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DRAGONS, BUT KINDER

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The recent sanctions against Russia amongst the sharpest in modern history

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

A man for all seasons



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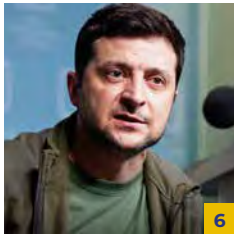
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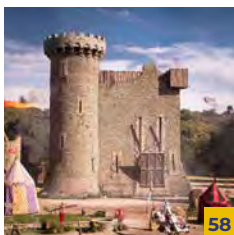
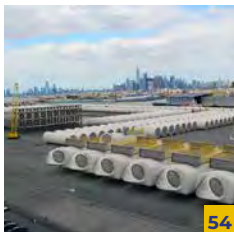
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Nikola Hendrickx

EDITORIAL

Today's Ukraine, tomorrow's Taiwan: Can we believe China?

On the very first day of Russia's attack on Ukraine, China criticised Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's "insane" comparisons of Ukraine and the island of Taiwan, which Beijing has repeatedly said it wants to recover. And yet, if Vladimir Putin's warlike temerity succeeds, would it not present Xi Jinping, a Chinese president with increasingly bellicose inclinations, with a blank cheque?

The situation in Ukraine, which is perceived by Russia as an integral part of its territory, is indeed reminiscent of that of Taiwan, which is struggling with its powerful Chinese neighbour, that wants to bring it back into its fold. But a Chinese military invasion will almost certainly not happen in the coming weeks or months. The Chinese Communist Party Congress, scheduled for this autumn, and at which Mr. Xi is expected to be re-elected, is too important an event to disrupt.

However, Xi Jinping is watching the situation closely, to see how the United States and Nato ultimately respond to the Russian aggression. If he sees the response is weak, that would probably encourage him to plan more aggressive actions against Taiwan.

For Beijing has intensified military, diplomatic and economic pressure on Taiwan since President Tsai Ing-wen came to power in 2016. Unlike her predecessor, she firmly believes that the island is a sovereign nation and not part of China. Would Xi Jinping be right in assuming that the reaction of the West, and in particular that of the United States, would be the same in the event of an invasion of Taiwan?

It is far from certain that this would be the case. For one thing, Ukraine is not a member of Nato, while Taiwan is a de facto security partner of the United States. The West has never given formal security guarantees to Ukraine, while the U.S. is bound to Taiwan by the Taiwan Relations Act signed in 1979, "to help maintain peace, security, and stability in the Western Pacific and to promote the foreign policy of the United States by authorising the continuation of commercial, cultural, and other relations between the people of the United States and the people on Taiwan, and for other purposes".

"The fact that the Taiwanese authorities are making a big deal out of the Ukrainian issue is nonsense," reacted Hua Chunying, spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Taiwan is not Ukraine. Taiwan has always been an inalienable part of Chinese territory. This is an irrefutable historical and legal fact".

We should note that only a few days before the outbreak of the war against his Ukrainian neighbour, Vladimir Putin assured that no one had anything to fear and that the West was "paranoid".

Not recognised as an independent state by the UN, Taiwan has a population of 23 million and a democratic political system. The island has been ruled since 1945 by a regime - the "Republic of China" - that retreated there after the Communist victory in mainland China in 1949, following the Chinese civil war.

The "People's Republic of China," based in Beijing and led by the Communist Party, considers the island to be part of its territory. It has constantly threatened to invade the island in the event of a formal declaration of independence. For the past several months, naval and air incursions have been increasing in Taiwanese waters, raising questions about a US military intervention in the China Sea. Such a prospect would, of course, have extremely serious and far reaching consequences worldwide.

Be that as it may, since the outbreak of the Russian invasion, China has adopted a cautious attitude towards Ukraine, but has also offered increasing support to Russian President Vladimir Putin. China has repeatedly sided with Russia in blaming the West for tensions in Ukraine, accusing it of maintaining a "Cold War mentality" and calling for respect for Russian security concerns.

The conclusions of the Ukrainian crisis will undoubtedly inspire the Chinese president in his own projects in Asia, particularly with regard to this small island in the China Sea that is so important to his public opinion.

China could also exploit the situation in Ukraine to exacerbate its pressure and psychological warfare against Taiwan by launching more frequent military manoeuvres, operations targeting the islands controlled by Taiwan in the China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, as well as increased disinformation campaigns.

The threat of invasion is a powerful tool of coercion. It could well be that the hope in China is that a military campaign of intimidation and threat will be enough to break Washington's and Taipei's will to resist Chinese political demands on Taipei.

Russia's actions in Ukraine undoubtedly constitute a reckless assault on global order, and if international conventions are broken, there must be a price for those actions.

China regards Taiwan as a renegade province awaiting to be reunited, by force if necessary...the future of that region is also fraught with danger.

Trajan Dereville



VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

A man for all seasons

Volodymyr Zelensky could undeniably have made his task so much easier had he accepted US President Joe Biden's offer to be flown out of Kyiv by private jet. His line *"I need ammunition, not a ride"*, as if taken from an action movie, echoed around the world, and in just a few days, the Ukrainian president, symbol of the resistance of an entire nation, won the hearts of people in every corner of the world. Nearly four million people now follow him on Twitter, while his videos generate millions of views on Facebook and YouTube. Wielding the weapon of communication with great skill, and endowed with a genuine talent for finding the right words, he defends tooth and nail his homeland which is in the grip of war; a war that according to many observers, Ukraine cannot win. Yet his composure in the face of Russia's military might is impressive. But will he survive the conflict?

Elected with a massive majority in 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky is the embodiment of a progressive ideal for his people. The former comedian who was sucked into the world of politics to become president, had seen his popularity decline, until that fateful 24 February 2022, when

he astonished the world with his will to resist the unprovoked, massive and brutal military offensive launched by the Russian army.

In a few hours, the 44-year-old president became the embodiment of a people refusing to bend under the military assaults of Vladimir Putin. On the evening of February 24, in a first televised address, he appeared dressed in a simple green, military sweatshirt to announce the general mobilisation. He revealed that the enemy had identified him as target number 1, and his family as target number 2. His wife, Olena Zelenska, and their two children, a 17-year-old girl and a 9-year-old boy, were taken to a shelter.

In his new role as a war leader he defiantly declared, *"In one breath, we will say the only thing that needs to be said: Get out of our land!"*

Western intelligence services had predicted a lightning campaign with a rapid assault on Kyiv. But the resistance put up by the Ukrainian armed forces proved exceptionally determined and fierce. Nevertheless, Russian troops began their advance towards Kyiv, the capital. Cities and towns were bombed, the first deaths were reported and panic seized the population which fled in huge numbers. The United States and France offered to exfiltrate the Ukrainian president. His reply has now become something of a byword for courage and determination.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky



© Nf

Russian tank captured by the Ukrainian army

What surprised many was Zelensky's courage. He was under direct threat of assassination by the Wagner Group, a band of ultra-violent Russian mercenaries deployed in Kyiv. What's more, he had already been the target of several assassination attempts in his place of residence. However, the night Joe Biden offered to exfiltrate him, he refused and told him that this is where the fight was, and that he needed ammunition and not a ride. This was a pivotal moment; millions of Ukrainians realised that Zelensky would not capitulate and that he would not be intimidated by Vladimir Putin.

