Sunday, that tended towards the sensationalist, peppered with pictures of young ladies wearing very little. But, of course, sensationalism sells papers (as do scantily clad young ladies): who would buy “man goes for walk in forest” when the alternative version of “man chased by bear in forest” is available? The Belgian papers told Kox and others that “John F. Kennedy did not die, that Elvis was still alive and that man never got to the moon”, but there were other, more truthful articles, and Kox is convinced that most people believed (and still believe) those. At heart, most people prefer the truth. “I think it’s only a very small minority who believe it’s 5G, or the Russians, or aliens that have something to do with Covid,” he assured me. He told me that the previous day a neighbour had asked his opinion about a letter she’d received, in which it was alleged that in the American state of Vermont, more people had died as a result of having received the vaccine than from Covid.

“So I asked her if it was her idea,” he told me. “‘No,’ she said, ‘it was in a letter from a friend.’ I asked her if she or the friend were virologists or epidemiologists and she said ‘no.’ I asked her if she knew where the state of Vermont was on a map of the United States and she admitted she’d never heard of it.” And so on and so forth; that’s how rumours start and spread. I know there are some anti-vaxxers out there who believe the vaccine will merge with your DNA, and one rapper claimed that the vaccine had made him infertile, while an extreme few believe the vaccine delivers a chip into your bloodstream that



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Richard Whately (1787–1863), STP, Archbishop Dublin Socius

allows Bill Gates to track you, though it doesn't explain why he might want to. There is an old saying, quoted by the late fantasy writer Terry Pratchett in his book 'The Truth', and now, almost word-for-word, by Tiny Kox as well: "a lie can run around the world before the truth has tied its shoelaces".

Of course, the lie has to be salacious if it's to succeed and the ease with which it will subsequently circulate is something upon which our less reputable governments rely. Sadly, there is no shortage of them. 'Fake news', as it's called, has become a fact of modern life and it's widely used by disreputable administrations, of which there is sadly no shortage. "What is truth?" asked jesting Pilate, and did not stay for an answer," wrote Archbishop Richard Whately of Dublin (who was by training a political economist), thus effectively copping out of having to analyse Pilate's supposed words.

Religious people doubt that Pilate said it at all as he was never known to jest. Indeed, he was not a nice man and was ordered back to Rome to face trial for cruelty and oppression after complaints about him from the Samaritans. If even



© Wikimedia

Karl Lauterbach

the ancient Romans thought he was too cruel, he must have been truly unpleasant.

In the debates (and protests) over restrictions there has been much talk about so-called "2G", and it's not a reference to the mobile phone standard replaced by 3G and then by the current 4G standard. It stands for "geimpft oder genesen", German words meaning vaccinated and recovered. Those that cannot claim 2G status are increasingly likely to find themselves excluded from certain shops (the ones generally described as 'non-essential') and also from social events and venues. Angela Merkel, now 'Acting Chancellor', is very worried about the rising hospitalisation rate. "We know we could be better off," she told DW, "if the vaccination gap wasn't so big." In Germany the 2G rule will be imposed in any of Germany's sixteen states in which more than three people per 100,000 have been hospitalised. The outgoing Merkel government has come in for a great deal of criticism for failing to bring down the hospitalisation rate, although it's not certain that the new government, a coalition of the Social Democrats (SPD), the Green Party, and the neoliberal Free Democrats (FDP) will have greater success. The virus clearly doesn't read the newspapers or obey political rules.

An SPD member of the Bundestag, Karl Lauterbach, has accused Merkel's outgoing administration of being too slow to act to hold Covid infection rates within bounds. He told the administration that they had "underestimated" the fourth wave. "Some scientists were not really giving an alert, others were," he told DW. "There was a lot of wishful thinking in our government." Meanwhile, in some states the health system is being simply overwhelmed. Germany's doctors are demanding clear rules to "break the chains of infection." "The virus is still with us and threatens the health of citizens," said Olaf Scholz, the Federal Vice-Chancellor. He stressed that efforts must be intensified to convince Germans who are not yet vaccinated to become fully vaccinated and also to encourage those already vaccinated to have the booster shot. He told the lower house that everything must be done to "ensure that millions of citizens get a booster; that is the task of the next weeks and months." According to the German health ministry, around 67.3% of Germans are now fully vaccinated (or were by 12 November).

## DANGER AROUND EVERY CORNER

Of course, the spread of SARS-CoV-2 is not the only threat to the peaceful progress of Europe into 2022 and beyond. There is also political instability and the risk of armed conflict here and there. The matter became a subject of debate at the European Parliament's "hybrid" session in November. By "hybrid", I mean that although some MEPs were present in person, as well as some guest speakers, others only joined in on line. With European Council President Charles Michel and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in attendance, a number of political group leaders said that not enough was being done to address various attacks on the rule of law, something upon which the entire European Union is based.

Opinions varied but among other problems to be highlighted, Ska Keller, a German Green MEP, called for far greater vaccination roll-out, including outside the EU, while Marco Zanni, an Italian MEP from the Identity and Democracy group, said that the violent protests that have been taking place in a number of cities are proof that the EU institutions should be doing more. There were calls for more solidarity with Poland, Latvia and Lithuania over the threat from



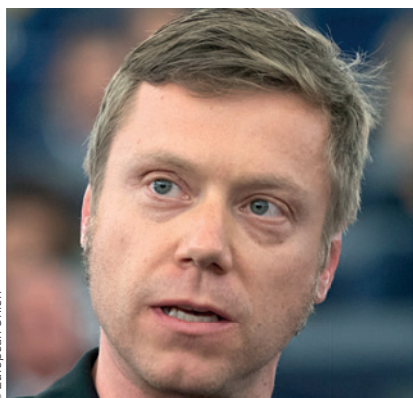
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MEP Ska Keller



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MEP Marco Zanni



© European Union

Martin Schirdewan

Belarus to swamp the border areas with ever larger groups of migrants, mainly from Iraq. All have asked for EU help with the crisis. There were calls for more action against the Belarus dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, with an EU-wide migration policy, according to Martin Schirdewan of The Left in Germany, in order to prevent what he described as “an evil autocrat from instrumentalising refugees.”

A bit late for that, I'd say. Commission President von der Leyen announced that transport operators involved in Lukashenko's blackmailing-by-trafficking operation face being blacklisted, but warned that any counter-measures must respect the rule of law and fundamental rights. Footage emerging from the border area suggests there's been relatively little of that on show. For the refugees that nobody seems to want there appears to have been very little sign of humanity.

Listening to the debate is an unedifying experience and it makes the future look even bleaker. Everyone wants action of some sort, if only they could agree exactly what. “I think the crucial question,” Brendan Donnelly, the director of the Federal Trust, told me, “Is whether the European Union can ‘tame’ (and I'm not quite sure what that taming would mean, whether it would be legal, political, the imposition of sanctions or whatever) the Polish and Hungarian governments, and particularly the way they have been floating, constitutionally, the idea that they are no longer bound by European legislation. That really is cherry-picking, and that is what the British government was trying to do. I can understand the caution of the other countries of the EU, but unless they take a firm stand, perhaps by financial sanctions, within the context of the European Union, to show that there's a price to be attached to the behaviour of the Polish and Hungarian

governments, I think the basis of trust and of credibility, upon which the whole of the European Union rests, may be undermined.” Reinhardt Butikofer, a German Green member of the European Parliament, told me that among the ordinary citizens of Poland there is majority support for EU membership, so Warsaw looks unlikely to follow London down the twisting, ever-narrowing path into obscurity and relative irrelevance. And while Poland wants to stay in for something like ideological reasons, Hungary is more dependent on the EU financially. It couldn't easily afford to withdraw.

It would be easy to dismiss Belarus as an aberration, too far gone down the road to tyranny to turn back. That would be wrong, according to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, leader of democratic forces there. Speaking to the European Parliament, she urged MEPs to amplify the voices of the ordinary Belarusian people. She reminded the House of the many voices of democracy in her country that had been silenced by Lukashenko's thuggery before turning to the migrant crisis on the border, and she posed a question: “Supposing this abuse of migrants is somehow stopped,” she asked, “do you really assume the regime's abuses and threats beyond its borders will end there?” She warned that there would be more to come: the smuggling of drugs and contraband, military provocations and even nuclear disasters by Europe's borders. Tsikhanouskaya told MEPs that the democratic movement in her country cannot afford to wait for Europe; expressions of solidarity and concern are all very well but they need to be turned into real concrete action. Europe, she warned, needs to become more proactive when facing up to autocracy. She urged members to call for sanctions. “Let me assure you,” she said, “sanctions do work. Continue holding a consistent sanctions policy. Sanctions split elites,



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MEP Reinhard Butikofer

destroy corruption schemes and divide people around Lukashenko.” She said she wanted to see Europe standing in a more united way with Belarusian democratic forces. “Let's not forget the Belarusian prisoners of conscience,” she urged, “and let's help those who were forced to leave the country. Today, not only democracy in Belarus but also democracy in Europe depend on whether we will walk this path together.”

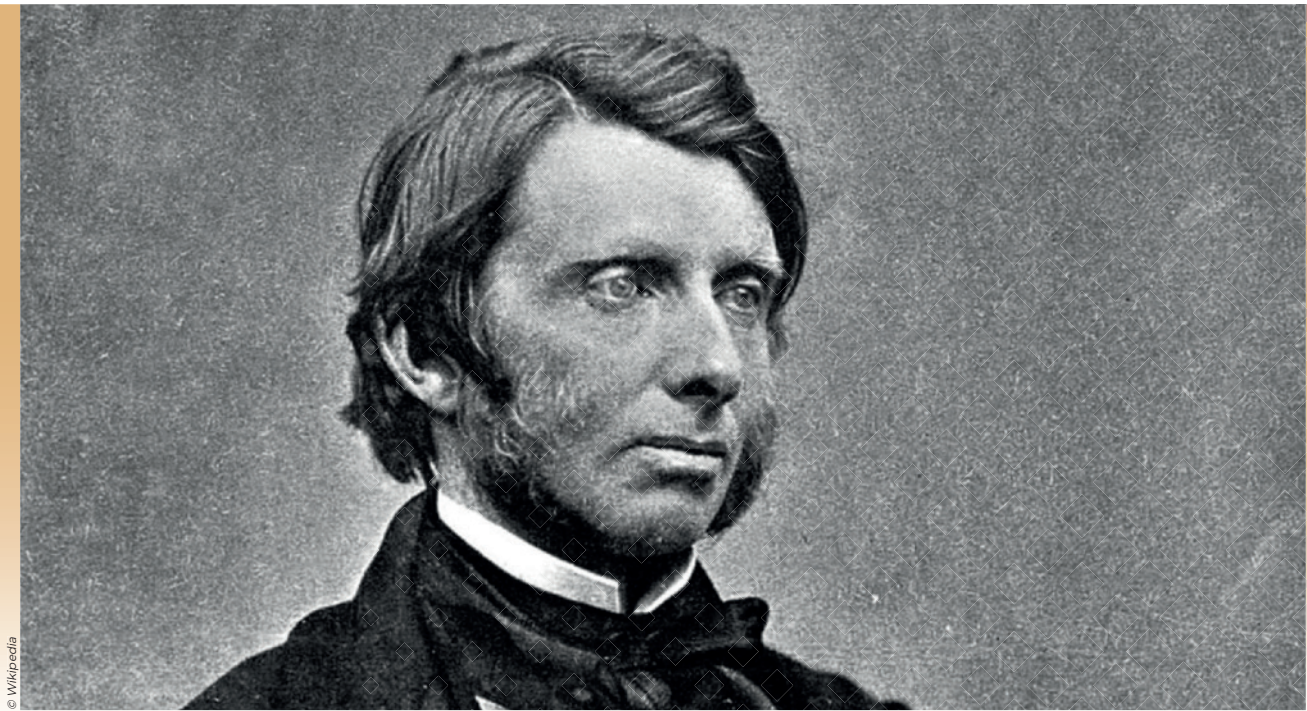


© Tsikhanouskaya.org

President of the Coordination Council of Belarus Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Will Europe have the courage of its convictions, being only too well aware that Lukashenko's closest ally is Vladimir Putin. Nobody wants to provoke Putin, but perhaps a little provocation wouldn't go amiss. Putin may like to show off his arsenal of weapons and how easily he can spread space debris across the path of the space station as it wheels through the already over-crowded void. All-out war against NATO, though, may not be part of his game plan. Brendan Donnelly, Director of Britain's Federal Trust, doesn't believe that to be the case. “I don't think that Russia is in any traditional sense an expansionistic power at the moment,” he assured me. “I may be wrong about that, but that's my sense of it. They're always trying to push at the envelope, other than having any long-term strategy, such as to re-occupy those parts of continental Europe that they've lost.” A reassuring point of view and based on much study. It would seem, then, if we're to be optimistic, that Putin's forces will not be sitting around your Christmas table this year. But that doesn't mean he's not thinking about it; he's certainly nobody's Santa Claus. Europe, as we know, faces a great many problems and we have by no means exhausted them. We can be assured that 2022 won't necessarily be a bed of roses, but neither should it be a wasteland of thorns and briars, we can hope. Wear your walking boots but tread softly.

Jim Gibbons



© Wikipedia

John Ruskin

## 2022: A NOT SO CRYSTAL BALL

### *Part Two: BURSTING BUBBLES – All together or not at all*

It was the 19<sup>th</sup> century English art critic, painter, social commentator, and all-round polymath John Ruskin who wrote that “Government and cooperation are in all things the laws of life; anarchy and competition the laws of death.” He was a firm believer in reform long before such views were fashionable, including education for the labouring classes and for women (not a fashionable idea at the time), and he warned about the environmental damage being done by the Industrial Revolution.

Since he believed in governments cooperating, one must assume he would have approved of the European Union, as well as the United Nations, ASEAN and the Council of Europe, among other examples of international cooperation. If he were to regard the problems on Europe’s doorstep as we move towards a new and equally troubled year, he would presumably have recommended that the various governments get together in common cause and ‘sort it out’.

What we need to do, according to Cristiana Grigore, who campaigns for her Roma people, is to “connect and communicate beyond great divides”. Being Roma, she is painfully aware of the divisions in our society and believes that the current situation is not sustainable. “We live in so many bubbles,” she told me, “that are defined by our wealth, or ethnicity, or privilege

or lack of privilege, or need to protest or need to protect, or rights, and there is less and less communication and real genuine connection between parties, in a way that we can listen to one another, empathise with one another, understand the common struggle and understand who can be supportive, and why this matters beyond the immediate cause we want to protect.” I first met Cristiana in the garden of her parents’ house in Romania, not far from Craiova.

With the family being Roma, it was a small place and fairly remote. She went on to win a Fulbright scholarship to Vanderbilt University, gaining her degree in International Education Policy and Management in December 2012. She now runs the Roma People’s Project at Columbia University in New York, seeking to dispel negative impressions about the Roma and Sinti people and other minorities and bring them out of

the shadows and into the light. The same could be said to apply to Europe as a whole.

“Europe is not happening and it’s all in our hands,” Professor Danuta Hübner told me. Professor Hübner spent five years as Commissioner for Regional Policy but gave it up in 2009 to stand for



© Wikimedia

Cristiana Grigore



© Wikimedia/Adrian Gryciuk

Danuta Hübner

the European Parliament as a member of Poland's Civic Platform party, sitting with the centre-right European People's Party. "You know all this famous European decision-making through political will, and my feeling is that there is a lot of political will to find solutions and move forward on many fronts, actually, because of the way we reacted to the pandemic nearly two years ago." Hübner takes comfort from the way in which Europe's initially disjointed response became more organised once Europe got over its panic. "It was clearly as an emergency and without the right competences, but we managed to move. You saw the flexibilities; you remember the taboos?"

They were gone all of a sudden, so I think that we proved that in difficult times we have the machinery to move, but then (and it was surprising really to me) we established very quickly the system for the longer term, for the recovery, for new ways of financing it, the new way of approaching economic governance, the co-ordination, so I think a lot has been done to create a chance for Europe to survive." The actual success of EU authorities also impressed Professor Schennach, an Austrian Parliamentarian who sits with the Socialists, Democrats



© Friends of Europe

Sajjad Karim

and Greens group in the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE). "You should not forget that for health measures, they have no mandate."

