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magazine



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THE ART OF COERCION
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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 for further analysis. Whether it's news, security, diplomacy, technology, energy, terrorism, European affairs, no subject is treated superficially. Europe Diplomatic Magazine is an independent media, conveying balanced ideas of openness and analysis based on almost 30 years of experience in the journalistic world.

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BEIJING
2022

Nikola Hendrickx

EDITORIAL

Just applaud...don't speak out !

The Olympics are a microcosm of how China treats the world. Much of this criticism can be directed at Chinese president Xi Jinping. It suffices to look at how China has already gained an advantage in the Winter Olympic Games. Athletes from Europe are denied entry into China to become familiar with the venues, and practice in the arenas where they will compete. Any skier, bobsled team or luger will tell you that familiarity with the terrain and course is crucial to gaining the tenth of a second advantage that could spell victory or defeat.

By allowing access to the venues to Chinese athletes only, the playing field is of course, not level. Beijing is in fact using COVID-19 protocols as an excuse to justify banning foreign athletes from China ahead of the games. Consequently, these draconian measures and repressive tactics are giving Chinese athletes a clear competitive advantage. It can be said that the same applies to international trade.

Access to the Olympics, like access to markets, is a direct result of China's backwards spiral into authoritarianism launched by Xi Jinping over the last decade. Only 14 short years ago, Beijing hosted the Summer Olympic Games. At the time, this was seen as a great triumph for China which was then opening to the rest of the world. Hu Jintao, the country's leader during the 2008 Olympics deserved credit for the success of that event when China's international stature grew. Many Europeans were hopeful that this signaled a new era of Europe-China relations.

But that sense of hope and optimism has been shattered under Xi Jinping's arrogant, authoritarian and wolf warrior 'pseudo-diplomacy' that was introduced in 2012. Today, China prefers to threaten and intimidate others into submission. When that doesn't work, it imposes its will by force; the brutal repression of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong is particularly edifying in this respect. Xi Jinping is now the face of all the problems challenging the Winter Olympics.

According to Canadian cybersecurity group Citizen Lab, the 'My2022' smartphone application that athletes must use in order to comply with China's Covid-19 regulations have inadequate encryption measures within it that can leave athletes, journalists and sports officials vulnerable to hackers, privacy breaches and surveillance

In addition, computer forensic specialists have found that the app included a list of censorship keywords installed by the Chinese government.

The findings come as an additional international concern, this time about digital security during the Games. Germany, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have urged their athletes and National Olympic Committees to leave behind their personal phones and laptops and travel with cheap 'burner' phones and SIM cards that can later be discarded or destroyed for fear of digital espionage.

The Dutch Olympic Committee has actually banned its athletes from bringing personal phones and laptops because of surveillance concerns, and Team Canada is one of many Western teams asked to keep digital security in mind at the Beijing Winter Games.

So, the Chinese leadership's refusal to act in a conciliatory manner on the world stage gives little hope for the 2022 Winter Olympics to fulfil its role as a unifying force, and the world has little hope for a rapprochement with China under Xi Jinping.

Trajan Dereville



© Wikimedia

Members of a Chinese military honor guard

THE ART OF COERCION

China becomes ever more assertive in trying to exert influence and suppress criticism in Europe

My Chambers dictionary defines democracy as “a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people collectively and is administered by them or by officers appointed by them.” Based on the evidence to hand, this would not be a definition that would be recognised by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). They seem to favour a form of government in which supreme power is vested in the General Secretary of the Communist Party and his indisputable rule must never be questioned in any way, anywhere. This determination doesn't merely stretch across China itself; Beijing seems to believe it has the right to censor content and even ban the exhibits of art galleries across the entire world, including Europe. In China itself, the CCP has a list of words that cannot be used in case they are used to criticise the party or its officials. Among the many attempts to control discussion worldwide, it tried to ban an exhibition of work by the Chinese-Australian artist and dissident, Badiuca, in the Italian city of Brescia. The exhibition went ahead anyway, thanks to the courage of Brescia's mayor, Emilio Del Bono, who told the New York Times: “Art should never be censored”.



From left to right the mayor of Brescia, Emilio Del Bono, Zehra Dogan, Roberto Cammarata, Badiuca, Laura Castelletti, Francesca Bazoli

Badiuca's work has often been critical of the Chinese government, highlighting human rights abuses that the CCP denies ever having happened. According to the CCP, there never was a massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989, yet they issued watches to the soldiers who put an end to the protest, inscribed “to commemorate the quelling of the rebellion”.

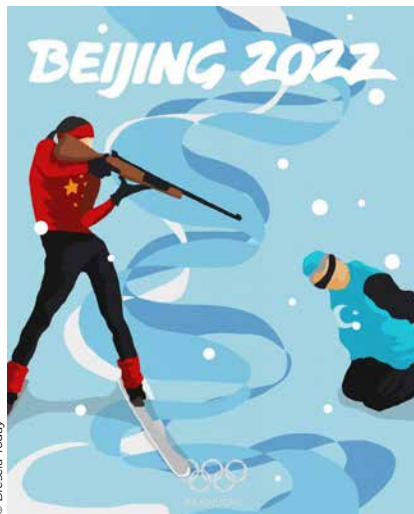
Badiuca, a recipient of the Václav Havel International Prize for Creative

Dissent, has used paintings of the watches in his art and fully expects further harassment by a government determined to re-write history in its own favour, omitting all the nasty bits. The nasty bits include imprisonment for speaking out about human rights abuses, such as China's treatment of the Uyghurs.

Or, indeed, any comment that could, in someone's imagination, be thought of as criticism of the apparently infallible General Secretary, Xi Jinping. In

December 2021, the only memorial to the event, in which thousands may have died, was removed. It was a tall sculpture which stood in the grounds of Hong Kong University and the BBC were denied the right to film its removal, although they tried. This is an example of Beijing's gaslighting technique: if something is embarrassing to the CCP, then it simply didn't happen; it is erased from history and if you remember it, you're mistaken.

China has a growing market for art and Badiucao fears that this fact will discourage institutional galleries around the world from permitting his work to be exhibited. "Authoritarian governments are always trying to control artists," Badiucao told Artnet News. "The Chinese government is using the art market as a tool to stop artists like me." But as *The Economist* reported in December 2020, China uses bullying as a tactic because it seems to work: "Once told that they have crossed a 'red line' by harming China's interests or calling out its misdeeds, many governments crumble swiftly.



© Brescia Today

One of Badiucao's posters protesting against the Chinese Olympics

Others fold after suffering months of threats, trade boycotts and cancelled official meetings." The article goes on to accuse delegations from Western governments of swiftly giving in to China in trade or other discussions: "They bow to China's mix of market power, geopolitical importance and ruthlessness." It may be the ruthlessness that frightens them most. This becomes increasingly important as the Winter Olympics

draw near, to be hosted, of course, by China. By the time you read this, they may indeed be history (they run from the 4th to the 20th of February), but don't expect that history to include a mention of any protests that may be staged during them. In Beijing's view, they will simply not have happened.

China can now boast the world's largest economy, bigger than that of the EU, for instance, and it has even overtaken the United States. No wonder the governments of smaller nations are nervous. In the school playground, if the largest boy there wants to bully smaller people, few are in a position to stop him. Incidentally, school bullying seems to be on the increase in China, according to the National Library of Medicine, an American website: "The incidences of reported bullying, bullying others and witnessing bullying are 26.10%, 9.03% and 28.90%, respectively.

Primary school students are more likely to be involved in bullying behaviours. Students from elite schools (leading schools) are also more likely to be involved." But, of course, kids learn from their elders, don't they? The top schools reveal that China's very intensive educational system is not so egalitarian as most people might imagine. According to the CKGSB website: "Newly-affluent Chinese families, desperate for a good education for their children, are willing to pay top dollar for a quality alternative. Tuition at private schools ranges from 250,000 RMB (which stands for Renmimbi, or People's Currency and equates to €35,500) to 500,000 RMB (€69,000) per year. (China's per capita GDP in 2015 was \$8,000, or just over €7,000.) Private schools and tutoring institutions are mushrooming in response to demand.



Student teacher in China teaching children English

In dealing with China, don't go showing any pictures of Winnie the Pooh; Xi is sometimes depicted (by very brave people) in the character of the "bear of very little brain", although the physical resemblance requires a certain stretch of the imagination.



© White House/Lawrence Jackson

Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President, Barack Obama at the White House in 2015

The disapproval mainly seems to stem from a photograph of Xi walking next to the then US President, Barack Obama, in which their movements match those in a book illustration of Pooh Bear walking next to the much taller tiger figure, Tigger. The resemblance is, in this case I confess, uncanny and most world leaders would have shrugged it off as a joke, or even as a compliment. Xi and his apparatchiks, however, are very thin-skinned indeed and seem to over-react to the tiniest slights, even imagined ones. Apparently, Pooh Bear was based on the teddy bear of children's author (and creator of the Winnie the Pooh stories) A.A. Milne's own son, Christopher, just as other inhabitants of the 'Hundred Acre Wood' were based on the boy's various soft toys. There was nothing political about them.

HOWEVER TRUE, CHECK WITH BEIJING FIRST

Over-reaction seems to be a hallmark of China's international relations. Take the case of little Lithuania, a charming country and a member of the EU. It provoked Beijing's Ire by permitting a Taiwanese embassy to open. China won't accept the existence of what it sees as a part of China having official recognition in its own right anywhere in the world. Instead of a written rebuke, however, China downgraded diplomatic relations with the Baltic state, began to block imports and even put pressure on a German maker of car parts (and a few others) to stop using Lithuanian products in their output.



© Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Eric Huang, newly appointed director of the representative office (third from right), poses with other staffers outside the Taiwan Representative Office in Vilnius, Lithuania on Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021

It seems little bit like finding a mouse behind the skirting board and burning the whole house down to get rid of it. President Biden decided to ban the import of goods from Xinjiang because of allegations of forced labour, but companies that followed this law were loudly condemned in China and accused of racism, bullying and hate crimes. Intel decided to abide by Biden's ruling, writing on its website: "Intel is required to ensure our supply chain does not use any labor or source goods or services from the Xinjiang region". It caused fury in China, being described by the party newspaper, the Global Times, as "arrogant and vicious", although it's hard to see how anyone familiar with the English language could apply either word in this case. They are simply inappropriate adjectives. Intel caved in without demur, posting an apology for "the trouble caused to our respected Chinese customers, partners and the public." It seems to be a somewhat mealy-mouthed acquiescence.

National Review, an American website, was incensed: "Why don't we consider China's small acts of tyranny, such as its corporate intimidation, to be similarly threatening?" it asked. "After all, they make space for the very large acts of tyranny, for instance, the system of sterilization, internment, and forced labor inflicted on an entire culture in Xinjiang." Think you can avoid upsetting China by using a mobile phone? Not if it was one made in China, apparently. Lithuanian investigators allege that the phones contain a hidden 'blacklist' of 449 terms banned by the CCP.

The claim is that the blacklist remains dormant until someone in China operates a switch. The claim has been firmly denied by the phones' manufacturer, Xiaomi. However, the Lithuanian government takes it seriously and has instructed government offices to junk the phones. The advice was dismissed by The Global Times as "a new trick" by what it called "a small pawn" in Washington's attempts to damage China and Beijing has stepped up its pressure on Lithuania to capitulate.

It has stopped a regular cargo train to Lithuania, increased the bureaucratic nonsense for anyone exporting to China and, most seriously, it has blocked the flow of Chinese-made glass products required by some Lithuanian manufacturers, blaming "power cuts". So far, China's actions haven't swayed opinion; Lithuania remains pro-Western and firmly against Communist China. China especially dislikes Lithuania because it was the first Soviet state to break away from the Soviet Union, and Beijing fears it could set a precedent. But if a Baltic minnow like Lithuania, with a population of fewer than 3-million

people and an economy only 1/270th the size can stand up to the mighty dragon that is Communist China, why can't larger countries that Beijing has targeted? Interestingly (or perhaps not) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has pledged "ironclad US support for Lithuania in the face of attempted coercion from the People's Republic of China."



© US State Department / Freddie Everitt

US Secretary of State Anthony J. Blinken

The fact is that China's bullying tactics remind the Lithuanian people and others a little too closely of what the Soviet Union tried (unsuccessfully) to do when Lithuania sought to go its own way.

GASLIGHT SERENADE

The Chinese government engages in an activity now known as 'gaslighting', in which truths are subverted and half-truths are promulgated as the only correct version. Everything else is the result of your failure to comprehend or remember properly. The word comes from the stage play 'Gas Light' by English playwright Patrick Hamilton, which ran for a very successful six months at London's Apollo Theatre in 1938 before going on to a record-breaking 4-year run on Broadway under the changed name, 'Angel Street'. It was also made into a successful and terrifying film in 1944 by George Cukor, starring Charles Boyer, Ingrid Bergman and Joseph Cotten. According to the Medical News Today website, "Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse where a person or group makes someone question their sanity, perception of reality, or memories." The term 'gaslighting' used to refer to abuse in personal relationships in which one partner tries to persuade the other not



© National Cyber Security Centre under Ministry of National Defence

The Lithuanian Ministry of Defense investigation has found four substantive cybersecurity risks: two concern inbuilt apps, one – personal data security, and one more – possible clash with the freedom of speech requirement. Three of the cybersecurity risks have been found in Xiaomi cell phone, one in Huawei, and no cybersecurity vulnerabilities have been identified in OnePlus

only that they're wrong but also that they're stupid ever to have believed otherwise. It's a form of coercion between romantic couples that can be very dangerous to the victim's mental health. Nobody in the West is actually suffering a mental breakdown because of the CCP's activities, but a surprising number of enterprises have backed down rather than face Beijing's wrath (and risk losing trade, presumably).



Chinese censors have banned the release of Christopher Robin based on A.A. Milne's children's book

China has now created what have been described as 'censorship factories', companies employing mainly young college graduates to trawl every media source, however minor and unimportant, on a never-ending search for words, references or phrases that could be construed, however obliquely, as critical of Xi or the CCP. For a country that has banned references to A.A. Milne's children's book, it's never hard to find something the CCP won't like. It's finding something they do like that is sometimes difficult, although you may get away with saying what a wonderful and faultless chap Xi Jinping is, as long as you do it respectfully.

China, of course, denies accusations of forced labour in Xinjiang, or of using the labour of Uighurs detained in camps and detention centres. China has claimed that attendance in the camps is 'voluntary' and intended to be educational, turning people away from terrorism. If it's voluntary, why do the camps have tall concrete walls, topped with barbed wire, and guard towers at the corners?



A re-education camp for Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China

Why are there accusations of beatings, torture, forced sterilization and mass rape, not to mention strong attempts to eradicate Uyghur traditions and heritage? Former officials in the Trump administration claim that China is committing 'genocide' in these supposed 'vocational training centres'. There had been reports of internees suffering hours of political indoctrination, of food deprivation, sleep deprivation, forced sterilizations, abortions and gang rapes in hugely overcrowded cells, with toilet facilities restricted to just a few minutes a day. Of course, it could be argued that it's just American anti-Chinese propaganda – Trump disliked all foreign regimes, after all – and that the Uighurs are all happy with their lot. But there is no evidence that this is so, nor does the CCP seem keen to change western minds by revealing what they are really like. One can understand governments that fear a possible radicalisation of their Muslim populations taking steps to prevent it, but there is no proof that this is what has been happening in Xinjiang.



A soldier assigned to a regiment under the PLA Xinjiang Military Command crosses a one-rope bridge obstacle as his fellows provide security for him during a rope bridge maneuver

If everything is so wonderful there, why is Beijing not inviting deputations from the West to visit these "voluntary educational" establishments to witness for themselves the good work going on there. Why can't Western diplomats visit and chat to the happy Uighur workers swapping jokes on the factory floor? Instead, any suggestion that things may be as bad as the rumours suggest is met with tit-for-tat sanctions, travel bans against EU and US politicians who, if they gave a clean bill of health, would remove the shadow hanging over the labour force in parts of China. Instead, the CCP has accused the EU of "grossly interfering" with its internal affairs.



A graphic posted on the Amnesty International site depicting Chinese government officials removing religious and cultural artefacts from a home

Al Jazeera reported China's anger at the accusations: "China's Ministry of Commerce has expressed 'strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition' to a United States ban on imports from Xinjiang region. The ministry described the US action as 'economic bullying', state news agency Xinhua reported."

FAR, FAR AWAY

Xinjiang is a landlocked autonomous region in Western China that is home to almost two million people, many of them Muslims. It is also very large, covering 1.6-million² kilometres, from the Tibetan plateau in the south-east to Kazakhstan at its north-western border. Known for many years simply as Xiyu, which means ‘western region’, the area became known as Xinjiang (New Borders) when it was annexed to China under the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty the 18th century. Being cut off from the sea and surrounded by tall mountains, it has a dry continental climate with unpredictable and uneven rainfall. The people have become very well-practised in water conservation as a result. It is home to some forty different ethnic groups, the most numerous of which are the Uyghurs, who form the majority population, and the Han Chinese, although there are also Hui (Chinese Muslims) as well as Mongolians, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Khalkha, Manchu, Tajiks, Tatars, Russians and Tahurs. The region is wealthy in terms of its natural resources, with coal, iron, zinc, chrome nickel and copper, as well as molybdenum and tungsten, but most significantly, perhaps, it is rich in oil and natural gas. It’s easy to understand why the region is important to the CCP, in view of its natural wealth and its strategically important position as ‘Gateway to Central Asia’, with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia and Russia on its border and with India and Pakistan to the south. It is also central to China’s famous ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI) having once been on the ancient Silk Road.

But its majority population, the Uyghurs, have a very distinctive culture of their own and speak a language closely related to Turkic. You will not find many Uyghurs saying or writing: “我是中国人 (in Pinyin: “wǒ shì zhōngguó rén”), which means simply “I am Chinese”. After all, they consider themselves to be Uyghurs first and foremost. There again, even the great Mao Zedong spoke the Hunan variety of Mandarin, Xiang, rather than the language of Chinese government and recordings of his speeches display a strong Hunan accent.



Uyghur man from Kashkar

In fact, it’s believed that there are 297 living languages spoken in present-day China, but of its 1.21-billion people, the greatest number – an estimated 955 – speak the official language, Mandarin. The Uyghurs don’t converse in Mandarin, and, of course, most of them are Muslims. They also claim that the many state-controlled industries in the region discriminate against them when it comes to employment. After riots in the regional capital, Urumqi, in 2009, in which almost 200 people died, China clamped down on Xinjiang and especially its Muslim population, banning the wearing of veils, long beards and the use of Islamic names. It also cracked down on Quranic studies and prevented Muslim officials from observing the Ramadan fast. There were other repressive measures, too. One of the great architects of the Russian Revolution, Mikhail Bakunin, who was a Communist, revolutionary and founder of what is called “collectivist anarchism”, wanted to overthrow the Tsarist regime and had no truck with capitalism, but I cannot imagine him liking the CCP much, either. He once wrote “All submission to authority humiliates; all exercise of authority perverts.” Try telling that to Xi Jinping. Back in the early 1970s, Bakunin’s words appeared as graffiti along a canal wall in Walthamstow, which is in the east of London. It was a time of much poetic graffiti in the UK, but nobody seemed to take much notice of the messages. My favourite was on a wall at Paddington Station, London, reading “Far away is near at hand in images of elsewhere”. Nobody knew exactly what

it meant, nor who had written it (one newspaper always referred to him – if it was a ‘him’, and not a ‘her’ – as “the Master of Paddington”) and the wall was demolished long ago.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

China does not restrict its activities to its homeland. It has agents who are active worldwide. In the UK, a story broke in January about the CCP’s attempts to bring influence to bear within the political establishment. Britain’s domestic security agency, MI5 (supposed employer of James Bond in the popular spy books of Ian Fleming) took the very rare step of issuing a written warning to the Speaker of the House of Commons, to be relayed to all Member of Parliament, about the activities of a Chinese lawyer, Christine Lee. She had cosied up to several politicians and had even donated more than £600,000 (almost €720,000) to a former Labour Party front-bencher and still a sitting Labour MP, Barry Gardiner, and £5,000 (roughly €6,000) to the constituency office of Sir Ed Davey, MP, who currently leads the Liberal Democrat party.



Christine Lee pictured in 2001

Davey travelled to Beijing six months later. He was a member of the Cabinet, serving as Energy Secretary, and he was negotiating deals to fund Britain’s nuclear power programme at the time. Lee also became friendly with the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, and even received a letter of thanks from his successor, Theresa May. Lee’s son, Daniel Wilkes, worked in Gardiner’s office, although he resigned as soon as news of the MI5 letter became known. MI5 described Lee in the letter as “an agent” of United Front Work Department,

believed to be a part of the CCP engaged in overseas influence and coercion. MI5 wrote that her aim was “to cultivate individuals with the goal of promoting the CCP’s agenda and challenging those that do not agree with its principles.” According to MI5, Lee was targeting a number of influential politicians who have yet to be named, if they ever are. The recipients of Lee’s largesse should perhaps have remembered the words of the great Greek dramatist, Sophocles: “Enemies’ gifts are no gifts and do no good.” The recipients of Beijing’s generosity will find come under investigation by MI5.

So where has Beijing been spreading its cash? The UK has been the major beneficiary, receiving more than £50-billion (roughly €60-billion), but China has been investing in Nordic countries (especially Finland), as well as Portugal, Luxembourg, and Malta, which have benefited from very large contributions considering their small size. In return, China expects to have complete control over what it sees as its territory, on land, sea and air. The ‘coda’ website mentions the fury Britain aroused in China when Britain sailed its largest warship, HMS Queen Elizabeth, through the South China Sea. It was its shortest route and only involved entering what is regarded (outside China, at least) as ‘international waters’. The massive aircraft carrier had American warplanes on board and the flotilla it led included a Dutch warship. Beijing was furious. “China receives friends with good wine,” said political commentator Wu Shicun, “and deals with wolves with a shotgun.” Not the most pacifistic of messages from a country that claims to want peace. However, no shotguns were produced, and the vessel sailed through.

Meanwhile, China seems to be trying to reboot its relationship with the EU, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi visiting his Finnish opposite number, Pekka Haavisto, whose often-expressed concerns over human rights didn’t get a mention in China’s version of the meeting. As we’ve seen before, what China doesn’t like didn’t happen. Their policy seems to revolve around the idea that whoever controls history controls everything. Meanwhile, China is the biggest manufacturing economy in the world and the biggest exporter of goods, as well as having the fastest-growing consumer market in the world and being the second-largest importer of goods. It’s

the world’s largest trading nation, too. According to the ‘The National Interest’ website, the latest report from the IMF shows China’s economy (\$24.2-trillion or €21.2-trillion) to be one sixth larger than America’s (\$20.8-trillion or €18.2-trillion).

Maybe Beijing believes that sheer size overrides such matters as honesty and truth. Shortly after the EU blacklisted four Chinese officials linked to the alleged mistreatment of the Uighurs in Xinjiang, China imposed personal sanctions on European policymakers and think tanks, banning Chinese people and organisations from doing business with them and banning the named individuals from entering China. China also took revenge on a clothing company, H&M, which disappeared from Chinese websites because it decided to stop using cotton from Xinjiang over the issue of forced labour. China’s response is invariably asymmetric, responding extremely vigorously to any reaction by foreign government over China’s policies.