On Twitter, which he was already using frantically, he continues sending messages in Ukrainian and in English to explain which world leader he had just spoken to and urge Ukrainians not to surrender. On Saturday, 26 March, in a video posted on his Telegram account - an application that is very popular with his fellow citizens - he filmed himself in the streets of the capital without a bulletproof vest, in order to prove that he is not on the run, contrary to rumours, "Don't believe in fakes. I am here." he told his followers.



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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky posting a video on Feb. 26: «We are here, we are not laying down any arms»

Volodymyr Zelensky takes on a new role; that of a president at war. He rapidly recognises the convergence of war and the media, and uses weapons that he masters like no other: social networks. It is via Facebook, Twitter and Telegram that he addresses his people and the international community.

Social networks have been instrumentalised long before people became aware of disinformation campaigns and all the things that can be engineered via digital platforms. So, the idea that social media can be a weapon of war is not new. But the way the Ukrainian president is using it to make direct appeals to the rest of the world is pretty unprecedented. No one has used it on this scale before.

Zelensky urges the population to resist and fight Vladimir Putin's army. From Western governments he asks for weapons and harsher sanctions. He also addresses the inhabitants and soldiers of his neighbouring country, in Russian: "Today, I tried to reach the President of Russia. Result: radio silence. That is why I am addressing the Russian citizens today. But not as a president. I am addressing them as a Ukrainian citizen".

It is not clear how many Russians actually heard this address, but he certainly did it in a most convincing fashion.

Since the war broke out, Volodymyr Zelensky has been presenting himself to the world in a khaki green outfit. He gives the image of a freedom fighter who is confronting the Russian dictator, of a hero who has decided to remain in the presidential palace, protected behind sandbags. This is

what he had to say to very early on in the conflict: "President Biden and I have exchanged many times. I am grateful to him for helping me, but he did not hear me. I informed the United States that Ukraine will fight for the whole world. But against Russia, you cannot fight alone".

For the first time in history, the whole world is watching a president at war, live. He presents himself as a citizen, a father, a husband...an affected, vulnerable and exhausted man.



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President of Ukraine visiting the frontline positions of the military in the Donetsk region just before the war

BIRTH OF A LEADER

Volodymyr Zelensky was born on 25 January 1978 into a typical middle-class family of Russian-speaking academics from Krivoy Rog, a fairly large city and important industrial centre in the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast of Ukraine. The country was then part of the USSR. During World War II, his grandfather, whose three brothers died in the Holocaust, fought against the Germans in the Red Army. His father is a computer science professor at the Kryvyi Rih State University and his mother an engineer. When he passed his baccalaureate, Ukraine had already gained its independence. He studied law but never worked in this field, preferring instead to explore the world of the stage and television.

In 1997, Zelensky together with a group of friends created his first project, 'Kvartal 95', a team of authors and actors who specialised in writing and staging comedy sketches for public performances.

Two years later, 'Kvartal 95' was invited to Moscow to participate in the Major



President Zelensky's wife, Olena Zelenska with Ukrainian soldiers undergoing rehabilitation in Queen Astrid Military Hospital in Brussels in 2019

League of KVN or 'Club of the Funny and Inventive', which is a Russian (and formerly Soviet) comedy TV show and an international competition where teams, usually composed of students, compete by giving funny answers to questions and performing prepared sketches.

It was at about this time that he fell in love with Olena, a former university classmate. They married in 2003 and that same year, he set up the Kwartal 95 studio, a television production company. Together, they wrote and produced sketches, films and political programmes with provocative and humorous tones. Their shows attracted millions of viewers and Zelensky became a star of the small screen, not only in Ukraine but also in Russia.

His programmes were broadcast on 1+1 TV, the most-watched channel



Promotion poster for 'Servant of the People'

in Ukraine, owned by one of the most powerful oligarchs in the country: businessman, billionaire and media tycoon, Igor Kolomoisky. He is also one of the most influential oligarchs in Ukraine. Kolomoisky is a somewhat shady character; a man who has made his fortune by means that are borderline legal, if not downright criminal.

So, Kolomoisky and Zelensky were in business, so to speak. Kolomoisky owned one of the main television stations, to which Zelensky's Kwartal 95 Studio sold its productions.

In 2015, Igor Kolomoisky financed a new series written by the Zelensky couple. Entitled 'Servant of the People', this programme would forever change the fate of the actor. The series tells the story of a history teacher who, overnight, finds himself president of Ukraine. This character says out loud what everyone else is thinking, and while he speaks out against corruption in Ukraine, his students film him without his knowledge. Their videos are then shared millions of times on social networks and will have unexpected consequences.

The history teacher that Volodymyr Zelensky embodies is a man of the people, propelled to the uppermost echelon of the state. But reality proved somewhat different from fiction. In 2019, Zelensky took advantage of his notoriety as a star of the small screen, as well as Igor Kolomoisky's vast fortune to stand as a candidate for the presidential election.

The 'Servant of the People' series was hugely popular and the Ukrainian people indeed yearned for new faces in politics after years of high-level government corruption and mismanagement. These are the two things that, together with Kolomoisky's encouragement may have compelled Zelensky to present himself as a presidential candidate. But the arrival on the scene of this actor who was closely linked to an oligarch of dubious reputation aroused huge skepticism among many Ukrainian and Western observers. The thought that Kolomoisky may be acting as Zelensky's man in the shadows was disturbing to the highest degree.

Volodymyr Zelensky named his political party 'Servant of the People', the same name as the television series



Igor Kolomoisky

that made him famous.

For hosting the debate preceding the second round of the election, the star showman chose Kyiv's Olympic stadium as the venue. He wanted to confront the outgoing president, Petro Poroshenko under the gaze and scrutiny of tens of thousands of spectators. And he did it in a big way; it reminded one of the arenas of Roman times, where all kinds of entertainment were offered to the population.

The incumbent tried with all his might to portray Zelensky as an inexperienced novice who lacked the courage and character to confront Russian president Vladimir Putin, but utterly failed to scathe his opponent in any significant manner.

However, many didn't appreciate this style of theatrical staging, because it turned politics into entertainment, and a serious debate between candidates into an acting performance. However, it must be said that this is precisely where Zelensky's strength lies.

And in the centre of the stadium, Volodymyr Zelensky was indeed the star. The fictional president in the hit television series, crystallised the deep desire of Ukrainians to have a sincere president, a man of the people, entirely committed to them. Ukrainians were so in need of change that they voted for an empty shell, as it were. Just because he was a new face, someone who was against the system and who didn't look like the average politician. Someone who promised to do things differently. In fact, he didn't promise anything concrete and he didn't position himself either. He was a kind of blank sheet of paper onto which people could project all their hopes and dreams.