Throughout Europe, however promising the political signs, there are those who take different lessons from the pandemic and our response to it. As a result, they have been engaging in protests, especially in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany but elsewhere, too. What they're objecting to are the restrictions put in place in a bid to halt the spread of COVID-19. Their excuse is that they don't really believe the virus exists, despite a death toll that had reached 5,227,930 globally by the end of November. "I take the view that people are actually protesting about the wrong things," said Sajjad Karim, a former British Conservative Member of the European Parliament. He no longer has much time for the party under its current leadership, nor for people who jump on populist bandwagons to demonstrate their dissent.

"The things that they ought to be protesting about they are just accepting, and the things that are common sense and good for all of us, they're up in arms about. Obviously, with the rise of the anti-vaxxers, and people protesting against the Covid pass and all those sorts of things, I take a very different view to all of that; actually, it's a matter of civic duty to make sure you get vaccinated. If ever there was a situation in which 'we are all in it together', this is it." In other words, he believes there can be no sensible argument against us protecting ourselves, our friends and colleagues, and those we meet, by way of having a vaccination. "To protect my parents," Karim said, "my children need to be vaccinated; otherwise it doesn't work."

### SNEAKING UNDER THE VIRUS RADAR

But while he believes that the need for vaccination is beyond dispute, that doesn't mean there is nothing to protest about. Karim says there certainly is, we just don't recognise it even when we're told about it at all. There appear to be acts of government in preparation using the pandemic as cover. "On Friday (19 November) it came to light that the British government is pushing through a new 'nationality' bill," he informed me, "with amendments that would

allow it to withdraw the nationality of British citizens (even those that were born here of immigrants) without giving them notice, yet nobody was protesting against this." It's probably because few in the UK have heard about it; I certainly hadn't until Karim told me. And it is now marching towards the statute book without anyone raising much opposition. "It's gone through first reading, it's gone through second reading," he had to tell me, since I had heard nothing about it, nor had it been mentioned in the media I had seen, "It only came out to the public on Friday night. Even the opposition has accepted it." And where are the concomitant protest marches, angry words, and petitions? Well, nowhere, it seems. We're back to bubbles again, and bubbles spell trouble.

"I think the crucial question," Brendan Donnelly told me, "is whether the European Union can 'tame' – and I'm not quite sure what that 'taming' would mean, whether it would be legal, political, through sanctions or whatever – the Polish and Hungarian governments, and particularly the way that they've been 'flirting' constitutionally with the idea that they are no longer bound by European legislation."



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Brendan Donnelly

Donnelly, Director of the London-based Federal Trust for Education and Research, sees problems ahead for Britain's relations with the EU, its greatest trading partner, following the UK's withdrawal. Some have said that the only good thing to emerge from "Brexit" from the EU's point of view is that the way it has damaged Britain will not encourage others to try the same thing. It's very unlikely that Poland in particular, I was assured, would opt for "Polexit" because research suggests that 90% of Polish voters would choose to stay

in the Union. It's a dilemma and a matter of grave concern for pro-Europeans like Professor Hübner. "We have to be very clear that within the ruling coalition in Poland we have practising politicians who are openly against Europe, openly against European values, openly against the ethics of Europe, which means links with the judicial system of the European Union, with the fact that all our judges in Poland are also European judges, and dismantling the judicial system on the basis of the unconstitutional nature of the European treaties, which has happened and it's extremely serious."

It all looks very worrying but despite that, most of the people I spoke to remained quite positive about the prospects for 2022. The thing is that in this uncertain world there are many more things to worry about than attempts by nationalists to undermine the EU. Like China, for instance. "Well certainly China represents a very fundamental alternative to what we stand for," said Reinhard Bütikofer, a German Green MEP who is a member of the China delegation. "China represents the most extreme kind of authoritarianism; some people call it 'tech totalitarianism'. China represents a different kind of global order. They're not into multilateralism; they're not into international rule of law. They are aiming for a return to power politics, where the powerful act as they will and the less powerful act as they must."

Bütikofer's view was given a big boost from an unexpected quarter: the head of MI6, Britain's secret intelligence agency. The senior spies of most countries seldom go public and they don't come much more senior than the man referred to as 'C' (in Ian Fleming's James Bond books and in the movies he's called 'M'), whose real name used to stay



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

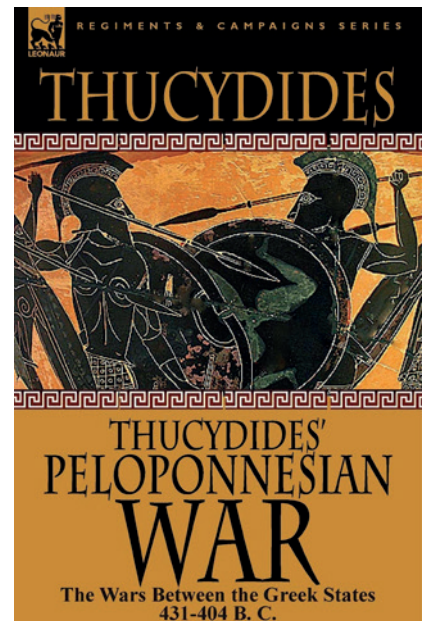
secret. Richard Moore, as he is called, gave a speech at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), in which he warned about the dangers lurking behind the smiles of Xi Jinping and, for that matter, Vladimir Putin.

He told his audience that his service saw four major threats to security: Russia, China, Iran and international terrorist groups that recognise no borders. "Chinese intelligence officers," he warned, "seek to exploit the open nature of our society, including through the use of social media platforms to facilitate their operations. We are concerned by the Chinese government's attempt to distort public discourse and political decision making across the globe." Given the long experience of MI6 internationally, are the personal ambitions of Xi Jinping something over which we should lose sleep? Well, yes, says Moore, pointing out the damage already done.

"The Chinese Communist Party brook no dissent," he told his audience. "Beijing have eroded Hong Kong's 'one country, two systems' framework, and removed individual rights and freedoms, in the name of national security. Its surveillance state," he warned, "has targeted the Uighur population in Xinjiang, carrying out widespread human rights abuses, including the arbitrary detention of an estimated one million Muslims." The US meanwhile, is trying to demonstrate the superiority of democracy, but it's a divided country with a large number of violent religious extremists, which is not very convincing. So here we have a large nation, somewhat set in its ways and internally divided facing an emergent China with global ambitions. Some have likened it to the situation in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, when the Athens-led Delian League faced the Peloponnesian League,

led by Sparta: two powerful trading nations, each fearing the other's growth and success.

The Greek historian Thucydides wrote in his History of the Peloponnesian War that such a set of circumstances would inevitably lead to armed conflict. It's called the 'Thucydides trap', and some American political writers fear history may be about to repeat itself. According to Thucydides, the two empires debated their differences at Sparta, with the Athenians present defending their Delian League and Athens' reputation, but also to make veiled threats. "Our aim is to show you what sort of city you will have to fight against, if you make the wrong decision," said one delegate, according to Thucydides in the first chapter of his History of the Peloponnesian War. "It has always been a rule that the weak should be subject to the strong; and besides, we consider that we are worthy of our power." The words seem to have a very strong resonance for today's world.



Thucydides' Peloponnesian War

### MY PIROZHKI IS OFF

China is not the only problematic country, run by an extremely autocratic leader, of course. We have only to look at Russia, whose increasing self-confidence led to its agents murdering those who were seen as Putin's enemies. For instance, Anna Politkovskaya was shot dead in the elevator of her Moscow apartment block for reporting on the Chechnya war in a way that displeased Putin.



© Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung  
MEP Reinhard Bütikofer





© John Martens

Spontaneous citizens' memorial to Anna Politkovskaya in 2006

The press conference room at the European Parliament in Brussels is named in her honour. Former KGB operative Alexander Litvinenko was poisoned with polonium in London. It had been given to him by agents Andrey Lugovoy and Dmitriy Kovtun of the FSB (successor to the KGB). He died of radiation poisoning. Sergei Yushenkov, one of the leaders of the Liberal Russia party, became the second politician from that party to be murdered in Moscow. Less than a year earlier, Vladimir Golovlyov, a co-chairman, was shot and killed in the capital. That was in August 2002.

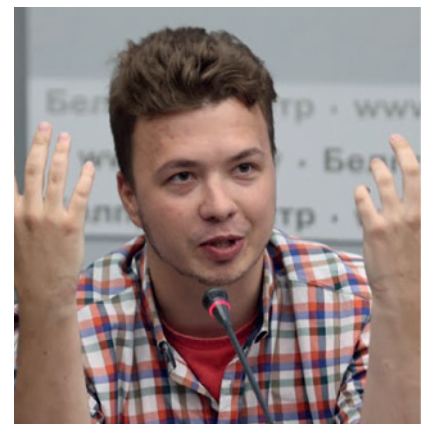
In 2018, in the pretty and historic English city of Salisbury, Sergei and Yulia Skripal were poisoned, although they survived, fortunately, after a long recovery. Skripal is a former Russian military officer who also served as a double agent for the British intelligence, so he was never likely to be popular in the Kremlin. He and his daughter were poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent hidden in a spray perfume bottle which put both of them in hospital, critically ill. The poison was then carelessly thrown away by the would-be killers, despite its

deadly content, and while a police officer attending the initial attack ended up in intensive care for some time, having also suffered from radiation poisoning, in a nearby village a local woman, Dawn Sturgess, found the discarded bottle, tried what she thought was perfume and died very soon afterwards. Annoying Putin comes at a high price, it seems.

It's all very strange, because whenever my work has taken me to Russia I have found the people there warm, friendly, and keen to engage with others who've had different life experiences. (Pirozhki, by the way, is a popular Russian street food: small baked or fried puff pastry parcels, normally filled with potatoes, meat, cabbage, or cheese. They are delicious). There's not much about Vladimir Putin that most people would describe as delicious. Destructive, perhaps, or depressing, or even detrimental to the public good. But does any country have the will (or the ability) to rein him in? His activities and seeming lack of self-restraint have influenced the drama taking place on Poland's border with Belarus, as the Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko weaponizes some of the world's neediest people to

cause problems for the European Union. He is angry about the sanctions the EU imposed for his fraudulent election victory and for his use of fighter jets to force a Ryanair flight from Greece to divert to Minsk, where dissident journalist Roman Protasevich was snatched after agents boarded the plane and placed him under arrest.

Some have described it, reasonably, as 'state hijacking'. Protasevich remains in custody. His crime? Having been the editor of the Nexta channel, which was run from outside Belarus and was opposed to Lukashenko and his administration.



© Wikipedia

Roman Protasevich

Lukashenko has encouraged refugees from the Middle East to believe they can get into the EU easily if they reach his country first. It was never true; he just wanted to see thousands of poor refugees having to be held back by force from entering Poland, Latvia or Lithuania, which would make for embarrassing television coverage for the EU. He doesn't seem to think it matters if they live or die; he was sure Putin would support his inhumane actions. In a recent speech on the Russian state news agency, MIA Rossiya Segodnya, Lukashenko emphasized Belarus's close ties with Russia: "Our Fatherland is one: from Brest to Vladivostok. Here we have two states - Belarus and Russia. Two states, one Fatherland," he said. But in threatening to cut off gas supplies being piped through his land to European customers, he may have overstepped the mark.

Lukashenko said in an interview with the Satellite News Agency that "the integration of Russia and Belarus has no boundaries", but it seems he was wrong.



© Nrf

Novichok suspects Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshir



Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin

He had annoyed Putin, with whom he claims to be “in constant touch”, however hard that is to imagine. “Migration is an issue that we didn’t manage to find solutions to,” Professor Hübner told me. “Solutions exist to terminate migration, but not solutions to cope with it or manage it, because there will be people coming to Europe in the decades to come and we know also that there will be other issues to migration.” It’s a depressing thought, a little like the SARS-COV-2 virus: we never planned for it because we didn’t understand how big it would be and so we didn’t see it coming. She believes we will see other reasons driving attempts to migrate to Europe, such as climate change. “We have never found a European solution,” she told me, “that would allow us to cope with migration and that would take into account the global tendency in Belarus, the demographic tendencies in Europe, the fact that we are ageing.”

### FAIRER FARMING, GREENER WORLD?

Hübner notes that most of the migrants are relatively young, but rather than taking the opportunity to find people



German Chancellor Angela Merkel with Russian President Vladimir Putin in January 19, 2020 in Berlin

to undertake work in currently unfilled positions, there are populist politicians keen to use fear in a population to elevate their own positions by offering short-term fixes and stoking up nationalism. There seemed no easy way out, but Hübner told me that eventually Angela Merkel rang Putin, who told her “You have to talk to Lukashenko.” That’s how it happened, although we’ll probably never know the details.”

Putin in peace-making mode may surprise us, although it doesn’t surprise British Conservative member of parliament Neil Parish. He is less concerned about the risk of falling into a ‘Thucydides’ trap, partly because the West isn’t keen on rushing into war but also because neither are Russia or China in his view. “I mean, Russia would not win an all-out war, but there would be a lot of bloodshed, so therefore I do think we should make sure we’ve got the missiles in Poland, we have to make sure we’ve got enough to protect Europe, because war comes about when we are weak, not when we are strong.” I should point out that Parrish is no war-monger; he’s a farmer and prefers peace for his livestock. He foresees a good future for the agro-economy, as long as we learn lessons from the past. “I think we’ll see greener agriculture,” he said. “I think we’ll see less fertilizers, less fungicides, being used. In this country we’re looking at geno-technology to see if that can help us produce food with less chemicals, and I think we will see generally more organic matter going into the soil; better management, less soil erosion, but we’ll have to be careful that we don’t destroy our production so that we then import from deforested rain forests illegally in the Amazon or from Malaysia, and I think Europe and Britain have to be careful as we go forward, maintain good levels of production in a greener way, reduce our carbon output, reduce our methane gas, which we can slightly by altering the diet for the sheep and the cattle, so I’m optimistic that we can still maintain a reasonable level of production, but we do have to be careful. A bit like the overall green agenda, let’s not do away with all the wild production to save some gases, just so that everyone can get on their aeroplanes and fly away on their holidays.”

Such behaviour seemed all too visible as the COP26 meeting ended. It wouldn’t be possible if Ziya Altunyalidiz had his way. His report before the Parliamentary



Ziya Altunyalidiz

Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) won unanimous support. He is a member of Turkey’s socially conservative Justice and Development (AK) party and rapporteur for a report to the Strasbourg assembly that addresses issues of criminal and civil liability in the context of climate change. The report makes it clear that “member states of the Council of Europe have recognised their legal responsibility for climate change at national, European and international levels and thus, indirectly, the concept of ‘climate justice.’” The report demands that the various governments should “ensure that relevant legal instruments are available to respond to environmental and other harm caused by climate change; in this context, access to judicial (civil, criminal and administrative) remedies, both to prevent and to compensate for damages caused by climate change in relation to actions or omissions by the state, natural and/or legal persons, is essential.” Altunyalidiz believes that wealthy countries should back up their promises with cash. “They promised before US\$100-billion,” he reminded me, “but as far I know, they have just delivered around 20% of it up to now, and the rest of it, unfortunately, is still to pay.” He seemed to doubt it would be.

Altunyalidiz wants very much to see environmental measures taken to make this a greener world, but he believes – reasonably enough, one might argue – that if the rich want a cleaner world they must help the poor to pay for their part of it. “If you want to change something you must be genuine and serious and also take things responsibly and try at least to help to pay for whatever you have done to the climate.” Altunyalidiz wants to see net zero emissions by 2026 and believes it to be possible, if the will is there to achieve it. He wants to see

environmental crime recognised right across all the Council of Europe member states and beyond their borders, and to regulate and legislate and put it in force. He also, in his report, makes it clear that whoever pollutes the environment has to pay for it. He supports the notion that “the polluter pays”, which may not find many supporters among some of the world’s biggest industrial concerns. “The people should have the right to litigation,” he told me. “That is why I think that litigation is important. All around the world, NGOs and individuals and companies are now taking issues to the courts. Litigation is increasing and I think it’s going to be effective.” There’s nothing like the risk of being dragged through the courts and possibly being fined if found guilty to make would-be polluters toe the line.