Criticism of China’s human rights abuses is seen as interference in its internal affairs, about which nobody must comment. For European companies that are active globally, China poses an enormous threat, according to the European Council on Foreign Relations. “China is able to bar companies from its market by adding them to its Unreliable Entities List on the grounds of posing a purported threat to Chinese security,” says the ECFR’s website. “But China also recently adopted a new export control law which has significant extraterritorial reach. Under this new law, European companies may have to ask Beijing’s permission to sell their products to other European firms or to third countries even if they are not for military use (as is American or European practice).” China has also introduced a ‘blocking statute’ to put further pressure on European businesses. “This law prohibits companies from complying with rules or sanctions imposed by other countries without stating which rules these are,” says the ECFR. “Much depends on how Beijing will apply this vague law, but the upshot is that European subsidiaries in China could now get into trouble if they comply with a European or US sanction or export control measures.”



Chinese President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), presents the heads of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Academy of Military Science with the military flag in Beijing

TIME AND TIDE WAIT FOR NO MAN

China not only refuses even to acknowledge criticism, it also finds others to blame when the unexpected happens. For instance, it is now claiming that the Omicron variant of COVID-19 was brought to Beijing by a letter from Canada that was contaminated.

Pang Xinghuo, the deputy director of the Beijing Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, says the first person to be diagnosed with Omicron had received a letter, mailed from Canada on 7 January, which proved to be contaminated. She told the South Chinas Morning Post: “We do not rule out the possibility that the person was infected through contacting an object from overseas,” although her department’s official view is that letters and packages are unlikely vectors for virus transmission. China is especially sensitive to stories about the origin of COVID-19 because many fear it could have escaped from a Chinese laboratory, which Beijing firmly denies.



Pang Xinghuo, Deputy Director of the Beijing Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Is this repressive form of Communism something of which Mao would have approved? Almost certainly yes. His Red Army came down hard on any who deviated from his vision for China's future. His war with Chiang Kai-shek, he told the writer Robert Payne over a dinner in Yenan, was won before it was engaged, since the nationalist Kuomintang failed to field their real military forces against the Communists, relying instead on various warlords who hated Chiang Kai-shek as much or more than they hated Mao's Communists. "There was never a moment when we were not absolutely certain we would win through," Mao told Payne. In Payne's own recollection, Mao was a man of many different personalities. "He was the romantic revolutionary on fire with revolutionary ideas," Payne wrote in his book, *Eyewitness*, "but he was also the retiring scholar and the calm spectator of events and the author of the opera which he had dreamed up during long, studious nights. He was a man playing several parts, and no-one would ever know what compulsion drove him to becoming so various.



Statue of Mao Zedong in Zijingshan Park

Scholar, revolutionary, student, military strategist, poet, propagandist – he was all these, but he was considerably more. Those soft hands held China in their steel-like grip." Now, it's the grip of Xi Jinping that binds his great country together and there is little sign so far that he is a visionary, as Mao was. It's been said that Mao took no pleasure in killing or torturing people in his revolutionary cause, although the historian Lee Feigon recalled that he could be "draconian and authoritarian" when crossed, but he never sank to the villainy of his mentor, Joseph Stalin.

China is a hugely ambitious country that has proved itself unusually ruthless in its pursuit of global influence. It's not the first country to use force, or the threat of force, to implement its global policies. Britain did much the same in the 19th century. It seems as if Western countries and businesses will have to learn to live with a new reality: to do business with China, don't say or do anything they may take as an insult and never question their actions. Perhaps we should learn from the Florentine statesman and political philosopher, Niccolò Machiavelli, who wrote: "Since, then, a prince is necessitated to play the animal well, he chooses among the beasts the fox and the lion, because the lion does not protect himself from traps; the fox does not protect himself from wolves. The prince must be a fox, therefore, to recognise the traps and a lion to frighten the wolves." But even the world's greatest empires – the Roman, the Mughal, the Spanish and the British (and there are many more) are now just history. As the old saying goes, "Everything passes, everything perishes, everything falls." Possibly even the CCP?

Toby Bowman-Grant

CHINA ACCUSES MEPS OF BEING TOO BIG FOR THEIR BRITCHES

*Post script to "The Art of Coercion"
by Toby Bowman-Grant*

Relations between the CCP and Europe have deteriorated further since I wrote the body of this article. The European Parliament has come in for direct criticism for daring to comment on Beijing's attitude to what China calls "the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region". You may recall at the time Britain handed over Hong Kong to China (and not before time!) that China promised to retain the same style of governance. It was always a promise they had no intention of keeping, instead inflicting the sort of restrictive government the CCP favours, in which nobody ever criticises the government. It's something the Papacy tried in the Middle Ages and it has never worked, at least not for long.

The European Parliament voted to condemn "the deterioration of human rights in Hong Kong" and urged the



Anti-Chinese demonstration in Hong Kong

European Council to introduce targeted sanctions against targeted officials, going as far as to urge the Chinese government to repeal the National Security Law for Hong Kong. It's hardly a surprising point of view from a body committed to human rights but it has infuriated the Chinese, who seem unable to accept any criticism whatever. A Commissioner of the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that politicians should stop what he called 'political hysteria' against China and Hong Kong. MEPs also demanded diplomatic and political boycotts of the forthcoming Beijing Winter Olympics, but a CCP spokesman called it "a publicity stunt" and a "self-deceiving political farce". China invariably dismisses any criticism of its very flawed system, and this time it urged MEPs to stop meddling in what it sees as China's internal affairs. Presumably its broken promises on Hong Kong's governance should simply be forgotten? It accused MEPs of being "too big for their britches".

Meanwhile, China has persuaded Australian tennis authorities to ban fans from wearing t-shirts bearing the slogan "Where is Peng Shuai?", a reference to the Chinese tennis star who seems to have disappeared since accusing a senior CCP official of sexual assault. This has led to accusations that the Australian authorities have caved in to Chinese bullying. It has drawn strong criticism from global tennis star Martina Navratilova, who has condemned the decision as "pathetic". It begs the question: will Chinese officials ever realise that such criticism will go on until Beijing wakes up to the need for better human rights and much less repression?



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NEWS IN BRIEF

EU SPACE INITIATIVE TO OPEN UP NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENERAL AVIATION ACROSS THE UNION



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EUSPA launched a new initiative called "EUSPA Network of pilot projects" to facilitate the implementation of **EGNOS**-based procedures to non-instrument runways for general aviation and validate the safety assessment guidelines, published earlier in November.

Since its certification for use in civil aviation in 2011, EGNOS has become an important aid in the European aviation sector, increasing both the safety and accessibility of airports. Thanks to the accurate guidance offered by the system, pilots can easily land under challenging weather conditions such as poor visibility and avoid aborted landings (go-arounds).

From an airport perspective, EGNOS *LPV* approaches allow for instrument landings at lower costs as there is no need to install ground navigation aids. Satellite-based approaches by EGNOS are precise, stable, offer smoother glide paths and very high levels of availability.

As of today, more than 400 airports -mostly medium or large- in Europe rely on EGNOS-based approaches. General Aviation aerodromes usually rely on only *VFR* operations and have limited ground infrastructure. Even though the General Aviation (GA) community undertakes millions of flights on aircraft equipped with GNSS-receivers, it is not taking full advantage of the technology.

EUSPA worked together with the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (*EASA*) and other general aviation stakeholders on the strategy and other materials to support the implementation of EGNOS for general aviation to increase instrument approaches with EGNOS at non-instrument aerodromes. In December 2019, the safety promotion material for the implementation of EGNOS based procedures to general aviation was published followed by the safety assessment guidance material focusing on safety assessment development. One of the biggest challenges of the implementation of EGNOS-based approaches to non-instrument runways for general aviation is the safety assessment. EUSPA launched a new initiative

called "**EUSPA Network of pilot projects**" to facilitate the implementation of EGNOS-based procedures to non-instrument runways for general aviation and validate the safety assessment guidelines.

Why invest in EGNOS?

Implementing EGNOS-based *LPV* procedures across European General Aviation airports brings numerous opportunities, from increasing flight traffic and boosting the economy of local communities to benefitting flight schools. SBAS approaches can help smaller airports create more connections for General and Business Aviation flights, while GA and BA pilots can rely on their instruments to land even under poor weather conditions such as decreased visibility.

About EGNOS

The European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service, or EGNOS in short, is European Union regional satellite-based augmentation system (SBAS). SBASs are used to correct the performance of global navigation satellite systems, such as GPS. To do so, EGNOS uses a set of geostationary satellites and a network of ground stations to increase the accuracy of GPS. In the next 3 years, a new, more powerful system called "EGNOS V3" will become available and the user experience will be maximised through the strengthening of Galileo's signal in addition to GPS's.

Source: <http://www.euspa.europa.eu>.

EPP0 SIGNS WORKING ARRANGEMENT WITH EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK GROUP



Jan Willem van der Kaaij, Inspector General, European Investment Bank; Laura Kövesi, European Chief Prosecutor, European Public Prosecutor's Office; Maria Leander, Secretary General, European Investment Fund

The European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) signed a working arrangement with the European Investment Bank Group (EIB Group) – comprised of the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Investment

Fund (EIF). This arrangement aims to provide a structured framework for an efficient cooperation between both parties, within their respective mandates and competences.

The cooperation, as established in this working arrangement, concerns the relevant areas of crime within the mandate of the EPPO, specifically criminal offences affecting the financial interests of the European Union, as defined in the EU's PIF Directive.

By joining forces in this manner, the EPPO and the EIB Group seek to maximise efficiency in the fight against fraud, corruption, money laundering and any other criminal offences affecting the Union's financial interests, while avoiding the duplication of effort.

TURKMENISTAN IS PLANNING TO SHUT DOWN THE "GATES OF HELL"

The crater has been burning for 50 years.

The decision to quell the burning gas crater near the village of Darvaza was taken by President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov at a government meeting.

As the head of state noted, the fact that a huge amount of gas has been burning in this area for many years has a negative impact on the ecology and health of the people living nearby.

In this regard, Deputy Prime Minister Shakhim Abdrakhmanov, who is in charge of the fuel and energy complex, was instructed to involve scientists and, if necessary, foreign experts to find a solution to this problem.

"We are creating and will continue to create all the necessary conditions for the development of colossal reserves of hydrocarbon resources for an independent, neutral Fatherland for the benefit of the native people," Berdymukhamedov said.

It will be recalled that the issue of closing the crater was first raised by the President of Turkmenistan in 2010.



The gas crater "Gates of Hell" near Darvaza, Turkmenistan

The burning gas crater near the village of Darvaza, popularly known as the Gates of Hell, located in the centre of the Karakum Desert, about 260 kilometers north of Ashgabat, is a Turkmen tourist attraction.

In 1971, Soviet geologists discovered a natural gas accumulation in the area, and drilled a well, causing a collapse - the upper layers of the soil simply collapsed into an underground cave, opening a large hole filled with gas.



Independence Day parade in Turkmenistan

To prevent human and animal gas poisoning, geologists decided to let it burn, believing that the gas would burn out within a few weeks, but it has instead continued to burn for more than 50 years and is expected to keep on burning. The diameter of the gas hole is 60 metres and its depth is about 20 metres.

In November 2013, renowned traveler and researcher George Coronis from Canada descended to the bottom of the crater for research and sampling. He was able to find bacteria that live at the bottom of the crater at high temperatures. These bacteria are nowhere to be found on the Earth's surface and are doing well, living in a small ecosystem at the bottom of the hot crater.

Although the crater, named "the Gates of Hell" has become something of a mystery and has captured public imagination, it is a simple geological anomaly; a superficial gas pocket which caused the ground to sink into a natural depression, allowing the slowly escaping gas from a large, deep natural gas field to both accumulate and burn without being rapidly diluted and extinguished by the wind.

The gas from similar, smaller gas leaks in the area are rapidly dispersed by the desert wind. "Burning ground" sites where natural gas escaping from the ground has been ignited are found in other parts of the world.

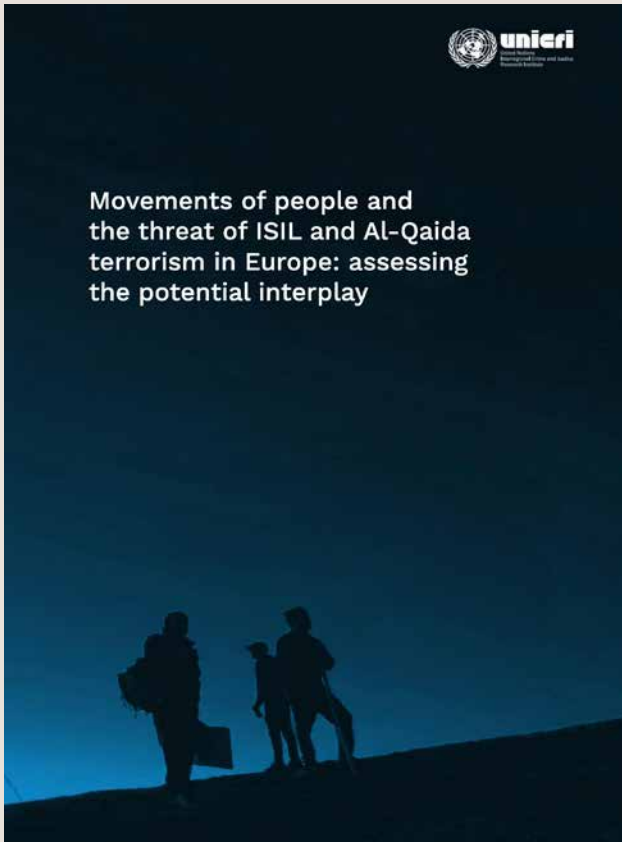
In January 2022, a commission was tasked to find a solution for extinguishing the burning gas crater in Darvaza. The commission hopes to either extinguish the gas crater altogether, or find a way for the crater to continue to burn, without causing a negative impact on the surrounding environment.

James Lookwood

NEW REPORT! MOVEMENTS OF PEOPLE AND THE THREAT OF ISIL AND AL-QAIDA TERRORISM IN EUROPE: ASSESSING THE POTENTIAL INTERPLAY

In April 2021, following concerns raised by some European countries, UNICRI launched a research initiative to explore, assess, and understand the potential interplay between regular and irregular movements of people and the threat stemming from ISIL and Al-Qaida inspired terrorism in Europe. The research also looked at the risks posed by returning and relocating Foreign Terrorist

Fighters (FTFs). The recent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the potential massive exodus of Afghans have led to heightened security concerns in European countries and Turkey. Indeed, there is a high risk of possible infiltration of individuals linked to ISIL-K and Al-Qaida among those trying to leave the country.



<http://www.unicri.it/News/Report-movements-people-threat-ISIL-Al-Qaida-terrorism-Europe>

Given the current complex international security context and the various factors involved, the scope of the analysis has been kept intentionally broad. On the one hand, the report considers the impact of migration policies and border management regulations on the terrorist and extremist challenge stemming from ISIL and Al-Qaida. Specifically, it looks at the extent to which these prevent and/or monitor malicious actors to move throughout European territories (or to return to them). On the other, it focuses on the indirect effect that the socio-political environment of destination be it the quality of reception conditions and/or the presence of anti-migrant sentiment and extreme right-wing activities can have on the vulnerabilities of migrant communities, and hence ultimately, on creating a fertile ground for radicalization by ISIL and Al-Qaida supporters.

Where relevant, the report highlights differences in treatment and policies vis-à-vis citizens and aliens. When it comes to people's movements across external borders, states are mainly concerned by extra-European citizens' movements. However, movements of nationals or residents are considered within the scope of this report, as intra-EU movements are also relevant for this analysis. The latter category of movement will also be considered in the context of the return (and/or relocation) of FTFs.

The last section highlights specific recommendations and outlines programmatic interventions to be undertaken by UNICRI and partner entities in order to successfully address the identified priority issues.

NASA'S WEBB TELESCOPE REACHES MAJOR MILESTONE AS MIRROR UNFOLDS

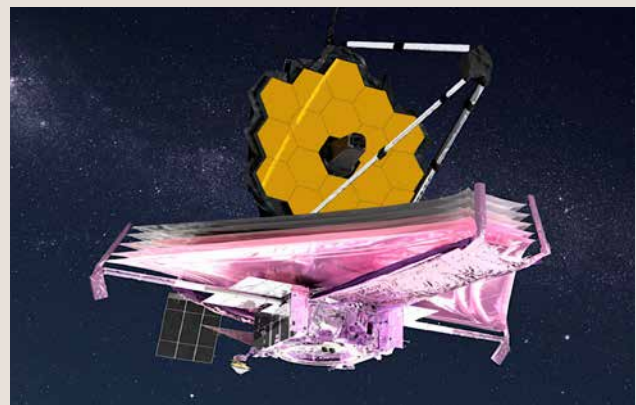
NASA's James Webb Space Telescope team fully deployed its 21-foot, gold-coated primary mirror, successfully completing the final stage of all major spacecraft deployments to prepare for science operations.

A joint effort with the European Space Agency (ESA) and Canadian Space Agency, the Webb mission will explore every phase of cosmic history from within our solar system to the most distant observable galaxies in the early universe.

"Today, NASA achieved another engineering milestone decades in the making. While the journey is not complete, I join the Webb team in breathing a little easier and imagining the future breakthroughs bound to inspire the world," said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson. "The James Webb Space Telescope is an unprecedented mission that is on the precipice of seeing the light from the first galaxies and discovering the mysteries of our universe. Each feat already achieved and future accomplishment is a testament to the thousands of innovators who poured their life's passion into this mission."

The two wings of Webb's primary mirror had been folded to fit inside the nose cone of an ArianeSpace Ariane 5 rocket prior to launch. After more than a week of other critical spacecraft deployments, the Webb team began remotely unfolding the hexagonal segments of the primary mirror, the largest ever launched into space. This was a multi-day process, with the first side deployed Jan. 7 and the second Jan. 8.

Mission Operations Center ground control at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore began deploying the second side panel of the mirror at 8:53 a.m. EST. Once it extended and latched into position at 1:17 p.m. EST, the team declared all major deployments successfully completed.



This artist's conception of the James Webb Space Telescope in space shows all its major elements fully deployed. The telescope was folded to fit into its launch vehicle, and then was slowly unfolded over the course of two weeks after launch

The world's largest and most complex space science telescope will now begin moving its 18 primary mirror segments to align the telescope optics. The ground team will command 126 actuators on the backsides of the segments to flex each mirror an alignment that will take months to complete. Then the team will calibrate the science instruments prior to delivering Webb's first images this summer.

"I am so proud of the team spanning continents and decades that delivered this first-of-its kind achievement," said Thomas Zurbuchen, associate administrator for the Science Mission Directorate in NASA Headquarters in Washington. "Webb's successful deployment exemplifies the best of what NASA has to offer: the willingness to attempt bold and challenging things in the name of discoveries still unknown."

Soon, Webb will also undergo a third mid-course correction burn one of three planned to place the telescope precisely in orbit around the second Lagrange point, commonly known as L2, nearly 1 million miles from Earth. This is Webb's final orbital position, where its sunshield will protect it from light from the Sun, Earth, and Moon that could interfere with observations of infrared light. Webb is designed to peer back over 13.5 billion years to capture infrared light from celestial objects, with much higher resolution than ever before, and to study our own solar system as well as distant worlds.

"The successful completion of all of the Webb Space Telescope's deployments is historic," said Gregory L. Robinson, Webb program director at NASA Headquarters. "This is the first time a NASA-led mission has ever attempted to complete a complex sequence to unfold an observatory in space a remarkable feat for our team, NASA, and the world."

NASA's Science Mission Directorate oversees the mission. NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, manages the project for the agency and oversees the Space Telescope Science Institute, Northrop Grumman, and other mission partners. In addition to Goddard, several NASA centers contributed to the project, including Johnson Space Center in Houston, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, Ames Research Center in Silicon Valley, and others.

THE NEW HUMANOID ROBOT UNVEILED BY ENGINEERED ARTS AT CES 2022

Engineered Arts, A UK company that creates the most memorable interactive character experiences, announced at the January Las Vegas CES 2022 its latest humanoid robot named Ameca (pron. Am-ek-uh). Through 20 years of increasing robotics innovation, the Ameca series features ground-breaking advancements in movement and natural gestures, intelligent interaction, and a future-proof software system designed to embrace artificial intelligence and computer vision with adaptive learning giving users an API customization pathway never before available.



© Engineered Arts

Engineered Arts' Ameca humanoid robot will take center stage at CES 2022 in Las Vegas at the Great Britain and Northern Ireland Pavilion from January 5th - 8th.

Complete details, images, videos and specs of the Ameca humanoid robot are available at: <https://www.engineeredarts.co.uk/robot/ameca/>.

"A humanoid robot will always instill an image of what the future may hold. Ameca represents a perfect platform to explore how our machines can live with, collaborate, and enrich our lives in tomorrow's sustainable communities," said Morgan Roe, Director of Operations at Engineered Arts. "Ameca integrates both AI with AB (artificial body) for advanced, iterative technologies that deliver superior motion and gestures, all housed in a human form and robotic visage for a non-threatening, gender-neutral integration into an inclusive society," added Roe.

The Engineered Arts team can create any robot figure in as little as four months. All Engineered Arts Ameca, Mesmer series and RoboThespian robot creations are available for ownership or through an integrated end-to-end rental program for special limited engagements and showcases across the world.

About Engineered Arts

Engineered Arts, Ltd. integrates a talented team of engineers and creatives, working together to produce technology that lives and breathes engagement, imagination, and entertainment. At the heart of its robotic humanoids is the Tritium operating system, a cloud-based operating system that drives robot animation, interaction, maintenance links and content distribution.

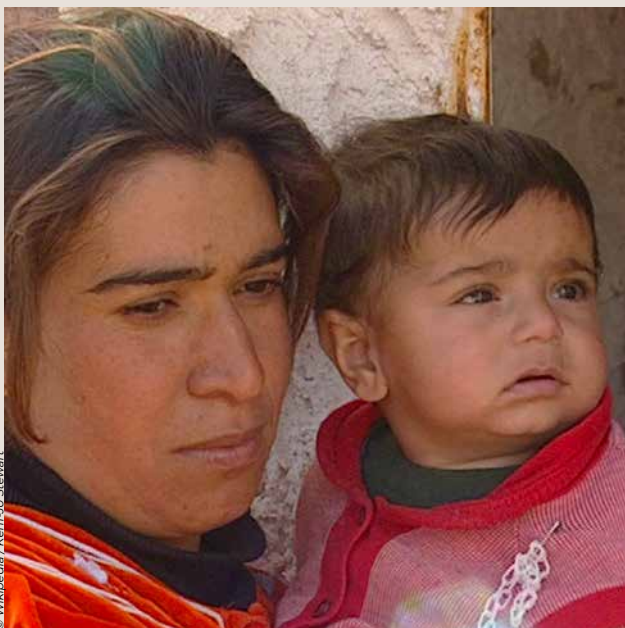
SUPPORT TO JOINT INVESTIGATION TEAM OF SWEDEN AND FRANCE TARGETING CRIMES AGAINST YEZIDI VICTIMS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

The judicial authorities in Sweden and France have set up a joint investigation team (JIT) to support proceedings involving core international crimes committed by foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) against the Yezidi population in Syria and Iraq. Eurojust has supported the setting up of the JIT, which will enable the long-term coordination of investigations and the swift sharing of information and evidence. The joint efforts will also avoid multiple interviews of the same victims, who have lived through dire circumstances.

The main aim of the JIT will be to identify FTFs who were involved in core international crimes, such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, primarily perpetrated against members of the Yezidi minority during the armed conflict in Syria and Iraq, in view of potential prosecution. The JIT will also focus on identifying victims and witnesses of these crimes committed by FTFs in Syria and Iraq.