President Zelensky among ordinary Ukrainian citizens

On April 21, 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky won the second round of voting by a landslide majority; he obtained 73% of the votes, and thus became the 6th president of Ukraine. During his first months at the head of the country, Ukrainians speculated on what kind of president he would turn out to be. People knew what kind of actor he was, but nobody knew what kind of statesman he would be. He had no experience in governance and had never held political office, even at a local or regional level.

But in April 2019, in a different part of the world, another reality TV personality and businessman had been the head of another nation since 2017: Donald Trump, 45th President of the United States. So it was not so shocking that an actor became president; Ronald Reagan was also a movie actor before he became president of the USA in 1981.

Many Ukrainian citizens already believed in Zelensky because they deeply wanted some kind of change, and saw in him the long-awaited miracle. In other words, they saw him as the one who would solve the problems that had accumulated for so many years.



President Volodymyr Zelensky in Chernobyl

FACING A FORMIDABLE ADVERSARY

However, the biggest challenge facing the new head of state lay outside the borders of Ukraine. It was Vladimir Putin, the president of Ukraine's powerful neighbour, Russia. As far as Putin was concerned, Ukraine in itself constituted a provocation, and anyone who took control of it, unless placed there with Putin's approval, would represent a challenge.

And yet, some observers believe that Putin actually saw in Zelensky the ideal president for Ukraine. In other words, an incompetent, vulnerable and weak-minded person who would be willing to make concessions. In fact, he was convinced that Zelensky would make concessions.

Vladimir Putin has been waging a war against Ukraine for years in the Donbas, a region located in the east of the country. The two self-proclaimed republics that make up the region are dominated by separatists supported by Moscow, whose army, stationed on the other side of the border, was constantly threatening to intervene.

The young Ukrainian president promised to finally put an end to this conflict.

In the Ukrainian parliament he declared: *"They have often asked me if I am ready to accept a cease-fire. What a prodigious question! And you, dear Ukrainians, what are you ready to sacrifice in the name of your loved ones' lives? That is the question. I can assure you that in order to ward off the death of our heroes, I am ready to do anything. I am not afraid to make difficult decisions. I am ready to lose my popularity, my ratings and, if necessary, without the slightest hesitation, I am*

ready to lose my position, if it can lead to peace."

The question then arose as to whether the new president would be able to perform on the international stage.

A few weeks after the elections, Volodymyr Zelensky pulled off a surprising feat: an exchange of prisoners of war. In September 2019, thirty-five Ukrainians made a highly publicised return to the country. One by one, the liberated Ukrainians got off an official plane, under the bravos of a visibly very emotional crowd. In Moscow, the contrast was striking. The 35 Russians released by Ukraine disembarked discreetly. The airport tarmac was empty and other than journalists, there were no jubilant crowds to greet them.



President Zelensky welcoming freed Ukrainian prisoners at Boryspil International Airport

"I and Vladimir Putin have achieved what we promised," declared Volodymyr Zelensky, who had come to welcome his liberated fellow citizens. Newly elected, he savoured one of his first diplomatic victories, but also the outcome of negotiations that had often taken the form of a Herculean task. The exchange of prisoners, mentioned several times under the presidency of Petro Poroshenko, remained impossible for a long time because of the unfavourable relations between Moscow and Kyiv.

But in reality, Zelensky's debut was indeed difficult. He suddenly found himself at the heart of a political scandal. It broke after the revelation of the content of a telephone conversation in which Donald Trump, then president of the United States, threatened to deprive Ukraine of \$400 million in military aid if Zelensky

refused to launch an investigation for corruption against the son of Joe Biden, his Democratic rival in the U.S. presidential election.

And in fact, it proved very damaging for Zelensky to be confronted with a case of this magnitude when he was just beginning his term. It takes a lot of self-confidence to respond appropriately in such circumstances.



Volodymyr Zelensky with US President Donald Trump

Donald Trump did manage to somewhat tarnish Volodymyr Zelensky's image. As far as Vladimir Putin was concerned, a weakened Ukrainian president was precisely what he needed in order to further his imperialist ambitions in Ukraine and the Donbas.

The Russian president is adept enough to sniff out the weaknesses of foreign heads of state and is very good at exploiting them. Russia is known for not being afraid to take on opposition stronger than itself, and Vladimir Putin excels in this exercise.

But the Ukrainian president did not lose sight of his objective: peace in the Donbas and with Russia. He looked for allies and found them in France and Germany. In Paris, he met Vladimir Putin for the first time at a summit hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron in December 2019. Although Zelensky showed poise and skill, the talks failed.

There was no political will on the part of Moscow to get out of the Donbas, because Russia uses the Donbas as leverage to influence Ukrainian domestic politics. But this summit demonstrated one point that was very

important for Zelensky; that Kyiv was ready to do anything as long as it did not compromise the territorial integrity of Ukraine and its sovereignty in reaching an agreement with Putin and its European partners.

STAVING OFF THE SWELLING TIDE OF DIFFICULTIES

The continuing war in the Donbas indeed allows Russia to exert pressure on Ukrainian domestic politics. The conflict has already claimed 14,000 lives. Ukrainians are tired of this war. And Vladimir Putin knows full well that if his counterpart fails to reach a peace agreement, he will have broken his campaign promise.

Two years after entering into the stormy waters of Ukrainian politics, Volodymyr Zelensky was witnessing his brilliance beginning to fade. The Ukrainian economy, one of the weakest in Europe, was practically at a standstill.

The head of state was at his lowest ratings in the polls and his party had suffered a bitter failure in the municipal elections.

But President Zelensky, a master in the art of staging, decided to showcase his greatest strengths. He knows how to spin things to make a story work. In May 2021, he pulled out all the stops and organised a high-profile media event in a huge hangar of the aircraft manufacturer Antonov. It was the second anniversary of his presidency, and he went on to reveal an unprecedented political and social programme for the remaining three years of his tenure.



President Zelensky at the UN

However, he did not manage to completely eradicate corruption in Ukraine; he had a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the oligarchs. Overall, he did not radically change the situation in Ukraine and he did not particularly impress the international community. If one had asked important figures of the American and world political scene before this war, probably nobody would have thought that Zelensky is an important world leader to be reckoned with.

In October 2021, the president faced a political crisis when documents uncovered in the 'Pandora Papers' investigation revealed the network of offshore companies that were created and maintained by Volodymyr Zelensky and his entourage. The president had invested part of the fortune that his television programmes had generated in foreign accounts. In his fight against the oligarchy, under the constraint of the European Union, he had reluctantly attacked his former patron Igor Kolomoisky.

He also closed down the three Russian-language channels of the oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk in order to reduce



Vladimir Putin, Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel and Volodymyr Zelensky in Paris, 9 December 2019

Russian influence in the country. This caused some concerns about press freedom. But Viktor Medvedchuk who is also the chairman of the pro-Russian political organisation Ukrainian Choice and opposed to membership of the European Union, is Vladimir Putin's best ally in Ukraine.