### WAYS OUT OF THE MAZE?

That, however, came in that report by Altunyaliz and not from the much-heralded COP26 conference in Glasgow. We shouldn’t despair altogether, says Inka Hopsu, a member of the Green League in the Parliament of Finland, in commenting on the outcome of the international get-together. “It has its good side,” she assured me, “in that multilateral work is still possible. We are committed to the Paris agreement and the countries come together and have their discussions, but at the same time the results of the meeting are not that strong.” Perhaps it would have achieved more if another of Hopsu’s ambitions had been fulfilled. She wants to see the rôle of young people in conflict prevention and conflict resolution enhanced. She fears that we get so many stale old solutions being put forward because it’s the same stale old politicians doing it. In her report to PACE, she points out that the proportion of younger people



Inka Hopsu

within legislatures has actually gone down, highlighting the rather shocking fact that only 3.9% of Europe’s national parliamentarians are under 30 years old.

Do the old hands fear the youngsters wouldn’t be any good at it? The evidence suggests otherwise: people like Newton, Einstein, Dirac, Heisenberg, Bohr and Pauli did their best work when they were in their twenties. Peter Higgs proposed the existence of the sub-atomic particle that bears his name when he was in his mid-30s. He is now 92 and physicists are still working with and looking further into the Higgs Boson, which takes his name and is what gives all matter mass.

Higgs admitted to me when I interviewed him in 2013 that he now gives the more difficult mathematical calculations involved in his ongoing research to younger colleagues because he finds them a bit difficult, which doesn’t make him any less of a genius to my mind. But many young people are reluctant to get involved in politics, which can be a slow and frustrating process. In Hopsu’s report, she says: “The Assembly deeply regrets that nearly six years after the adoption of the first UN Security Council landmark resolution concerning youth, peace and security, little progress has been made, and young peacebuilders find that their space for action is diminishing rather than growing.” Only Finland has introduced an action plan for implementing UNSC resolution 2250, as it’s known.

The report also notes that UNSC Resolution 1325, which is about women, peace and security has taken more than two decades even to reach a few national agendas, going on to point out that: “The Assembly is particularly concerned about the exclusion of young women from peace processes and insists that their inclusion in all stages of conflict regulation should be the focus of immediate attention.” There is an old saying: “God moves in a mysterious way”. Politicians move in ways that are not only mysterious but also very often occult, arcane and unfathomable, and done (if done at all) at less than snail’s pace. Hopsu, though, hasn’t given up hope. “Some of the youth movements, the environmental youth movements are very strong,” she assured me, “and they are now on the streets, and they are definitely showing that they are interested.”



French economist Thomas Piketty

Of course, people who get involved in politics at a young age often change their minds, moving from left to right or right to left or in some bizarre sideways direction. Take Thomas Piketty, for instance, Director of Studies at the École des hautes études en science sociales and a professor at the Paris School of Economics. He now professes a kind of socialist realism, but he started his political journey further to the right. “Like many, I was more liberal than socialist in the 1990s, as proud as a peacock of my judicious observations, and suspicious of my elders and all those who were nostalgic,” he writes in his latest book, ‘Time for Socialism’. “I could not stand those who obstinately refused to see that the market economy and private property were part of the solution.”

There are, of course, no ‘quick fixes’ in politics or in sociology and certainly not in economics, either. Those who are still committed to their teenage beliefs when they’ve grown to adulthood should be viewed with deep suspicion. People will normally respond to changing circumstances, even (perhaps especially) when it involves espousing a different set of political beliefs. For us today, the question is: in which direction will they go? As long as it’s away from anarchy and towards cooperation and consensus, everything should be well, at least if John Ruskin can be believed. Perhaps, though, we should note the comments of the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, written in 1830, before we get too enthusiastic: “In politics, what begins in fear usually ends in folly.” 2022 should be an interesting year.

*Jim Gibbons*



Erasmus

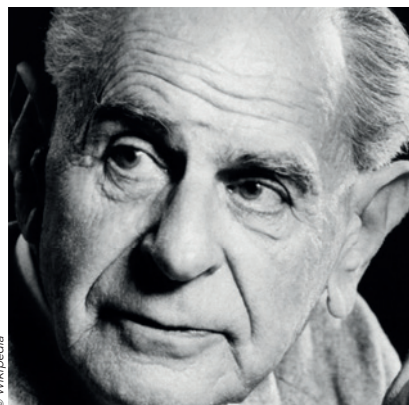
## “**QUOT HOMINES, TOT SENTENTIAE -** **“There are as many opinions as there** **are people” – Erasmus**

### LOOKING AHEAD TO 2022

#### *Part 3: Welcome ever smiles, and farewell goes out sighing*

So here we are, on the cusp of a new year, with all its promises and fears. Welcome, 2022! Come in, make yourself at home. For some of us, it will be a year that fulfils dreams and ushers in good fortune. For others, it may be memorable for all the wrong reasons, and for too many it will be the last year they’ll see. Let’s look at the world as it stands: still reeling from an ongoing pandemic, involving a virus that mutates at lightning speed to evade our measures to fight it. We have neo-nationalists trying to form political blocs to overturn the liberalism of the European Union’s rules. The one consoling fact for those who do not share their ambitions is that we’ve seen it before, and it didn’t work, nor last. Indeed, the signs are that it’s already coming apart and may have burst asunder by the time you read this. Many is the time when I have been called upon to report on the latest attempt at

the European Parliament to form a new right-wing political group and interview its proponents, only to find that the innate xenophobia that often hides behind nationalist rhetoric inevitably led to squabbles and the breaking up of the new order. Nationalists, by definition, find international cooperation difficult



Karl Popper in the 1980's

and cross-border alliances short-lived. What else, then? Well, an ever-more-assertive China may decide that it must finally reclaim Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao, subsume them into its body politic. This certainly would not go down well in Washington, nor in any Western capital. It wouldn’t do Beijing much good either in the long run. So, what does 2022 hold in store for us? After all, there is a lot that needs doing, if country leaders can avoid fighting each other for long enough.

“Optimism is a moral duty, that is what Karl Popper said, and that is part of my life philosophy” said Rik Daems, President of the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly, quoting the Austrian-British philosopher Popper, when I asked him to look ahead to 2022. “Hopeful or worried? I am optimistic that we can reverse some of the negative



© Openvid

Rik Daems

trends that we see and that we can fortify positive ones. If that is being hopeful, OK. Am I being worried to a certain extent? Obviously, aren't we all? For a start, we're worried about the whole pandemic situation which has got a terrible effect on our daily life, and it forces the executive branch and even the parliamentary branch of any country in the world, and, as a matter of fact in all the Council of Europe member states, to take measures that, the longer it takes, the more worried the citizens are, also. So yeah, I'm worried about that, and then if you go into a certain trend you see that a number of countries are, like, leaving the international logic and getting into a national logic, that would probably be my biggest worry."

We'll come back to that point. Of course, everything looks better when the economy is thriving but concerns about the future, especially regarding the ongoing pandemic, tend to dampen it down. In its Global Economic Survey for 2022, Euro Chambers warns that the continuing pandemic is still having a dire effect. The Chair of the Global Chamber Platform, Christopher Leitl, makes it clear where the blame should lie. "We see business confidence rising for most of the world's regions," he wrote, "but



© Wikimedia

Christopher Leitl

COVID-19 and supply chain bottlenecks remain serious impediments to a strong global economic recovery. Governments must not let down their guard and continue supporting businesses through policies that enhance innovation and competitiveness, while rejecting protectionist measures that stifle trade flows and foreign investment."

No-one knows how long the pandemic will last, especially with its new and highly infectious (it seems) omicron variant. The 14<sup>th</sup> century's infamous Black Death, for instance, continued returning for years. Caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, it first struck in Mongolia in 1346, reaching Europe the following year. It finally started to fade in the 1350s but never went away entirely, killing an estimated 200-million people, almost 50% of Europe's population in all. What a lot we have to look forward to. At least the SARS-CoV-2 virus is neither quite as unpleasant in the way it kills, nor quite so deadly. And we know much more these days, of course.

### KILLING BUGS

"Combatting the pandemic," said Irish Fine Gael MP Seán Kelly, "is only temporary. Combatting climate change is long term, and for that reason it will be incumbent on governments to, first of all, be ambitious and to explain the need for the actions that have to be taken so that people can look in the long term, rather than the short term. Also, there will be need for legislation, something similar to what we have for Covid, so that we can compel bodies to reduce emissions, and the message has to get out there to all sectors, all industries, indeed, every individual." Knowing something is basically good for us, sadly, doesn't always guarantee popular support for the measure, as the many protests around Europe have shown. In Austria, for instance, crowds 40,000 strong waved banners with such slogans as "Make Austria great again" and "I will decide for myself". What the SARS-CoV-2 virus decides seems not to enter into their thinking. The protests were largely organised by Austria's far right Freedom Party, whose leader, Herbert Kickl, is not the first Austrian to urge civil disobedience and violence against those who don't agree with his views. I believe it's fair to say that more people share Seán Kelly's view than that of the Austrian far right.



© Wikipedia/Ewney

Herbert Kickl

Some of the banners displayed the letter "Q", in the colours of the US flag. "Q" represents a far-right American conspiracy theory group, normally referred to as 'QAnon', which is seemingly headed by a chap with a beard who wears horns on his head. The group, made up of a bizarre and eclectic collection of individuals, claims that various anonymous people have formed themselves into a satanic cabal of paedophiles and cannibals (yes, really; some folk will believe anything) that also ran a child sex trafficking ring and conspired against Donald Trump when he was President, thus causing his electoral defeat. It was the "Q" supporters who attacked the Capitol Building in Washington on 6 January, 2021, leaving five people dead (the final number is disputed and could be higher). Now the QAnon movement has spread to Austria; lunacy recognises no borders, it seems. At the Council of Europe, meanwhile, there is more concern about climate change and pollution than about the risk of imaginary cannibal paedophiles. For delegates, the environment matters rather more. "The Assembly has always endeavoured to promote environmental protection and to promote the role of the Council of Europe," says its website, "responsible, inter alia, for drawing up



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MEP Gunnar Beck

the Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law (ETS No. 172, 1998) and the Convention on Civil Liability for Damage Resulting from Activities Dangerous to the Environment (ETS No. 150, 1993). Therefore, it is disappointed that these two conventions have not attracted the number of ratifications necessary to enter into force.”

Doctor Gunnar Beck, a German MEP from the right-leaning Alternative für Deutschland party, is no fan of the European Union, which he accuses of responding too slowly to the Covid pandemic, among other things, and he understands the protests against further restrictions. He believes that Europe is now seeing an over-reaction in terms of measures aimed at ensuring a greater take-up of vaccines; vaccines, moreover, in which he has little faith anyway. “I think it’s got to be proportionate. There are certain rights that must not be abridged and ought not to be restricted,” he told me. “I think the EU is absolutely desperate because it can’t control things, and now for this time we have fears, with certain restrictions in order to control the epidemic or virus wave, and there are certain things that mustn’t be done.” Beck understands the growing opposition to lock-downs, whilst acknowledging that governments must try to restrict the spread of the virus. “You can’t prevent people from work, nor should you force people to vaccinate. But we do know from Far Eastern countries that there are certain measures that work: closing borders, as far as possible; at least giving people the option of home offices. All these are reasonable options. If you want to, also wearing masks in certain places. So, I think one has got to keep a balance, but this discrimination between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated has to stop, because we now know that vaccines are a lot less effective than was thought, although I’m not saying they are useless, or even worse than useless. I’m not saying that; I’m merely saying that they’re a lot less effective than we first thought.” He says they do not justify what he referred to as “massive discrimination against the unvaccinated”.

Not everyone shares Beck’s opinion of the available vaccines but there are certainly those keen to protect our rights and freedoms. “We have to be careful because the civil rights are in danger,” warned Professor Stefan Schennach, a Socialist member of the Austrian

Parliament, “and whatever we are doing to fight against the pandemic, we should never forget that when we take away civil rights we have to bring the civil rights back, and I’m very worried that some countries are not taking so much care over civil rights and human rights, and it’s understandable that for a short period, if necessary, you limit civil rights, but any measures you set up need an ending, so that after the fight against the pandemic, the full civil rights are back in force.”



Professor Stefan Schennach, Socialist member of the Austrian Parliament

### LOOK UP; LOOK OUT!

The Covid pandemic is not the only thing that we face in 2022, but there’s little point in rehearsing all the terrible events that might – and I stress “might” – occur. Dutch Socialist Tiny Kox prefers to look on the bright side. “Fear is realistic but it’s also not very productive,” he told me. “If you fear, then it’s better to go and lie in your bed and wait until you die, and if you have hope you get out of your bed and you see what you can do.” Kox is an optimist but not an unrealistic one. “There are a lot of worrying developments, of course; developments that we identified in our report on the strategic priorities of the Council of Europe. That is more of a question of what things could endanger our future,

and where we should put our priorities in order to avoid that danger becoming a reality. There, too, we also give a hopeful signal about what we can do about that future to prevent the fear becoming a reality.”

So far, we’ve been doing alright – sort of. At least, that’s the view of Finnish parliamentarian Inka Hopsu of the Green League. “I think the European Union has worked pretty well for a long time,” she told me when I asked if getting countries to work together was becoming more difficult. “The European Union’s main goal is to have peace in Europe and also to have secure situation also for economic matters, which we have had after the Second World War, so I think everything was successful, but we have new challenges now, with migration issues, with the climate change, and the question is: is the EU strong enough to respond to these? That’s the question now, but I hope we can strongly support the EU and find the solutions, and I’m happy that in the climate negotiations, the EU has been the one which is leading and giving those responses.” It’s an encouraging thought and one that could set the tone for the future if we let it.

Gunnar Beck of the right-wing German party Alternative für Deutschland, seems less confident that the EU represents the future. “Let’s bear in mind that the EU is very quick to blame others for its own misfortunes,” he told me. “Take the recent hike in gas prices. The most obvious reasons are the EU’s own climate change policies, like the reduction in gas drilling in the North Sea. They can’t admit it. Also, they’ve moved from long-term supply arrangements to spot trading. All of these are the real reasons for the recent hike in gas prices. The EU talks about the wind not blowing enough in the first half of this year, and, of course, they blame Putin, but there is evidence that Mr. Putin has increased gas supplies.



Parliament House, Helsinki, Finland



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The European Court of Human Rights, Strasbourg France

And who is responsible for delaying the inauguration of Nord Stream II? The German bureaucracy and resistance to Nord Stream II within the EU, perhaps American pressure. It has nothing to do with President Putin; he's very keen to launch Nord Stream II."

That is not the reason that the United Kingdom decided to leave the EU and plough its own furrow. That had more to do with innate nationalism and what often appears in its tabloid press as simple xenophobia. "Brexit was really just the first step that had to be achieved for so many other things," said Saj Karim, once a Conservative MEP but no longer linked to that party. "The other thing that those core 'Brexiters' are working towards is for the UK to leave the Council of Europe and to leave the ECHR (European Court of Human Rights), which is where these rights reside." Rik Daems doesn't share that fear. "We've been in the UK just last week and that is exactly the opposite of what I heard," he reassured me. "There is a concern though that they say, yeah, at one point in time, we believe that our own constitution, what have you, does not conform with the European Convention, but then at the end of the day, the European Convention is a sort of constitution, so if you ratify it you should adhere to it. If there are issues that need to be addressed, I would be the first to say: 'let's address them, I mean why run away from it?'"

We shouldn't forget that, whatever the extreme Brexiters may think, it was Britain that created the Council of Europe with the Treaty of London, signed in May 1949. It united Belgium, France, Denmark, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and, of course, the UK. It was, in part, to pull the rug from beneath moves towards closer European union than

the Attlee government favoured, I was once told by Dirk Spierenburg, one-time member of the High Authority, the forerunner of the European Commission. It was Spierenburg who co-wrote a book with Raymond Poidevin that explains the early years of the European Coal and Steel Community that would eventually develop into the European Union. I took on the long, slow job of rewriting into snappy prose the not very easy-to-read English translation in 1989. It took a year, more or less, and kept my weekends busy. The book was called "The History of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community – Supranationality in Operation". Not the snappiest title I've encountered but interestingly detailed and, as it turned out, a great source of information that has proved enormously useful to me over many years. My work in rewriting the translation involved regular meetings with Spierenburg to discuss technical points over coffee, and he was a very amusing man to work with. He told me that politicians all over Europe were aware of Robert Schuman's plan to render war impossible by uniting the production of both coal and steel, which were seen as the basic materials for conflict (Schumann called them 'the engines of war').