Investigations in the two JIT countries are ongoing and are coordinated by Eurojust through the Swedish and French National Desks, with the support of the Genocide Network Secretariat, hosted by Eurojust. Several coordination meetings have been held and the Agency has assisted Sweden and France in setting up the team.

Eurojust can also assist the JIT countries in determining the most suitable jurisdiction for prosecution and provide advice to prevent multiple legal actions against perpetrators for the same offence, thereby avoiding a breach of the so-called *ne bis in idem* principle.



Yezidi mother and child

The authorities involved in the JIT will cooperate with the United Nations Investigative Team to promote accountability for crimes committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) pursuant to its mandate.

Furthermore, the JIT Members will seek the assistance of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIIM). Both organisations hold a significant amount of evidence and expertise in investigating core international crimes, which may be crucial in establishing the crimes committed.

The investigative efforts of the JIT will be of added value to the judiciary in other EU Member States or third countries, who want to end the impunity of FTFs involved in core international crimes such as slavery or sexual violence against members of the Yezidi community.

Combatting impunity for war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity is the principal goal of the Genocide Network at Eurojust. It actively supports judicial authorities who are bringing cumulative charges for terrorism and core international crimes, in order to get justice done.

Authorities in several Member States have already brought cumulative charges for terrorism and core international crimes. Combatting impunity by bringing cumulative charges was the central theme of the successful 5th EU Day Against Impunity organised in 2020, and has since seen a steady increase in judiciaries across the European Union.

Joint investigation teams

A joint investigation team (JIT) is one of the most advanced tools used in international cooperation in criminal matters, comprising a legal agreement between competent authorities of two or more States for the purpose of carrying out criminal investigations. Made up of prosecutors and law enforcement authorities as well as judges, JITs are established for a fixed period, typically between 12 and 24 months, such as is necessary to reach successful conclusions to investigations.

Providing operational, legal and financial support to JITs is a key part of Eurojust's mission, together with enabling access to the expertise of the JITs Network, a network of relevant national experts, who encourage and promote best practice in the use of JITs. Eurojust also hosts the JITs Network Secretariat, which supports and stimulates the activities of the JITs Network. Since 2005, the Agency has supported national authorities in the setting up and running of JITs, and has provided funding from 2009, while also taking a leading role in promoting JITs and developing awareness and understanding around the tool and its use.

How to avoid MOBILE SIM SWAPPING?



WHAT IS A SIM SWAPPING ATTACK?

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



1 Collect victim's personal data
Via phishing, data breaches, social media searches, malware



2 Carry out the fraudulent SIM swap
In-store, contacting company's representative over the phone or online through the provider's app or portal



3 Exploit the swapped SIM
The fraudster receives calls or messages addressed to the legitimate user to make bank transactions and accessing email accounts, sites and social media

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS?

- **Before the attack:** You receive strange phone calls asking you to share codes or SMS messages that you have received from your mobile telecom provider.
- **During the attack:** Your phone loses network connection for a longer period, and you are not able to make or receive phone calls.
- **After the attack:** You may see suspicious transactions in your banking accounts, or lose access to your social media or email accounts, or see other activity you do not recognize.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE A VICTIM?

If you experience any of the above signs, contact your telecom provider as soon as possible.

If it confirms the SIM swap, immediately contact your bank and change the passwords to your online accounts. Furthermore, report the fraudulent activity to the police.

HOW TO PREVENT THE ATTACK?

- Avoid providing any personal information to someone pretending to be representative of the telecom provider.
- Never communicate, over the phone, the one-time passwords you receive from your mobile operator.
- Choose app-based 2-factor authentication, instead of two-factor via mobile phone or SMS.
- Be cautious with the personal information that you share on websites and social media.
- Do not open suspicious hyperlinks or attachments received through email or SMS





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Visit of Pope Francis to South Korea in 2014

FRANCIS :

Pope, Head of State and Diplomat

In 2014, US president Barack Obama and Cuban leader Raul Castro formalised the historic rapprochement between their two countries and took the opportunity to thank Pope Francis for his crucial mediation.

The following year, in the midst of the presidential campaign in the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte who went on to win the presidency in 2016, called the pontiff a *"son of a bitch"* for causing traffic jams in central Manila during a visit.

Finally, in 2017, Pope Francis, already winner of the Charlemagne Prize which rewards 'the most valuable contribution to understanding in Europe', brought together the heads of state from all over the European Union in the Sistine Chapel, on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

Three years, three issues and three different venues, but yet one thing in common: Pope Francis appears here



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Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and Primate of Argentina

more as a head of state, with wide experience in diplomatic practice than as a spiritual guide.

Indeed, since the election of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires to the throne of Saint Peter on 13 March 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, renamed Francis, has revitalised the diplomatic activity of the Vatican which has also seen increasing media coverage.

The first Latin American pope, the first Jesuit pope and the first non-European pope since Gregory III in

731, the Argentinian who nicknamed himself the 'Pope from the end of the Earth', acceded to the papacy following another unexpected event; the renunciation of his predecessor Benedict XVI, something that had not happened since Gregory XII in 1415.

His extra-European and multicultural origins - as the son of Italian migrants settled in Argentina - as well as his conditions of accession at the head of the Roman Catholic Church with 1.3 billion faithful, enabled him to renew and re-direct papal diplomacy.

More emphasis was given to the millions left behind by globalisation and ultraliberal capitalism, to ecology and the plight of migrants, while maintaining and even strengthening the role of mediator and peacemaker, characteristic of apostolic diplomacy.

A UNIQUE DIPLOMACY IN THE SERVICE OF A 'MORAL POWER'

In order to fully understand all the challenges of papal diplomacy, one must bear in mind the specificities of the pontifical diplomatic apparatus which maintains a diplomacy unique in its kind that is also perfectly suited to the Vatican State, also unique in its kind.



Main facade of Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome

It is clear that the Vatican City State does not have the traditional attributes of power.

The smallest country in the world with an area of 0.44 km² and a population of 799 inhabitants, the Vatican with its 135 Swiss Guards also has the smallest army in the world.

So much for the bare facts. In matters of law however, a distinction must be made between the Vatican City State and the Holy See or Apostolic See. The former is an elective, absolute monarchy, while the latter refers to the government of the Catholic Church, headed by the Pope, who is therefore both head of state of the Vatican and spiritual leader of Catholics.

However, while the Vatican City State is quite a negligible power, this is not at all the case with the Holy See, which has moral authority over nearly 1.3 billion faithful on five continents. Legally therefore, it is the Holy See that represents the Vatican State on the international stage.



King's Counselor, Abbot Fulrad giving Pepin's written guarantee to Pope Stephen II

The existence of the pontifical territory dates back to the 8th century, when the king of the Franks, Pepin the Short gave Pope Stephen II some of his conquered lands to confirm their alliance. After centuries of intervening in the affairs of the peninsula, the creation of the Vatican State did not take place until 1929, with the signing of the Lateran Agreements between Benito Mussolini and Pope Pius XI.

Consequently, Catholicism became the only denomination to possess a sovereign and independent state, and therefore to benefit from an official status in the field of public international law.

This reduction in the size of the pontifical territory allowed the management of the Catholic Church to be 'de-Italianised' as it were. The pontiff, who no longer had any particular interests in the Italian peninsula, could devote himself fully to his universal mission - *katholikos* in Greek - embodied in the various papal journeys since Pope Paul VI (1963-1978).

Freed from competition between nations, the Pope does not seek to strengthen the influence of his state around the world, and this is what makes his diplomacy so specific. It is the only case of an entity subject to international law that specifically pursues religious and moral goals.

Since he is not accountable to voters, the pope enjoys great freedom of action. Having no specific interest, the Holy See is a neutral state, uninvolved in the geopolitical game.

This explains why it requested a seat only as an observer, and not as a member, at the United Nations in 1964.

Nevertheless, the Holy See is a major diplomatic power, and has thus significantly contributed to shaping today's diplomacy. As early as the

15th century, the first permanent ambassadors to the courts of Europe were envoys of the Pope, known as *nuncios*.

Today, it is the Secretary of State, a kind of Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is the Vatican's second in command.



Pope Francis Addressing the UN General Assembly in 2015

Diplomacy is therefore part of the DNA of the Holy See, which maintains diplomatic relations with 183 countries, including the Palestinian Authority. Only 13 have refused to do so; most of these are strict Muslim countries (Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Comoros, Maldives, Oman and Somalia) or communist states (China, North Korea, Laos and Vietnam).

But even in these countries the Vatican has an apostolic delegate who watches over the Catholic minorities present, such as in Brunei, Comoros, Laos, and Somalia. What's more, negotiations are underway with China and Vietnam.

The Holy See is also a member of, or has observer status in many important international organisations, including the IAEA, UNHCR, OSCE, UNESCO, WTO, OAS, AU, etc. which allows it to participate in debates and to bring a spiritual and moral dimension to the discussions, while avoiding a real political commitment.

This means that it is listened to by all the international actors, who also appreciate its discretion.

A MEDIA PHENOMENON

This is the most visible characteristic of the pontificate of Francis, who, with his smile and humble manner, immediately won over the media. The press did not get along very well with his predecessor Benedict XVI, who was considered too rigorous.

It is precisely in order to counter a press that is sometimes not very lenient that the Vatican has developed its own media.

Other than the traditional media such as L'Osservatore Romano newspaper which has been published in eight languages since 1861, there is Vatican Radio, which was created in 1931 and which now broadcasts in forty languages. This is often the only link between isolated Christian minorities and the rest of the Christian world. The television channel, Vatican Media was set up by John Paul II in 1983.



The special edition of L'Osservatore Romano following the announcement of the election of the Pope

His successors have continued to adapt the Holy See to the media of the time. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI opened the Vatican News website, before inaugurating his twitter account @pontifex the following year. Anxious to communicate directly with the faithful, Francis followed suit, creating his Instagram account in 2016. And it works. On Twitter, the pope is the third most followed political leader with fifty million followers behind Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. On Instagram, he is the eighth most followed personality with seven million followers.

The ability to bring people together is indeed the key to his popularity. He speaks about human rights, solidarity, exploitation, ecology, globalisation, immigration.



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This unifying speech appealed to a press in need of a positive and charismatic leader, to the point that the influential newsmagazine Courier International headlined in March 2017 "François, the last leftist".

With his very powerful speech on migrants and his strong commitment to ecological issues as illustrated in his 'Laudato Si' encyclical letter in 2015, the Pope has imposed himself as the last truly influential figure of the left in a world dominated by populists.

But Francis' socialism could be seen as essentially an illusion, as the Pope heads a Church that still prohibits condoms, divorce and abortion, hence the Spectator magazine's bitter comment: "Francis the illusionist". It is clear that the media enthusiasm has gone a little overboard.

If the title of 'Fourth most influential man in the world' awarded by Fortune in 2015 or that of Personality of the Year by the Times in 2013 can be justified, it was more surprising to find the Pope on the cover of the American magazine Rolling Stone, which is more accustomed to rock stars, with, what's more, a headline in reference to Bob Dylan: "The times they are a-changing".



And in February 2017, on the cover of the Italian Rolling Stone this time, with the headline "Francis, the pop pope". Even more astonishingly, in 2013, Esquire magazine named the Pope as the best-dressed man of the year, even though he wears the same cassock with worn-out sleeves all year round and orthopaedic shoes.

But the pontiff is aware of the risks of media over-exposure and is not exempt from blunders, at a time when paedophilia, as well as other negative societal phenomena may be threatening the credibility of the Church's word.

BUILDING BRIDGES OR MAKING A DEAL WITH THE DEVIL?

As Vatican diplomacy is traditionally one of consensus, Pope Francis refuses to exclude any one actor, which leads him to negotiate with sometimes unsavoury political regimes that are often vilified by Western governments.



Pope Alexander VI Borgia (Vatican Museums - Musei Vaticani, Vatican)

But the work of the Holy See is above all to strive towards a reduction in international tensions, in order to build peace. This activity can be seen in three main areas: the Holy See's mediation efforts, the promotion of nuclear disarmament and interreligious dialogue.

In fact, ever since Pope Alexander VI divided the New World between the Spanish and Portuguese in 1493, mediation has been a constant feature of papal diplomacy, perceived as impartial.

And there are countless international issues on which the Pope has weighed in to avoid conflict.

In April 2020 for example, Pope Francis implored, on his knees, the leaders of South Sudan to reconcile and work for peace after five years of civil war. Francis is no stranger to spontaneous, genuine and gratuitous outbursts that can open a breach in the peace process and break diplomatic deadlocks.

Another bold proposal was the cancellation of the debt of African countries, which are struggling with the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the proposal came from Senegalese President Macky Sall in March 2020, the Pope's Easter message on 12 April hastened its implementation.

The next day, it was mentioned by French president Emmanuel Macron, before the G20 finally agreed on a moratorium on the subject.

The pontiff also made a big splash by opposing the Western air strikes in Syria against Bashar Al-Assad as part of the EU's plan to combat terrorism. In 2013, he organised a day of prayer in St. Peter's Square against the bombing which was eventually abandoned.

He considered that strikes would have only aggravated the circle of violence and delayed negotiations. He is also particularly concerned by the conflicts on the American continent.



Colombian Farc soldier

In Colombia for instance, he worked hard to facilitate negotiations between the government and the FARC, which led to an agreement in 2016 and the disarmament of the paramilitary group. And his trip in 2017, during which he met with 6,000 victims of the violence and 500 former guerrillas was intended to strengthen that peace.

The Holy See has also been involved in the negotiations between protesters and the government in Nicaragua and in Venezuela.

But on the American continent, the Pope's most spectacular diplomatic action remains his mediation between Cuba and the United States. In fact, the growing proportion of Latin American Catholics in the US population makes the Holy See a mediator for the entire continent.

In December 2021 it was announced that Pope Francis may pay a visit to Ukraine in the very near future. The head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk announced that he had spoken to the Pope who had shown concern about the fate of ordinary people, especially those who may not be fully heard today.



Pope Francis, at the Vatican with the Greek Catholic Major Archbishop of Kyiv-Halych, Sviatoslav Shevchuk

He added, *"His Holiness was very interested in how the Ukrainian people live, and he is really deeply concerned about this"*.

His Beatitude Sviatoslav also said he had told the Pope about the common feelings among representatives of various Ukrainian churches and religions that the war in eastern Ukraine would end after the Pope visited the country.

The pontiff's peacemaking spirit is also evident in his efforts to engage in dialogue with the Islamic community.

Few popes have worked so hard for dialogue with Muslims.

It must be said that in the context of terrorism, there was an urgent need to renew the dialogue, after it had been put on hold under Pope Benedict XVI.

He had provoked a real uproar in the Muslim world with the address he delivered at the University of Regensburg in Germany in 2006, in which he denounced the violence inherent in Islam because of jihadism.

This speech inflicted serious damage to papal diplomacy and led to violence against Christian minorities and to the demonstrations in which effigies of the Holy Father were burned.



Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of Egypt's al-Azhar mosque and university, exchanging documents during an interreligious meeting at the Founder's Memorial in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Feb. 4, 2019

DARING STANCES AND BOLD DECLARATIONS

Papal diplomacy is also characterised by a constant desire to build bridges, to create links with all the actors of world geopolitics and to address social problems.

In addition to the Holy See's relativist view regarding the place of Europe and even that of the West in its international policies, the other type of 'globalisation' advocated by the Vatican does not only entail a rebalancing of forces between West and East.

It is also characterised by an attentiveness to migrants and to those excluded from society, in line with the social doctrine of the Church and that of Saint Francis of Assisi, a model of poverty.

From the beginning of his pontificate, the tone was set as his first trip took him

to Lampedusa, where he denounced a "globalisation of indifference", recalled the failings of European leaders and publicly displayed his support for migrants.

The pope recognises the legitimate fears of Europeans in the face of the migratory wave, but considers that these should not drive political action. Far from a simple exhortation to welcome, Pope Francis also considers that migrants must respect the laws and cultural identities of the countries that welcome them.

In short, the pontiff advocates for a true integration of migrants and not an assimilation, erasing the cultural identity of the immigrant but rather a fusion of cultures, in order to avoid the creation of segregated communities.

This nuanced discourse does not prevent him from being very aggressive on the issue. In January 2018 he explicitly took sides in favour of the migrants' right to land, for a facilitation of family reunification and against the detention of unaccompanied minors.



Pope Francis greets refugees at a Mass for migrants on 7 June 2018

On his return trip from the Greek island of Lesbos, he even brought back in the papal plane, several Muslim families to the Vatican, which led to strong criticism from Christians in the East. They did not understand the pope's gesture, as they felt that they are suffering just as much as Muslims.

More generally, there is a growing chasm between the pope and Catholics. While Francis' criticism of social inequality and the treatment of migrants appeals to agnostics, Catholics seem more reserved in their acceptance of such comments.

Without going back to the war between conservatives and progressives in the

Curia, Francis no longer seems to be in tune with many Catholics, who, politically, are turning to xenophobic populists. Although claiming to be Catholics and advocating the Christian heritage these politicians are the exact opposite of the Holy See's discourse of openness.



Pope Francis meets with diplomats from more than 180 countries, at the Vatican, January 10, 2022

Social openness and criticism of capitalism have outraged traditionalists who accuse the papacy of destabilising Europe and accelerating the end of Western civilisation with its pro-migrant discourse. Its 2015 call for all European parishes to welcome two migrant families each has only reinforced the division. Many observers are of the opinion that Francis' 'naively idealistic' interference in the political arena against populism has accelerated the papacy's detachment from the historical heart of its power, the West.

Every year in January, some 200 diplomats meet in the Vatican's apostolic palaces to present their greetings to the pope. The head of the Catholic Church then delivers a long speech. On Monday, 10 January 2022, Pope Francis sent his greetings to the 183 ambassadors accredited to the Holy See.

A landmark ceremony during which the pope presented his vision of the world. The Covid-19 pandemic, the situation in Lebanon, forgotten conflicts, the migration issue, the preservation of the common house and the elements for building a culture of dialogue and brotherhood. These were the main themes addressed by Pope Francis in his long speech, in which he also outlined his priorities at the international level for 2022, advocating for multilateralism.

In the Hall of Blessings of St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis recalled in his preamble that the purpose of diplomacy is to "help put aside disagreements in human coexistence", before addressing the major issues of the moment.

PROMOTING VACCINATION AGAINST COVID-19

It is a personal as well as a collective responsibility, based on "respect for the health of those close to us. Caring for the health of oneself and others is a moral obligation" insisted the Holy Father who regrets the dissemination of unfounded information or poorly documented facts.

He added, "vaccines are not magical tools for healing, but they are the most reasonable solution for the prevention of disease". As for the authorities, the pope regretted "the lack of firmness in decisions and clarity in communication which are sources of confusion and mistrust and which undermine social cohesion by feeding new tensions".

The pontiff reiterated his invitation to States and international organisations to adopt "a policy of disinterested sharing as a key principle for guaranteeing access to diagnostic tools, vaccines and medicines for all".

LEBANON AT THE CENTRE OF THE POPE'S CONCERNS

The first country mentioned by Pope Francis was Lebanon, to which he renewed his closeness and his prayers, and to which he hoped that "the necessary reforms and the support of the international community" would help it to remain firm in its identity as a model of peaceful coexistence and brotherhood between the different religions present there.



Pope Francis and European Commission President, Ursula Von der Leyen

Looking back on his 2021 trips to Iraq, Hungary, Slovakia, Cyprus and Greece, he again spoke at length about the migration issue he touched on in Lesbos.

In this context, he particularly urged the European Union to find its internal cohesion in the management of migration, and to establish "a coherent and comprehensive system for managing immigration and asylum policies, in order to share the responsibility for receiving migrants".

However, the pope did not forget other sensitive points such as the border between Mexico and the United States.

CRITICISM OF 'CANCEL CULTURE'

If the great challenges of our time are global, the solutions are increasingly "fragmented," the Holy Father noted. This is why "it is necessary to rediscover a sense of our common identity as a single human family" and to find the path of multilateralism, despite the crisis it is going through. At issue is the misuse of international organisations.

The pope criticised the practice of 'cancel culture', a form of ideological colonisation that leaves no room for freedom of expression, the mass withdrawal of support from public figures or celebrities who have done things that aren't socially accepted today. It is also a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure

The pope spoke out against this practice, "In the name of protecting diversity, we end up erasing the meaning of any identity, with the risk of silencing the positions that defend a respectful and balanced idea of different sensibilities". He went on to add, "We are witnessing the elaboration of a single thought forced to deny history, or worse, to rewrite it on the basis of contemporary categories, while any historical situation must be interpreted according to the hermeneutics of the time."

The Pope reminded the attendees that multilateral diplomacy, "called to be truly inclusive", must not forget permanent values, in the forefront of which are "the right to life, from conception to natural end, and the right to religious freedom".



Pope Francis and child in South Korea

Another field of action for multilateralism is the care of our common home, which suffers from "continuous and indiscriminate exploitation of resources". No one can exempt himself from making efforts, says the pope, who regretted that the decisions taken at the COP26 in Glasgow are too limited.

FORGOTTEN CONFLICTS

Pope Francis hoped that solutions will be found to the interminable conflicts such as Syria, which he said needs political and constitutional reforms, and the lifting of sanctions that directly affect the daily lives of its people, who are increasingly trapped in poverty.

Yemen was also cited as a forgotten war. The Holy Father reiterated the Holy See's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, namely a two-state solution so that the two peoples can live "in peace and security, without hatred or resentment, but healed by mutual forgiveness".

Francis then reviewed other situations of conflict or tension: Libya, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, the Sahel, Ukraine, the Southern Caucasus, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

FRANCIS RECOGNISES THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Francis' tenure as pope has also been noted by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community for adopting a much more conciliatory tone towards them than his predecessors. "But he who speaks Christian words without putting them into practice hurts himself and others," he said in 2013.

So where does Pope Francis stand on LGBTQ issues ?

In a 2020 documentary film entitled 'Francesco' by Israeli-American director Evgeny Afineevsky, the pope said he favoured civil unions for homosexual couples so that they can have legal protection. "Homosexuals have the right to be in a family. They are the children of God", he said. However, he added that the term 'marriage' should be reserved only for the union of a man and a woman.

Since his election as pope, Francis had already mentioned several times the notion of civil unions for people of the same sex. According to his biographer Austen Ivereigh, Jorge Bergoglio, the future pope, had also defended the merits of this legal protection when he was still archbishop of Buenos Aires, in the context of a heated debate in 2010 on the legalisation of gay marriage.



Pope Francis and Evgeny Afineevsky

In the documentary however, he pleads with unprecedented strength and greater freedom of tone in favour of this type of civil union.

To date, the Catholic Church considers homosexual acts to be 'moral deviance', at odds with nature as God created it. Not all commentators are convinced that Francis' words will begin a real opening of the Church.

"ABORTION IS MURDER"

In September 2021, the pope who was asked to respond to a plan by American archbishops to deprive pro-abortion leaders like President Joe Biden of communion, said in general terms that the Church was not called to take a political position.

"What should the pastor do? To be a pastor, not to condemn", including "the excommunicated", said the pontiff, without wishing to comment directly on the debates of an American Church often openly present in political life.



Pope Francis meets President Joe Biden on Oct. 29, 2021

On the plane returning from a four-day trip to Hungary and Slovakia, the pope called for "compassion and tenderness," condemning such episodes of Church history as the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre or the hunt for witches and heretics.

"If you get out of the pastoral care of the Church, you become a politician," he said with disapproval.

At the same time, the pope took care to express once again his abhorrence of abortion, which he compared to "murder".

Pope Francis has spoken out repeatedly on the issue of abortion, most often within a broader reflection on the defence of the weakest, both the elderly and victims of human trafficking. "This defence of unborn life is intimately linked to the defence of all human rights," which is "the internal coherence" of the Catholic Church's message, he said.