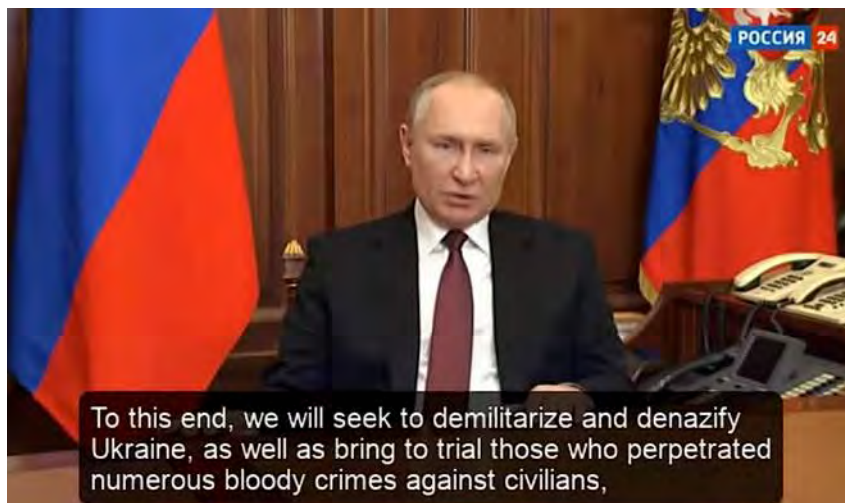
The Russian president again stepped up the pressure on Kyiv in the spring of 2021 by launching military manoeuvres with more than 100,000 men on the Ukrainian borders to the east; an operation that was widely reported on Russian television. A dangerous escalation and military confrontation was still possible at any moment.

Ukraine is disarmed and is no match for Vladimir Putin. In 1994, the country gave up its nuclear arsenal in exchange for security guarantees from the United States, Great Britain and Russia. Then Ukraine tried the diplomatic channels by ratifying global treaties that were duly signed. There was The Budapest Memorandum of 1994, consisting of a series of political assurances whereby the signatory states committed to "respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine". But the meaning of the security assurances was deliberately left ambiguous and the treaty never worked. And President Zelensky repeatedly recalled that besides that, Ukraine tried to maintain good relations and live in good understanding with Russia, thanks to the mixed families by promoting relations on historical, economic and social levels; the two countries were well and truly united in the Soviet era. But these steps did not succeed either. What more could be done?

THE STORM HITS WITH FULL FORCE

In July 2021, Vladimir Putin published a manifesto. In an essay on the history of Russia and the Soviet Union, he openly challenged Ukraine's right to exist. If the international community had been willing to take a closer look at this, it would have seen what was to come.

Vladimir Putin incessantly repeats Russia's claim to Ukraine, and this was still the case three days before the invasion. "Ukraine for us, is not just



a neighbouring land. It is an integral part of our history, culture and spiritual sphere." On February 24, 2022, he went on the offensive on the pretext of fighting against fascism. His stated goal is "to protect those ethnic Russians who have been subjected for 8 years to persecution and genocide organised by the regime in Kyiv. That is why we must fight to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine."

Volodymyr Zelensky reacted immediately. He was resolute and very clear with his fellow Ukrainians: "They tell you that we are Nazis. Tell me how a people could be Nazis when, in order to defeat this same Nazism, they themselves sacrificed 8 million lives? How could I be a Nazi? Tell that to my grandfather who served the whole war in the Soviet army".

He then issued this warning to Russia, "Don't start a war. If you do, you will see our faces. Not our backs, but our faces."

Unfortunately, these words fell on deaf ears. Since the first missile hit Ukraine, the whole nation has rallied behind



Volodymyr Zelensky holding a press conference on Russia's military operation in Ukraine, on February 25, 2022 in Kyiv

president Zelensky. There is no more political opposition to the president because everyone has understood that he is doing everything to defend the nation and that they are all in it together.

The Ukrainian president became immediately active on social networks. On Telegram he said: "We have nothing to lose but our freedom, as well as our dignity. This is our most valuable asset." And in another appearance, he said: "We have never been slaves and never will be. For this is our spirit, our destiny. Our Ukrainian armed forces are our infinite pride".

His grave and firm tone of voice expresses his determination. Every day, he addresses his people and gives them courage. He is accessible and has acquired a truly presidential stature. During one of his countless interventions on social networks, where he films himself with his smartphone, he winks mischievously when he announces: "It snowed...it's spring...and what a spring! A warlike spring! It's sad...but it will be okay. We'll defeat them all!"

The official government newsletter on the internet began to be published in several languages, and the whole world started to follow the Ukrainian president. He is playing the biggest role of his life; it is almost an existential necessity. It may be partly the result of his past experience of creating imaginary worlds, but this time, it is for real. And by necessity, the skills and talents he developed in the world of entertainment now seem of great help to him in real life.



© Ukrainian Defense Ministry Press Service

Ukrainian soldiers launching US-made Javelin missiles

He regularly addresses Russian citizens: *"I want everyone in Russia to hear me, absolutely everyone. Thousands of dead, hundreds of soldiers who do not understand why they were sent to Ukraine. Sent to Ukraine to die. To kill their fellow man. The sooner you demand that your authorities stop this war, the more lives you will save, on your own side."*

In another appearance a few days later, he said: *"Dear citizens of Russia, as already said, today began the bombing of our heroic city, Kyiv. It reminds us of the year 1941. To you, all citizens of the Russian Federation who are protesting, I want to say: we see you. This is a sign that you have heard us. It is a sign that you are beginning to believe us. Fight for us. Fight against the war"*.

Volodymyr Zelensky has become the voice of Ukraine. The iron will of the people to resist surprised many. Experts were convinced that Putin believed Ukraine would self-destruct from within on the first or second day of the invasion. But instead of

disintegrating, the whole nation came together.

Following the decree of general mobilisation, men between the ages of 18 and 60 were no longer allowed to leave the country. They had to fight; the stakes were high in what President Zelensky described as a people's war. The whole population began making Molotov cocktails, tank traps and other obstacles in order to prevent the progress of Russian tanks.

A PRESIDENT AT WAR

Ukrainians seem to have won at least one war; they have conquered the hearts and minds of people around the world. This is largely due to the fact that Volodymyr Zelensky has been extraordinarily present in the public eye from the very beginning. He makes daily speeches and he addresses parliamentarians across Europe via video link. He has conveyed a message to the Israeli parliament, urging lawmakers to abandon Israel's neutrality and help save Ukrainian lives. He has spoken to 300 members of the US Congress via Zoom. He tweets and gives his opinion instantly on everything that's going on.

On public squares throughout Europe and the world, Volodymyr Zelensky mobilises millions of people who constitute his strike force against Vladimir Putin. His message is straightforward: *"you are next, you too are threatened, help us!"*. He has become a heroic fighter for freedom. On the fourth day of the conflict, Volodymyr Zelensky signed an official application for Ukraine to join the European Union. During a video

address to members of the European Parliament in Brussels, he said, *"With us, Europe will certainly be stronger. Without you, Ukraine will be isolated; we have shown you our strength, we have proven to you that we are at least as strong as you. Prove to us that you are with us! Prove to us that you will not abandon us! Prove to us that you are truly Europeans!"*

Many were very pleasantly surprised by Volodymyr Zelensky's behaviour at the beginning of the war. He managed to compose his ideas very intelligently and formulate his thoughts brilliantly. He was convincing and concrete in everything he said. When it came to keeping the public informed about events, he proved to be a brilliant politician. He even became among the most powerful politicians in Europe today.