Dirk Spierenburg

We'd just got over one global conflict and didn't want another. Spierenburg knew it would be a hard sell to the British and when one of the idea's keen proponents travelled to London to put it to a government minister, it is said that his outright rejection included the phrase "the Durham miners would never forgive us." To offer a less powerful option for a union of Europe's nations that didn't threaten parliamentary sovereignty, the Council of Europe was born. Karim doesn't think that fact would sway the Brexiters. "That means nothing to these people," he said. "This is my point. People are protesting about the wrong things. The things that they should be protesting about, they're just accepting and shrugging their shoulders and moving on, but the things that they really ought to be co-operating with and accepting, they're protesting about, so the whole thing is topsy-turvy."



© Ziya Altunyaliz / Twitter

Ziya Altunyaliz

This topsy-turvy nature of today's politics was echoed by Turkish MP Ziya Altunyaliz of the AK party. "The biggest threat to peace is a global issue," he told me. "The production and supply of varieties has been changed all round the world. Countries all around the world are trying to take advantage of a sometimes – may I say – upside-down situation, including the pandemic as well. The right thing is, if anything, unbalanced all around the world. I think that it is going to impact the rest of the world and people or countries will think it is to my advantage and I should take it without consideration of others living around the world and other countries as well. And that's why whatever you do as individuals or as countries, you have to take many things in practice and supply the right balance to also consider others' rights to live in it and to take in and to

have sustainable living conditions and development all around the world.”

### HE'S BEHIND YOU!

So where is the world heading in 2022? And is Europe to play a sufficiently large part in it? “Europe is just not happening, it’s all in our hands,” Polish Socialist MEP, former European Commissioner and political scientist Professor Danuta Hübner believes, “And you know this famous European decision-making through political will and my feeling is that there is a lot of political will to find solutions and to move forward on many fronts, actually, because of the way we reacted to the pandemic. Two years ago, it was clearly a fresh emergency and without the right competences we managed to move, to use all the flexibilities; you remember the taboos that were gone all of a sudden? So, I think we proved that in difficult times we have machinery to move. But what was surprising to me is that they very quickly established the mechanism for the longer term, the whole recovery and such and whole new way to finance it, the new way of approaching economic governance, the co-ordination. So I think a lot has been planned to create a chance for Europe to survive, first of all, and then to move forward, without – and I think this is just as important – giving up on priorities that we established before the pandemic.” So, the world has changed, but Europe remains a very important part – even a very important structure – within it.

Europe is not without its enemies, of course. Indeed, democracy could be said to be not without its enemies. Take the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, for instance, who seems to be no fan of nations linking together for mutual advantage – unless he’s in charge. “I would say that fundamentally, Putin is a revisionist,” said Reinhard Bütikofer,



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Migrants stranded in harsh conditions on the Belarus-Poland border

© Un.org

an German MEP from the Greens and European Free Alliance group, who detects personal ambition in Putin. “He once said that the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and if you look at his policies through that prism, it makes sense. He denies the Ukrainian people the right to determine their own future.

He displays the same attitude vis-à-vis Belarus, and to some extent also the Baltic countries. So I think he really wants to reverse the setting free of nations that used to be under the Russian heel, and on the other hand he’s a pretty good poker player: whenever he sees an opportunity of taking some advantage of something for a low price, he will probably go for it. He’s not the ultimate gambler. He doesn’t run an incalculable risk, so there are ways to deter him by standing fast together, but whenever we let our partners in Eastern Europe down, whenever we don’t show the necessary level of solidarity, chances are that Putin might take advantage of that.” That fear is shared by British Conservative Member of Parliament Neil Parish. “I think peace and stability in the world have a lot to do with the Russians in particular, what they’re doing on the eastern borders of Europe, what they’re doing in Ukraine, you know, I think there’s influence in Belarus. So, there are a lot of problems, and that’s the closest to us, and of course the other problems are the Chinese. It’s very difficult to know how to deal with the Chinese, because if you try to beat them metaphorically with a stick, they don’t like it.

The problem is you can’t really just ignore their behaviour.” For Parish, the Far East is a matter of personal concern. “I have a Japanese daughter-in-law,” he explained, “and I just wonder what’s going to happen vis-à-vis Japan

and China eventually, and I think it’s a worrying time for us. I think we need to have our eyes open and I don’t think we should take a too romantic view of the Russians and the Chinese, because Putin is thoroughly dangerous and the Chinese, of course, are just expansionist and they believe in a greater China.” It’s an interesting footnote here that Putin’s enemy, the opposition politician and anti-corruption activist Alexei Anatolievich Navalny, who survived an attempted poisoning and is now in a Russian prison, is being awarded the 2021 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. I don’t imagine that bothers Putin one tiny bit but at least it’s a symbolic gesture.

### INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE BORDER

The world is not entirely made up of nation states working within their own borders. Some people do not have, may never have had, borders they can call their own. Take the Roma and Sinti people, for instance among others, who get pushed to the edge of things and have to eke out their existence without many of the amenities we take for granted. I have visited a number of Roma communities and unless you had seen them too you would find it hard to believe the sort of squalor in which they are expected to live in our modern Europe. In one case, a rotting apartment building with crumbling internal steps and with no running water looked out over a massive garbage pile, running with rats. One Romanian Roma woman who obtained her qualifications through a Fulbright scholarship at Vanderbilt University, New York, set up and now runs an educational organisation called Link Education and Practice, or LEAP, to help members of minorities to become more employable





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Vanderbilt University, New York

“Through the lens of my work on Roma rights,” Cristiana Grigore told me, “and the Roma narrative, I see that this is the case, not only that the Roma are stereotyped and there are so many prejudices against us, but that’s the case with so many other groups, and that’s also the case with us: how we look at the wealthy and privileged. In the United States there is a whole narrative about what they do and how they do things, so I think that finding ways to understand the human side and it’s important not to demonise any group and to understand the context and the factors.”

Meanwhile, what of the alleged seekers after a life outside the European Union? We’ve heard of ‘Polexit’ or ‘Hungeroff’, but are these realistic scenarios? Brendan Donnelly, director of the Federal Trust, thinks the chances of the EU breaking up have been over-stated. “Well, I don’t think that either of them actually want to leave the European Union, Poland for more edifying reasons, but Hungary, as well, there is a sense of ‘European-ness’, of European identity, in contrast with what was inflicted on them by the Soviet Union. But in the case of Hungary in particular, there’s the sense of financial dependence on the European Union, which I think will stay the hand of the

government. It will always push as far as it can and take what is necessary in the way of steps to remain within the European Union.”

Donnelly, without knowing it, is endorsing the New Year message of Rik Daems to the member states of the Council of Europe, but also to all political associations of countries and groups of countries, wherever in the world they may be. “My message to the world,” he told me, “would be: talk to each other, find solutions to the problems that might arise, and to say, in another way, what is the definition of a problem? It is defined by its solution and if you cannot find a solution, then you have a situation that you have to live by, but I rather think you’ll have the other one!” The 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet, Jalāl ad-Dīn Mohammad Rūmī, once wrote about arguments: “Raise your words, not your voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.” Never was truer word spoken.

The title I have chosen for this article comes, not from Rumi, as he’s most often known, but from William Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, which is one of his lesser-performed plays. The quotation seems to fit, however, our somewhat uncertain emergence into the New Year of 2022:

“Time is like a fashionable host  
That slightly shakes his parting guest by  
the hand,  
And with his arms outstretched, as he  
would fly,  
Grasps in the comer: welcome ever  
smiles,  
And farewell goes out sighing.”  
Fingers crossed, eh?

*Jim Gibbons*

## A MESSAGE FROM JIM GIBBONS

I would like to thank all the people who found time in their busy schedules to face an on-line interview with me. The interviews were conducted over a period of about four weeks, starting in early December 2021. I hope they feel I have done justice to their replies to my questions. Thank you all for your patience. They are (in no special order):

**Gunnar Beck**, a German MEP of the *Alternative für Deutschland* party;

**Professor Stefan Schennach** from Austria, who sits with the Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group in the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly;

Ireland’s **Seán Kelly**, a Fine Gael member of the European Parliament, sitting with the European People’s Party (EPP);

**Tiny Kox**, a Dutch member of the Socialist Party in the Netherlands and the party’s leader in the Senate since 2003;

**Brendan Donnelly**, Director of Britain’s pro-EU Federal Trust;

**Cristiana Grigore**, a Romanian woman who now runs the Roma People’s Project at Columbia University in New York;

**Professor Danuta Hübner**, a former EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, now representing Poland’s centre-right Civic Platform Party in the European People’s Party group at the European Parliament;

Britain’s **Sajjad Karim**, a former Conservative member of the European Parliament and the first British Muslim to be elected;

**Reinhard Bütikofer**, a German Green member of the European Parliament and Chair of its Delegation for Relations with the People’s Republic of China;

**Ziya Altunyalı**, a member of the Turkish parliament representing the Justice and Development party (AKP), headed by Turkey’s President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan;

**Inka Hopsu**, a member of the Finnish parliament representing Finland’s Green League;

**Neil Parish**, a Conservative member of Parliament in England, a farmer and former member of the European Parliament;

and last but by no means least, **Rik Daems**, a Belgian Liberal politician and now President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

They all deserve my profound thanks and I should like to take this opportunity to wish all of them a splendid 2022, in which their dreams come true and their nightmares most definitely do not.



© Wikipedia



## KEEPING A CHECK ON TECH

*Does the EU's Digital Service Act protect freedom?*

“Science moves, but slowly slowly, creeping on from point to point,” wrote the 19<sup>th</sup> century English poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson in his dramatic monologue poem, Locksley Hall. In the case of devising appropriate EU-wide legislation for our ever-expanding digital services, to describe its progress as ‘slow’ is like saying that the Himalayas are ‘a bit on the high side’ and have treacherous parts for climbers. In fact, the poem with its 97 rhyming couplets tells of a young man who, whilst wandering with friends, asks them to go on without him because the place at which he has stopped, the eponymous Locksley Hall, is full of fond memories for him. It is somewhere he spent part of his childhood or youth and where he had a dalliance with a childhood sweetheart, who dumped him (he’s still annoyed about it). At one point, though, it almost looks as if he has foreseen the digital marketplace of the early 21st century, with all its marvels: “Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails, Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales; Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain’d a ghastly dew

From the nations’ airy Navies grappling in the central blue.”

Either Tennyson had amazing foresight, an extremely effective crystal ball, or a generous supply of mind-altering substances. I think I’d better settle for the ‘foresight’ option, I suppose, although the latter has its arguments, too.

It was back in December 2020 that the European Commission published its long-awaited ideas for a Digital Services Act (DSA) after many years of tossing ideas back and forth about the need to control illegal and even toxic content (define what that even means, if you can) and the deliberate spread of

disinformation. The main motivation was the need to consolidate various and diverse strands of EU legislation and the sorts of regulations aimed at controlling what some may consider to be ‘harmful’ material. The proposed DSA, however, goes way beyond consolidation and harmonisation, according to Article 19, an international human rights organisation that seeks to defend and promote freedom of expression and freedom of information on a worldwide basis. Article 19 claims that the DSA is trying to make ‘Big Tech’ accountable to public authorities for its actions through ‘enhanced transparency



The Berlaymont, seat of the European Commission in Brussels



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and due diligence'. However, unlike the Digital Marketing Act (DMA) of which it largely approves (subject to certain amendments), it can foresee big problems with the DSA, arguing that it threatens the protection of Freedom of Expression. It especially dislikes the mandatory removal of 'illegal' content within 24 hours, the preferential treatment it gives to any speech by politicians and the fact that the blocking of access to platforms for failing to comply with the DSA will "disproportionately affect users' rights to free expression and access to information." It mildly applauds MEP Christel Schalders for improving the text on users' rights, among other changes. Article 19 wants to see the removal of amendments that would mandate the removal of certain categories of illegal content within 24 hours. It also wants the deletion of amendments giving preferential treatment to politicians and the power of Digital Service Coordinators to request 'interim blocking' of platforms. There are several other things, too complex to explain here, perhaps, that the group also doesn't like.

We must be clear at this point that despite the similarity of names, the Digital Services Act is not the same as the Digital Markets Act (DMA). Both acts lay down rules for what are called 'intermediary service providers'. These include providers of Internet access, 'cloud' providers, search engines, social networks and on-line marketplaces. But they are not the same piece of legislation, although they are supposed to progress towards the EU statute books in lockstep.

The DSA is intended to strengthen the Single Market and protect citizens' rights by establishing a standard set of rules on obligations and accountability right across the market itself. The DMA, on the other hand, is aimed at ensuring that there is a higher level of

competition by regulating the behaviour of core platform services that act as gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are platforms that serve as gateways between online service providers and their customers. In this rôle they occupy a significant and enduring market position. The DMA will impose certain prohibitions and restrictions on them, including a ban on them discriminating in favour of their own services, as well as obliging them to share data generated by business users. Observers have noted that the wording of the European Commission's original proposal is sympathetic to human rights. On this occasion it seems to be the amendments tabled by the European Parliament that are posing the risks. As the Electronic Frontier Foundation EFF puts it on its website: "It threatens a dystopian set of rules that promotes the widespread use of error-prone upload filters, allows the entertainment industry to block content at the push of a button, and encourages disinformation by tabloid media on social media."

It is clear, then, that not everyone sees the DSA as a step forward; it has too many negative aspects for across-the-board acceptance. The EFF, for instance, is afraid it will mean even more ill-advised and ill-conceived restrictions on internet freedom by imposing automatic filters, ostensibly to protect copyright but in reality simply as a way to curb everyone's rights on the Internet through the use of what are called 'algorithmic filters'.



European Parliament Brussels

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These are a form of artificial intelligence that is very far from actually being intelligent. They will further 'enhance' (or rather worsen, if you prefer) the unpopular 2019 Copyright Directive's ability to interfere with the on-line rights of some 500-million users across 27 EU member states. The EFF points out that the sorts of filter introduced under the 2019 Directive are, as the EFF website puts it, "terrible at spotting copyright infringement". The EFF says the DSA fails in both directions, permitting some infringements to slip through whilst also blocking content that doesn't infringe copyright. "Filters can be easily tricked by bad actors," it points out, "into blocking legitimate content, including (for example) members of the public who record their encounters with police officials." The EFF is convinced that "however bad the existing copyright filters are, the DSA, as it currently stands, would make things far, far worse."

## RISE OF THE ROBOTS

The need for revision of the existing regulations, more-or-less unchanged since the e-Commerce Directive of 2000, has been brought into sharp focus by the pandemic. "The COVID-19 crisis has starkly illustrated the threats and challenges disinformation poses to our societies," writes the European Parliamentary Research Service in a briefing on the DSA. "The 'infodemic' – the rapid spread of false, inaccurate or misleading information about the pandemic – has posed substantial risks to personal health, public health systems, effective crisis management, the economy and social cohesion." It seems that some people, for whatever reason, like to spread lies and disinformation wherever they can, especially during a crisis. The aim of the DSA's supporters is to change that. "The Digital Services Act will change the EU's digital sphere enormously, creating a safer and fairer online space for EU citizens," said Mark Andrižanič, Slovenian Minister for

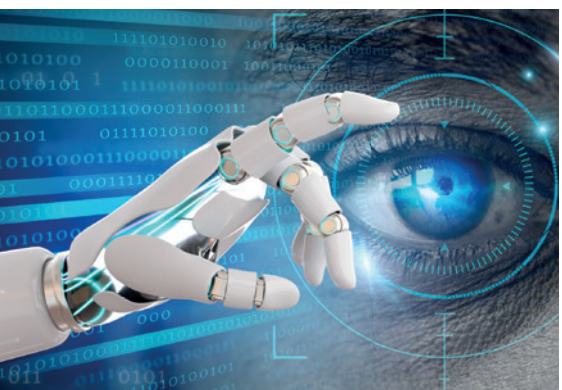


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Slovenian Minister for Digital Transformation  
Mark Boris Andrižanič

Digital Transformation, “Together with the DMA, this proposal is at the core of the European digital strategy, and we are convinced it will restore citizens trust and increase consumer protection.” He may be but many are not.