Without compromising or suggesting that the Church could one day change its position on this issue, the pope emphasises mercy, which implies that Christians should not remain in a position of condemnation, without which 'the moral edifice' of his message risks not only being misunderstood but also 'collapsing like a house of cards'.

DOGS AND CATS REPLACING CHILDREN

Recently, the pope went on the offensive again; this time he targeted married couples who refused to have children. "Today, we see a form of selfishness. We see that some people don't want to have a child. Sometimes they have one, and that's it" he declared during his weekly audience on 5 January 2022.

The pontiff regretted that couples are having fewer and fewer children and prefer to welcome pets instead. "Today,

couples do not want to have children. Instead, they have two dogs, two cats. And yes, it's funny, but it's the truth: dogs and cats take the place of children."

To give force to his speech on the 'demographic winter', Pope Francis used a singular image. He blamed modern couples for not fully investing in creating a family, preferring to adopt pets.

"This denial of motherhood and fatherhood diminishes us, takes away from our humanity. Thus civilization grows old and the country suffers," continued Francis, encouraging couples "to take the risk" of having children.



Pope Francis with children of the Santa Marta Dispensary in 2017

The pope did not limit his speech at urging the population to combat the falling birth rate, but he also made an appeal to political forces. He invited the official institutions to "simplify adoption procedures, so that the dream of all those little ones who need a family and of those spouses who want to give love can come true". A choice - that of adoption - which, in the eyes of the Holy Father, is "one of the highest forms of love and of fatherhood and motherhood".

PREFERENCE FOR THE PERIPHERIES AT THE RISK OF ABANDONING THE CENTRES

This theology of peace is coupled with an openness to the peripheries, to the margins of world society. Francis, the pope 'from the end of the Earth', never ceases to want to address those who are geographically far from the heart of the Catholic world and those left behind by globalisation, but at the risk of losing the support of the heart of his power base.

Whether it is his interest in distant Christian minorities or in migrants and the poor, the marketing aspect of the 'Pope of the peripheries' misses the core target by trying too hard to venture into new markets.

But to use a somewhat crude metaphor, it is precisely the core target that keeps a brand alive. By putting into perspective the space occupied by the West, and even by fighting the populist tendencies that are emerging within it, Pope Francis runs the risk of weakening the historical roots of Christianity, as well as its funding.

It remains to be seen whether the Christian communities in Asia and Africa will prove as promising and receptive as he hopes.

After nine years of a particularly dynamic diplomacy, several observations can be made. Pope Francis has made perfect use of all the potentialities of a unique diplomacy with unique objectives, while taking advantage of its media coverage.

Anxious to strengthen peace and considering dialogue as an indispensable tool to the resolution of conflicts, the pontiff has maintained relations with unsavoury regimes and resumed dialogue with the Muslim world while playing the role of international mediator.

But this relativisation of an increasingly closed West threatens the foundations of the Holy See, a Western European institution 'par excellence'.



During one of Vladimir Putin's three encounters with the Holy Father, the Pope used the talks to call for a "sincere and great effort" towards ending the conflict in eastern Ukraine the Vatican said, adding that the pair agreed a "climate of dialogue" had to be restored and that "all parties" had to adhere to the Minsk ceasefire agreements

This being the case, no one today would poke fun at the diplomatic power of the Apostolic See as Joseph Stalin allegedly did in 1943. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill suggested to Soviet leader Stalin the possibility of the pope being associated with some of the decisions taken at the recent Tehran Conference. "The pope?" said Stalin thoughtfully. "Ah, the pope ! How many divisions does he have ?"

Hossein Sadre



PARTICLES AND POLICIES

The EU's problem with nuclear power for cleaner energy

Agreements and alliances within the European Union (and elsewhere) about how best to obtain clean energy tend to be somewhat unstable. But there again, the atoms of uranium 235 (U-235) upon which the whole business depends are, by their nature, highly unstable. They have to be, or it would not be possible to produce nuclear power. Within the nucleus of each uranium-235 (U-235) atom are 92 protons and 143 neutrons (which are what go to make up the 235 total). The arrangement of these particles in uranium-235 is so unstable, however, that the nucleus can disintegrate if it is excited by an outside source. To create nuclear energy, it is necessary to excite the U-235 atom, and when its nucleus absorbs an extra neutron, it turns into the very unstable atom, Uranium-236, and quickly breaks into two parts. That is why it's called nuclear fission

Each time a U-235 nucleus splits, it releases two or three more neutrons, which can then go off and split more, thus creating a chain reaction. The splitting of an atom releases heat and gamma radiation, which is a form of radiation made up of high-energy photons. The process generates enough heat to boil water and produce steam, just as a coal-burning furnace does. The steam then drives a turbine fan that generates electricity. That part of the process would be familiar, I imagine, to people in the late 19th century. Not surprisingly, many people are wary of nuclear power because they're afraid of nuclear radiation escaping and the fact that a

similar atom-splitting technique with U-235 atoms is what powers a bomb.



Uranium metal highly enriched in uranium-235

Bombs are rather different, however, although in both cases, scientists must first enrich a uranium sample so that it contains up to 3 percent more U-235 than normal, which is sufficient for nuclear power plants to operate. If you're creating a bomb, however, you'll need weapons-grade uranium, which is composed of at least 90 percent U-235. In case you're wondering how to enrich your uranium sample, it involves using a centrifuge after the uranium has been used to create a gas. The centrifuge separates the U-235 atoms from the U-238 atoms that will also be present. It takes several repeats of this operation because to begin with the increase in U-235 is quite modest. However, to get weapons-grade uranium

is not only more difficult but also much more expensive. That is why so few countries actually possess the things. Slaughtering millions indiscriminately is a costly business.



Chernobyl Sarcophagus Memorial

However, despite fears over possible meltdowns, such as at Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima Daiichi, such events are extremely rare and are inevitably down to human error. Nuclear plants cannot explode like atom bombs, of course, but the generation of excessive runaway heat can melt the core. This can happen (although mercifully rarely) when the coolant source to the fuel rods fails and they overheat. This is what happened at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in March 2011. In that case, a powerful earthquake damaged the generators that powered the plant's water coolant pumps. As a result, some of the reactors at Fukushima Daiichi got very hot and started to split the water into hydrogen and oxygen. At that point the hydrogen exploded, breaching the secondary containment walls around some of the reactors. Then another explosion caused catastrophic damage to the main containment structure. The remaining nuclear waste remains highly radioactive for hundreds or even thousands of years. At Chernobyl, Russian authorities poured hundreds of tonnes of water onto the reactor



IAEA experts depart Unit 4 of TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station on 17 April 2013 as part of a mission to review Japan's plans to decommission the facility

core to cool it, followed by boron, clay, dolomite, lead, and sand to try to stop the radioactive particles from rising into the atmosphere, finally encasing the stricken plant in a kind of concrete overcoat, sometimes referred to as a 'sarcophagus', a somewhat ominous name for something doing a very ominous job. Horror films depict things rising from the tomb but we must hope nothing arises from this one.

GOODBYE, WORLD

In fact, the European Union gets just over a quarter of the energy it consumes from nuclear power, although the proportion varies from one member state to another. It gets a slightly higher proportion of what is called its 'base load power' that way, too. Base load power is the energy source that is always available and upon which countries can fall back in times of need, the main other source being coal or, where available, gas. Other energy sources, such as wind and hydro-electric are not available everywhere, nor all the time, and are in any case dependent upon the weather. But just as coal is a constantly available source of heat (until we have used it all up, I suppose), so too is nuclear power. What's more, nuclear power's proponents would argue, nuclear is clean: no forests need to be chopped down, no coal mines need to be dug, there is no smoke polluting the atmosphere with particles of carbon. What's not to like?



Nuclear Power Plant, Chooz France

Those opposed to nuclear power would say there is a lot not to like. When things go wrong – however infrequently that may be – they go wrong in a big way. According to the National Library of Medicine at the National Centre for Biotechnology Information (NIH) in the United States, "The most critical issue when considering the effects of radiation on the health of children was the increase of thyroid cancer, as clearly demonstrated among people who were children or adolescents at the time of the Chernobyl accident."

The on-line article stresses that in the immediate aftermath of a nuclear incident, such as those at Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima Daiichi, the most important thing is to prevent exposure of children to radioactive iodine. Entering the body through inhalation and ingestion, it can accumulate in the thyroid. "In the longer term, another concern is exposure to radionuclides with long half-lives, including cesium137 and cesium134," the website warns, "with physical half-lives of 30 years and 31 seconds, respectively."



Three Mile Island in 1979

What's more, the NIH is concerned about foetal radiation risks. Currently, radiobiological studies on low-level radiation are being reviewed, with reference to the effects upon the developing brain. As the website explains, "a foetal dose of 100 millisieverts (mSv) may increase the risk of an effect on brain development, especially neuronal migration, based upon the results of experiments with rodents." The report recommends further research on the effects of low-level radiation, about which it feels there is too little known.

In view of all this concern about the supposed risks, should the EU be putting all its eggs into one potentially radioactive basket? It's really a question of finding a viable alternative, and so far, nobody really has. The largest producer of nuclear power in the EU is France, responsible for 52% of the EU total nuclear energy production: 353,833 Gigawatts (GWh), followed by Germany with 9% (64,382 GWh), Spain (9%; 58,299 GWh) and Sweden (7%; 49,198 GWh). "These 4 countries together accounted for more than three quarters of the total amount of electricity generated in nuclear facilities in the EU," says the website of the European Commission. The website goes on to explain that: "At the beginning



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A wildfire burns in a national park in Oregon, USA

of 2020, 13 EU Member States with nuclear electricity production had altogether 109 nuclear reactors in operation. In the course of 2020, three nuclear reactors permanently shut down – two in France and one in Sweden. Nevertheless, France remained the EU Member State most reliant on nuclear electricity, which represented 67% of all electricity generated in the country in 2020.” But France, whilst part of a minority, isn’t alone, says the Commission. “The only other EU country with more than half of its electricity generated in nuclear power plants was Slovakia (54%). This figure stood at 46% in Hungary, 41% in Bulgaria, 39% in Belgium (not any more!), 38% in Slovenia, 37% in Czechia (formerly the Czech Republic), 34% in Finland, 30% in Sweden, 22% in Spain, 21% in Romania, 11% in Germany and 3% in the Netherlands.”



© Wikimedia

French MEP Christophe Grudler

At the European Parliament, a group of cross-party MEPs have formed a network to look into and try to lobby colleagues on the advantages of nuclear power. It was the idea of French MEP Christophe Grudler, of the Renew Europe group. “There is no doubt about it,” he told me, “Nuclear power is essential to achieving our European climate goals as it produces low-carbon electricity. That is why I believe

that nuclear power has a strong future in the EU.” He doesn’t see nuclear as being the sole source of power. “The electricity grid must always be balanced: as renewable energies are by nature intermittent, they need a controllable and decarbonized energy such as nuclear power to supplement them quickly if there is not enough wind or sun, for example.” Grudler would like to see an educational effort to ensure that people are better informed about nuclear power because the present level of knowledge is quite poor. “For example,” he said, “some people think that nuclear energy emits CO₂, which is not true!”

As a European Commission communication on cleaning up the planet put it in 2018: “The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued in October 2018 its Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways. Based on scientific evidence, this demonstrates that human-induced global warming has already reached 1°C above preindustrial levels and is increasing at approximately 0.2°C per decade. Without stepping up international climate action, global average temperature increase could reach 2°C soon after 2060 and continue rising afterwards.” The Communication makes clear that this is not an issue we can choose to ignore because of its potential impact on us and the world at large. “The IPCC report confirms that approximately 4% of the global land area is projected to undergo a transformation of ecosystems from one type to another at 1oC of global warming, increasing to 13% at 2°C temperature change,” it continues.

“For example, 99% of coral reefs are projected to disappear globally

at a temperature increase of 2oC. Irreversible loss of the Greenland ice sheet could be triggered at around 1.5°C to 2°C of global warming. This would eventually lead to up to 7 meters of sea level rise affecting directly coastal areas around the world including low-lying lands and islands in Europe. The rapid loss of Arctic sea ice during summer is already happening today, with negative impacts on biodiversity in the Nordic region and the livelihood of the local population.”

Lithuania used to boast a successful nuclear power plant at Ignalina. I visited it during one reporting trip many years ago, together with a camera crew. Construction had begun in 1974, when Lithuania was still part of the Soviet Union and the plant employed a very large number of people – more than 13,500 were employed at Unit 1 – but deployment of the second unit was postponed following the Chernobyl incident, which used the same type of Russian-built RBMK reactors, which lack a protective shield to contain any radioactivity that may leak in the event of accident. It was tough on the workers, most of whom were native Russian speakers and couldn’t therefore find alternative jobs in the country. In fact, the Chernobyl disaster was caused by a test of the safety procedures that went catastrophically wrong, leading to two separate explosions, the second of which – a steam explosion – lifted the 2,000-tonne metal plate to which the reactor was attached. A report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) blamed it on incorrect procedures being used during the safety test, but we may never know for sure because nobody can safely go there and take a look for a very long time. At least 28 people were killed in the blast and up to 30% of Chernobyl’s 190 metric tonnes of uranium was thrown into the atmosphere.



© Nrf

Chernobyl Reactor 4 after the explosion in late April 1986

335,000 people had to be evacuated and Soviet authorities set up a 30-kilometre-wide exclusion zone around the reactor, which some experts say will remain radioactive and extremely dangerous for literally tens of thousands of years. The disaster killed off the Ignalina power plant, upon which Lithuania depended, and made people begin to have second thoughts about nuclear power.

A NUCLEAR FUTURE



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British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and UN Secretary-General António Guterres chat during a photocall at COP26 in Glasgow

The issue of nuclear power inevitably came up at the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow in 2021. Leaders from around the world had gathered beside the River Clyde to debate climate change and how to avoid it globally. Delegates seemed to find it hard to discuss nuclear's possible rôle in averting an energy crisis, as if even talking about it suggested an adherence to the technology. It's certainly hard to see how global energy supplies can be maintained without it. However, even Sergey Paltsev, deputy director of the Joint Programme on the Science and Policy of Global Change and a senior research fellow

at the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Energy Initiative, admitted at COP 26 that "I wouldn't say that it's a rosy picture for nuclear," although he also stressed that in the context of clean energy generation, nuclear should be taken seriously.

It's certainly being taken seriously in Belgium: all of its nuclear plants will close by 2025, by which time Belgium has pledged to phase out nuclear power altogether. Last December, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo confirmed that Doel 3 and Tihange 2 will close this year and next, with the newer Doel 4 and Tihange 3 shutting down by 2025. The Belgian plants are operated by the French utilities company, Engie, and account for nearly half of the country's electricity output. Belgium has a coalition government, whose Green members called for the rapid application of a 2003 law that insists on closing the nuclear plants. Liberal members wanted to extend the plants' lives (they failed) and it has not yet been decided how Belgium will make up the shortfall in electricity generation. According to World Nuclear News, the Belgian transmission system operator Elia has previously said that Belgium will need an additional 3.6 gigawatts (GWe) of thermal capacity by the end of 2025. The Belgian government must now wait until 15 March to see if a permit for a new gas plant, proposed to be situated just north of Brussels, will be granted. De Croo has said it's "very unlikely" that the life of the nuclear plants could be extended if the gas plant isn't ready in time. World Nuclear News quotes the Belgian nuclear distributor as saying: "Engie takes note of the Belgian government's

announcement concerning the nuclear power plants and recalls, as we have done on several occasions and for more than two years, that technical, legal and regulatory constraints impose an incompressible deadline that does not allow us to ensure an extension of two nuclear units for the winter of 2025." The company also said that it would "continue to invest in renewable energies and in future innovations such as green hydrogen."



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Doel 4



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Belgian Prime Minister, Alexander De Croo

Brussels may be the effective capital of both the EU and of Belgium, but the Belgian government's decisions should not be confused with those of the EU. They fairly often differ, at least on points of detail. On the issue of nuclear power, they certainly do, with the EU as a whole seeing climate change as a bigger and more immediate threat than the use of nuclear fission to generate the heat needed to turn turbines, as a resolution in 2019 makes clear. The resolution was in connection with COP 25, the United Nations climate change conference before the one held in Glasgow last year. "The resolution on COP25 calls for the European Green Deal, announced by European Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen, to include a target of 55% emissions reductions by 2030 in order to be able to reach its target on climate neutrality by 2050.



Opening of COP25 in Madrid - 2 December 2019

It was adopted by 430 votes in favour, 190 against and 34 abstentions.” So far, so neutral on the nuclear issue, but it continues: “The resolution says the European Parliament ‘believes that nuclear energy can play a role in meeting climate objectives because it does not emit greenhouse gases, and can also ensure a significant share of electricity production in Europe; considers nevertheless that, because of the waste it produces, this energy requires a medium and long-term strategy that takes into account technological advances (laser, fusion, etc) aimed at improving the sustainability of the entire sector.’” That looks a bit like: “yes, go ahead, but only if you really must and please be careful”, which seems fair enough. Nuclear fission can be dangerous unless you’re paying close attention.

The European Union, then, is still quite keen – at least in some quarters – on developing nuclear energy as a way of keeping the lights on while reducing the output of carbon. It won’t be cheap, however. If the Union is to hit its carbon neutrality target, it will need to spend some €500-billion by 2050. This eye-wateringly high figure comes from the EU’s Commissioner for the Internal Market, Thierry Breton, who told *Le Journal du Dimanche* in an interview that “To achieve carbon neutrality, it is really necessary to move up a gear in the production of carbon-free electricity in Europe, knowing that the demand for electricity itself will double in 30 years.” He anticipates an industrial revolution of “unprecedented scale” he told the newspaper. Certainly, a European Parliament resolution stresses the need for nuclear energy to be included in any long-term plans

to reduce carbon emissions without reducing the amount of electricity being generated, World Nuclear News reported in January 2022.



Thierry Breton, European Commissioner-designate for Internal Market

Nuclear energy has always been a controversial topic, however. It looked as if MEPs would vote for the opposite view; “a draft of the resolution presented by the European Parliament’s Environment Committee (ENVI) had called for a phase-out of nuclear energy in the EU,” reported World Nuclear News, with MEPs claiming it is ‘neither safe, nor environmentally or economically sustainable.’” That sounds pretty definite. However, although the Environment Committee (designated ‘ENVI’ in Euro-speak) adopted the draft resolution on 6 November with 62 votes to 11, following a debate on 25 November, that decision did not make it through to the final text. Instead, amendment 38, which states that the European Parliament supports nuclear power, was approved by 322 votes, with 298 votes against and 45 abstentions. World Nuclear News reports that: “The resolution says the European Parliament ‘believes that nuclear energy can play a role in

meeting climate objectives because it does not emit greenhouse gases, and can also ensure a significant share of electricity production in Europe; considers nevertheless that, because of the waste it produces, this energy requires a medium and long-term strategy that takes into account technological advances (laser, fusion, etc) aimed at improving the sustainability of the entire sector.’” The Director General of Europe’s nuclear trade group, Foratom, Yves Desbazeille pointed out that nuclear power accounts for 50% of the region’s low-carbon electricity output. The use of nuclear energy in the EU avoids the emission of 700 million tonnes of CO₂ each year.



Watching this endless debate is a little like watching an extremely slow game of tennis. It should be punctuated by shouts by some umpire from the side-lines of “thirty, forty” or perhaps “deuce”. However, although it may be dull to watch, the outcome is of vital importance to us all.

NO EASY CHOICES

Europe is caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, energy prices are rising, putting up the cost of living for all of us. On the other

hand, there is widespread agreement that we must reduce the level of our greenhouse gas emissions. It would be easier to achieve either aim – limiting energy price rises and cutting carbon emissions – if it was not important to achieve them both at the same time. They seem to be mutually exclusive. As 2022 began, on New Year's Eve, the European Commission presented the EU's 27 member states with a new draft regulation in which both natural gas and nuclear power were designated as “green fuels” for generating electricity. There are plenty of people, especially in the Green camp, who see nuclear as something to be avoided because of the fear of a radiation leak. However, as the draft regulation says, nuclear produces virtually no emissions, while gas offers a relatively clean transition fuel as the EU looks for ways to phase out coal completely. If the European Parliament and the member states agree to play ball on this point, then nuclear power and gas will be listed alongside wind and solar as suitable technologies for private investment and for EU financial support from 2023 on. What's more, says the Foreign Policy website, “an official EU designation as green may help private companies, including lenders, meet increasingly ubiquitous environmental, social and governance mandates”. The inclusion of gas is not uncontroversial: some climate-minded European governments still count gas (understandably) as a fossil fuel, but it's over the inclusion of nuclear energy that things get difficult. It's a fact, however, that nuclear reactors can generate electricity 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, while wind and solar stop working when



Mongolian family using solar energy to power home

the wind dies down or the sun sets. The Commission's move may not be popular in some quarters, but it seems unavoidable.

MEPs and member state governments had been warned back in 2018 that in order to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, power generation overall must rise by up to two-and-a-half-fold. It also warned that nuclear would have to be part of the mix.

You may not be surprised to hear that France is the keenest member state where nuclear power is concerned. There is plenty of opposition, however. The Social Democrats who, together with the Greens, have taken over from Angela Merkel's government in Germany are firmly anti-nuclear and intend to phase out all nuclear power by the end of 2022. Neighbouring Austria is even more strongly opposed, although France gets the support of Finland and the Czech Republic. Those who are so keen to get rid of nuclear power still haven't really explained how they plan to keep the lights on without it. It seems doubtful that wind

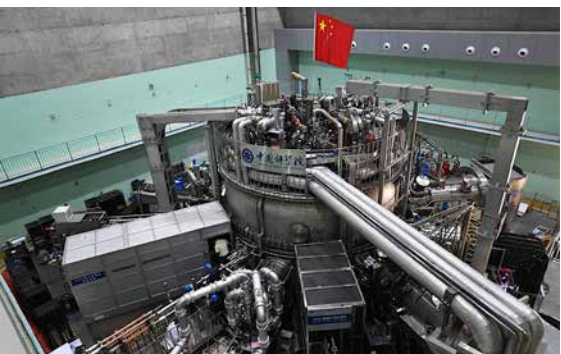
turbines or solar farms will be able to bridge the gap, and certainly not all the time. France, dependent on nuclear power for almost 70% of its electricity, has the lowest carbon emissions per capita of all EU countries. Germany, which saw an increase in both the use of coal and its emissions, is way above the EU average, around six times more per capita than France, despite defining itself as “a green forerunner”.

“No solution should be put aside by dogmatism,” warned Christophe Grudler. “It seems unthinkable not to use the decarbonised energies we have.” He pointed out that this could even be seen as a way for Europe to become more independent in its energy supply and less reliant on foreign sources. “The end of fossil fuels – 60% of which come from other continents – must be an opportunity to replace them with energy ‘made in Europe’, in the name of our strategic autonomy,” Grudler pointed out, while acknowledging that Europe must continue to invest in research on nuclear energy, “for example nuclear fusion”. There is a lot of research currently under way to develop



Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel launching the first hydrogen plasma in Wendelstein 7-X experimental stellarator reactor in Germany in 2016

nuclear fusion but it's some way from becoming a viable energy source. Early in January, however, China's "Artificial Sun" nuclear fusion reactor in Hefei set a new world record by running at almost 70-milliono Celsius for more than 17 minutes. Nuclear fusion works by forcing hydrogen atoms to join together to form helium, just as they do in the heart of the sun (and all other stars). The stars, with their huge gravity, find it easy; on Earth it's much less so, because the nuclei of the hydrogen isotopes involved strongly repel each other. The trick is to get ignition so that the reaction is self-sustaining, then to keep feeding it fuel. In theory, it should be much more efficient than nuclear fission. "The D-T fusion reaction releases over four times as much energy as uranium fission," according to the World Nuclear Association (WNA). It requires containment by means of a magnetic shield. It's not easy, though, nor cheap.