Every one of his videos and publications tells a story and conveys an emotion. Volodymyr Zelensky masters the art of storytelling to perfection.

The director of his victorious election campaign on social networks is now his minister in charge of Digital Affairs. From his bunker in the presidential palace, President Zelensky remains the media pro. The world is witnessing the incredible transformation of a person who has played many roles; very varied roles. We are also seeing the incredible metamorphosis that Volodymyr Zelensky's character has undergone since the events began. He has risen to the occasion in a way that was completely unexpected. He now plays the role of a man who has become an authentic president and a



© Nf

55 year-old Ukrainian Vasily Štefko from Kusnitsa in Transcarpathia has volunteered to fight the Russians despite his two artificial limbs



© Armed Forces of Ukraine

Ukrainian Tanks



© Nato

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky

commander-in-chief. Politically, this could represent a huge hope for the future.

The presence of Volodymyr Zelensky and the events in Ukraine have put Eastern Europe back on the world stage and have shown the West how precarious the situation is in this part of the world.

Asked recently by a reporter about the war and how long he thought he could hold out, Zelensky replied: *"We don't know, we don't think about it. Your question is a philosophical one...that's not the point. It's not about surviving, it's about fighting. The whole nation is fighting and we will fight until our last breath. We are fighting for peace and freedom, that's all."*

The Russian offensive in Ukraine intensified on March 15, with a series of strikes on Kyiv which is under curfew, despite a resumption of talks aimed at reaching a ceasefire, as well as a major concession by the

Ukrainian president, who said he was ready to give up membership of Nato. But the deserted capital nevertheless witnessed the visits by the Prime Ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, who had left Poland by train on March 15, to meet President Zelensky and Prime Minister Denys Chmygal.

They intended to "reaffirm the unequivocal support of the entire European Union" to Ukraine and present "a broad package of support measures", according to Warsaw. This trip came against the backdrop of the resumption of Russian-Ukrainian talks, after a 24-hour break.

"Negotiations are underway," said on Twitter, Mykhailo Podoliak, the chief negotiator on the Ukrainian side. High on the agenda were in particular, "a ceasefire and the withdrawal of troops" from Ukrainian territory. These negotiations took place by videoconference following three

face-to-face sessions in neighbouring Belarus, followed by a meeting on March 17 in Turkey of the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers.

The Kremlin has said that any "prediction" was premature, while an adviser to the Ukrainian presidency said a peace agreement was possible by "the end of May."

President Zelensky nevertheless seemed to make an important concession, by acknowledging that his country would not be joining Nato. *"We have heard for years that the doors would be open, but we also heard that we could not join. This is the truth and it must be acknowledged,"* he said during a meeting with Western officials. He had recently said he had "softened his position" on this issue.



© Ukraine Presidency

President Zelensky visiting wounded Ukrainian soldiers at a military hospital

What is certain is that the war in Ukraine has changed Europe. These are new and more dangerous times as thousands have already been killed and maimed, and millions of refugees, mostly women, children and the elderly have fled westward. The scale of the destruction is horrendous. The human drama is unfathomable.

No one knows what the outcome of the war will be or whether Volodymyr Zelensky will remain the hero who is being hailed and celebrated since the brutal invasion of his country.

But whatever happens, the young Ukrainian president has already fulfilled a mission.

Hossein Sadre



© Ukraine Presidency

Mykhailo Podoliak, Ukrainian chief negotiator

NEWS IN BRIEF

SPEECH RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY VALIDATED FOR TOWER CONTROLLERS



An air traffic controller is simultaneously responsible for three remote airports supported by outside views, radar displays, and visualization of speech recognition outputs in an electronic flight strip display

SESAR 3 JU member, DLR together with air traffic controllers from AustroControl and Oro Navigacija recently validated an assistant-based speech recognition system to support controllers working in future multiple remote tower centres. The validations are part of the project "Digital Technologies for Tower" (PJ05-W2-97 DTT), which is developing new technologies for airport towers, particularly in the area of remotely controlling multiple airports and innovative human-machine interfaces.

Flight strips are an essential tool for tower air traffic controllers. DLR's prototypic electronic flight strip display shows the most relevant information for every flight at each of the three airports in different bays.

The developed assistant-based speech recognition system first transforms the controller speech into a sequence of words. Afterwards, relevant air traffic control (ATC) concepts such as call sign, command types and values are automatically extracted from the sequence of words. Such ATC concepts are displayed and highlighted in the flight strip system without the need for the controller to manually insert information with an electronic pen. The aim is to keep the workload and situational awareness of controllers at an optimal level at all times.

The assistant-based speech recognition system uses machine learning algorithms to automatically adapt the acoustic, language, command prediction and command extraction models to new environments. Furthermore, it uses contextual knowledge from radar data, flight plan data, and meteorological data to reduce command recognition error rates.

The three-week validation was carried out from 14 February to 3 March 2022 with ten air traffic controllers from Austria and Lithuania in the TowerLab of DLR's Institute of Flight Guidance in Braunschweig. Working in a multiple remote tower setup they remotely controlled three simulated airports

in two scenarios: one with the developed speech recognition support and a second scenario for comparison without such support. During and after the simulation scenarios, researchers gathered data about the command recognition, workload, situation awareness, and system usability.

The trials are intended to prove that the automatic extraction of ATC commands supports and relieves controllers in their work. After the successful completion of the test campaign, the data collected is now being evaluated by the involved project partners. The first results will also be presented at an online open day a few weeks after the trials.

This project has received funding from the SESAR Joint Undertaking under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 874470.

SESAR is the technological pillar of the EU's Single European Sky policy and a key enabler of the European Commission's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. SESAR defines, develops and deploys technologies to transform air traffic management in Europe.

UK FAILS TO FULFIL CUSTOMS CONTROL OBLIGATIONS

The EU Court of Justice is set to enforce a hefty fine against the UK after it found negligence in the imposing of EU obligations to combat fraud and enter the correct amount of customs duties and VAT.

Since January 1, 2005, the European Union has abolished all quotas applicable to imports of textile and clothing products, particularly from China.



The three Towers of the Court of Justice

But in 2007, 2009 and 2015, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) sent mutual assistance messages to Member States, informing them of the risk of extreme undervaluation of imports of textile and footwear products from China, carried out by "shell companies", registered for the sole purpose of giving the appearance of legality to a fraudulent operation. OLAF has requested that all Member States monitor their imports of such products, to carry out appropriate customs controls and to take adequate and appropriate safeguard measures in case of suspicion of artificially low invoiced prices.

On 8 March, 2022 The European Court of Justice pronounced its judgement in relation to Case C-213/19 (Commission v United Kingdom), concerning the UK's undervaluing of imports of textiles and footwear from China and associated failure to fulfil obligations regarding customs control and the recovery of EU own resources, through failing to adopt measures necessary to combat fraud.