The EFF is among those that are worried because the proposals for the DSA would include the requirement for online platforms to remove without delay any content its algorithms consider to be even ‘potentially illegal’. It means that vital decisions are being taken in real time by automated filtering systems could be very expensive indeed. Such filtering systems, already shown to be unreliable, were set up in the knowledge that they made mistakes, whether they allowed through things that some people would prefer to see blocked or blocked things when they shouldn’t. A number of platforms boast about the capabilities of their AIs to spot and block certain material, but the EFF says that the top engineers of those platform operators are warning their bosses that they simply do not work at all. According to the EFF, the DSA sets up rules that effectively allow a handful of US-based tech giants to gain control over a large volume of European on-line speech, mainly because they’re the only companies with the capacity to do so.



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As a result, these US-controlled enclaves of inward-looking users will monitor speech and delete it at will, with no regard as to “whether the speakers are bullies engaged in harassment – or survivors of bullying describing how they were harassed.” A human could quickly spot the difference; a robot cannot.

There is a clearly-expressed fear that the DSA would serve to amplify the many faults already highlighted in the EU’s E-Commerce Directive. In fact, the DSA, as it stands, seems to have very few devoted friends. “The impacts of Internet legislation are rarely contained by borders,” warns the Digital Services Act Human Rights Alliance, another lobbying organisation. “To date, the EU has been a leader in Internet legislation, for better and, unfortunately, sometimes for worse, and the Digital Services Act is no different.” As you may have gathered, the frequently-expressed opinion seems to lean towards the view that the DSA is not better and may turn out to be a good deal worse than that which has gone before. Let’s face it, the robots involved in this task are not like C3PO or R2D2. Not surprisingly the vote on the DSA has been postponed, while on 24 November, the European Parliament’s Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) voted to approve the DMA by 42 votes to 2, an unusually overwhelming majority. It’s clear that, whatever they may think about the DMA, where the DSA is concerned quite a lot of individuals and organisations don’t like it.

German MEP Andreas Schwab, a member of the centre-right EPP group and rapporteur for the Digital Markets Act, believes the DMA will strengthen competition and prevent big tech companies from assuming dominant rôles. “The EU stands for competition on the merits, but we do not want bigger companies getting bigger and bigger without getting any better and at the expense of consumers and the European economy,” he said. “Today it is clear that competition rules alone cannot address all the problems we are facing with tech giants and their ability to set rules by engaging in unfair business practices. The Digital Markets Act will rule out these practices, sending a strong signal to all consumers and businesses in the Single Market: rules are set by the co-legislators, not private companies!” Members of the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee seem

largely convinced that the DMA will give back control of the market to those who set the rules, thus diminishing the overweening power of the tech giants. “Currently, a few large platforms and tech players prevent alternative business models from emerging, including those of small and medium-sized companies,” argued Committee Chair Anna Cavazzini, a German Green MEP. “Often, users cannot choose freely between different services. With the Digital Market Act, the EU is putting an end to the absolute market dominance of big online platforms in the EU.”



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German Green MEP Anna Cavazzini

MEPs did not pass the legislation without making some adjustments. For instance, they tweaked the Commission’s original proposal to increase the quantitative thresholds for a company to fall under the scope of the DMA to €8 billion in annual turnover in the European Economic Area (EEA) and a market capitalisation of €80 billion. To qualify as a gatekeeper, companies would also need to provide a core platform service in at least three EU countries and have at least 45 million monthly end users, as well as more than 10,000 business users. These thresholds do not prevent the Commission itself from designating other companies as gatekeepers as long as they meet certain conditions.

## DO MORE, FASTER AND WORSE?

Christel Schaldemose, the Danish Socialist MEP who acts as rapporteur for the proposed DSA on the European Parliament Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, wants to go further than the Commission proposed. “In the offline world, in shops, the owner is responsible for what is sold in his shop,” she said in an online interview. “And, of course, he



© intel.com

could go to the manufacturer and the importer, but he's responsible for the fact that the product needs to be safe. Online these platforms don't have that kind of responsibility. And I think that we have to look into how to create a bigger level of safety for products online, sold online.

And the proposal is for instance, putting an obligation to the platforms to know who the sellers are. But what if you can't find them, who shouldn't then have the responsibility?" All interesting points, of course, although some outside observers had suggested they may result in the new legislation failing to make it onto the statute books at all. Legislators don't like over-complicated legislation that may be open to various interpretations. As the EFF puts it, the normal patterns of over-severe legislation being proposed by the Commission, and then being toned down by MEPs, has gone into reverse. "In the case of the EU's most important legislative project for regulating online platforms, the Digital Services Act, the most dangerous proposals are now coming from the European Parliament itself, after the draft law of the EU Commission had turned out to be surprisingly friendly to fundamental rights." That's why the vote on the DSA has been postponed.



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Christel Schaldermose

What is it that Schaldermose wants that so many people apparently don't? Let's take a look at one or two examples. Schaldermose is demanding that platforms block illegal content within twenty-four hours if it's felt that the content "poses a threat to public order". Exactly what sort of content would pose a threat to public order is not made clear, so platforms will have little choice but to remove content on demand, a dangerous precedent. Meanwhile, the Parliament's co-advisory Legal Affairs Committee wants to go even further, giving the entertainment industry in particular the right to block uploads. In this way, live streaming of sports or entertainment events have to be blocked within half an hour of notification of an alleged infringement. This can only be done by using automated filters – robots again – because humans are not capable of making a judgement in such a short time. Germany has its own similar restrictions, but the DSA goes further. The German version only involves content that is clearly and obviously illegal, but no such restrictions hold back the DSA. The German law sets a 24-hour deadline for deletion but doesn't automatically punish any who break the deadline. In the EU version, any claims of breaching copyright, for example, could lead to massive fines. It means that the incentive to block anything that even hints at such problems will result in material simply never getting aired.

In Schaldermose's version, the platforms would be directly responsible for breaches, not just the user of the platform, with decisions again being taken by robots. These AI programmes frequently make mistakes, which has led to perfectly innocent material being flagged up and banned. "Oh, brave

new world that has such people in't," as Miranda exclaimed in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Of course, some of his plays (and quite a few of those written by his contemporaries) could have fallen foul of the sorts of measures being advocated by Schaldermose, had they existed back then. Elizabethan playwrights were notorious for occasionally pinching lines from rivals' efforts; Shakespeare's brilliant *King Lear* was an adaptation (albeit vastly improved) of a well-known and familiar old play that was little more than a pantomime with deaths and a happy ending. Shakespeare's *Lear*, of course, dies in misery, along with his good daughter, Cordelia (plus his two nasty daughters, Goneril and Regan, referred to cleverly by my English teacher as "the Ugly Sisters", as in *Cinderella*), his Fool and even poor old Kent. Sad enough, I think, without facing a fine for plagiarism as well.



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French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789

Of course, the laudable aim of the DSA, like the DMA, is to protect fundamental rights, honest businesses, and consumers. According to a body that calls itself the Digital Services Act Human Rights Alliance (DSAHR), it's going about it in the wrong way. In an online statement, it compares the embryonic DSA with Germany's unfortunate NetzDG, a law with similar intent, but not one most people would choose to copy.

"The NetzDG has been criticised even in Germany," it points out. "For example a recent study showed the regulation isn't helping remove problematic speech, but is potentially leading to overblocking." The writers are clearly concerned that the DSA in its final form, whatever that

may be, will influence the way platforms operate far from Europe, since a lot of content originates far away, which is why it's so important to get it right. As it is currently proposed it would be extremely expensive to operate. "Due to the wide territorial scope of the DSA," warns the statement, "non-EU platforms that provide services to the EU, including small and micro-providers will have to appoint a costly legal representative, who must be based in the EU." Another problem the statement points out includes the use of 'trusted flaggers': people whose objections lead to action whether or not they are trusted elsewhere. This system has led to problems with Myanmar, for instance.

### OBEY THE LAW – IF YOU CAN!

There is concern, too, about the very tight deadlines imposed for content removal which could interfere with fundamental rights. "EU co-legislators should avoid legally mandated strict and short time frames for content removal," the statement argues, "due to their detrimental impact on the right to freedom of expression and opinion." The very short time frames, coupled with "a strong push for swift content removal" that form a major part of the proposals for amendments by the Parliament's committees are a major source of concern. The statement says they will "make it impossible to carry out a 'legality check', let alone make a decision about whether to act against content that requires contextual analysis." The statement goes on to support the idea that platforms should enforce their own standards and terms of service. "However, we urge the European co-legislators," it stresses, "not to abandon

the fundamental rights perspective by imposing inflexible time frames for removals of third party content that inevitably will lead to removal of lawful content to avoid liability." France endeavoured to block online hate speech but because of its negative effect on users' freedom of expression, the law was struck down by the Constitutional Council of France as "unconstitutional".

The list of concerns about the proposed DSA goes on and on. The statement issued under the name of the DSAHRA, for instances, expresses alarm about the obligation to cooperate with law enforcement authorities, such as the obligation to inform them about serious criminal offences. It looks at first glance like a perfectly reasonable thing to do, but the requirement isn't restricted to 'imminent risks' and it fails to specify what data must be shared, while the amendments proposed by European Parliament committees go further. "Such rules would undermine the privacy of users," the statement warns, "and they are likely to have disparate impact on people who are already suffering from discrimination based on race or religion, and will have a predictable chilling effect on freedom of expression, as users cannot communicate freely if they are concerned that uploaded content is shared with law enforcement authorities." Few people, however law abiding, feel happy discussing their hobbies and other activities with a policeman sitting nearby.

It's not the first time that well-meaning MEPs have, by amending a European Commission draft, made it worse. In April 2019, for instance, they passed the clumsily-titled Copyright in

the Digital Single Market Directive, giving member states until June that year to enact it. It has proved highly controversial, as it clearly threatens to undermine the free expression of individual Internet users, who will risk having any content they attempt to post online blocked by companies that are afraid of breaching the new copyright laws. The EU Directive in this case is not actually a law, set out for all to obey, but a framework intended to guide member states in drafting their own laws.

Until the passing of the European Copyright Directive, Internet services in both the United States and the EU enjoyed "safe harbour" protection from liability when users (their customers) infringed copyright. In the EU, Article 17 of the Directive replaces the "safe harbour" with a major overhaul of the liability rules which forces Internet services to be much more cautious about the content they allow their users to post. The much-criticised Article 17 insists that Internet service providers make what are referred to as "best efforts" to obtain licences from rights holders, whoever posts the material. The Article then insists that all providers except for the newest and smallest must make every effort to ensure the non-availability of "specific works" identified by rights holders. Its third provision is that companies must again make "best efforts" to block future postings of content that had been previously removed following a notice to remove it. It's a bit like posting a bouncer in the entrance to a public library, to ensure borrowers don't illegally copy down a quote or make notes about something illegal. It is a clumsy piece of ill-thought-through legislation that has caused big problems for Internet companies. Everyone knows it was awful and should not be duplicated, but EFF, examining the new proposals for the DSA, says: "Apparently, the European Parliament has learned nothing from the debacle surrounding Article 17 of the Copyright Directive." The EFF says the DSA "threatens a dystopian set of rules that promotes the widespread use of error-prone upload filters, allows the entertainment industry to block content at the push of a button, and encourages disinformation by tabloid media on social media."

## Creating a Digital Single Market

EU COPYRIGHT RULES FIT FOR THE DIGITAL AGE





© Wikipedia

Electronic Frontier Foundation 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary poster

## WHO'RE YOU GOING TO CALL?

As things stand, the European Parliament is scheduled to debate the DSA and DMA on December 9, with a final agreed proposal (assuming agreement is ever reached) being put forward very early in 2022 for a first reading. Getting it right is important. As the European Commission puts it in its Explanatory Statement: “Digital services have brought important innovative benefits for users and contributed to the internal market by opening new business opportunities and facilitating cross-border trading. Today, these digital services cover a wide range of daily activities including online intermediation services, such as online marketplaces, online social networking services, online search engines, operating systems or software application stores.” We need it, then, but we can't agree on how to frame it, although the Commission is convinced that we should: “Unfair practices and lack of contestability lead to inefficient outcomes in the digital sector in terms of higher prices, lower quality, as well as less choice and innovation to the detriment of European consumers. Addressing these problems is of utmost importance in view of the size of the digital economy (estimated at between 4.5% to 15.5% of global GDP in 2019 with a growing trend) and the important role of online platforms in digital markets with its societal and economic implications.”

Assuming there is sufficient agreement for the DSA to become law, those engaged in running digital platforms will be obliged to take notice. According to the London-based law firm, Morrison and Foerster, “Breaches of the DSA may attract one-off fines of up to 6% of annual global turnover or periodic penalty payments of a maximum of 5% of average daily turnover.” That's a very clear incentive to obey the law.

Reading the European Commission's views you would never guess that there is any controversy. “The Digital Services Act (DSA) regulates the obligations of digital services that act as intermediaries in their role of connecting consumers with goods, services, and content,” it says on its website.

“It will give better protection to consumers and to fundamental rights online, establish a powerful transparency and accountability framework for online platforms and lead to fairer and more open digital markets.” It all sounds so non-controversial and innocent. See this from the website of EU Law Live: “The proposal follows the principle that what is illegal offline should also be illegal online and defines clear responsibilities and accountability for providers of intermediary services, such as social media and online marketplaces. The DSA proposed rules are designed asymmetrically, which means that larger intermediary services with significant societal impact would be subject to stricter rules.”

All fine, then? Not according to the Article 19 website, which contains a considerable list of objections. It says that the revised notice and action procedure contains “unduly short timeframes”, forcing a reliance on automated filters (we're back to robots here). Another objection concerns the suspension of public interest accounts, with the exception of politicians' accounts, presumably because they're seen as “reliable”. I don't know about you but I'm fairly sure that if I were to walk out in the street and ask passers by what profession they believe to be most trustworthy, not one would suggest politicians. Then there's the “must carry obligation” that automatically favours sources such as public authorities and scientific sources as the first port of call in any Internet searches. There is another proposal that the Article 19 group especially dislike: it allows Digital Service Coordinators to request a judge to block access an interim measure if a site is identified as “failing to comply” with DSA obligations, which the website describes as a “highly disproportionate and draconian response for failure to comply with the DSA's obligations”

It brings me back to one of the reasons given for creating the DSA (and the DMA, of course, although that is less controversial): that people don't really trust the Internet. Of course not. It is recommended that we search our various sources for the information we seek. No, we don't really trust the Internet, but I suspect we trust politicians even less.

*Toby Bowman-Grant*



Julian Assange anti-extradition demonstration

© Article19.org



**Going for a coffee? ... Lock your desktop first!**





## GLOBAL ARRESTS AND SEIZURES:

### *INTERPOL-WCO operation strikes wildlife and timber trafficking network*

A worldwide enforcement operation against wildlife and timber crime coordinated by INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization (WCO) has disrupted crime networks and seen hundreds of arrests worldwide.



© Interpol

Big cats destined for the illegal wildlife trade were intercepted at border control

Codenamed Thunder 2021, the month-long (1-31 October) operation involved customs, police, financial intelligence units and wildlife and forestry enforcement agencies in 118 countries: the largest number of participating countries since the annual operation started in 2017.

Thousands of cars, trucks and cargo ships suspected of transporting protected wildlife and timber were searched at checkpoints in all regions, often with specialist sniffer dogs and X-ray scanners.

Searches targeted illegally traded CITES-listed specimens, ranging from timber to live big cats, primates, reptiles, and birds, as well as derivative products such as clothing, beauty products, food items, traditional medicines and handicrafts.

CITES is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered

Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, an international agreement to ensure that trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Trade performed in breach of CITES is illegal.