The experimental advanced superconducting tokamak (EAST), or the Chinese "artificial sun", in Hefei, Anhui province

"The transition towards climate neutrality by 2050 gives energy a central role," says the European Commission, "as energy is today responsible for more than 75% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions." If anyone thinks that should be doable with a little research, bear this in mind: "To reach climate neutrality, we need to decarbonise at least six times faster than anything realised globally so far. We must drastically increase the share of renewable energy sources and clean energy carriers and improve energy efficiency." It all costs money, but Grudler thinks it would be well worth it. "We need the right signals from decision-makers so that energy companies can invest in technology and innovation without fear of backlash."

In the UK, a new and surprising lobbying organisation has been set up to put the case for nuclear power, called Greens for Nuclear Energy. "We believe that the increasingly urgent need to deal decisively with our emerging climate crisis makes continued opposition to nuclear energy irrational for environmentalists and reduces our chances of averting a climate catastrophe" says the group's website. On the same website, Professor Gerry Thomas, Chair in Molecular Pathology at the Faculty of Medicine, Department of Surgery & Cancer at Imperial College London even plays down concerns about the long-term effects of the Chernobyl disaster. "I can understand that people may be nervous about nuclear power," he is quoted as saying. "I was too, until I started working on the health effects of the Chernobyl accident. Now, 35 years later, we can say that the only health effect caused directly by exposure of the population leaving near the site of the Chernobyl accident has been an increase in thyroid cancer in those who were children at the time of the accident."

Apparently, thyroid cancer is relatively responsive to treatment. Another scientist quoted on the site is François-Marie Bréon of the Laboratoire des Sciences du Climat et de l'Environnement (LSCE), who wrote: "Nuclear will not be sufficient to stop climate change. Yet, it can definitely provide a large contribution. Coal fired power plants generate roughly one third of global CO2 emissions. These may be replaced by nuclear plants in many countries such as Europe, the USA, China, India and others. The world needs to engage into nuclear power at the same rate as France did during the 70s and 80s."



Professor Geraldine "Gerry" Thomas, Chair in Molecular Pathology at the Faculty of Medicine, Department of Surgery & Cancer, Imperial College London



François-Marie Bréon of the Laboratoire des Sciences du Climat et de l'Environnement (LSCE)

Some people are never going to accept a solution that contains the word 'nuclear'. The very term sends shivers up the spines of some people, and in the light of Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima Daiichi, it's an understandable reaction. The fact remains, however regrettable, though, that the alternative would appear to be runaway climate change, melting glaciers and ice sheets, desertification and so on, leading to the extermination of much of the life on planet Earth. The problem is also highlighted on the United Nations' website: "Effects include increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events – including flooding, droughts, wildfires and hurricanes – that affect millions of people and cause trillions in economic losses." "Human-caused greenhouse gas emissions endanger human and environmental health," says Mark Radka, Chief of the UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) Energy and Climate Branch. "And the impacts will become more widespread and severe without strong climate action." The EU's own website states clearly: "Climate related extremes such as forest fires, flash floods, typhoons and hurricanes are also causing massive devastation and loss of lives, as hurricanes Irma and Maria proved in 2017 when they hit the Caribbean, including a number of European outermost regions. This is now affecting the European continent with storm Ophelia in 2017 being the first strong East Atlantic hurricane ever to reach Ireland and in 2018 storm Leslie bringing destruction to Portugal and Spain." The EU is committed to ending global warming, it seems, even if that means using nuclear power, and it is putting money into something it seems we're all going to have to get used to, like it or not.

T. Kingsley Brooks



THE BOMB EXPLODES

Britain one year after its departure from the EU

“An act of economic self-harm.” That was how the prospect of Britain leaving the European Union was described by Britain’s Prime Minister of the time, David Cameron, before the referendum that would separate Britain from its EU neighbours. Cameron had campaigned hard for Britain to remain inside the Union, but the ultra-nationalism of Boris Johnson and his immediate coterie of back-benchers, keen for ministerial posts, won the day, albeit narrowly (in fact it was England and Wales that voted to leave; Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain). “I was absolutely clear about my belief that Britain is stronger, safer and better off inside the EU,” Cameron pointed out. “I made clear the referendum was about this, and this alone, not the future of any single politician, including myself. But the British people made a different decision to take a different path.” Cameron was visibly distressed by the outcome of the UK referendum and decided to step aside rather than be blamed for what he (rightly)

foresaw as the chaos to follow. “As such I think the country requires fresh leadership to take it in this direction,” he said. For Britain, the possibility of being inside as a whole but outside in certain respects, the model employed by Norway, was never an option. The referendum seemed to make it clear that the British people had – narrowly – rejected having any rules imposed on them or their country from Brussels.



Former British Prime Minister, David Cameron

Cameron said he accepted the judgement of the British population, despite it being “like planting a bomb

under the British economy,” as he had put it during his campaign to stay in.

The mistake he seems to have made was to believe that ordinary voters understood or cared about the economy. This had been, according to some observers, “a gut decision, not a head decision”. In the run-up to the vote, back-bench Conservative MPs had begun to see the Leave campaign as reflecting most closely the public mood they were meeting on the doorsteps in their constituencies. Cameron had negotiated some small changes to Britain’s deal with Europe, but it cut no ice with voters. As the right-wing (and consistently anti-European, indeed ‘anti-foreigner’) Daily Express put it, “Against the backdrop of the deepening, self-inflicted migration crisis and continuing economic paralysis across Europe, much of the British public seems in no mood to accept his meaningless fudge. When our very nationhood is at stake, voters rightly understand that hollow verbiage and inconsequential tinkering are

no answer.” It would appear that the writer of the article, Leo McKinstry, was blaming the EU’s belief in free movement and cultural diversity for the influx of would-be migrants, who had been trying to reach the UK from Calais by boat, rather than their abject poverty and their understandable lack of hope for a brighter future. That may also have been the motivation for many of those who voted to leave. In most countries – especially the relatively well-off ones – nationalism lurks not far below the surface, often accompanied by out-and-out racism.



Former British Prime Minister, John Major

I was a journalist in the Brussels press corps at the same time as Johnson was, with his paper, the Daily Telegraph, seeming to lap up his articles, despite them being, by and large, pure fiction. It got so serious during the premiership of John Major (also a Conservative) that his government issued a booklet listing Johnson’s deliberate untruths, just to show people that his ministers weren’t doing anything about the events Johnson had been reporting because they had never taken place. I wish I had kept mine; it was quite funny. I especially liked his claim that British trawlermen would be obliged to wear hairnets at sea as a hygiene precaution. Johnson later wrote that he’d spent some of his “most joyous hour,” as he put it, writing what he called “foam-flecked hymns of hate to the latest Euro-infamy”, starting with this claim that the EU planned to ban prawn-flavoured crisps. It was the UK government that forgot to include prawns in its list of flavourings sent to Brussels for inclusion in a list of approved flavourings. When this error was spotted, it was corrected immediately. Long after this became apparent and widely known, Johnson continued to cite the alleged ‘ban’ as



Boris Johnson campaigning for Brexit

evidence of EU meddling, knowing it be untrue. There are many more examples. The problem is that although the articles were laughably inaccurate (and deliberately so) they proved so popular with readers that other newspapers started to follow suit, instructing their Brussels correspondents to come up with similarly anti-EU nonsense.

But Johnson cannot be held solely to blame for the outcome. The EU was often secretive itself and certainly opaque in its dealings. But the referendum conformed to a pattern that was becoming familiar in the West. As the French economist Thomas Piketty, Director of Studies at the *École des hautes études en science sociales* (EHESS) and professor at the Paris School of Economics, wrote in one of his columns for *Le Monde* newspaper (since reprinted in his new book, “Time for Socialism”), there may be more to it. “Since the crisis in 2008, and even more so since Trump, Brexit, and the explosion of the xenophobic vote all over Europe,” he wrote, “there is a better appreciation of the dangers

posed by the rise in inequality and the sense of abandonment in the working classes, so that many now understand the need for a new social regulation of capitalism.” Xenophobia certainly seems to fit the direction of travel as a description, in this case.

SHAKING THE ‘PEPPA’ POT

The important question is: how has Brexit, as it has been dubbed, impacted on Britain’s economy? Has it turned out to be, as David Cameron predicted, “an act of economic self-harm”? It is actually very hard to be certain because, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive impact of its own.

However, even the House of Commons Library is not sounding optimistic in its assessment. “The ongoing economic effects of the pandemic and the publication of the first data showing the impact of the end of the Brexit transition period on UK trade paint a grim picture of the UK economy,” it says. “But the UK’s



Palace of Westminster London

vaccination programme and the first stages of the Government's roadmap to ease lockdown restrictions offer glimpses of cautious optimism." However, there is concern about the level of public borrowing. The web page goes on to praise the COVID vaccination programme, however, and says that "the Government's roadmap to ease lockdown restrictions offers glimpses of cautious optimism." The value of UK goods exported to the UK fell by 40% between December 2020 and January 2021, says the UK's Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), while the value of imports from the EU fell by 29% and overall trade with the EU represented just 44% of the UK's trade in goods in January 2021, the lowest monthly share of UK trade since comparable records began in January 1997.



Former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher

The fact seems to be that having used anti-European feelings to help him get Britain out of the EU, Johnson seems to find himself in hock to the Conservative right, some of whom would apparently like him to turn into another former UK premier, Margaret Thatcher. It was never going to be a viable transition. Johnson likes to joke and make people laugh, coming across as some kind of amiable clown, always amusing, while Thatcher, whatever people thought of her politics, was professional and dedicated, rarely making embarrassing mistakes. Johnson makes them all the time. It's this insistence on a return to kind of right-wing Conservative ideology, strangely, that threatens to unseat Johnson as Conservative leader. He now faces attacks by the man who helped spearhead his Brexit campaign, David, now Lord Frost, who has stated publicly that Johnson must switch the UK towards a low-tax, free market

economy, starting by scrapping his plans to raise national insurance, which is a kind of tax on earnings and self-employment profits which is used to fund some state benefits, such as statutory sick pay or maternity leave. It is scheduled to rise by 1.25% in April and Lord Frost says it shouldn't if Johnson expects victory in the next election.



Daily Star front page mocking Boris Johnson

Thatcher would never have made the bumbling speech Johnson failed to deliver properly to members of the Confederation of British Industry at the Port of Tyne in South Shields, in which he repeatedly lost his place, left long pauses and rambled at some length about the children's cartoon character Peppa Pig.

He also imitated the sound of a car accelerating. It could have been carrying away the last of his credibility in eyes of some of his own backbenchers. It put me in mind, strangely, of Falstaff's speech in Shakespeare's Henry IV part One, when he is trying to convince the Prince that he had been attacked and yet had bravely fought off his assailants. "I have peppered two of them: two I am sure I have paid, two rogues in buckram suits." Falstaff, himself a clownish and untruthful figure, was lying and confused but it seems that in this case it is Johnson himself who was "Peppered" (or perhaps "Peppa-ed") by talking about Peppa. The media loved it and the embarrassing, stuttering speech was the lead story on that night's television news. He will not be allowed to forget it. Even the interviewer who spoke to him afterwards asked if he was 'alright' with what seemed like genuine concern.

A MAN OF HIS WORD?

Now we turn to the post-Brexit agreement the UK made with the EU over Northern Ireland. I remember meeting up with John Hume of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, Doctor Iain Paisley of the Democratic Unionist Party (which he had founded) and Ulster Unionist Jim Nicholson, just as they emerged from the office of the then European Commission President Jacques Delors. They had successfully negotiated – together – a deal with the EU that would underwrite peace in the province for decades.

They had a right to look jubilant and proud and I shook hands with all three (clearly all pals together, which was very rare) before interviewing them together; a real moment to celebrate after so much heartbreak. It finally put an end to many years of murder and terrorism. John Hume had given speeches about how important peace was; I had attended one such meeting in a small French town some 30 or 40 kilometres from Strasbourg, when he praised the EU for providing the opportunity for "jaw-jaw" that was so much better, he said, than "war-war". He gave the speech in French and a very impressive speech it was, too. But if he, Paisley and Nicholson thought that meant the end of the so-called "Troubles" for all time, he reckoned without Boris Johnson's government.



Jacques Delors

With both the UK and Ireland part of the EU's Single Market, trade could flow freely between the Republic of Ireland and the North, as well as between the North and the UK mainland. It was one, big, barrier-free market, until Brexit got in the way. With both the UK and Ireland in the EU, crossing the border was as simple for citizens and goods as visiting your nearest neighbouring town. Clearly

that couldn't continue under differing regimes, so rather than impose a new border on the island of Ireland, the UK placed a border in the North Sea. UK traders, though, have since complained about the bureaucratic form-filling required to send goods to Northern Ireland.



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UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and Minister for Women and Equalities
Elisabeth Truss

The UK's Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, says that must end, despite Britain having signed an agreement with the EU. The so-called Northern Ireland Protocol leaves the province inside the EU's single market for goods so that cross-border trade with the Republic could continue without hindrance. Truss says it is interfering with internal trade across the UK, so it must go, effectively ending the need for Northern Ireland traders to notify the EU of any exports outside the zone. She has also stated that she will not permit final decisions to be made by the European Court of Justice. It's hard to see how the EU could agree to these demands, which Truss set out in a newspaper article, thus further angering Brussels. The EU argues that Northern Ireland cannot enjoy the benefits of being in the Single Market if the EU doesn't have some control; after all, it's what was agreed when the Brexit deal was done. It's the UK that wants to renege on it. Truss, for her part, is threatening to invoke what's known as Article 16 and she will be assisted in her negotiations by former Conservative member of the European Parliament (and qualified football referee), Chris Heaton-Harris, now Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



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Chris Heaton-Harris

According to the Institute for Government, "Article 16 allows either party to undertake unilateral safeguarding measures if the protocol leads to 'serious economic, societal, or environmental difficulties' that are liable to persist, or to diversion of trade". Basically, the UK is demanding the right to change the agreement it signed with the threat of action that would, effectively, suspend trade. At the time of writing, the issue remains unresolved and subject to further negotiation, assuming the EU has any confidence in UK promises any more. What's more, it could jeopardise the entire deal under which Britain left the Union. In October 2021, Johnson obliged every one of his elected members to support his Northern Ireland deal, which he now says must be changed or abandoned.

WAVING THE FLAG, BUT WHY?

Many UK citizens are concerned about the effect of Brexit on European travel. Certainly, the days of UK citizens driving through France, Belgium, Germany, and

Italy, for instance, without even noticing they've crossed a border are over, although travel is still possible, COVID restrictions permitting. If you're driving, you must, of course, ensure that your driving licence, vehicle logbook and insurance are up to date and apply the new identifying stickers to your vehicle, front and back.

They no longer say "GB" (for Great Britain), like the one my father put on his Standard Vanguard estate car in 1956 to drive the family through Belgium, France and Germany to reach Austria, where he was to meet his employers in person at their paper mill, near Vienna. I do remember (although I was only 8 years old at the time) having to stop at border crossings so that my father could show our passports and other documents to border guards. Now the identification plates (just stickers these days) say "UK", and most of the ones I've found for sale on-line also carry a Union Jack flag. Britain has become a very nationalist country under Johnson. It's strange, because it suggests we've gone backwards since the days of ancient Rome.

In AD 48, the Emperor Claudius had a long argument with the Senate in which he argued (successfully) that the most important citizens of Gaul and other conquered territories should be allowed Roman citizenship and, indeed, entry to the Senate. He pointed out to them that the founder Romulus's successor as ruler, Numa the Sabine, was a foreigner who came from outside Rome. Many senators disagreed with extending the same rights to



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London Heathrow immigration

outsiders in their day. How familiar that argument sounds! But both the emperors Trajan and Hadrian had been Spaniards, while as Dan Jones explains in his splendid new book, *Powers and Thrones*, “Septimius Severus, who seized power in AD 193 from four rivals, and clung to it until AD 211, was born in Libya (*Leptis Magna*) to a North African father and a Syrian Arab mother; his successors therefore shared this African-Arab heritage.” And Rome was certainly none the worse for that. This rather shows up the sheer nonsense of the claims by some that Europe will be ‘overrun’ by Africans, Arabs and others, ‘diluting’ Europe’s supposedly ‘pedigree’ bloodline and thus destroying our ‘European-ness’. It’s strange to think that some of today’s Europeans are more racist and small-minded than an emperor of Rome two millennia ago. Remember, it wasn’t this openness to foreigners on the part of Claudius that brought down Rome’s mighty empire, either; it was the selfish ambition of certain leaders who divided up what had been a single polity into separate administrative provinces to suit themselves.



Imperial portrait of Roman Emperor Claudius

The way in which Johnson’s wholly fictional ‘news’ stories, normally carried on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph*, were picked up by other journals and either repeated or copied in style by pressurized journalists undoubtedly affected the outcome of the referendum. It was a strange twist, because he doesn’t seem to have always been against the EU. In a column published in



British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson

2013, Johnson wrote that if Britain were to leave the EU, the British people would have to recognise that “most of our problems are not caused by Brussels.” He also said that “the question of EU membership is no longer of key importance to the destiny of this country”.

So, if Brussels and the EU were not to blame for Britain’s decline, what was? “Chronic short-termism,” was the problem, he suggested, together with “inadequate management, sloth, low skills, a culture of easy gratification and underinvestment in both human and physical capital infrastructure.”

FORTUNA FAVET AUDAX (SED NON STULTUS)

(Fortune favours the bold (but not the stupid)

Johnson often gives quotations in Latin, albeit not this one. Despite his clearly-stated doubts about the need to leave the EU, he promised the British people what he called an “oven-ready” Brexit deal. He also promised to fix the crisis in the social care system, to “level-up” the North. That undoubtedly won him a lot of votes in hitherto Labour-voting constituencies, but in reality it has not been quite what was promised. His stated plans to invest heavily in the rail network there were hugely watered down, although in November 2021, the government did announce that final works on the £8.3-million (€9.9-million) Bootle branch railway line upgrade have been completed, doubling the rail freight capacity to and from the Port of Liverpool.



Containers at the Port of Liverpool

Johnson also told voters he wouldn’t raise income tax, VAT, or national insurance. However, and without announcing it, he spent £88,000 (€105,500) on renovating his residence at 10 Downing Street, which is nearly three times as much as is permitted by the annual maintenance allowance. His advisor Dominic Cummings (later sacked for allegedly speaking unkindly about Johnson’s wife, Carrie) revealed that Johnson had had help with the funding from a donor, although Johnson was later obliged to pay for it himself. It’s been claimed that the wallpaper he and his wife chose cost £840 (just over €1,000) for a single roll and there have been allegations that it is already peeling from the walls, although that could just be a scurrilous rumour. Stronger wallpaper paste might help.

It may be harder to stick the UK economy back together, according to the Politico website. “Despite signing a raft of new trade deals since leaving the bloc,” it said online, “including so-called rollover deals that allowed trade with more than 60 signatory countries to continue on similar terms to those

enjoyed when the U.K. was still a member of the EU, the impact of Brexit on Britain's supply chains has been enormous." I haven't yet heard anyone saying to Johnson "I told you so", but they may have done. It is actually very hard to disentangle the effects due to Brexit from those due to the pandemic, but apart from the vaccine rollout – generally seen as a commendable success for Johnson – Britain has fared less well than many of its former partners. As soon as the Brexit transition period ended, UK exports to EU member states dropped by 45%. Imports also fell, by 33% and one year on, things have not picked up very well. Imports from the EU are still down while, according to Politico, in the first ten months of 2021, 52% of UK trade was with non-EU countries. "U.K. companies have no markets in which it is now easy to trade," Politico was told by trade expert David Henig, U.K. director of the European Centre for International Political Economy. "While EU countries have largely recovered to pre-COVID levels of trade, the same cannot be said of the UK, where flows in Q3 (third quarter of) 2021 were the lowest value relative to GDP seen since 2009." In that same trading period, the UK's trade with China overtook that with Germany, which, according to former Conservative Party Leader Iain Duncan Smith, is why Johnson's government has avoided criticising Beijing over the treatment of the Uyghur Muslims. Duncan Smith, certainly no fan of the EU, has been quite critical of Boris Johnson and his government since Brexit, making public his opinions.



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Conservative MP Alicia Kearns

The Politico website reports that Conservative MP Alicia Kearns, co-chair of the China Research Group, which is made up of MPs concerned about Britain's relationship with Beijing, said the government should follow Washington's lead by imposing a ban on goods imported from Xinjiang that have been made with forced labour. "The British people do not want to purchase goods that make them complicit in a genocide against the Uyghur or other minorities by the Chinese Communist Party, and we must do more to rid blood labour products from our country." A spokesperson for the UK Trade Department said they "expected 2022 to be a 'five-star year' for the country's trade push, amid negotiations with India, Mexico, Canada and the Gulf, as well as pressing for accession to the CPTPP trade bloc." Britain critically needs deals with foreign producers and markets, but can it afford to turn a blind eye to forced labour and genocide? Many Conservative backbenchers don't want that, although having placed Britain in a vulnerable place by leaving the EU, they have drastically narrowed the range of available choices.

Of course, we shouldn't forget that the EU has also come in for criticism. A decade or so ago, it set up what are called Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) made up of NGOs and business experts to monitor trade deals. The first one was with South Korea in 2011, intended to ensure that the products involved had no history of forced labour and other bad practices. Now it's been revealed that they lack any effective follow-up mechanism and are largely ignored, making them into paper tigers at best. The Commission has ignored the arrests of a journalist and an environmental lawyer in Vietnam, now locked up on trumped-up tax fraud charges for allegedly seeking to join the body. The Commission has said very little about the whole unseemly affair, which it appears to be ignoring. But if nobody takes any notice of the monitors, what is the point of monitoring? The Commission can be irritatingly fond of the approach based on the age-old principle: "if you ignore it, it's bound to go away." This is clearly an

issue that should be addressed. The Commission always prefers to wait and see if problems will dissolve of their own accord. Confrontation has never been its chosen path.

The UK has signed trade deals in principle with 69 countries (plus one with the EU) since Brexit came into force. Most of these, however, are what is called "rollover deals", which parrot the terms of deals it had as an EU member state. So far, not one has been a totally original deal.



© Wikipedia

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson

Last October, the UK struck a deal with New Zealand, a country so small and, in trade terms, insignificant, that it accounts for less than 0.2% of GDP. Even so, some have described the deal as a 'threat to UK farmers'. Because Britain is no longer obliged to stick to EU-enforced product standards, new checks on British products have been introduced and the strict EU rules on animal products means that some UK products can no longer be exported. Both the EU and the UK will have to remain in close contact over such issues as workers' rights and environmental protection, with the risk that if either side steps out of line, the other could introduce tariffs.

There have been other changes, too, some of them sounding strange. For instance, uncooked meats from Britain, such as sausages and burgers, will not be allowed into the EU unless that have been frozen to -18C. There will be more bureaucracy at ports and airports which will undoubtedly slow things down, too. Similarly, businesses in the service sector no longer enjoy automatic recognition. Businesses offering services, such as banking, architecture and accounting, and also doctors and chefs, will lose

their automatic right of access to EU markets stemming from mutual recognition of qualifications, and will face some restrictions. UK citizens will need visas to stay in the EU more than 90 days in any 180-day period.