The Grand Chamber of the Court upheld the Commission's application in part, essentially ruling that the UK failed to fulfil its obligations under EU law. This is in particular by failing to:

- apply effective customs control measures or to enter in the accounts the correct amounts of customs duties and accordingly make available to the Commission the correct amount of traditional own resources; and
- provide the Commission with all the information necessary to calculate the amounts of duty and own resources remaining due.

The Commission has claimed losses of EUR 2.7 billion. However the Court ruled that the calculation for this amount did not meet the requisite legal standard, requesting that the Commission therefore recalculate. The Court identified an inconsistency between the form of order sought in the Commission's application and the grounds set out in it, as well as the considerable uncertainty, as a result, regarding the accuracy of the amounts of own resources claimed by the Commission.

In the light of the particular circumstances of the case, the Court approves, however, the method used by the Commission to estimate the amount of traditional own resources losses for part of the infringement period, since that method has proved to be sufficiently precise and reliable to ensure that it does not lead to a clear overestimate of the amount of those losses.

The Court also makes clear that it is not for the Court to take the place of the Commission by calculating the precise amounts of traditional own resources payable by the United Kingdom. It is, however, for the Commission to recalculate the losses of EU own resources remaining due by taking account of the findings of the Court regarding the quantum of the losses and the value to be attributed to them.

The UK will not have the right to appeal the final verdict, but it can challenge the commission on how much money should be paid once the bill is revised.

James Lookwood

THE WORLD'S FIRST CARBON-NEGATIVE DIAMONDS ARE MADE FROM AIR

Aether, a luxury jewellery company, uses proprietary technology to transform harmful air pollution into the world's rarest diamonds.

From start to finish, the process of creating Aether diamonds happens in four steps:

CO2 is captured from the air: Atmospheric collectors pull carbon dioxide air pollution straight out of the sky. As the air is drawn in, the CO2 collects in specialized filters.

CO2 is processed into raw materials: The captured CO2 is then synthesized into a usable hydrocarbon raw material perfect for growing diamonds.



Diamonds grow in reactors: The hydrocarbon raw materials are placed into powerful reactors that create the perfect environment for growing a diamond. The diamonds grow in our lab one ambitious atom at a time, as the carbon perfectly aligns into crystalline form.

The finishing touches: The growing process continues for 3-4 weeks until the exact moment when it's reached peak perfection. The rough diamonds are then sent to our expert craftspeople to cut, polish, and set them into jewelry by hand. According to Aether, this creation is the first diamond using carbon from a source that isn't underground.

«We are addressing the lab-grown market in a new way, since there is some level of emissions and environmental impact from the fossil-fuel production used for lab-growns. It gets down to both mined- and lab-grown diamonds taking sides about which harms the environment less. Aether turns that paradigm on its head. We are benefiting the planet» says co-founder and CEO of Aether Ryan Shearman.

EUROPOL SUPPORTS BELGIAN AUTHORITIES IN SHUTTING DOWN AN ILLEGAL CIGARETTE FACTORY

With the support of Europol's European Financial Economic Crime Centre (EFECC), a massive illegal cigarette factory has been raided and shut down by Belgian Customs (Algemene Administratie van Douane en Accijnzen / Administration Générale des Douanes et Accises). The illegal factory was located in a former pet hotel in Arlon, Belgium.



Fourteen workers mainly from Eastern Europe were arrested, and the Belgian authorities seized the complete cigarette manufacturing machinery. Some four tonnes of tobacco and two million counterfeit cigarettes were also seized at the premises in Arlon. An additional 40 million counterfeit cigarettes presumably manufactured at the illegal factory in Arlon were seized in trailers in an industrial area in Duffel, Belgium. These cigarettes were most likely destined for the black market in France and the United Kingdom. The tax loss in Belgium alone is estimated at EUR 20 million.

The action on 15 March was the result of intensive international cooperation via Europol. French Customs (Douane) were also involved in the investigation and seized over 25 tonnes of counterfeit cigarettes and 16 tonnes of tobacco belonging to the same organised crime group in the city of La Longueville.

The organised crime group under investigation is involved in the large-scale production and distribution of counterfeit cigarettes. A number of investigations are ongoing against them in several European countries.

European coordination

Europol's EFECC supported the investigation by providing its secure communication platform and facilitating international cooperation between Belgium and France, running cross-checks and providing analytical support and operational expertise. One of its experts was deployed to Arlon to assist the Belgian authorities with the action day.

Excise fraud is currently an EU law enforcement priority. Strategic and operational plans have been developed under the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Crime Threats (EMPACT) Excise Fraud Project. Under this umbrella, a total of 24 countries led by Belgium are working together on countering the illicit production of cigarettes in the European Union.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: LATVIA URGED TO BETTER PROTECT AND COMPENSATE VICTIMS, CONVICT TRAFFICKERS

The Council of Europe's expert group on human trafficking has urged Latvia to take further steps to identify, protect and compensate victims of trafficking, and to ensure that traffickers are convicted. These are among the main proposals

for action included in the third evaluation of Latvia's implementation of the Council of Europe's anti-trafficking convention, published by the **Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings** (GRETA). (<https://rm.coe.int/greta-implementation-report-third-evaluation-round-on-latvia/1680a59480>)

Latvia used to be primarily a country of origin of victims of trafficking in human beings, but since 2019, there has been an increase in the number of foreign victims identified in Latvia. Trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation has become the main form of exploitation, and the number of identified male victims has increased over the years. The report welcomes the authorities' efforts to develop the legislative and policy framework, and adopt a new national action plan against trafficking in human beings (2021-2023).

Since 2016, only two victims of trafficking have claimed - and were awarded by criminal courts - compensation from perpetrators. The number of victims who received state compensation was 12 in the period 2016-2020. GRETA urges the authorities to make additional efforts to guarantee effective access to compensation for victims of trafficking. Furthermore, GRETA is concerned by the low number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions for trafficking in human beings, and the fact that a significant number of the sentences handed down were suspended. Adequate human and technical resources should be provided to the Police Anti-Trafficking Unit, says the report.

In addition, GRETA urges the Latvian authorities to make full use of the available measures to protect victims and witnesses, and to prevent intimidation during the investigation, as well as during and after the court proceedings.



EMSA SIGNS COOPERATION AGREEMENTS WITH EU NAVAL MISSIONS TO PROVIDE ENHANCED MARITIME AWARENESS FOR OPERATIONS IN SOMALIA AND LIBYA

European Maritime Safety Agency

EMSA is supporting EU Naval Force operations – Atalanta and Irini – following the signature of two cooperation agreements with EU NAVFOR-Somalia (Operation Atalanta) on the one hand and EUNAVFOR MED (Operation Irini) on the other. Operation Atalanta targets

counter piracy and the protection of vulnerable vessels and humanitarian shipments off the coast of Somalia, while operation Irini seeks to enforce the UN arms embargo on Libya and in doing so contribute to the country's peace process. By cooperating with EMSA in the areas of maritime security and surveillance, multiple sources of ship specific information and positional data can be combined to enhance maritime awareness for the EU Naval Force in places of particularly high risk and sensitivity. The support provided by EMSA comes in the context of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.