*Environmental crime has a direct impact on climate change, harms the livelihoods of millions of people, results in forced migration and can trigger the spread of animal-to-human viruses (zoonotic diseases).*

#### TARGETING THE CRIMINAL NETWORKS

Although results are still coming in, Operation Thunder 2021 has so far seen more than 1,000 seizures and the identification of some 300 suspects, triggering worldwide arrests and investigations linked to illegal trading, processing, exporting and importing CITES-listed wildlife and forestry products.



© Interpol

Border Force dog sniffs out illegal goods

Further arrests and prosecutions are foreseen globally as investigations continue to unfold.

“Organized crime networks are generating billions in illicit profits every year, at significant cost to our environment as well as the associated impacts of fraud, corruption and violence,” said INTERPOL Secretary General Jürgen Stock.

“We are seeing the continued globalization of crime, which means only an international response can be effective, as demonstrated with this latest Operation Thunder. Every one of our 195 member countries has a role to play in combating

this threat, either directly or in the follow-up investigations,” added Secretary General Stock.

Total worldwide seizures reported to date include:

- 478 kg ivory pieces and 487 kg ivory-derived products
- 75 big cat parts, 29 live big cats
- 856 kg pangolin scales
- 531 turtles and tortoises
- 171 birds
- 336 reptiles
- 4,843 kg marine products, including corals
- 75,320 kg timber, including 313m<sup>3</sup> of rosewood
- 1.4 million plant-derived items

“With criminals trafficking endangered species along the same routes they use to smuggle other illicit goods, customs is strategically placed at borders to intercept illegally traded CITES-listed products,” said WCO Secretary General Kunio Mikuriya.

“Large-scale cross-border operations such as Operation Thunder 2021 illustrate the benefits and impact global law enforcement cooperation has in deterring wildlife crime, putting its perpetrators behind bars, and raising awareness of its devastating effects,” added Dr Mikuriya.

On the border with Mozambique, South African authorities seized 460 kg of abalone bound for China. Abalone molluscs are at critically low levels because of over-exploitation.

Myanmar authorities made 13 seizures nationwide totalling 68 tonnes of restricted and endangered hardwood species.

Polish authorities intercepted 29 illegal caviar shipments including one batch valued at USD 10,000. International trade in all species of sturgeons is CITES-regulated.

In one of the operation’s largest plant-based seizures, the UK’s Border Force in Felixstowe seized from a maritime container 1.3 million tablets containing CITES-listed Saussurea Costus plant.



© Interpol

Border Force examine slimming products containing cactus extract

## Operation THUNDER 2021

Tackling illegal wildlife crime

**118** countries

**300** offenders apprehended

**1,002** seizures of wildlife and forestry products, including:

<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>478 kg</b> ivory pieces and <b>487 kg</b> ivory-derived products</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>856 kg</b> pangolin scales</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>531</b> turtles and tortoises</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>336</b> live reptiles</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>75,320 kg</b> timber, including <b>313m<sup>3</sup></b> of rosewood</p> </div>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>1,4 million</b> plant-derived items</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>75</b> big cat parts, <b>29</b> live big cats</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>4,843 kg</b> marine products, including corals</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>171</b> live birds</p> </div>
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WCO

INTERPOL

ICCWC

Spain's Guardia Civil seized more than 250 CITES-protected items worth EUR 250,000, including turtles, parrots, ivory-based merchandise and timber.

Authorities in the Netherlands intercepted 145 snakes and other reptiles in luggage at Schiphol International Airport, as well as 454 live birds, mostly African songbirds.

### TRENDS IDENTIFIED SO FAR INCLUDE:

- increase in illegal money transfers to launder the proceeds of wildlife and timber crime,
- use of online platforms to facilitate cross-border trafficking,
- more commercial and customs document fraud for export, transit, and import,
- links with other serious crime, as seen by Namibia which reported 14 wildlife crime cases linked to the illegal trade in
- pharmaceutical products, food and vehicle parts.

In seizures that suggest some emerging trafficking routes, Nicaraguan authorities seized 657 m3 of rosewood bound for China, while Hong Kong (China) authorities seized 3.2 tonnes of red sandalwood in freight from the United Arab Emirates.

Demonstrating the link between wildlife and drug crime, Operation Thunder 2021 saw Mexican authorities arrest three Chinese



nationals smuggling Totoaba bladders, sea cucumber and coral along with methamphetamine and cash.

“The volume of seizures made during Operation Thunder 2021 proves how serious the transnational organized crime threat is for wild species and ecosystems across range, transit and destination countries,” said CITES Secretary General Ivonne Higuero.

“The success of Operation Thunder 2021 strongly contributes to the strategic vision of CITES Parties, and reinforces that we must work together, combining different skills, mandates and resources to reduce threats to wildlife and live in harmony with nature,” added Ms Higuero.

### INTELLIGENCE-LED FIELD OPERATIONS

Police and customs shared wildlife and timber trafficking intelligence ahead of the operation enabling field officers to target specific trafficking hotspots during the tactical phase, with an emphasis on land, sea and airport border points as well as wildlife parks.

Known criminals, particularly INTERPOL red notice fugitives, were identified ahead of.

Since the first edition in 2017, Thunder operations have seen some 8,000 seizures of protected wildlife and forestry species and the arrest of more than 3,000 offenders.

Operation Thunder 2021 is the fifth in a global series initiated by the INTERPOL Wildlife Crime Working Group. Coordinated jointly by the WCO and INTERPOL, with the backing of the CITES Secretariat and the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), these operational efforts are funded by the European Commission's department for International Partnerships and the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

INTERPOL's environmental security activities are all externally funded and dependent on sustainable partnerships.



Thunder searches targeted illegally traded CITES-listed specimens such as here in Spain



## INFLATION: IS IT HERE TO STAY OR WILL IT GO AWAY?

In the last episode we talked about the energy crunch; the skyrocketing gas prices, geopolitical movements around gas involving Russia, its neighbors, the EU, the US and even the immigration issues. There were also the dilemmas around the shift to the new energy sources and the complex operational and geopolitical procedures around the transition from the old to the new and alternative energy sources, electric vehicles, shortage of semiconductors, lithium and China's positioning in the alternative energy market.

Little did we suspect that the reform and legislation around fossil fuels would translate into an energy crisis and hence become one of the major drivers, and the inevitable consequence of what the central bankers are watching closely. Economists are trying to assess and decipher more and more of what went on during the last months, namely inflation.

In the last decade, we have been through so many different events, from “too big to fail”, to quantitative easing, to social media, to the tech revolution and the

longest bull market in history lasting from 2010 to 2019, that we had forgotten about inflation.

The last time the market was worried about inflation was in 2007, when consumer prices rose rapidly, just before the US housing crisis in 2008. This was better known as “the subprime crisis”, from which all the subsequent crises stemmed with the expected domino effect.

The effects of 2008 were carried over into 2013 with the Greek and European debt crises. The effects continued to be felt until early 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic hit with full force, striking a blow to the system's most already vulnerable shell. Fear arose that history was repeating itself.

The fear of a global recession or something similar to what the world went through during the Great depression of 1929-1939 with all its consequences has prompted lawmakers to do all they can to counter the possibility of a steep economic downturn or a new depression.

Typically, there is no economic growth during a recession and unemployment rises. Sometimes, prices fall in a process

known as deflation, which in itself, is not a bad thing for businesses and consumers. However, it is unfavorable for the financial sector and credit lenders, in other words, the banks. As deflation deflates debts, it decreases the value of the debt or the money lent.

Therefore, policy makers and central banks, including the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Federal Reserve (the Fed) have, since the beginning of the crisis, taken drastic monetary measures. On the one hand, they have lowered interest rates – a quite conventional tactic – but on the other, have made a less conventional move by buying bonds and other debt securities on the open market with newly-created bank reserves. They have also injected new credit, also known as “quantitative easing (QE)”,



with the aim of increasing money supply and thus spurring economic activity on the domestic market.

For more than a decade now, policy makers have done their best to re-inflate prices in order to preserve the market from a deflation. They have done this by increasing the money supply to unprecedented levels, and distributing cheap money to households and businesses, and by keeping interest rates very low, close to zero.

However if all the measures implemented fail to bring about economic growth, in parallel with the re-inflating prices, we are then dealing with stagnation. Here, the economy will suffer from a phenomenon known as “stagflation”, which is as costly as a recession.

**A LESSON IN HISTORY: THE USA IN THE 1970S**

If the Great Depression of 1929-1939 is remembered like a plague in modern financial history that eventually led to the outbreak of World War II, the Great Inflation of the beginning to the mid 1970s is remembered like an “energy Pearl Harbor”, in the words of President Richard Nixon’s top advisor at the time. In 1964, inflation measured a little more than 1 percent per year, and had been in this vicinity over the preceding six years. Inflation began ratcheting upward in the mid-1960s and reached more than 14 percent in 1980.

The recession of 1973-1975 in the U.S. came about as a result of skyrocketing fuel prices, influenced by a booming global economy. OPEC had also raised oil prices and placed an embargo on oil exports to the U.S in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war. As a consequence

of this conflict, OPEC countries boycotted the US for supporting the Israeli army, and therefore the Arab embargo quadrupled oil prices. This came at a time when the US economy was struggling amid heavy government spending on the Vietnam War, as well as a Wall Street stock crash in 1973-74.

It was this economic stagnation, coupled with the high inflation that occurred during that period that gave rise to the term “stagflation”.

Those who remember the 1970s Great Inflation can also recall the following ingredients: high oil prices, thick sweaters, fire stoves, inflation, unemployment and finally, recession in 1981-82.

During that period, the CPI - core consumer price index - peaked to 13,5% with the result that inflation hovered stubbornly between 10 and 12% from February 1974 through April 1975. Between 1973 and 1975, the U.S. economy posted six consecutive quarters of declining GDP and at the same time tripled its inflation. Concurrently, GDP declined 4.7% in the US, 2.5% in Europe, and 7% in Japan, while the unemployment rate wiggled between 6% to 10 %, and almost peaked at 11%.

Up until that point, economists of the Keynesian school, namely the New Zealand born William Phillips and founder of a theory that goes by the name of “Phillips Curve” that later proved to be too simplistic and perhaps erroneous in some ways, thought that inflation was to be encouraged as it meant higher growth, even if the unemployment rate was high.

According to the theory of the late British economist, John Maynard Keynes,



Men stand in line outside a depression soup kitchen in 1931

growth in the money supply can increase employment and promote economic growth. This theory was inspired in large parts by the dramatic memories of historically high unemployment rates in the United States and around the world during the 1930s. At that time, the Fed had more or less let the banking system collapse, allowing the money supply to dwindle and causing prices to fall. This brought about the deflation that contributed to the contraction of the entire economy.

According to Keynesian economic theories prevalent in the 1970s, inflation should have had an inverse relationship with unemployment, and a positive relationship with economic growth. Thus, rising oil prices should have ultimately contributed to economic growth. It was explained that increasing inflation should decrease unemployment, and that a focus on decreasing unemployment also should increase inflation.

The belief was that when labor demand increases, the pool of unemployed workers subsequently decreases and companies increase wages to compete and attract a smaller talent pool. And so companies pass along those costs to consumers in the form of price increases. Therefore any fiscal stimulus would increase aggregate demand.

At that time, president Nixon, who at first came to office as a fiscal conservative but later ran budget deficits, supported an income policy, and eventually announced that he was a Keynesian as the reelection year approached.

He exploited the idea that monetary policy can and should be used to manage aggregate spending and stabilize economic activity. It should be noted that this is still a generally accepted tenet



President Barack Obama meets with Economic Recovery Advisory Board Chair Paul Volcker in the Oval Office

that guides the policies of the Federal Reserve in the US and other central banks in the world today. During that time the Fed continued increasing the money supply and kept the interest rates low. But one big, erroneous assumption regarding the implementation of the stabilization policy of the 1960s and 1970s was that there was a firm and exploitable relationship between unemployment and inflation, where the policy makers thought that they could in the long term, lower the unemployment rates by introducing higher rates of inflation. This is how, according to some economists, the greatest failure of American macroeconomic policy in the postwar period was brought about.

A few years later, in 1979, Paul Volcker was appointed chairman of the Fed by the new American president, Jimmy Carter. Volcker was a strong supporter of aggressive monetary policies and tried to put a stop to inflation in the US, even if it came at the detriment of short-term employment. Under Volcker, the Fed raised the federal funds rate from 11% at the time to a peak of 19% in 1981. It reduced growth in the money supply,

sending interest rates well into double digits, resulting in successfully lowering the rate of twelve-month inflation from a peak of nearly 15% to 4% by the end of 1982.

Though the Fed's policy under Volcker was effective in reducing inflation, the monetary contraction—combined with the impact from the oil price shock—provoked a deep slump that raised the unemployment rate to 10.8%. This pushed the economy into the most severe recession since the Great Depression and spurred strong popular opposition.

So, stagflation finally ended, but at a huge cost. By the time America finally emerged from that slump, unemployment didn't fall below 6% until late 1987.

**WHAT HAPPENED IN 2021?**

When it comes to figures, the current annual inflation rate in the US shot up to 6.8% in November 2021, (the highest since June 1982 and in line with forecasts), versus 10-12% in the 1970s. According to Bloomberg, the national unemployment rate in the US in November 2021 was 4.2%. This is considerably lower than that of 1976, when unemployment was at the very high rate of 7.7%. Nothing like this has been seen in the US since the Great Depression.

As far as Europe is concerned, the annual inflation in the European Union was 4.4% in October 2021 (the highest figure on record in the 25 years that the data has been compiled), up from 3.6% in September.

One year earlier, that rate was 0.3%. The increase is caused mainly by the spike in energy prices, while the highest inflation is seen in Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary and Poland.

According to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, the EU unemployment rate was at 6.7% in September 2021, down from 6.9% in August 2021 and from 7.7% in September 2020, versus 6-10% in the 1970s and early 1980s.

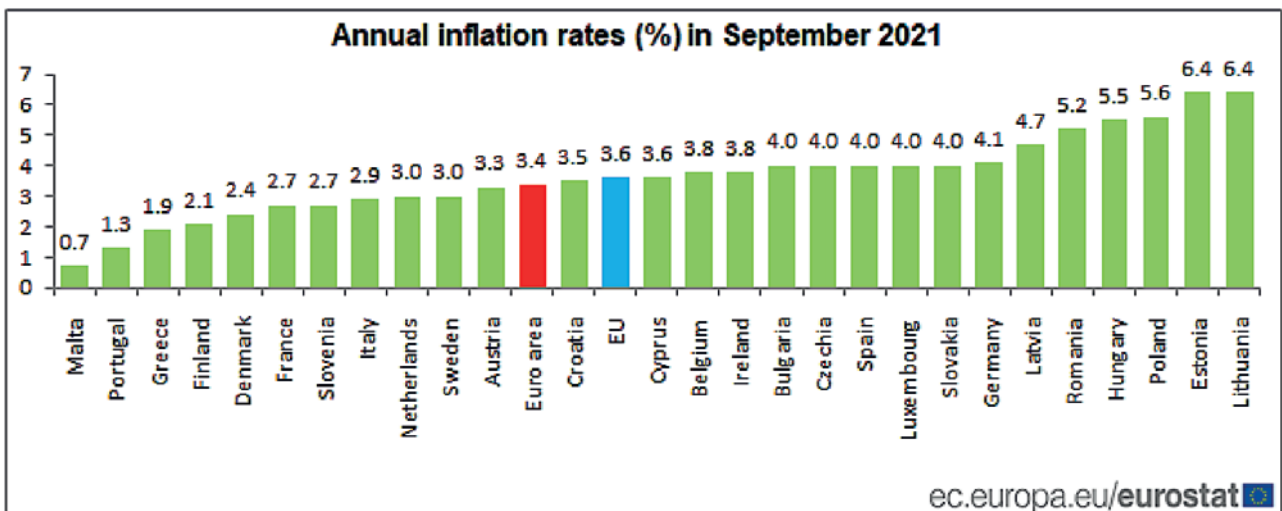
However, a 4% to 5% unemployment rate is considered to be full employment and is not particularly alarming. The natural rate of unemployment represents the lowest unemployment rate whereby inflation is stable or the current unemployment rate with non-accelerating inflation.