Current European Health Insurance Cards (EHICs) will remain valid until they expire but UK citizens will then have to apply for new types that are being introduced. Watch your mobile phone use, too, if you go abroad; the automatic ban on additional roaming charges has ended. Pet passports are no longer valid and in future new animal health certificates will be needed for each pet for every individual trip.



European Health Insurance Cards (EHICs)

Fishing was a big issue that proved very hard to resolve but up to 2026, the UK could gradually gain more control over its own territorial waters and – theoretically – could ban EU vessels, although that would also allow our former partners to impose taxes on British fish (the fish won't mind; they'll be dead). Britain will have no further link with the European Court of Justice, which seems to be an issue that is especially dear to the hearts of Brexiters. Why? I've no idea. The right-wing populist newspapers, such as the Daily Mail, the Sun, the Daily Express, and the Daily Telegraph, were especially keen on putting distance between the ECJ and the UK and I've never quite understood the reason. Britain's justice system does not have an especially exceptional record when it comes to protecting human rights, although those newspapers were incensed when the government's proposal to prorogue parliament was thrown out. It seems to me that justice is justice, wherever it's applied and if one of those newspapers thinks things should be otherwise, we can only assume they favour laws cherry-



European border control

picked to serve their particular line of thought, rather than the fair and balanced variety.

At the time of writing, Boris Johnson is still Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, (it seems to be less united than it used to be), but he has been coming under increasing pressure over allegations of sleaze.

He tried to save an MP ally, Owen Patterson, who was accused of breaking the rules by lobbying his colleagues on behalf of two companies and earning around £100,000 (€120,000) a year to do so. He failed, and has since faced criticism for permitting and attending drinks parties at 10 Downing Street while urging the public to avoid socialising. Some people who were unable to say goodbye to dying loved ones are especially angry that while they were despairing about not being able to part properly, Johnson, his wife and others were whooping it up in defiance of his own rules. There are growing calls for him to go, but with an 80-seat majority he may ignore them.



Conservative MP Owen Patterson

Like much that has a European perspective, however, it's the anti-EU rhetoric that defies rational thought. A Conservative MP of my acquaintance told me that his

constituents are a nice, friendly bunch – but only until somebody mentions Europe. At that point they metaphorically froth at the mouth and stamp their feet. Why do they hate the continent so much? He doesn't know, and it's awkward for him because he has always been – within certain limits – pro-European, so he simply never mentions it. Partially, I suppose, we should blame Boris Johnson and his “fiction” posing as news. He wrote the items because they paid well and were popular, although all of us based in Brussels knew them to be untrue. It certainly means, however, that any hope we may have harboured of re-joining the EU one day must be set aside.

Many of those who voted leave would, according to some research, happily sign up to become the 51st state of America, believing it's more like the UK than, say, France, Belgium or Germany, which proves, I suppose, that they haven't really visited any of them, or at least not taken much notice of their surroundings while they were there. Either that or they have a real horror of trying to learn another language. Margaret Thatcher once said that: “Europe was created by history; America was created by philosophy”. No, I don't know what she meant, either. If it was philosophy, it was the philosophy of breaking off from imperialist Britain, which is what George Washington and his troops wanted. It all begs the question: what – if anything – has Britain gained by leaving the EU? We must each keep our own council on the matter I suppose, but based on Brexit's achievements so far, the expression “not a lot” would seem to fit the bill.

Anthony James

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TRUTH, FREEDOM AND FAIRNESS?

Policing the content on social media platforms

It was former US President Barack Obama who said: “We have to uphold a free press and freedom of speech - because, in the end, lies and misinformation are no match for the truth.” No match, perhaps, in terms of what we have a right to expect, but it’s a position that’s surprisingly difficult to uphold. Bias has a habit of creeping in, for whatever reason. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines ‘bias’ as: “the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgement”. In many fora, evidence of bias is clear. Most people prefer to buy newspapers (if they bother at all in these days of electronic communication) that reflect most closely their own political views.

It’s hard to imagine Leon Trotsky, for instance, buying Britain’s Daily Telegraph or Daily Mail, nor Donald Trump bothering to read the Morning Star, although I’m sure that these publications have their virtues and their ardent readers, who believe their conflicting versions of events in full confidence of

their veracity. However, with printed news, everyone knows where they stand. With social media it’s not always quite so clear. As the 16th to 17th century English philosopher and member of parliament Francis Bacon wrote in one of his essays: “What is truth? said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer.” He was clearly aware that there were politicians around back in New Testament times, too. I should think the Stone Age had a few as well.



Former US President Donald Trump accusing the media of fake news

Many of us these days get much of our information about the world from social media platforms. It’s often quite hard to tell which way they lean politically, although Britain’s Sun newspaper, itself fairly far to the right, has accused Google of having a pro-left-wing bias. This apparently comes from research conducted at two US universities, Columbia and Northwestern, which claims to prove that Google’s list of top stories contains disproportionately few items from right-wing websites, such as Fox News.

In other words, the news it shows is seldom favourable to Donald Trump and his supporters or of Britain’s departure from the European Union. The newspaper alleges that Google prefers to direct people to left-wing news sources. Mind you, these supposedly left-wing sources are hardly radically Trotskyite either. They are, in fact, CNN, The New York Times and The Washington Post, not exactly beacons of Socialist revolution. The Sun, however, is undeniably (and unashamedly) right-wing in its political bias.



A London School of Economics report into how the media treated a far-left challenger for leadership of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, when he was seeking selection concluded that he had received unfairly negative coverage.



© UK Parliament

Jeremy Corbyn

“Hate speech in some traditional media, particularly tabloid newspapers, continues to be a problem,” it concluded, “with biased or ill-founded information disseminated about vulnerable groups, which may contribute to perpetuating stereotypes.” The report singled out an article by Sun columnist Katie Hopkins about the continuing influx of migrants trying to cross the English Channel. In an article headed “Rescue boats? I’d use gunships to stop migrants”, Hopkins went on to describe migrants as “cockroaches” and “feral humans” and proposed that gunboats should be dispatched to prevent further arrivals by sinking the craft in which they are trying to arrive. She is not the only public figure (if a columnist can be described as a ‘public figure’) to have suggested such a drastic solution. When the far-right British National Party (BNP) won two seats in the European Parliament in 2009, its leader, Nick Griffin, was interviewed on BBC television, where he recommended that the EU should “get tough” with asylum seekers, sinking their boats in the Mediterranean. The interviewer, Shirin Wheeler, said she could not believe the Union would engage in murder at sea. In response, Griffin replied: “I didn’t say anyone should be murdered at sea - I say boats should be sunk, they can throw them a

life raft and they can go back to Libya.” It’s certainly a controversial point of view, if not totally without its supporters.

He continued: “But Europe has sooner or later to close its borders or it’s simply going to be swamped by the Third World.” No other political group, including far-right parties such as Geert Wilders’ Dutch-based ‘Freedom Party’ would sit with them in the European Parliament chamber. Wilders described the BNP’s immigration policies as ‘disgusting’. In a BBC interview recorded inside the European Parliament building in Brussels, Griffin said he was “disappointed but not surprised.” When asked about Wilders’ comments he told the BBC’s Shirin Wheeler: “I’ve no doubt at all that he is responding to things that he’s heard that we’re supposed to have said or alleged to have done, which is very often liberal-left media propaganda, and which simply isn’t true.” Griffin and his BNP colleague, Andrew Brons, lost their seats in the next European election and Griffin was subsequently expelled from the party he’d led, accused of trying to ‘destabilise’ it.



Geert Wilders

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT?

We are wandering away from the problems of policing social media sites, although the issues are closely linked. According to the Council of Europe, freedom of expression and freedom of the media – including social media – are protected under Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights. It is supposed to guarantee

freedom of expression, “underpinned by legal guarantees for independence and diversity of media and safety of journalists and other media actors”.



© Wikipedia/Peter van der Stuijs

How to better tackle “fake News”, propaganda and disinformation whilst safeguarding Media Freedom remains in focus for the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. (OSCE)

Try telling that to the journalists of Belarus, where Alexander Lukashenko still insists that he was fairly-elected as leader, with an amazing 80% of the popular vote. Most Belarusians appear to disagree on the ‘fairness’ point (not to mention the 80% claim). Several foreign journalists have since been deported while others, including native Belarusian journalists, have had their media accreditation withdrawn. Among them were a video journalist and a photographer from Reuters news agency, two from the BBC and four from Radio Liberty. Many others have been ordered to leave, with Lukashenko accusing them of being part of a Western plot to get rid of him. Perhaps most significantly, Lukashenko still enjoys the support of Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose interest in personal power seems to far outstrip his commitment to democracy.

It would be wrong and inconsistent to ignore some of the allegations concerning social media and its misuse, however. There would certainly appear to be some examples of uneven treatment by and of social media platforms. As Al Arabiya reported in July 2020, Twitter had come under fire over a decision that seemed to permit Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, to call for genocide in



Khamenei's Tweet in 2014



Donald Trump's Tweeter suspension notice

Israel and the deaths of Jewish people on its platform, whilst simultaneously censoring Tweets by the then President, Donald Trump, for writing that looters rioting in Minneapolis would be shot. Not surprisingly, Trump and his many supporters considered this to be a mite unfair.

The issue was even raised at a hearing held in the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, attended by a Twitter official. Human rights lawyer Arsen Ostrovsky asked why Twitter had begun to flag up tweets by Trump, but not those of Iran's Khamenei who, Ostrovsky pointed out, "has literally called for the genocide of Israel and the Jewish people" on its platform. Twitter's Head of Policy for the Nordic Countries and Israel (an odd grouping, I'd have thought), Ylwa Petterson, appearing by video link, explained that "Foreign policy sabre-rattling on political or economic issues are generally not in violation of our Twitter rules." Again, this comes from Al Arabiya's remarkably balanced coverage: Petterson faced a question from Israeli parliamentarian Michal Cotler-Wunsh, double-checking that from Twitter's perspective it's OK to call for genocide but not to comment on a domestic political situation, even if some of the Minneapolis rioters were also said to be looting.



Human rights lawyer Arsen Ostrovsky

Trump's Tweet, Petterson explained, was "violating our policies regarding the glorification of violence" and could therefore cause harm. Twitter had not, at the time of the hearing, added any warnings about Khamenei calling for "armed resistance", describing the destruction of Israel as the removal of a "cancerous tumour" and Zionism as in need of being uprooted. The encounter angered US Republican Senator Ted Cruz, who pointed out that while Twitter chooses to censor "free speech of many conservatives – including the President – the Ayatollah Khamenei's account remains active and is still posting anti-Semitic Tweets". Perhaps Twitter has never read the views of the great French painter, Henri Matisse, who wrote: *"Ce que je rêve, c'est un art d'équilibre, de pureté, de tranquillité, sans sujet inquiétant ou préoccupant, qui soit... un lénifiant, un calmant cérébral, quelque chose d'analogue à un bon fauteuil qui délasse de ses fatigues physiques."* (What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter... a soothing, calming influence on the mind, rather like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue). Twitter should, perhaps, take up painting.

EVEN-HANDED?

The social media giants stand accused of trying to exert undue influence over people who perhaps presume the content they read is checked for its veracity and fairness. It isn't always, at least not in the way you might expect. Take this article from Gulf News, based in the United Arab Emirates: "Most mass media the world over practise some kind of tyranny, even if it looks less flagrant than political despotism. Doesn't the media usually manipulate the minds of people almost everywhere in the world? Doesn't it form their likes and dislikes? Isn't it the media that sets cultural, social,

artistic and political norms whether you like them or not?" It's true, of course, but the question here is not so much whether or not it influences our decision-making as whether or not it does so in a fair and balanced way. No, according to Gulf News. "Media dictatorship, in actual fact, is more difficult to combat than political dictatorship. Whereas the latter is as clear and noticeable as a boil on the face, the former is like cancerous cells which can hardly be noticed or identified by the ordinary man." Of course, the reader can always go to a different post on another platform that complies more closely with his or her views.



A petition launched by the Jewish Democratic Council of America to expel Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene from Congress

Early in January, the National Review, a conservative publication, drew attention to an example (by no means the first) of double standards being applied with regards to the national origins of a particular story. "Twitter's decision last week to permanently suspend Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene's account calls attention to the company's permissive attitude toward accounts operated by foreign authoritarian regimes," says the article. She had contravened Twitter's Covid Misinformation Policy by casting doubt on the efficacy of vaccines.

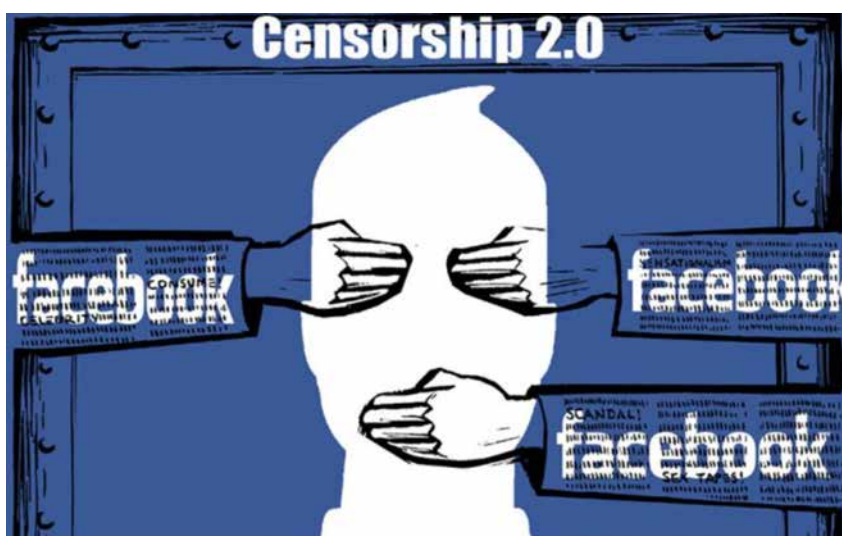
However, they did nothing about similar anti-vaccine campaigns on Twitter

by accounts affiliated to the Russian and Chinese governments. Take for example the death of Carlos Tejada, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Foreign Editor of the New York Times, who died one day after receiving a Moderna booster shot. The jab and the death, according to doctors, were not connected (Tejada is said to have suffered a heart attack) but Global Times, a media source linked to the Chinese government, not only suggested otherwise but went on to gloat about the death as if in celebration. “Looking forward to more details by the NYT. It’ll be a good commemoration of Tejada, who won a Pulitzer for slamming China’s COVID-19 performance,” said its Tweet. The Global Times continued to suggest, unhindered by Twitter, that the Moderna jab is dangerous. It also routinely verifies Chinese government-backed sites that deny Chinese atrocities. Russia also regularly suggests that the Pfizer vaccine is less effective than its own Sputnik V version, even though tests in the West suggest Sputnik V has little or no effect on the Omicron variant. Not being either a biochemist or a virologist, I cannot honestly comment on the issue, nor gauge who (if anyone) is telling the truth here. Public perception and national pride seem more important to the Russian and Chinese authorities than human life. However, it would seem that posts by potentially hostile governments are exempt from any form of control, however dangerous they may be.



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There have been some whistle-blowers who have revealed things about social media platforms their owners would have preferred to remain hidden. Take the case of Frances Haugen, a former product manager with Facebook. When she left her post, she took with her copies of certain documents that she subsequently shared with the Wall Street



A poster on the news internet site Visegardpost illustrating an article about Facebook’s ban of Konfederacja, an alliance including the libertarian Korwin list and the nationalist National Movement (RN), with eleven MPs in Poland. Konfederacja’s account, followed by more than 671,000 users, was removed from the social network, allegedly for “violating the Covid-19 information rules”

Journal, showing that the company had long prioritised “growth over safety”, as she put it. Among the revelations, the papers seemed to show that Facebook treated celebrities, important politicians and other influential people differently from the general public by not checking what they were posting. The leak also revealed that a group of Facebook shareholders were bringing a lawsuit against the company, alleging that the \$5-billion (€4.4-billion) payment it made to the US Federal Trade Commission to settle the Cambridge Analytica data scandal was set so high in order to save Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg from personal liability. The scandal erupted after executives from the UK election monitoring company, Cambridge Analytica, had been recorded boasting about how they had harvested data from Facebook to help secure electoral victory for Donald Trump and also the UK vote to leave the EU. Haugen’s revelations included the fact that Facebook’s research had revealed the negative impact of its subsidiary, Instagram, on teenagers, with some 32% of teenage girls saying that if they had felt bad about their bodies, Instagram had made them feel worse. The report was suppressed, and Facebook had claimed that Haugen’s revelations ignored the positive effects of Instagram. She was unmoved. “There were conflicts of interest between what was good for the public and what was good for Facebook,” she said. “Facebook over and over again chose to optimise for its own interests, like making more money.” Zuckerberg has also been

accused of harvesting personal data and using it to influence world politics. It seems to be widely accepted, however, that the algorithms exploit users’ data for advertising and marketing purposes.

IF YOU THINK SOCIAL MEDIA IS BAD, GOING WITHOUT IT IS WORSE

While many of us moan about social media being biased or unfair, it remains an important tool. Otherwise, countries facing unrest, such as Kazakhstan, wouldn’t try to quell anti-government riots by closing the Internet. That is what they’ve done, however, and Al Jazeera quotes the internet monitoring group, Netblocks, as saying that connectivity levels plunged to zero as a consequence. “Kazakhstan is now in the midst of a nation-scale internet blackout after a day of mobile internet disruptions and partial restrictions,” the NetBlocks monitor tweeted. “The incident is likely to severely limit coverage of escalating anti-government protests.” We are left to wonder: if the internet had existed during the French Revolution, would Maximilien de Robespierre, strong opponent of slavery and imperialism, have retained his head? His social media postings would have been interesting.

Restrictions on social media don’t always feature in attempts to quash protests, according to Stanford University’s Spogli Institute for International Studies. Look at Belarus, still run by the man sometimes referred to as ‘Europe’s last dictator’, Alexander Lukashenko.



Alexander Grigoryevich Lukashenko,
President of Belarus

“Although the Belarusian government has placed significant restrictions on the media,” says a report conducted by academics, “Belarusian citizens enjoy somewhat untrammelled internet access. This has played a significant rôle in the protests, since online outlets are Belarusians’ main source of uncensored news.” The government did, however, cut off access to many of the social media sites. The questions remain, however, over the influence of social media. “These are complicated questions that will not be settled any time soon,” says the report. “But the Belarusian protests are a reminder that social media can be an important tool for pro-democracy activists, especially when authoritarian governments have monopolized other media. It also allows Western state media, such as Radio Liberty and the BBC, to reach receptive audiences.” The whole report is long and extremely interesting, and I recommend you to read it at the following web address: <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/no-modest-voices-social-media-and-protests-belarus>

Don’t think for a moment that everything is hunky-dory in Belarusian social media circles, of course. Take the case of Yegor Dudnikov, a Russian citizen put on trial in Minsk for allegedly preparing materials that urged insurrection against Lukashenko. He claims he was beaten by police before receiving an eleven-year jail sentence, which sounds somewhat disproportionate.

According to Radio Free Europe, “Dudnikov placed at least 55 posts about the protests on the Telegram channel administered by the so-called Groups of Civic Self-Defense of Belarus (OGSB), an organization labelled as extremist and banned in Belarus in the aftermath of the protests.” Dudnikov is just one of many anti-Lukashenko protestors to have been jailed. One of Belarus’s oldest civil rights organisations has been declared “extremist” (anyone who is not an ardent admirer of Lukashenko is seen as dangerous). Of course vicious regimes centred on one tyrant never have difficulty recruiting thugs to beat up its opponents. Meanwhile, Radio Free Europe’s service has also now been given the ‘extremist’ label. Lukashenko is not averse to using social media himself in what has been called his “hybrid war” against the EU, apparently in revenge for sanctions against him and his despotic regime. It was how he urged tens of thousands of mainly Iraqi Kurd refugees to come to his country for an “easy” access into the EU by crossing, “unchallenged”, into Poland or Lithuania. The access proved far harder than Lukashenko had promised but Belarusian authorities confiscated the migrants’ mobile phones, leaving the media struggling to keep up.

Russia itself is a major user of social media, but by no means the biggest, ranking sixth in the world, behind China, India, the United States, Brazil and Japan. However, Russians may rank fairly low in terms of overall use but they spend a lot of time on-line. According to the Translate Media website, of the 3 hours and 34 minutes ordinary Russians spend on average online every day, most of the time is spent reading news. VKontakte (VK) is Russia’s biggest social media site,

with Moi Mir and Odnoklassniki (OK.ru) not far behind. Twitter and YouTube are also popular, but LinkedIn is banned.

Freedom House reports on its own website that: “According to the Levada Center, a non-governmental research organization, the overall internet penetration rate reached 76 percent by the fourth quarter of 2019, when the proportion of Russians who used the internet daily or at least several times a week was about 65 percent.” The switch to 5G networks has proved difficult because the frequencies required for it to run are controlled and used by the Russian military.



The Russian smartphone brand BQ has introduced a smart phone for military personnel

A SLEEPING GIANT WAKES UP

If you’re looking for a fair and free internet for social media, you can forget China. Freedom House again reports that: “Conditions for internet users in China remained profoundly oppressive and confirmed the country’s status as the world’s worst abuser of internet freedom for the seventh consecutive year.” During the monitoring period, Freedom House found that: “authorities censored calls for an independent investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic and criticism of Chinese-produced vaccines. Ordinary users continued to face severe legal repercussions for activities like sharing news stories,



Yegor Dudnikov

talking about their religious beliefs, or communicating with family members and others overseas.” As Mao Zedong once said, “Communism is not love. It is a hammer which we use to crush the enemy.” It’s doubtful, of course, if he would recognise Xi Jinping’s regime as ‘Communist’ at all. He could be quite ambivalent, of course, even suggesting that variety of thinking could be useful, saying: “Letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is the policy for promoting progress in the arts and sciences and a flourishing Socialist culture in our land.” He did not really approve of artistic activities, though, and apparently hated his own poetry. When told by the journalist Robert Payne after a dinner during the Long March that students at one university knew his poem ‘The Snow’ by heart, he smiled in disbelief and said: “They have no business wasting their time with these poems.” He may have felt they shouldn’t waste their time on the internet either, but we’ll never know.



© Wikimedia

Noam Chomsky

The United States may favour poetry more (perhaps not the poetry of Mao Zedong) but a lot of Americans have demonstrated over and over again that they favour wealth. As the American philosopher, historian and social critic Noam Chomsky wrote: “Concentration of wealth yields concentration of political power. And concentration of political power gives rise to legislation that increases and accelerates the cycle.” That certainly seems to form the basis of the business model most loved by the world’s social media companies. The New York Post reported, towards the end of last year, that Facebook had admitted that its “fact checks” on what its users can access are no more

than “opinion”. In fact, on science issues such as Covid-19, climate change and air pollution, Facebook defers to Science Feedback, a worldwide group of scientists who check the supposed facts. Not all of those who have posted content that has been subsequently blocked agree with Science Feedback’s criteria or judgements, and some have complained to Facebook about not being allowed to post. Facebook, it seems, then refers them to Science Feedback, effectively hiding behind the independent fact-checkers. This has provoked complaints from those denied access to the web, especially over the issue of whether or not the SARS-CoV-2 virus had originally escaped from a laboratory in Wuhan. Science Feedback recommended blocking the article, but without pointing out that one of the contributing expert groups behind the judgement, EcoHealth, had funded the Wuhan lab. The deeper one digs into social media and its relative fairness, let alone its accuracy and reliability, the murkier it all becomes. As the New York Post put it: “The fact-check industry is funded by liberal moguls such as George Soros, government-funded non-profits and the tech giants themselves.