F. Bogaert

EUNAVFOR-Somalia Atalanta

EMSA has been supporting the EU NAVFOR-Somalia Atalanta operation since April 2011 when piracy off the coast of Somalia was at its peak. The various measures taken to suppress piracy have been successful and the mandate of the operation was not only renewed at the beginning of last year but also expanded to include measures against illegal activities at sea, such as implementing the arms embargo on Somalia, monitoring the trafficking of weapons, and countering narcotic drugs. Through the cooperation agreement, EMSA is providing EU NAVFOR with access to an integrated maritime monitoring solution which offers the possibility of consulting vessel position data, central reference databases and earth observation products. This is integrated with EU NAVFOR data – such as vessel risk level based on vulnerability assessments – creating a specifically tailored maritime awareness picture. The new cooperation agreement extends the longstanding collaboration with EU NAVFOR for an indefinite period and is a great example of how EMSA is serving maritime security and law enforcement communities worldwide.

EUNAVFOR MED Irini

The EUNAVFOR MED operation Irini began on 31 March 2020 with the core task of implementing the UN arms embargo on Libya using aerial, satellite and maritime assets. It replaces operation Sophia but with a new mandate. While EMSA has been providing satellite AIS data to EUNAVFOR MED since 2015, the new cooperation agreement allows for access to EMSA's Integrated Maritime Services platform and in particular to the Agency's Automated Behaviour Monitoring (ABM) capabilities. These services help EUNAVFOR officers to keep a close eye on Libya's ports as well as to monitor the flow of maritime traffic in the area and target specific vessels for inspection based on suspicious behaviour picked up by the ABM tool. While the agreement is open ended, operation Irini's mandate is expected to run until 31 March 2023.

'SPIRIT OF INNOVATION' STAKES CLAIM TO BE THE WORLD'S FASTEST ALL-ELECTRIC VEHICLE

Rolls-Royce believes the all-electric 'Spirit of Innovation' aircraft is the world's fastest all-electric aircraft, having set three new world records in November 2021 when the aircraft reached a top speed of 555.9 km/h (345.4 mph) over 3 kilometres, smashing the existing record by 213.04 km/h (132mph). In further runs at the UK Ministry of Defence's Boscombe Down experimental aircraft testing site, the aircraft achieved 532.1km/h (330 mph) over 15 kilometres – 292.8km/h (182mph) faster than the previous record – and broke the fastest time to climb to 3000 metres by 60 seconds with a time of 202 seconds. During its record-breaking runs, the aircraft clocked up a maximum speed of 623 km/h (387.4 mph) which we believe makes the 'Spirit of Innovation' the world's fastest all-electric vehicle.

The 'Spirit of Innovation' is part of the ACCEL or 'Accelerating the Electrification of Flight' project. Half of the project's funding is provided by the Aerospace Technology Institute (ATI), in partnership with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and Innovate UK.

The aircraft was propelled on its record breaking runs by a 400kW (500+hp) electric powertrain and the most power-dense propulsion battery pack ever assembled in aerospace. Rolls-Royce worked in partnership with aviation energy storage specialist Electroflight and automotive powertrain supplier YASA. As well as a stunning technical achievement, the project and world record runs provided important data for Rolls-Royce's future electric power and propulsion systems for all-electric urban air mobility and hybrid-electric commuter aircraft. The characteristics that 'air-taxis' require from batteries, for instance, are very similar to what was developed for the 'Spirit of Innovation'.

Rolls-Royce has an incredible history of flying speed record attempts and breaking records, dating back to the Schneider Trophies of the early 1930s. The speed achieved by test pilot and Rolls-Royce Director of Flight Operations Phill O'Dell in the 'Spirit of Innovation' was more than 213.04 km/h (132 mph) faster than the previous record set by the Siemens eAircraft powered Extra 330 LE Aerobatic aircraft in 2017. Never in the history of the FAI record attempts has there been such a significant increase in speed over such a short time, highlighting the rapid pace at which electrification of aerospace is advancing.



© Rolls-Royce



TURKEY TROTTING – BUT IN WHICH DIRECTION?

Will Turkey be allowed to join the EU while Erdoğan remains in charge?

“Give me a Turkish army. I will conquer the world,” said Napoléon Bonaparte. Fortunately for us, no-one ever did, although he came pretty close with his French army. As with Adolf Hitler in the last century, his downfall came when he tried to conquer Russia. Turkey’s unpredictable President – the country’s 12th – has avoided stepping into the war over Ukraine, but has remained astutely positioned on the edges. Turkey has announced that it is blocking warships from entering the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, in line with a convention that gives it control over the passage of military vessels through what is a strategic area. So far, four Russian warships have been turned away. “We have alerted both countries of the region (Russia and Ukraine) and elsewhere not to pass warships through the Black Sea,” Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said. “We are applying the Montreux Convention.” The convention, which dates from 1936, governs the free movement of commercial ships in

peacetime through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits.

It has long been an area of strategic importance, with the straits linking the Aegean Sea, which is part of the Mediterranean, Turkey’s Marmara inland sea and the Black Sea. My grandfather, an Engineer Commander in the Royal Navy, had his ship sunk under him at the Dardanelles during



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu

the First World War, only escaping with difficulty from the engine room wearing only his underpants. Steam turbine engines got very hot. For many years, my mother had a fragment of the shattered glass from the Dardanelles Lighthouse mounted on an ebony base (lost years ago during house clearances) and I still have in front of me a disarmed Turkish 75mm Howitzer shell that landed on my grandfather’s ship without exploding. He had the explosives removed and mounted it on also on an ebony base. Back in those days, the writing on the shell was still in Arabic.

The European External Action Service (EEAS) has said for a long time that it sees Turkey as a potential EU member state. After all, it has been a NATO member since 1952. On its website, the EEAS points out that: “The European Union is committed to enlargement, a strategic investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security, and stability in Europe.”



© Presidential Press Service

Turkish President Erdoğan meets with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg

Turkey remains a candidate country for the EU membership and a key partner in many areas of joint interest such as migration, counterterrorism, economy, and trade.” At the moment the biggest obstacle to membership is almost certainly Turkey’s President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. There have been massive demonstrations in Istanbul and other cities over Erdoğan’s autocratic rule and his suppression of civil rights.

Turkey said it planned to make adultery illegal, having dropped the plan earlier because it would block accession to the EU. “No further chapters can be considered for opening or closing and no further work towards the modernisation of the EU-Turkey Customs Union is foreseen,” the Commission said at the time.