Inflation has been hovering over us with several inflationary hikes, most recently in 2010-11; the spike was largely driven by the prices of goods, especially oil, whose prices are always volatile. Each rise was accompanied by dire warnings that runaway inflation was just around the corner. But such warnings proved, again and again, to be false alarms, up until the Covid pandemic of 2020.



© UNICEF/Animacs/Wilander

'We can end the pandemic', UN chief says in new call for global vaccine plan . A COVID-19 vaccine is administered in Indonesia



The current inflation has a lot in common with that of the 1970s; the boom in global demand for energy, geopolitics influencing oil prices, and a decade of easy monetary policy with low interest rate, money supplies and plenty of liquidity.

However, the verdict is in the hands of the GDP; with 2.3% in 2018, 1.7% in 2019, -6.3% in 2020, and 5% in 2021 as confinement measures were gradually lifted, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) forecasts economic activity in the Euro area to expand by 4.3% in 2022 and 2.5% in 2023. France recorded the strongest quarter-on-quarter GDP growth (3.0%, compared with 1.3% in the previous quarter), followed by Italy (2.6%, compared with 2.7% in the previous quarter)

The US economy expanded an annualized 2.1% in Q3 2021, slightly higher than 2% in the advance estimate, but below forecasts of 2.2%. According to the OECD, United States GDP exceeded its pre-pandemic level by 1.4% in the third quarter of 2021.

That said, it is the end of the monetary easing for central banks. The Federal Reserve will increase the rates by three times in the coming year, with the first hike expected sometime in the spring of 2022. It will also end its Bond-buying/Asset Purchase Program. The Bank of England (BoE) will follow suite and end its Bond-buying/Asset Purchase Program, and despite the sharp increase in the Omicron infection rates, will implement an increase of 0,15%. The European Central Bank (ECB), will likewise bring an end to its Bond-buying/Asset Purchase Program, but has so far ruled out raising interest rates next year.



President Donald Trump announcing the nomination of Jerome Powell to the post of Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System in 2017.

## CHINA'S ROLE

The world is experiencing a bottleneck problem, or better said, a supply chain clogging weighing on the semiconductor markets, now a major contributor to global inflation.

Ever since the pandemic struck, consumer behavior has shifted to consuming more goods than services. People are continually ordering innumerable items online, and demand has only increased with the pandemic. Overall consumption is up 3.5 percent since the pandemic began, so it's no wonder that the ports are clogged while the shipping costs have reached new heights.

According to Politico, China's harsh travel and transport restrictions are also an important factor that is being overlooked in creating "non natural" port clogging. With Beijing deciding to impose strict quarantine measures, including even on the crews of container ships, freight transport is being delayed, with its massive consequences impacting the rest of the world.

However while the EU politicians - Eurogroup President Paschal Donohoe and ECB chief Christine Lagarde - speak of "strong, swift and coordinated economic policy response of the European Union and its member states" during the pandemic regarding inflation, they never mention Beijing's macro-economic role in the current inflation.

Western consumers are so used to inexpensive Chinese-made goods that even when these are no longer cheap, they continue buying. The Chinese Producer Price Index jumped 13.5% in October from one year ago, shooting up from September's 10.7%. Vegetable prices jumped 16% in October, gasoline and diesel prices rose more than 30%. The ongoing energy crunch was also a great contributor to the sharp increase in producer price inflation, as the cost of coal mining and processing has gone up enormously.

There is also the fact that the Yuan is currently at its strongest in more than three years versus the U.S. dollar. The last time it was at this level was in the summer of 2018, just before the trade war triggered by Washington. China responded by allowing its currency to devalue, making its exports more competitive with U.S. goods. Chinese manufactured goods are no longer cheap due to its monetary



ECB President Christine Lagarde addressing a plenary session of the European Parliament.

policies and the ongoing energy crunch; yet European and American consumers want to continue buying. The inflation in China has transmitted itself to the rest of the world.

According to Morgan Stanley, China's debt has grown by \$4.5 trillion over the past 12 months, more than growth in debt for the U.S. (\$2.2 trillion), Japan (\$870 billion) and the euro area (\$550 billion) combined, over the same period. The majority of this debt creation in China has been directed toward infrastructure and property markets, feeding domestic demand, but it has lifted global commodity prices and China's commodity-related producer price segments.

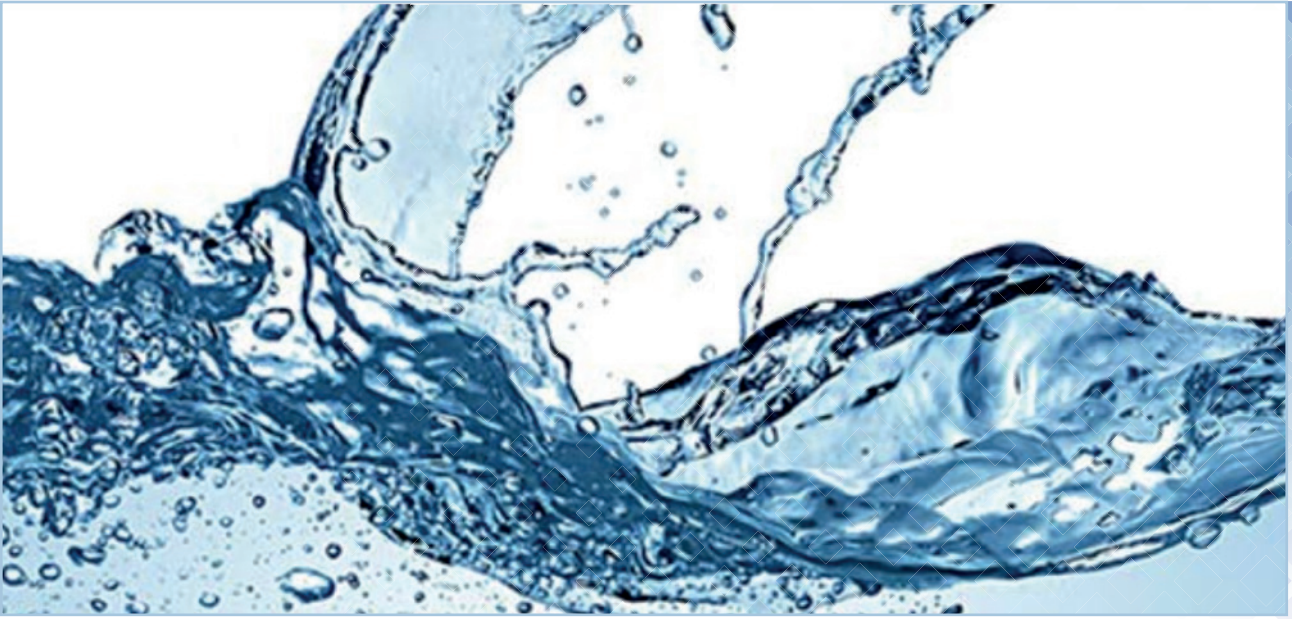
We are just stepping into 2022 and we are starting the year by looking at the global inflation in the eyes. But as long as it is accompanied by economic growth and healthy employment, the figures will not be that dangerous.

The market is divided into two camps, one - 'Team Transitory' - believes that the current inflation is transitory and will eventually pass and fade away, while the other is of the opinion that it has a more persistent nature because it is accompanied by lower growth rates, very similar to the 'stagflation' of the 1970s.

So far, the warnings about inflation have proved right, while the predictions by "Team Transitory" that inflation would quickly fade have proved to be somewhat naive.

Governments and central banks will do all they can to offset inflation. However, at the core of today's inflation lie energy prices and all that is causing the imbalance of supply and demand. Therefore, as long as energy prices are not tamed, neither will the current inflation.

Vianne Savoli



# WATER

*This magic element of life*

**W**ater, this natural element which is fundamental to human existence, accounts for more than 60% of our bodies and is one of the most basic biological needs.

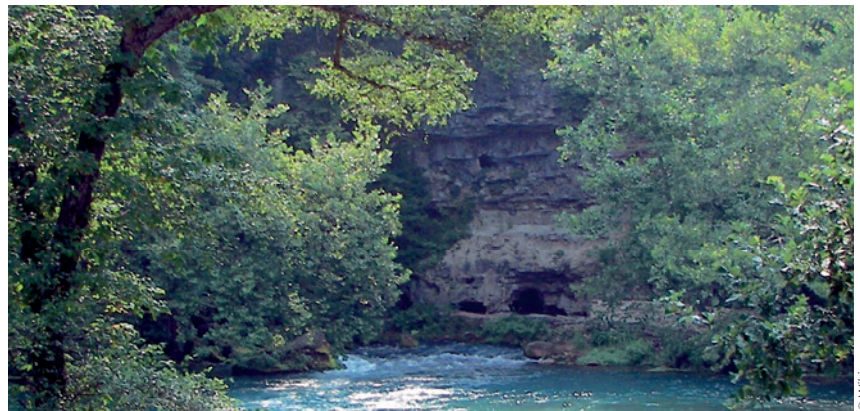
Although water covers approximately 71 percent of the Earth's surface (326 million cubic miles of water on the planet), only around 3 percent of this water is actually freshwater. However, most of it is inaccessible to us, being locked up in glaciers and polar ice caps or buried too far underneath the earth's surface. Most of our drinking water comes from rivers and streams (roughly 0.4% of the earth's water to be shared among the almost 8 billion people) but sadly, much of this accessible freshwater has become highly polluted lately (Source: worldwaterreserve.com).

Nearly 30 percent of all fresh water resources on Earth are to be found underground. Eurogeosurveys estimates that 75 percent of European Union residents depend on groundwater for their water supply (Denmark gets its drinking water 100 percent from ground waters).

There are more categories of drinking water, which are used for human consumption. Natural mineral water comes from natural underground reservoirs and mineral springs. They are considered more pure and cleaner than surface water and may be treated at source, to remove any unstable elements and undesirable residues. This water can provide important minerals such as magnesium, calcium, sodium and zinc (in different percentages, depending on the formation of the source) and it is considered very beneficial to human health, being

an effective way to boost the daily mineral necessary intake.

Bottled mineral still water has an average of 7.1 to 7.5 pH level, which is slightly alkaline, while that of sparkling mineral water is lower, between 5.3 and 6. Keeping a balanced pH level in the body and in the blood has been linked to increased immunity and good health. But, when used in high quantities, carbonated mineral water may cause problems with the kidneys and can lead to kidney stones formation or bloating.



On an average day, nearly 303 million US gallons (1,150,000 m<sup>3</sup>) of water flow from Big Spring in Missouri at a rate of 469 cubic feet per second (13.3 m<sup>3</sup>/s)





Romanian Borsec mineral water advertisements

Mineral springs have been exploited for over 4000 years. Romans were the first to acknowledge the benefits of both thermal and mineral springs. The habit of drinking this ‘curing water’ continued throughout human history and it flourished even more, once traveling became easier and faster, especially in Europe. The tradition of bottled water comes from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the first bottled water was made in the UK. Later on, mineral water consumption became very popular and was considered a health remedy. In 1809, Joseph Howkins developed the first recipe for carbonated water. He reproduced, for the first time, the natural effervescence of natural spring water. This technological discovery led the way to mass consumption of cheaper sparkling water as well as to increasing the popularity of mineral water (healthier and with natural properties that cannot be fully reproduced) even further.

It is estimated that 60 percent of Europe's underground mineral water reserves are in Romania. However, out of the approximately 1900 mineral water brands in the EU which are officially registered and recognized by the European regulatory authorities, Germany with 821, has the highest number of certified natural mineral water brands. Italy comes second with 322, followed by Hungary with 214 and Spain with 165 registered mineral water brands. (Source: Statista.com-2016). Romania, although having huge potential and natural reserves, with around 2000 natural mineral water springs, currently exploits only about 20 percent of them, with

an average consumption of 50 liters per person; this is half of Europe's numbers.

In Europe, the average consumption of packaged water was around 115,3 liters per person in 2019 (Source: Statista.com). The total volume of bottled water consumed in Europe in a year is estimated at around 50.000 cubic meters and continues to grow yearly. Italians seem to be the thirstiest of all Europeans, with an average consumption of 184 liters of mineral water per year (Source: eurogeosurveys.org).

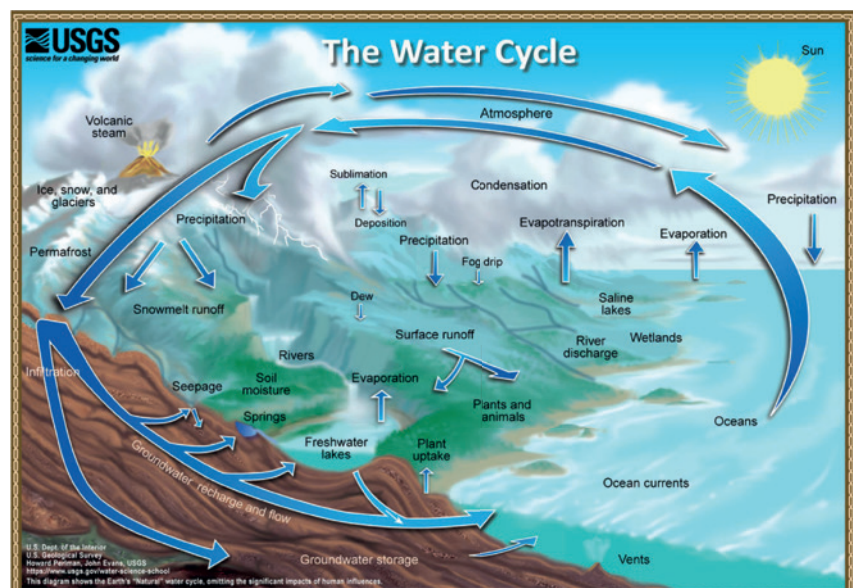
Germany and Hungary have some of the lowest water prices within Europe. On the opposite side, Iceland and Norway have the most expensive mineral water (Source: Numbeo.com).

The preference in Europe nowadays is more for sparkling mineral water. Inversely, the US market seems to be

more open to still water consumption. This comes not only from a long tradition, but also a need since as tap water was not safe to drink for a long time on the American continent. Although this is no longer the case, the American preference was already set and in total, in 2020, for the fifth year in a row, bottled water ranked higher than any other beverage in the preferences of American clients.

In Europe, tap water is appreciated for its quality and is considered as being one of the safest. Austria for example, is renowned for that quality, after it invested heavily in its water systems. It now publicizes the fact that it brings its tap water directly from some natural springs in the Alps (in Vienna, they advertise the famous ‘Wiener Hochquellen Wasserleitungen’).

As people are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of clean water consumption, demand for purified bottled water has also increased. From the 1980s on, bottled mineral water consumption has experienced a boom, partly benefiting from wise and targeted marketing campaigns. Even now, with a multitude of choices of beverages on the market, the European bottled water market is expecting a growth of around 3 percent between 2020 and 2026. The new trend of flavored waters has also helped. Whether due to its better taste or its perceived health benefits, because of fewer calories than other sugary soft drinks, it has definitely influenced sales and the resulting increased market share.





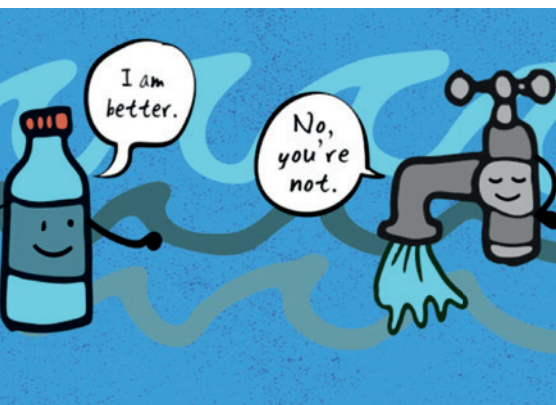
The "Kläfferquelle" (Vienna spring water pipeline) with up to 50,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water per day (during the snowmelt), the most abundant source

© Wikimedia/Waldriedel

Although the global pandemic has severely affected the tourism industry which constitutes one of the major markets for bottled water, mineral water consumption has continued its upward trend. Bottled water has been in especially great demand as consumers stock up for longer "stay at home" periods due to lockdowns. Trade Associations such as the European Federation of Bottled Water (EFBW) are also constantly advocating for the consumption of mineral water.