The checkers are not the unbiased arbiters of truth; they are useful distractions, groups Facebook can use to absolve itself of responsibility.” It also added, somewhat gratuitously, the expression: “Free speech be damned.” With all this talk of fairness and absence of bias, we should, perhaps, recall that since the NYPost was bought by Rupert Murdoch in 1976 it has become a paper of the somewhat illiberal right.



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George Soros



David Kaye

Worldwide, then, where do we stand with social media? According to the Surfshark website, last year was better than the one that preceded it. 2021 saw 19 social media shutdowns, down from 29 the previous year. Most cases of censorship happened during political events. Furthermore – and this may come as a surprise – Africa is the world’s most censored continent. At the beginning of that year, Uganda imposed an internet blackout to coincide with its presidential election. I must admit to disappointment with Uganda. Many years ago I was there with a camera crew to cover a conference under the Lomé Convention, which brought together the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of countries (ACP). While I was there I interviewed the President, Yoweri Museveni, in the garden of the presidential palace. He came across as a reasonable man, amiable, highly intelligent and keen to modernise his country. A month or so later, during an official visit to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, he recognised me in the corridor and stopped to greet me and have a chat. It seemed warm and genuine, and I believed in his good intentions for his very beautiful country. Since then, his apparent determination to cling to power at virtually any price has seen some very strange figures rise to positions of prominence and, indeed, influence in the country, which saddens me.

In his book “Speech Police – The Global Struggle to Govern the Internet”, author David Kaye points out how much social media has changed: “As Bill Clinton famously said about China’s hope to control the internet, ‘Good luck! That’s sort of like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall.’

But the contemporary internet is nothing like Jell-O. It facilitates control by companies and governments: censorship and abuse, representation and disinformation.” Kaye, who is the United Nations Special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, makes the point that the internet was designed to be a kind of free-speech paradise, but a lot of the material on it turned out to incite violence, spread untruth and promote hate. I’m not really sure that it was ‘designed’ to be anything other than a simple way to communicate and publicize people’s views. Napoleon Bonaparte famously said of China: “There lies a sleeping giant. Let him sleep! For when he wakes, he will shake the world.” Considering that was written in 1821, it shows amazing perspicacity on the part of the great French general. The world has certainly been shaken and now Xi Jinping is determined to ensure that his part of it isn’t shaken any further.

Closing the internet, for whatever reason and for however long, is not a cost-free exercise. Business Insider reports that, according to Top10VPN, in 2021 internet shutdowns cost the global economy \$5.5-billion (€4.84-billion). Worst hit was Myanmar, which lost an estimated \$2.8-billion (€2.46-billion) because of shut-downs. It’s not money this crisis-hit country can afford to lose. The Asian Development Bank expects last year to show an economic contraction for Myanmar of 18.4%. For authoritarian governments, retaining personal power remains of much greater importance than saving the population from poverty and hunger. With some countries resorting to draconian measures to clamp down on on-line dissent, there would seem to be a stark choice between an open and free internet where free speech reigns supreme and a heavily censored and closely-policed means of communication whose participants could end up in jail or worse if they post a derogatory comment. Interestingly, David Kaye quotes a European Commission official as being the man to ask the most vital question.

Robert Viola, who headed the Commission’s division responsible for communications networks,



In this report, published by the European Commission, an international team of experts takes a behavioural science approach to investigate the impact of online platforms on political behaviour.
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/49b629ee-1805-11eb-b57e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

content, and technology (known in Brussels as DG-CONNECT, with DG standing for Directorate-General) met Kaye at his Brussels office in 2018 and started out with the most essential and obvious question: “Who is in charge?” It’s a fundamental question, but one to which there is no clear answer. As Kaye points out, it means asking such questions as “who ensures the protection of individual rights on the internet? Who makes the rules that govern online expression? Who enforces them? Who adjudicates disputes concerning their enforcement? The companies? National governments? The European Commission? Some combination of them?” Nobody has so far come up with an answer that meets with universal agreement. The media giants have shown they’re not to be trusted if it comes to a choice between responsibility and profit.



Robert Viola

Governments are certainly not to be trusted when most politicians would say virtually anything to get re-

lected, however untruthful. Not the Commission because a lot of citizens don’t trust the EU, either. Donald Trump’s most ardent supporters have used it to incite violence against an elected government because they didn’t like the result of an election. Unrest against various dictators has been urged and has caused violent clashes and deaths. Belarus has used it to lure unsuspecting migrants to an icy forest in winter, just to destabilise the EU. It is a huge reservoir of possibilities, good and bad. As Kaye points out, governments regulate internet content while tech companies moderate it. But if the websites themselves are the gatekeepers or frontier guards on the road to information, they have to be fully transparent and accountable. Is there a way to ensure that? Clearly not; at least, not yet. Even the more prudish governments have found it virtually impossible to curtail such activity as prostitution and on-line pornography, let alone political discontent. It’s especially difficult because we don’t all share the same values when it comes to decency and morality (which, perhaps, is just as well), let alone our political leanings. We just have to celebrate our differences and the wide range of the views we hold. Regardless of what we find on-line and whether or not others agree or disagree with us, I refer you to that old French saying: “Vive la Différence!”

Jim Gibbons

EUROPE *Diplomatic* magazine

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INTERPOL'S WARNING

« *Financial crime – don't become a victim!* »

Follow some common sense rules to reduce your chance of being a victim of financial crime. Criminals are quick to exploit the ignorance and vulnerability of their victims. The recent proliferation of devices, from smartphones and tablets to web-connected appliances, has opened us all up to even greater risks. Yet by simply following a few common sense rules, you can drastically reduce your exposure and the risk of being taken in by these fraudsters.



COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS)

We are seeing criminals trying to cash in on the coronavirus outbreak.

Medical supplies

With surgical masks and other medical supplies in high demand yet difficult to find in retail stores, fake shops, websites, social media accounts and email addresses claiming to sell these items have sprung up online.

But instead of receiving the promised masks and supplies, unsuspecting victims have seen their money disappear into the hands of the criminals involved.

Phone fraud

Criminals are also using telephone deception to carry out financial frauds – they will call victims pretending to work for a hospital or medical clinic, claiming that a relative of the victim has fallen sick with the virus and request payments for medical treatment.

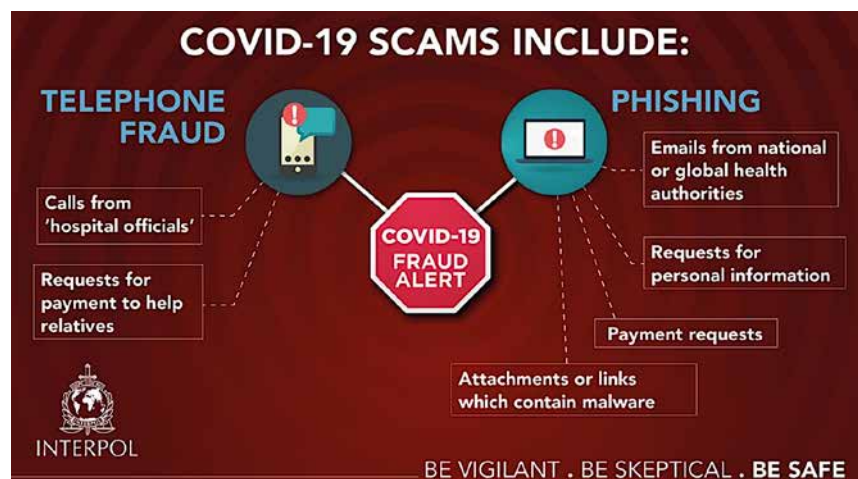
In many cases, the fraudsters impersonate legitimate companies, using similar names, websites and email addresses in their attempt to trick unsuspecting members of the public, even reaching out proactively via emails and messages on social media platforms.

Warning signs

If you are looking to buy medical supplies online, or receive emails or

links offering medical support, be alert to the signs of a potential scam to protect yourself and your money.

- Independently verify the company/ individual offering the items before making any purchases;
- Be aware of bogus websites – criminals will often use a web address which looks almost identical to the legitimate one, e.g. 'abc.org' instead of 'abc.com';
- Check online reviews of a company before making a purchase – for example, have there been complaints of other customers not receiving the promised items?;
- Be wary if asked to make a payment to a bank account located in a different country than where the company is located;
- If you believe you have been the victim of fraud, alert your bank immediately so the payment can be stopped.



- Do not click on links or open attachments which you were not expecting to receive, or come from an unknown sender;
- Be wary of unsolicited emails offering medical equipment or requesting your personal information for medical checks – legitimate health authorities do not normally contact the general public in this manner.

NON-DELIVERY FRAUD

In non-delivery fraud, criminals promise victims highly sought-after goods, accept payment, then never deliver. While the principle is simple, the fraud scheme is often sophisticated. Criminals can adapt a well-established modus operandi to suit any product, whether it is medical equipment, puppies, office supplies or electronics.

Read: 5 reasons non-delivery fraud works

TELECOM FRAUD

Random victims are contacted by a criminal claiming to be a friend, relative or someone in a position of authority and tricked into parting with money.

- DON'T panic! If you receive a call saying a friend or relative is in trouble, first try to check the identity of the caller but don't call back the same number.
- DON'T give any personal or confidential information over the phone.
- DON'T trust someone who claims to be a government official or law enforcement officer; they never demand payment or confidential information. DO contact your local police to check.

ROMANCE SCAMS

Criminals develop a "relationship" with victims through social media with the ultimate goal of obtaining money.

- DO be vigilant if you are approached by someone you don't know, especially if it leads to a request for money.



- DO think twice before transferring money, however genuine the request might seem.
- DON'T disclose personal/confidential information on social media.

INVESTMENT/BOILER ROOM FRAUD

Victims are pressured into investing in fraudulent or worthless shares.

- DO be skeptical if you receive a cold call on investment opportunities.
- DO verify the authenticity of investment products and consult an independent financial advisor.
- DON'T transfer money to anyone simply based on a call.

SEXTORTION

Victims (often men) are tricked by an attractive stranger into participating in naked videos chats which are secretly recorded and subsequently used for blackmail.

- DO remember that nothing is private on the web and data cannot be erased.
- DO ask pertinent questions and try to verify the identity of anyone who approaches you.
- If you do receive a blackmail threat, DON'T pay up, report it to the police.

PAYMENT CARDS

- DO keep your cards safe. Regularly check your bank/credit card accounts.

- DO look carefully at ATMs and payment terminals to make sure there are no suspicious objects around the card slot.
- DO keep your distance from other people when using payment terminals.

- DON'T disclose your PIN/passwords. Banks will never ask you for this over the phone or by email.

- DON'T provide bank details unless you initiated the payment process.

- If you are contacted by your bank to update details or take advantage of a special offer, DON'T click on the link in the email. Check out the legitimate website or contact the bank.

- DON'T make a payment online or do any online banking if you are connected to public Wi-Fi, as your information can be easily stolen.

MONEY LAUNDERING

- DO be suspicious if you are asked to let someone else use your bank account.
- DO be wary of cash transactions concerning large amounts of money, there are much more secure payment methods available.
- DON'T let yourself be manipulated. Criminal syndicates often operate by developing relationships with their victims before tricking them into handling money



© Utah.com

Great Salt Lake

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

Our bodies need about 100 g of salt for each 40 kg of weight in order to function properly

Salt, an ionic compound made of sodium and chloride ions is indispensable to human life. Our bodies need about 100 g of salt for each 40 kg of weight in order to function properly. Sodium is extremely important in cell processes and in the transmission of signals to and from the brain. It is involved in the regulation of fluids in the human body and plays a central role in blood pressure control. Salt activates several salivary and digestive enzymes, which contribute to a proper digestion and absorption of food in our stomach.

Salt has been part of human life for millennia. It was already used by Egyptians around 6000 BC to preserve their mummies, and then it was traded by Phoenicians and by people near the Mediterranean Sea. Salt has been quoted by famous philosophers and poets. "Salt is born of the purest parents: the sun and the sea" said Pythagoras, also giving

an idea of how salt was obtained in ancient Greece. In old Japan, salt was sprinkled on theater stages before each play to drive away evil spirits.



Lake salt from Jilantai (Inner Mongolia, China)

At first, the Chinese were among the pioneers in salt production and trade. They obtained the precious substance from sea water and saline lakes but also through old mining technologies. Salt was a driver for progress in mining techniques in general, but was also a steady and

significant source of wealth for the Chinese empire. Imperial Chinese governments kept their monopoly on salt trade and production until the 20th century.

Salt has been traditionally used for thousands of years, both as an effective food preservative and as a seasoning. Before the invention of other, more advanced refrigerating systems, all foods (meat, fish and vegetables) had to be salted in order to be safely preserved for long periods of time. Therefore, salt has undeniably contributed to the development of human civilization.

A long time ago, salt was seen as a highly valued trade commodity and some even used it as currency. The discovery of salt sometimes determined the establishment, as well as the rise and fall of some of the greatest cities and empires on Earth. Salt brought wealth but also wars and revolts throughout history.

The 'gabelle' was a notorious and very unpopular tax on salt in France, established during the mid-14th century and which lasted until 1946. The famous 'Gandhi Salt March' in the 1930's started in reaction to an increased tax by the British on the salt produced in India under Britain's monopoly, and which ultimately led to India's independence in 1947.



Mahatma Gandhi during the Salt March, March 1930

Liverpool flourished as a prime exporting port for the salt extracted in British salt mines. The powerful Polish kingdom attained part of its wealth from its great salt extraction sites (such as Wieliczka salt mine in the Krakow area) but saw this vast activity slowly decline after the Germans introduced sea salt, which was considered superior. Today, Wieliczka Salt Mine, the oldest extraction site in Poland dating back to the 12th century is a Unesco World Heritage Site, and was transformed into a museum after extraction operations ceased in 1996.



Hallstatt, Austria

Venice and Genoa, two of the most powerful Italian seaports fought over the salt access and trade supremacy. Other cities imposed taxes on salt passing through, or became wealthy from the monopoly on the salt trade.

The Romans developed their own technique of salt extraction from the sea. They gathered the saline water in large but shallow basins where it evaporated, leaving the salt to dry out in the sun. Via Salaria, which ran from Rome to the Adriatic coast is considered one of the most important salt trade routes in antiquity and is believed to be one of the main reasons for the growth and development of the future capital of the Roman Empire. Some have even suggested - although this is not well documented - that at some point, Roman legions were paid in salt.

Later, Austrians were the first to develop a new salt extraction technique. Situated in the Salzkammergut area, on the shores of Lake Hallstättersee, lies one of the most beautiful small towns in Austria. Hallstatt is a World Heritage site and is famous not only for its breathtaking scenery but also for being the location of the world's oldest salt mine.

Hallstatt is believed to be the first place where salt was properly extracted on a large scale, some 7000 years ago, and the expansion of the mining activities helped the whole region flourish. The very name of Salzburg, one of the main Austrian cities, stands as proof of the significance of salt in the area ('Salz' is salt in German). In Hallstatt, tourists can visit the old mines now converted into a museum, and learn more about the everyday life of the very first workers, the mining techniques they used and the entire salt production process. In order to enter the underground saline world, you first have to take a funicular up from the town before entering the mine with its carved rock walls. You will then see the 64-meter-long slide which was used in the mining activities and, last but not least, deep down in the tunnels you can discover the oldest wooden staircase in Europe, used by workers 2800 years ago to remove the "white gold" from the mountain. You can also watch a short movie about the daily work routines at the 'Bronze Age Cinema'. (1) Austrians used a special



© Kamil Bankowski / Poland Travel

"Wieliczka" Salt Mine, Poland

extraction method: they carved into the rocks of salt and then filled the space with fresh water which was absorbed by the saline walls. The solution was later boiled to extract the salt. At the beginning, wood was the main element used in the process, but increasing salt production paved the way for the development of coal mining, as coal rapidly replaced wood in the various technological stages.

Great Britain was especially quick in making the change to the new type of fuel once the industrial revolution began. Salt was also used in the chemical industry for various other products. Britain obtained its salt from salt mining but also from the sea. 'Wich' and 'wych' are names traditionally associated with salt production in Britain (Cheshire Middlewich, Nantwich, Northwich or Droitwich).



Himalayan salt (coarse) from Pakistan

France obtained salt from saliferous spring waters in the Seille region. The technology used there was pretty simple: boiling water until it evaporated to leave only the salt dust.

Salt varies in colour (the pink Himalayan salt extracted from deep inside the mountains of Pakistan, at the Khewra Salt Mine is famous). It has different levels of purity and sodium concentration, providing opportunities for great marketing strategies and sales revenues. The production process may also vary; it can be extracted from rocks underground, from saline sea water and from natural brines.

Historically, salt mining - and mining in general - was considered one of the most dangerous and costly activities. Hundreds of thousands of workers probably died in the



Cargill Salt Mine

process, either crushed in work accidents deep down in mines, due to the long-term effects of inhaling harmful vapours during work or by dehydration caused by prolonged contact with the salt.

Although it is now considered a cheap but indispensable part of our modern everyday life, salt was scarce during the period spanning the Industrial Revolution. Salt mines were mostly operated by underpaid workers, slaves or convicted felons, mainly because of the hard and dangerous work it involved.

Nowadays, most modern salt exploitations are owned by big multinational companies, such as Cargill, Compass Minerals or Akzo Nobel. Although production is largely streamlined, the techniques are not substantially different from those used thousands of years ago.

Today, China is the largest salt producer worldwide, followed by the USA and India. In 2020, about 270 million metric tons of salt were produced (1), some 10 million metric tons less than the previous years. The total global production was evaluated at approximately 28.5 billion US dollars (the last two centuries have seen a decline in the price of salt).

While the leading top consumers are the Chinese, the largest salt exporter is currently the Netherlands (in 2018, total export was 319.93 million US dollars).

Europe is the second largest salt producing region in the world and the EU salt industry consists of an association of crystallised salt producers in 18 European countries.

Its members have a combined turnover of more than 1.5 billion euros and employ nearly 9 000 people.

Their declared vision is "to be the voice of the salt industry in Europe and to promote the values and benefits of salt as an essential building block for the chemical industry and the energy sector and as a vital mineral for health, safety and nutrition".(2)

Today, Germany is the leading European producer of salt, followed by the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland and the UK.



Kłodawa Salt Mine

Nowadays, 60% of the salt produced in Europe comes from solution mining. This method consists in pumping water into the underground salt deposits (up to 400 meters deep) and forcing it out through other pipes. The resulting brine is a highly saturated salt solution which is left to evaporate, and from which highly pure salt is ultimately extracted. There are substantial salt reserves throughout

the continent, with a long tradition in mining operations. Solnitsata, in Bulgaria, is one of the oldest salt exploitations in Europe, supplying salt to the Balkans.

In Germany, Rheinberg, Heilbronn and Berchtesgaden, with the latter being the oldest active salt mine in that country. In Italy, Racalmuto, Realmonte and Petralia. In Poland, Klodawa, the biggest salt mine still in operation are all important names on the 'salt map'.

As early as approximately 6000 BC, some of the early Neolithic salt production facilities have been discovered in Poiana Slatinei, in modern day Romania. The country also has the largest European salt mine at Slanic, in Prahova County, about 100 km from Bucharest. This mine was extensively exploited from 1912 to 1970.

The vast spaces created by the excavation activities are currently open to visitors who can access the 14 breathtaking underground galleries by minivan. Each gallery is 55 meters high and leads to the heart of the salt deposit. The special, saline micro-climate and constant temperatures in the mines are highly appreciated for their healing properties, and the mine now features a special area used exclusively for medical purposes. Its carved walls and sculptures made out of salt, depicting important historical figures are also a big attraction. Due to the very large size of the premises, after exploitation ceased in 1970, it has also been used for a number of aeromodelling shows. The salt mine features an old elevator, which is no longer in use but can still be seen. Interestingly, there are no metallic parts used in its construction, as metal may rust more rapidly when in contact with salt.

Turda salt mine, also in Romania, is considered the world's most spectacular natural underground formation shaped by human activity. It is one of the oldest salt mines in Europe, dating back to Roman times. It was discovered by digging up the salt deposited after the evaporation of the sea that covered the entire region millions



Salina Veche Salt Mine, in Slănic, Prahova, Romania

of years ago. The large salt reserves still remaining are now estimated to be able to fully cover the salt consumption needs of the entire planet for 60 years!.(3)

After mining operations ceased in 1932, it was turned into a huge tourist attraction. It is one of the tourist sites listed in the prestigious Michelin Travel Guide for Romania (rated with two stars). Each year, hundreds of thousands of people come to visit and explore the saline labyrinths. There are spa accommodations, a sports park, a lake with boats, a minigolf, bowling and even a Ferris wheel, all underground. In 2020, a Guinness World record was set there. Two athletes, Rhiannan Iffland from Australia and Constantin Popovici from Romania, dived from a 20 metre-high platform into the underground lake. At 120 metres below ground, this is the deepest underground body of water in which a dive has ever been performed. Needless to say, this event drew even more attention to the place.

Other than the food industry, the main consumer of salt is the chemical industry. It is an essential ingredient for obtaining over 50% of all modern chemicals. It is used for the production of rubber, paper, glass, textiles, caustic soda.

For chlorine production, a process known as electrolysis is used, where an electric current is sent through saline water which interacts with the chloride ion in the salt thus creating chlorine. Salt also remains the best de-icing solution today.

A number of salt reserves have recently been discovered on Mars, fueling hopes for some sort of sustainability for a future human colony on that planet. It may also offer some clues as to the reasons why Mars dried out.

For millennia, as is still the case today, people have acknowledged the importance of salt; there can be no proper life without it. Even in Biblical times, salt is mentioned numerous times. In various contexts, it is referred to metaphorically as signifying permanence, loyalty, durability, fidelity, value, and purification.

After all, "there must be something strangely sacred about salt" (Kahlil Gibran).

Alexandra Paucescu

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ALTERNATIVE INVESTING IN THE FACE OF THE PANDEMIC

As far as one can trace back, one of the earliest forms of alternative investment in modern history was the first American transcontinental railroad, built between 1863 and 1869, connecting Council Bluffs in Iowa to the Pacific Coast in San Francisco, California over public land. The project was financed through state and government subsidies or bonds - government loans that had to be paid back in time with interest - and awarded to two private construction companies, Central Pacific and Union Pacific.

In 1859, Theodore Judah, a civil engineer and the main promotional figure behind the American transcontinental railroad, went out looking for private funding and managed to convince four relatively unknown merchants in Sacramento, California, to invest in his project. The proposed railroad was to link the gold mines to the eastern seaboard of America, which was the hub of the economy in those days. The four merchants - Leland Stanford, Collis

P. Huntington, Mark Hopkins and Charles Crocker - accepted the risk of investing their money in this long-term project that was not even close to starting, and even less to paying off anytime soon.

The project was a success. Ten years later in 1869, the transcontinental railroad was completed amid celebrations and wide press coverage.

It was considered as the greatest construction project of its era and a key achievement in America with an immediate and positive impact upon the economy. Firstly, it reduced the time it took to travel across the country from six months to six days, and encouraged the growth of American businesses by allowing goods to be shipped from the isolated



The ceremony for the driving of the golden spike at Promontory Summit, Utah on May 10, 1869 on the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad. At centre left, Samuel S. Montague of Central Pacific Railroad, shakes hands with Grenville M. Dodge of Union Pacific Railroad (centre right)



© Edfm

West Coast to the manufacturing-intensive East Coast much faster than before. Secondly, it created a production boom as resources from the mid and western parts of the United States were able to be used in production. Furthermore, it enabled tourism and immigration, as innumerable lives were spared among those attempting to cross the desolate lands through mountainous roads.

The four merchants who later came to be known as the big four, went to collect their money, allegedly laughing all the way to the bank.

Since those days, alternative investments have grown in popularity and have become more accessible; these have become the new normal in investing. An alternative investment is defined as any investment that falls outside the conventional long term asset classes such as stocks, bonds, currencies and commodities. In the 20th century, alternative investments included real estate, private debt, infrastructure, private equity / venture capital, hedge funds, equity crowdfunding and leveraged buy-outs, among others. Today, with investors' increased demand for alternative methods, newer classes of assets have emerged, and the alternative investments market has extended into other areas such as art, collectables, wine, precious metals, gems, oil and gas drilling operations, natural resources such as wind and solar energy, cryptocurrencies and NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens), to name a few.

As time goes by and the demand for diversification increases, financial markets with endless imagination and innovation continue to discover and present new classes of assets to investors.

These high risk-reward opportunities that in the past were limited to super high-net-worth individuals (HNWI) and institutional investors only, are today accessible to every category of investor through direct or indirect investments. In indirect investing, the investor uses the services of an intermediary, such as a fund manager, who pools multiple investors' capital and invests on their behalf. Other trends for private investors consists in going from public to private markets and to turn to passive versus active investing.

The primary objective of alternative investments was to diversify the investor's portfolio. This means dividing the risks and rewards by investing in different asset classes. These can be correlated and noncorrelated asset classes in order to hedge or to protect the capital against unwanted market moves. However, its role has since developed.

MODERN PORTFOLIO THEORY

In the 1950s and 1960s, 'modern portfolio theory' established the mechanics and benefits of diversification. This framework highlighted risk as a function of a portfolio, formalizing the idea that exposure can be reduced by holding a wide range of investments.

But currently, after a decade-long period of low interest rates and Central Bank monetary interventions, traditional investments are forecasted to deliver modest returns of approximately 4% or less per year, over the next 10 years. Both institutional and individual investors are not only looking for diversification, but most prominently for return, known also in financial jargon as 'yield'.



Workers at a construction site in Dubai. Foreign direct investment is an important source of capital for infrastructure projects

A Preqin survey in 2018 had found that 84% of investors were planning to increase the amount of capital they commit to alternative assets over the next five years.

While alternative investing represented just 5% of global pension portfolios in 1996, in 2019 these accounted for more than 25%. Depending on the risk appetite, current data indicate that between 10% and 20% of diversified investment portfolios contain alternative investments, including real estate.

Most individual investors devote only 5% to alternative investments. Pension funds and endowments however are well above that, with 30% and 50% respectively invested in alternatives to further diversify investor portfolios and gain exposure to the income and yields that these opportunities offer.



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Another key driver for the spike in the demand for alternative investing has been the expansion of the emerging markets, both as investment targets and as new wealth generating areas, where capital is likely to be invested. The Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East and Latin America in particular, South east Asia, China, India, and Brazil are playing an increasingly important role both as a source of capital from investors allocation to alternatives, and as the focus of investment opportunities for fund managers looking to deploy capital.

It is no surprise that the alternative asset industry has grown exponentially in recent years, with the Assets Under Management (AUM) reaching record highs in recent years. The trend shows no sign of slowing or coming to a halt.

In 2021, fundraising for alternative assets, including private equity, real estate, infrastructure, private debt, and natural resources, surpassed \$1.1 trillion. And total assets under management in alternatives exceeded \$9 trillion, according to Moody's.



The dot-com bubble

Global alternatives under management rose from \$7.9 trillion in 2013 to over \$10 trillion in 2020. The volume is expected to reach \$14 trillion by 2023 and \$21.1 trillion in 2025.

PRIVATE EQUITY

In the dominant asset classes, private equity is in the lead, followed by hedge funds. Private equity is in fact, the name of the asset class of funds, and the activities of investors investing directly in private companies or engaging in buy-outs of public companies, result in delisting of the public company.

In 2021, the asset class raised \$737 billion and reached \$5.8 trillion in assets under management after delivering an annual return of 45.2% through March 2021. Analysts at Moody's predict that private equity will continue to deliver strong returns in 2022.

Private equity, known for its high risk-reward correlation, is currently the most popular asset class in the alternative investment world. The U.S. Private Equity Index provided by Cambridge Associates shows that private equity produced average annual returns of 10.48% over the 20-year period ending on June 30, 2020, while during that same time frame,

the Russell 2000 Index, a performance tracking metric for small companies, averaged 6.69% per year. The S&P 500 index returned 5.91%.

THE HURDLES ON THE WAY

For Moody's, although the overall 2022 outlook for the asset management industry is stable for now, the booming alternative asset classes come with some risks. In their report, Moody's highlights three potential hurdles investors may face in the alternatives, in the near future.

One of the hazards is Moody's concern for the risk of rising systemic credit as a result of increased allocation to these leveraged assets; private equity funds typically conduct leveraged buyouts, and, as the asset class grows,

so does the amount of borrowing. As there have been lots of borrowing, companies tend to carry a fair amount of debt, with aggressive debt structure. As this happens in private markets, there is less visibility inside the debts that the companies carry.

With the growth in activity and cheap credit available, many 'lower-rated' companies have been borrowing more capital. According to the report by Moody's, the question is whether weaker credit can withstand high rates or a downturn. With lower rates, weaker creditors have been tempted to buy more, but if the rates rise, it is possible that they may not be able to support the debt.

Another important risk is that of liquidity. By definition, alternative assets are much less liquid than traditional assets. The illiquidity that comes with investments in alternative asset classes can put future stress on investment portfolios, and with regard to private investments, investors are unable to exit their investments as easily as they can sell public stocks and bonds.

Lastly, a general risk that applies to every investment vehicle in the alternative investment world is that of regulation. As many alternative investing, including private equity happens in the private market with less surveillance, the investor should be prepared to embrace the hazards that go with it.



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Mounting Fears Shake World Markets As Banking Giants Rush to Raise Capital

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD
AND ANDREW ROSEN
AND ANDREW ROSEN

Their market through the 1990s, financial services on Wall Street, as banks for a decade in the period made credit tight.

Stocks tumbled, and many were down 50% or more. The New York Stock Exchange fell 10%, and investors fled toward the safe harbor of the government bonds in the wake of the collapse of Lehman Brothers in late 2008. The crash of 2008 was the most severe since the 1929 crash.

The market crash in 2008 was the most severe since the 1929 crash. The market crash in 2008 was the most severe since the 1929 crash.



Morgan Stanley in Talks With Wachovia, Others

By ANDREW ROSEN
AND ANDREW ROSEN

Morgan Stanley is in talks with Wachovia and other banks to raise capital. Morgan Stanley is in talks with Wachovia and other banks to raise capital.

Our era is not only defined by the 2008 recession, low interest rates, monetary interventions of central banks, and the longest bull market in history, but also by an unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic, lockdowns, quarantines, event cancellations, and a worldwide switch to remote work, that have reset the trends in the future of investing.

DEEP TECH & VENTURE CAPITAL

According to McKinsey, the most negatively impacted sectors by Covid-19 include real estate, travel and hospitality, logistics, media, retail and consumer durables. On the other hand, fintech, software, telecom, healthcare, pharma & biotech and tech services have boomed, while sectors such as asset management and business services have remained neutral in the face of the pandemic.

Covid-19 obliged us to sit at home and turn to the digital world. Now, this trend has taken over and the importance of deep tech in our epoch has turned Venture Capital into another thriving asset class, providing historically significant alpha in sophisticated institutional investor portfolios. Top absolute returns for venture capital have historically exceeded and outperformed those for other asset classes such as real estate. While the return on investment for real estate is 27% in 5 years and 24% in 25 years, the returns on Venture Capital are 48% and 57% respectively. (Source: Cambridge Associates Global Venture Capital, Global Private Equity, and Global Real Estate Benchmarks Return Report).

Venture capital (VC) is another form of private equity - inherently risky and illiquid - involving investment in startup companies which are traditionally high growth and often technology-centric. A venture-backed company will typically raise multiple rounds of financing before reaching an exit, which is often either in the form of a sale to a larger incumbent or through an initial public offering (IPO). While investors known as LPs (Limited Partners) left the Venture Capital industry after the Nasdaq bubble in 2000, they have now been returning to the asset class, together with other non-traditional investors such as mutual funds, hedge funds and sovereign funds.

In the last decade, the world has witnessed an explosion in technology-based innovation, producing hundreds of billion-dollar companies, so-called 'unicorns,' and boosting interest in private technology investment. In our era the difference between a young company and an established company is thinning. Uber was founded in 2009 and is currently valued at \$68 billion. Airbnb was started in 2008 and last raised funding at a \$25.5 billion valuation. The universality of smartphones and the transformation in cloud computing and storage has created a rich territory for starting and building companies at historically low costs with sky rocketing potentials, and entrepreneurs and investors have capitalized on these trends. Software is eating the world and the phenomenon of technology disrupting all industries is a continuing trend.

Deep tech - the generic term for technologies that include artificial intelligence, robotics, blockchain,

advanced material science, photonics and electronics, biotech and quantum computing - is where the capital will go in the coming years. One concrete example is the development of 3D printers. The cost of 3D printing a two-bedroom home is around \$4,000, which is quite inexpensive in comparison to the cost of that same home using manual labour. In geographic areas that need a lot of housing for a low cost, this technology will of course be a game-changer for both real estate and space investing. As an example, this can - and is predicted to - impact the real estate investment space which is a major subset of alternative investments.



As the pandemic continues with quarantines, lock-downs and event cancellations and much uncertainty regarding the future, many investors may have decided to stick with the most secure investments rather than gambling in unknown territory. At the same time, many have embraced alternative investing with even more pace than before, regardless of the environment looking safe or not.

CRYPTO ASSETS

For years, many on Wall Street thought of cryptocurrencies as a fringe asset class. Yet, a recent survey from Fidelity found that more than half of institutional investors in Asia, Europe and the U.S. currently invest in digital assets, and a majority also expect to do so in the future. This means that Bitcoin has matured from an obscure asset class with few users to an integral part of the digital asset revolution.

There are now talks of turbo certificates and ETFs on Bitcoin, issued by established banks and financial institutions in traditional assets.



The market value of these novel assets rose to nearly \$3 trillion in November 2021, from \$620 billion in 2017. Despite high volatility their popularity has soared among retail and institutional investors alike. Since the beginning of 2022, the combined market capitalization had retreated to about \$2 trillion, still representing an almost four-fold increase since 2017.

Bitcoin, Ether, and other crypto assets showed little correlation with major stock indexes before the pandemic. But as the central banks across the world started to unleash unprecedented levels of financial support in the face of the health crisis, crypto prices and US stocks both soared on heightened risk appetite among investors.

Today, Bitcoin is becoming increasingly correlated with the stocks. So, with the increased and sizable co-movement and spillovers between crypto and equity markets, the digital currency contains limited risk diversification benefits, as opposed to its initial role.

Given their relatively high volatility and valuations, their increased co-movement could soon pose risks to financial stability, especially in countries with widespread crypto adoption. Very soon, the world can expect a significant regulatory movement in the crypto market.

In the US, a \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill signed by president Joe Biden in November 2021 includes crypto tax reporting provisions that could make it easier for the IRS to track crypto activity among Americans. The new regulations will most probably disrupt the price movements of the already volatile cryptocurrencies.

BETTING ON DIGITAL UNIQUENESS

In recent months, technology has been at the forefront of discussions around alternative assets, with the emergence of a new, highly sought-after form: the non-fungible token (NFT). The total market cap of NFTs is about \$31.4 billion, making up 1.53% of the current \$2.05 trillion total market cap for cryptocurrency.

NFTs have been around since 2014, but came to light and gained momentum in 2020, coinciding with the start of the pandemic.



NFTs represent the uniqueness of a digital asset, conveying ownership of a digital file (a piece of music, a work of art, GIF, JPEG, essay, domain name, game, or purchases within games, etc.) that is non-fungible, meaning highly unique pieces of digital art that only one person can own.

This data is stored on a blockchain such as Ethereum, with the knowledge and reassurance, via the blockchain, that the NFT is the only 'authentic' one of its kind. As they cannot be altered or counterfeited, NFTs are intended to be a secure method of asset ownership, more easily transferable than traditional assets.

Ever since Mark Zuckerberg announced the rebranding of Facebook to 'Meta', the notion of the metaverse has gone mainstream worldwide. Those in favor of NFTs speculate that in the future, when the metaverse - a digital world where people play, work, advertise, socialize, and transact - becomes the norm, NFTs will be the essentials to own for our avatars to exist and function. Investment in digital real estate is now also possible via NFTs.

By the end of 2021 the NFT market valuation reached \$41 billion, coming close to that of the traditional art market at \$50 billion in 2020. As a side note, the art market was down substantially in 2020, due to the pandemic and canceled fairs.

On the downside, one can mention the following counter arguments : at the moment, NFT worth is entirely tied to aesthetic, sentimental value

and speculation. Right now, it is impossible to gauge its worth as a long-term investment. NFTs have been the target of a few security breaches, scammers, hackers and stolen wallets. Furthermore and most importantly, creating and selling NFTs accounts for a lot of power usage, as do blockchain transactions, hence unsustainable and damaging for the planet in the long run.

STATE OF THE ART MARKET

While the entire world suffered in 2020, the contemporary art market rose by 15.1%, showing that the asset class is the least correlated of all asset classes. The ultra-wealthy continued buying art during the pandemic, with more appetite than before, and as shows and art fairs were canceled with fewer opportunities to buy paintings, the value of art continued to improve.

The longer-term outlook for the market is bright, with increased interest from young collectors. And with middle-class households entering the market, a new class of buyers is being created. Also, with more sophisticated infrastructure for online sales emerging, art is becoming more accessible to everyone. For instance, Singulart, the online gallery that was founded in 2017 in Paris has raised EUR 60 million in series B round, one of the stages in the capital-raising process of a startup. From this fact alone, one can deduct that the marriage between tech and art is here to stay.

Vianne Savoli

TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman



Very Peri: What if 2022 were a colour?

For its 2022 Colour of the Year, Pantone (*) has created a new shade: Very Peri, a vibrant periwinkle blue with violet and red undertones. Let's find out more and get some inspiration...

Symbol of a new version of the world

For the first time in its history, the Pantone® Color Institute created a new colour to encourage inventiveness and creativity in a world of unprecedented change. According to Executive Director Leatrice Eiseman, "It is literally the happiest and the warmest of all the blue hues. Because of that red undertone, it introduces an empowering feeling of newness, and newness is what we're looking for."



Have fun with the Pantone 2022 colours

1. Le Grand Chiquito

The it-bag, available in THE colour of the year surely offers solid value. (jacquemus.com)



© JACQUEMUS



© POMELLATO

Twenty years ago, the arrival of the trailblazing Nudo ring revolutionised the world of jewellery, and it has not disappointed since. It's a definite yes to this model with an amethyst gemstone on a white diamond-dusted ring in rose gold. (pomellato.com)

2. Nudo ring

4. Knee-length boots

A concentrate of femininity and glamour with a wow effect. (Liu Jo, spotted on farfetch.com)



© LIU JO

3. Belted coat

The ideal colour for countering the dreariness of winter (Roberto Cavalli, spotted on yoox.com)



© ROBERTO CAVALLI



© BOTTEGAVENETA

5. Sunglasses

'Violet against ultra violet'...or how to protect your eyes in style (bottegaveneta.com)

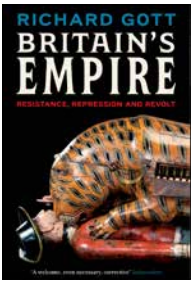
Which colours go with Very Peri ?

Very Peri is great for providing an eye-catching pop of colour. It's up to you to combine it with other colours for a sober or a sophisticated effect.

- Yellow: as its complementary colour, yellow matches perfectly all purple hues.
- Lilac, lavender, violet: perfect for creating a "fifty shades of purple effect".
- White or off-white: for a very soft contrast.
- Blues, greens or black: to add depth to your outfit.

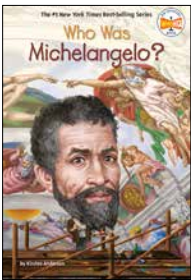
(*) For over 20 years, Pantone's Colour of the Year has influenced product development and purchasing decisions in multiple industries, including fashion, home furnishings, and industrial design, as well as product packaging and graphic design.

BOOKS

**BRITAIN'S EMPIRE***By Richard Gott***RESISTANCE, REPRESSION AND REVOLT**

Contrary to nationalist legend and schoolboy history lessons, the British Empire was not a great civilizing power bringing light to the darker corners of the earth. Richard Gott's magisterial work recounts the empire's misdeeds from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the Indian Mutiny, spanning the red-patched imperial globe from

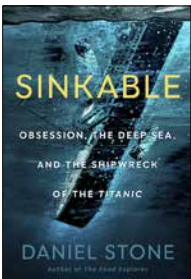
Ireland to Australia, telling a story of almost continuous colonialist violence. Recounting events from the perspective of the colonized, Gott unearths the all-but-forgotten stories excluded from mainstream British histories.

**WHO WAS MICHELANGELO?***By Kirsten Anderson and Who HQ**Illustrated by Gregory Copeland*

Contrary to nationalist legend and schoolboy Travel to Renaissance Italy and learn about the young apprentice who went on to become a true master, and one of the most beloved sculptors and painters of all time, Michelangelo!

Michelangelo created some of the world's most recognizable art, from the statue of *David* to the intricate ceiling fresco of the Sistine Chapel.

Beyond his well-known painting and sculpting, he was a gifted poet and architect. Young readers can learn about the entirety of Michelangelo's life, from his time as a young apprentice, his relationships with several Catholic popes and the Medici family, to his unwillingness to stop working into his late eighties. A perfect read for art lovers and fans of the Renaissance.

**SINKABLE***By Daniel Stone***OBSESSION, THE DEEP SEA, AND THE SHIPWRECK OF THE TITANIC**

From the national bestselling author of *The Food Explorer*, a fascinating and rollicking plunge into the story of the world's most famous shipwreck, the RMS *Titanic*.

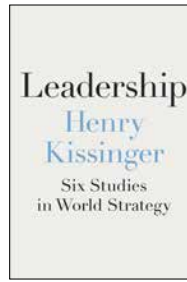
On a frigid April night in 1912, the world's largest and soon most famous ocean liner struck an iceberg and slipped beneath the waves. She had

scarcely disappeared before her new journey began, a seemingly limitless odyssey through the world's fixation with her every tragic detail. Plans to find and raise the *Titanic* began almost immediately. Yet seven decades passed before it was found. Why? And of some three million shipwrecks that litter the ocean floor, why is the world still so fascinated with *this* one?

In *Sinkable*, Daniel Stone spins a fascinating tale of history, science, and obsession, uncovering the untold story of the *Titanic* not as a ship but as a *shipwreck*. He explores generations of eccentrics, like American Charles Smith, whose 1914 recovery plan using a synchronized armada of ships bearing electromagnets was complex, convincing, and utterly impossible; Jack Grimm, a Texas oil magnate who fruitlessly dropped a fortune to find the wreck after failing to find Noah's Ark; and the British Doug Woolley, a former panty hose factory worker who has claimed, since the 1960s, to be the true owner of the *Titanic* wreckage.

Along the way, *Sinkable* takes readers through the two miles of ocean water in which the *Titanic* sank, showing how the ship broke apart and why, and delves into the odd history of our understanding of such depths. Author Daniel Stone studies the landscape of the seabed, which in the *Titanic's* day was thought to be as smooth and featureless as a bathtub. He interviews scientists to understand the decades of rust and decomposition that are slowly but surely consuming the ship. (She's expected to disappear entirely within a few decades!) He even journeys over the Atlantic, during a global pandemic, to track down the elusive Doug Woolley. And Stone turns inward, looking at his own dark obsession with both the *Titanic* and shipwrecks in general, and why he spends hours watching ships sink on YouTube.

Brimming with humor, curiosity and wit, *Sinkable* follows in the tradition of Susan Orlean and Bill Bryson, offering up a page-turning work of personal journalism and an immensely entertaining romp through the deep sea and the nature of obsession.

**LEADERSHIP***By Henry Kissinger***SIX STUDIES IN WORLD STRATEGY**

Henry Kissinger, consummate diplomat and statesman, examines the strategies of six great twentieth-century figures and brings to life a unifying theory of leadership and diplomacy.

In *Leadership*, Henry Kissinger presents a far-reaching study of six impactful leaders in modern history: Konrad Adenauer, Charles de Gaulle,

Richard Nixon, Anwar Sadat, Lee Kuan Yew, and Margaret Thatcher. Emerging in a period of institutional and imperial collapse across the globe, these leaders created a new international order from the vestiges of the old. Drawing not only on his deep study of history, but also his distinguished career in government, Kissinger pulls back the curtain to expose the masterful strategies of these great geopolitical minds. What results is a subtle and discerning portrait of modern statecraft, revealing timeless lessons on strategy, diplomacy, and leadership.

Looking far beyond their well-known victories and defeats, Kissinger contextualizes their highly individual strategies of statecraft over the scope of their lives – from their rise to power, to controversies and reversals, to epoch-making decisions and achievements. From Kissinger's unique vantage point and through his personal relationships with his subjects, we see not only the impact of these far-sighted statesmen during their period in power, but also their legacies.

Throughout, Kissinger sheds light on leadership in times of war and peace and negotiation across gaping divides. Essential reading for all hoping to master the arts of command, persuasion, and inspiration, *Leadership* is at once sweeping in its scope and intimate in its perspective.

**FOSSIL FUTURE***By Alex Epstein***WHY GLOBAL HUMAN FLOURISHING REQUIRES MORE OIL, COAL, AND NATURAL GAS—NOT LESS**

The New York Times bestselling author of *The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels* draws on the latest data and new insights to challenge everything you thought you knew about the future of energy.

For over a decade, philosopher and energy expert Alex Epstein has predicted that any negative impacts of fossil fuel use on our climate will be outweighed by the unique benefits of fossil fuels to human flourishing—including their unrivaled ability to provide low-cost, reliable energy to billions of people around the world, especially the world's poorest people.

And contrary to what we hear from media “experts” about today’s “renewable revolution” and “climate emergency,” reality has proven Epstein right:

- Fact: Fossil fuels are still the dominant source of energy around the world, and growing fast while much-hyped renewables are causing skyrocketing electricity prices and increased blackouts.
- Fact: Fossil-fueled development has brought global poverty to an all-time low.
- Fact: While fossil fuels have contributed to the 1 degree of warming in the last 170 years, climate-related deaths are at all-time lows thanks to fossil-fueled development.

What does the future hold? In *Fossil Future*, Epstein, applying his distinctive “human flourishing framework” to the latest evidence, comes to the shocking conclusion that the benefits of fossil fuels will continue to far outweigh their side effects including climate impacts for generations to come. The path to global human flourishing, Epstein argues, is a combination of using more fossil fuels, getting better at “climate mastery,” and establishing “energy freedom” policies that allow nuclear and other truly promising alternatives to reach their full long-term potential.

Today's pervasive claims of imminent climate catastrophe and imminent renewable energy dominance, Epstein shows, are based on what he calls the “anti-impact framework” a set of faulty methods, false assumptions, and anti-human values that have caused the media's designated experts to make wildly wrong predictions about fossil fuels, climate, and renewables for the last fifty years. Deeply researched and wide-ranging, this book will cause you to rethink everything you thought you knew about the future of our energy use, our environment, and our climate.



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