Natural Mineral Water Europe (NMWE) represents the interests of the European bottled water producers. It is based in Brussels, Belgium and it promotes natural waters, spring waters and their benefits before the European Union regulatory authorities and international organizations.

In the EU, the exploitation, quality standards and marketing of mineral waters are strictly regulated by European Directives 2009/54/EC and 2003/40/EC. From January 7, 2022 due to Brexit, EU mineral waters will have to be additionally accredited by British authorities in order to



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Evian and Aquafina advertisements

be imported to the UK. Although some fear that the process might take weeks or even months, British officials assured that this will not be the case and that popular European water brands will be available in UK supermarkets as usual. Needless to say, that there are huge sums and interests at stake.

The bottled water industry is now a multi-billion dollar affair with big players on the market. Some of the largest bottled water producers in the world are Aquafina (owned by Pepsico), Dasani (owned by Coca Cola), Nestlé and Danone (France).

It is important to note that the top two world producers, both from the USA, get their water from the tap and then refine and purify it through osmosis and ultraviolet sterilization, enriching it with minerals or adding flavors. Brilliant marketing strategies and great logistics are part of their success. Nestlé Waters, with gross annual sales of 3.4 billion dollars, bases its strategies on promoting the importance of water for good health.

Danone, another big player on the water market with gross sales of 540 million dollars (Source: Zippia.com) has concentrated on delivering high quality water in creatively designed bottles in order to increase its market share and notoriety.

Evian (now owned by Danone) is one of the most famous natural mineral water brands in the world. Its natural mineral water source, 'les Bassins' in the 'Haute Savoie' region, is the only one recognized by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971. This is an international UNESCO convention with over 170 member states.

Ramsar is one of the oldest intergovernmental accords for preserving the ecological character of wetlands and promoting best water practices, with more than 2400 recognized sites around the world. Despite its price compared to other mineral waters, Evian acquired its fame and market share which is steadily growing.



Carpatica advertisement

Whether they come directly from the Alps or from the rain in the tropical forest of Fiji (as advertised by Fiji, another top world water brand), these waters are recognized as luxury items, to be found in 5-star hotels and Michelin Star restaurants, consumed by international influencers and celebrities, all adding to their fame.

Bottled mineral waters are produced by some 23 European countries. The most famous brands such as Evian and Perrier from France, San Pellegrino from Italy, Gerolsteiner from Germany and Voss from Norway are recognized internationally and are currently distributed worldwide. There are other, more recent brands that are trying to compete with these established names to also gain some notoriety by emphasizing their competitive advantages.

Aqua Carpatica, a relatively new Romanian brand has gained fame in recent years and other than Europe, it is now also sold in the USA and Asia. It underlines its advantage of being extracted from springs deep in the Carpathian Mountains, home to the last wild forest of Europe and far from any non-agricultural or industrial activities that might affect its purity. It is the only mineral water which is naturally nitrate and sodium free, and perfect for newborn care, with a naturally alkaline pH of 8,2 (nitrates are heavy oxidants. They are odorless, colorless and tasteless, and harmful to humans when ingested in large quantities). With its unique

square shaped bottles and its high-quality composition, Aqua Carpatica won the 2021 edition of the 'Superior Taste Award' at the International Taste Institute in Brussels for the fifth year in a row. Jury members are composed of renowned chefs and experienced water sommeliers. As the water industry developed, so did the options for safe and attractive packaging. There are now rows of glass or plastic bottles and aluminum or cardboard cans of all shapes, sizes and colours waiting for the customers in many supermarkets. When considering packaging, the question of not only safety but also the taste of the product, as well as the environmental impact need to be addressed. In ancient times, silverware was widely used; now it is modern materials. Glass is still considered the safest, and since it is chemically inert, it does not affect flavor. Its impact is also much less severe on the environment which today, is literally suffocating under the weight of plastics. Glass bottles have also been promoted as more elitist and luxurious; this undoubtedly brings to mind Perrier with its elegant, green glass bottle. The brand has promoted this image for a long time, associating its high quality sparkling mineral water, extracted from the unique underground source in Vergèze, in the south of France, with the distinctive green bottle.

Nestlé has recently unveiled a revolutionary prototype of its Perrier water bottle, made entirely of recycled plastic, using new recycling

techniques, without compromising quality. This new technology is important as it allows plastics of all types and of all colors to be recycled and transformed, thus creating an endless life cycle to plastic. The 'Carbios' technology uses enzymes from naturally occurring microorganisms to break down PET plastics (polyethylene terephthalate, a type of thermoplastic polymer resin) contained in various plastics or textiles into its constituent parts. These can then be converted back into new, virgin-grade plastic (Nestlé.com). Around Europe, a whole series of recycling measures and rules have been implemented in order to increase plastic recycling and to reduce plastic pollution.

No matter where they get their natural waters from, all producers must be aware of the fact that heavy and uncontrolled exploitations may endanger these natural resources to become depleted and diminish to nothing. Pollution and extensive agriculture may also pose a serious threat to the quality, safety and availability of our drinking waters.

We must all treat water as a natural heritage, a precious element of life, to be protected, valued and preserved.

'If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water' (Loren Eiseley).

*Alexandra Paucescu*



Château de Vergèze, the current Perrier® Museum and former home of the Garnier Family

# TO VISIT

## *Civita di Bagnoregio*



© Civita di Bagnoregio

**C**ivita di Bagnoregio is located in Tuscia on the border between Tuscany and Lazio. About a decade ago, no one had heard of this town. It had exactly 11 residents. Why? Well, for starters, Civita di Bagnoregio is crumbling bit by bit into the valley below.

Ok, lets backtrack. The main entrance is a huge stone passageway, cut by the Etruscans 2,500 years ago when Bagnoregio was Bagnorea. The name probably derives from *Balneum Regis*, referring to the presence of thermal waters with particular therapeutic properties. The town flourished through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance until disaster struck. On 10 June 1695 an earthquake hit Civita, separating it (with the formation of a spectacular cliff) from the other two districts of Mercato (today Mercatello) and Rota.

That earthquake signalled the beginning of a mass exodus from Civita di Bagnoregio. The town was never the same and in the centuries that followed more and more pieces of the cliff eroded away, taking any buildings with them into the abyss.



© Civita di Bagnoregio

The precarious setting earned Civita the nickname “The Dying City” or “The City in the Sky”.

Fast forward to today and Civita di Bagnoregio is now one of Tuscia’s and Central Italy’s most popular tourist attractions as thousands of visitors flock to see what’s left of the town.

With so few inhabitants and neither the means nor the desire to modernise, Civita di Bagnoregio has remained preserved in its medieval cloak. The city’s most famous native was the 13<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher and saint Bonaventure. It is a study in close observation. A gorgeous day trip into what Italy looked like before the tourist attractions and postwar palazzos. A lovely taste of rural life and the hardy and hard working locals who are left holding up the fort.

A couple of years ago, Civita di Bagnoregio decided to charge visitors a small entrance fee – €5 on the weekend, €3 on weekdays – to visit the town. The money goes towards preserving the remaining buildings and holding back the tides of erosion.

Civita di Bagnoregio will inevitably disappear when the final pieces crumble into the spectacular Valle dei Calanchi below. Knowing this and knowing that nothing can be done to prevent it makes your visit all the more special and... macabre.

But the town is hardly dead no matter what its nickname suggests. Instead it is a bustling mess of visitors and locals, gossiping nonni and the rare child or two. Its social calendar is filled with fascinating traditional festivals and there are plenty of great restaurants where you can sit and soak up the splendour around you. The views of the valley are breathtaking, but so are the tiny streets and flower-filled piazzas. It’s also been officially declared a “Borgho più bello d’Italia” (One of Italy’s most Beautiful Towns).

An important note, Civita di Bagnoregio can only be reached on foot. Supplies are mopeded in, while the rest of us must walk the rather long and tiring footbridge that connects the town to the parking lot back on the ‘mainland’.

### WHAT TO SEE IN CIVITA DI BAGNOREGIO



© Civita di Bagnoregio

Despite its nickname, during the tourist season, Civita bustles with day trippers. Most visitors come to Civita di Bagnoregio for its incredible views of the surrounding valley and its beautifully preserved buildings. The town doesn’t have breathtaking tourist guidebook monuments that you can tick off your bucket list. This is just Italy. A quiet little village town still stuck in the Middle Ages. A piece of history without the hangups of modernity or the invasion of souvenir shops and tacky tourist menus.

A visit to the Civita di Bagnoregio is like a treasure hunt. Blink and you’ll miss the Renaissance portals and ivy draped courtyards. Decide not to sit in the piazza and watch the locals and you’ll miss the chance to experience the town in all its complexities and beauty. That said, there are a few gems that can’t be missed. These are our favourites:

### VISIT CIVITA DI BAGNOREGIO

You need to buy a ticket to visit Civita di Bagnoregio. Tickets are available at the infopoint just outside the parking lot. From there, you must walk along along bridge over the gorgeous Valle dei Calanchi and into town. It’s pedestrian access only. You can’t drive into Civita di Bagnoregio.

**Infopoint Civita di Bagnoregio**  
Località Mercatello Bagnoregio (VT)  
+39 3248660940  
promotuscia.bagnoregio@yahoo.it

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From 8am to 8pm

**Entry ticket**  
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# EUROPE

# *Diplomatic* magazine

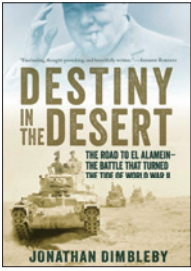
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# BOOKS



## DESTINY IN THE DESERT

By *Jonathan Dimbleby*

THE ROAD TO EL ALAMEIN: THE BATTLE THAT TURNED THE TIDE OF WORLD WAR II

The definitive history of the battle of El Alamein? "The end of the beginning," as Churchill said? the bloody conflict that would change the course of World War II.

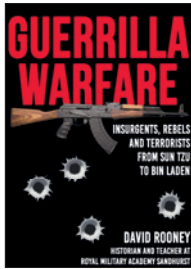
It was the Allied victory at the Battle of El Alamein in November 1942 that inspired one of Churchill's most famous aphorisms: "This is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end, but it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

In this thrilling historical account, Jonathan Dimbleby describes the political and strategic realities that lay behind the battle, charting the nail-biting months that led to the victory at El Alamein in November 1942.

Drawing on official records and the personal insights of those involved, Dimbleby creates a vivid portrait of a struggle which for Churchill marked the turn of the tide—and which for the soldiers on the ground involved fighting and dying in a foreign land.

16 pages of B&W photographs

Published by Pegasus Books - Distributed by Simon & Schuster



## GUERRILLA WARFARE

By *David Rooney*

INSURGENTS, REBELS, AND TERRORISTS FROM SUN TZU TO BIN LADEN

*The history of the world's most brutal surprise attacks: guerrilla warfare.*

Since man's earliest days, there has been conflict and, also from that point, unconventional forms of action where the norm was abandoned and the

unorthodox employed. Here, historian David Rooney selects examples of the leaders who, for personal, religious, tribal, or national ambitions, have been trailblazers in this form of warfare.

Tracing the origins of guerrilla theories back to the Maccabees, the author moves on through the Napoleonic Age and the Boer Wars before considering Michael Collins, Mao Tse Tung, T. E. Lawrence, Castro and Guevara, and the Guerrillas of World War II before considering the situation with Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden. The irregularity of this form of military action seems so pertinent in an age where convention and tradition in all walks of life is quickly abandoned in search of fast results; the warrior of the twenty-first century is more likely to adopt unconventional strategies than ever before. The topic is one of public debate and this explanation of its evolution can only increase our understanding and awareness of the topic.

Published by Skyhorse - Distributed by Simon & Schuster



## WAR IN THE SHADOWS

By *Patrick Marnham*

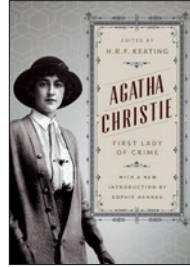
RESISTANCE, DECEPTION AND BETRAYAL IN OCCUPIED FRANCE

After publishing an acclaimed biography of Jean Moulin, leader of the French Resistance, Patrick Marnham received an anonymous letter from a person who claimed to have worked for British Intelligence during the war. The ex-spy praised his book but insisted that he had missed the real 'treasure'. The letter drew Marnham back to the

early 1960s when he had been taught French by a mercurial woman – a former Resistance leader, whose SOE network was broken on the same day that Moulin was captured and who endured eighteen months in Ravensbrück concentration camp. Could these two events have been connected? His anonymous correspondent offered a tantalising set of clues that seemed to implicate Churchill and British Intelligence in the catastrophe.

Drawing on a deep knowledge of France and original research in British and French archives, *War in the Shadows* exposes the ruthless double-dealing of the Allied intelligence services and the Gestapo through one of the darkest periods of the Second World War. It is a story worthy of Le Carré, but with this difference – it is not fiction.

Published by Oneworld Publications - Distributed by Simon & Schuster



## AGATHA CHRISTIE

By *Agatha Christie*  
 Edited by *H. R. F. Keating* /  
 Introduction by *Sophie Hannah*

FIRST LADY OF CRIME

*From Poirot to Miss Marple, from The Mousetrap to Witness for the Prosecution, this a fascinating look at the life and work of Agatha Christie, the world's most successful and popular crime writer.*

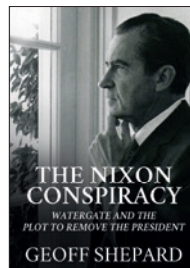
Agatha Christie was not only the most successful author of detective stories the world has ever known, she was also a mystery in herself, giving only the rarest interviews—declining absolutely to become any sort of public figure—and a mystery, too, in the manner in which she achieved her astonishing success.

Distinguished crime novelist (and acclaimed critic) H. R. F. Keating brings together a dozen noted writers from both sides of the Atlantic to throw light on the ever-intriguing Dame Agatha. Some essays analyze Christie's art itself; some explain the reasons for her success—not just the books, but also in film and theatre.

The myriad of critical angles explored here are penetrating, affectionate, enthusiastic, analytical, and even funny. Together, they give an almost unique insight into the life and work of the First Lady of Crime.

Includes essays by Sophie Hannah, H. R. F. Keating, Elizabeth Walter, Julian Symons, Edmund Crispin, Michael Gilbert, Emma Lathen, Colin Watson, Celia Fremlin, Dorothy B. Hughes, J. C. Trewin, Philip Jenkinson, William Weaver, and Christianna Brand.

Published by Pegasus Crime - Distributed by Simon & Schuster



## THE NIXON CONSPIRACY

By *Geoff Shepard*

WATERGATE AND THE PLOT TO REMOVE THE PRESIDENT

*Geoff Shepard's shocking exposé of corrupt collusion between prosecutors, judges, and congressional staff to void Nixon's 1972 landslide reelection. Their success changed the course of American history.*

Geoff Shepard had a ringside seat to the unfolding Watergate debacle. As the youngest lawyer on Richard Nixon's staff, he personally transcribed the Oval Office tape in which Nixon appeared to authorize getting the CIA to interfere with the ongoing FBI investigation, and even coined the phrase "the smoking gun." Like many others, the idealistic Shepard was deeply disappointed in the president. But as time went on, the meticulous lawyer was nagged by the persistent sense that something wasn't right with the case against Nixon.

*The Nixon Conspiracy* is a detailed and definitive account of the Watergate prosecutors' internal documents uncovered after years of painstaking research in previously sealed archives. Shepard reveals the untold story of how a flawed but honorable president was needlessly brought down by a corrupt, deep state, big media alliance—a circumstance that looks all too familiar today. In this hard-hitting exposé, Shepard reveals the real smoking gun: the prosecutors' secret, but erroneous, "Road Map" which caused grand jurors to name Nixon a co-conspirator in the Watergate cover-up and the House Judiciary Committee to adopt its primary Article of Impeachment.

Shepard's startling conclusion is that Nixon didn't actually have to resign. The proof of his good faith is right there on the tapes. Instead, he should have taken his case to a Senate impeachment trial—where, if everything we know now had come out—he would easily have won.

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