But that doesn’t mean that the EU is turning its back on Turkey. How could it, when Turkey is the EU’s 6th largest trading partner, representing around 3.6% of the EU’s total global trade in goods in 2020? The EU is important for Turkey, too. In 2020, around 33.4% of Turkey’s imports came from the EU, which also accepted 41.3% of its exports. The total value of trade between them was around €132.4-billion. That is a lot of revenue by any standards. Most of Turkey’s exports to the EU were machinery and transport equipment, which also, strangely, dominated EU exports to Turkey. Other goods included clothing, agriculture, and raw materials, as well as fuel and mining products. It’s been a very long courtship. An Association Agreement between Turkey and what was then known as the European Economic Community (EEC) was signed back in 1963, with a protocol that brought the two sides closer, entering into force ten years later. A full Customs Union was enacted on 31 December, 1995,

since when trade between the two has increased more than four-fold. Trade is one thing, however; complying with EU rules and standards is another, and that’s where things get tricky.

LOCKING UP AND LOCKING OUT

Observers note that Turkey currently comes nowhere near to fulfilling the eligibility criteria for EU membership, which supposedly guarantees democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and a working market economy. They have also pointed out that the EU has never managed to arrest Turkey’s backsliding on what it considers to be democratic norms. Indeed, Erdoğan seems to simply shrug off any demands the EU makes for his country to meet Western standards, despite the fact that on most global issues the two sides are fairly closely aligned. On civil rights, however, they are not.

For instance, Turkish journalist Sedef Kabas has been jailed by a Turkish court, pending her trial, charged with insulting Erdoğan (something most other leaders tend to shrug off as the price one must pay to be in charge). She was taken to a court where a judge confirmed her formal arrest. It was shortly afterwards confirmed again at the main courthouse. What is she accused of? Live on Tele 1, a TV channel linked to an opposition party, she said: “There is a very famous proverb that says that a crowned head becomes wiser, but we see it is not true. A bull does not become king just by entering the palace, but the palace becomes a barn.” She could have faced up to up to 4 years in jail but was released after just 7 days.

Erdoğan’s chief spokesperson, Fahrettin Altun, criticised Kabas’s comment, saying: “I condemn the vulgar insults



Sedef Kabas escorted to the court house

made against our president in his office.” He won’t enjoy EU membership much, then, if Turkey ever achieves it; EU leaders are constantly insulted, often in the media and rather more rudely than that. Kabas has denied the charge anyway and has been supported by the Chief Editor of Tele 1, Merdan Yanardag, who said: “Her arrest at 2 am because of a proverb is unacceptable. This is an attempt to intimidate journalists, the media and society.” Not a very successful one, either, it would appear. The European Court of Human Rights has called upon Turkey to change or revoke its laws on “insulting the president”.



© Instagram/Sezen Aksu

Sezen Aksu

But Turkey has form in this area; it’s not the first time it has allegedly overreacted to a mild rebuke or a little criticism. There seems to be a concerted attack on prominent women at the moment as well. A pro-government Islamist group heavily criticised Turkish pop singer Sezen Aksu for sharing on YouTube a 5-year-old song called “How Wonderful to be Alive”, in which there is a reference to Adam and Eve, whom the song refers to as “those ignorant ones”. Erdoğan himself threatened reprisals against Aksu because Islam views Adam as a prophet and that therefore Aksu has insulted Islam.

The European Court of Human Rights has even brought action against the Turkish government for what it deems to be political arrests and detentions. The court has also called on Turkey to change its legislation after it ruled that a man’s detention under the law violated his freedom of expression. That would seem to be an understatement: thousands have been charged and sentenced for allegedly insulting Erdoğan. That’s quite a record for the eight years since he moved from being prime minister to president. Just to set the record straight, since 2014, when Erdoğan became

president, 160,169 investigations have been launched over alleged insults to him, with 35,507 cases filed and 12,881 convictions.

A few years ago, Erdoğan even attempted to have a German comedian prosecuted in his own country for reciting a poem on television that Erdoğan found offensive. At that point, enter *The Spectator* magazine, which launched a competition with a cash prize for the person who came up with the most amusing (but very insulting) poem about Erdoğan, which was won by Britain's then-Foreign Secretary, now Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. I won't repeat it here because it's rather rude, but it promises to be an interesting summit meeting should the two leaders ever come face-to-face.

This likely antipathy hasn't prevented Turkey from flooding British TV channels with adverts for itself as a holiday destination. Practically every advertisement break carries a beautifully shot and expertly edited advertisement for the country's many delights, from the wonderful bazaars of Istanbul to the beaches of its coastal regions. They look very tempting and extremely beautiful, and they are. I haven't sampled the beaches, I'm afraid, not being much of a beach person, but I have adored Istanbul when I have been there. Apart from all the sights and its glorious mosques, its people are very friendly and its cafés serve glorious Turkish coffee (of course) – strong and black, as it should be. Interestingly, however, the adverts do not show people at prayer, wearing Islamic clothes or – in the case of women – wearing the hijab, the commonest type of veil. It's a brief sort of garment to cover only the hair and is usually worn with conventional clothes. Something similar was obligatory in the Christian West until surprisingly recently. The

hijab, however, falls far short of the all-covering burqa that is prominent in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan. This would not merit comment were it not for the way in which Erdoğan seems to be sliding towards following a stricter form of Shariah law. That doesn't quite gel with the bikini-clad girls in those television ads, unveiled and all-but undressed.

STRONG FAITH CAN KILL YOU



Joan of Arc is interrogated by The Cardinal of Winchester in her prison, 1431. Painting by Paul Delaroche (1797-1856), Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen

I certainly would not denigrate Shariah Law, nor any form of religious orthodoxy, Muslim, Christian or Jewish, as long as people are not forced under threat of reprisals to adopt it, but it has been common practice down the ages for tyrants to hide their more ludicrous and cruel acts behind their religion; don't blame me, blame God.

Joan of Arc is interrogated by The Cardinal of Winchester in her prison,

1431. Painting by Paul Delaroche (1797–1856), Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen

That's what pro-English church clerics – supposedly holy men – did on 30 May, 1431, to Joan of Arc, or St. Joan, as she became eventually. With the help of some English sections of the church, a religion supposedly followed by both sides in the war, they had concocted accusations against her including: “heresy, witchcraft and violating divine law for dressing like a man”. Who knows what they would have made of today's fashions, or the miniskirts of the 1960s? She told her judges that she had been obliged to dress as a man while in the English-supporting Duke of Burgundy's prison, where she was held for a time, because, she said, if she dressed as a woman the English soldiers molested her, which seems likely. It has even been said that she was raped there by an English member of the aristocracy, also very likely.

Her trial judges recorded the following in their notes of the trial: “We say and determine that you have falsely imagined revelations and divine apparitions, that you are a pernicious temptress, presumptuous, credulous, rash, superstitious, a false prophetess, a blasphemer against God and his saints, scornful of God in his sacraments, a transgressor of divine law, sacred doctrine, and ecclesiastical decrees; that you are seditious, cruel, apostate, schismatic, straying in many ways from our faith; and that in these ways you have rashly sinned against God and his Church.” Utter nonsense, of course, but nonsense carefully dressed up in sacred robes. Her death was a terrible travesty of justice to an extremely religious (perhaps one might even say over-religious?) teenager who had, against all expectations, led the French army to victory during what became known as the Hundred Years War. She was burned to death at the stake at the age of just 19. The English, of course, failed to conquer France, thanks in large measure to the heroic if illiterate peasant girl, Joan from Domrémy, a village in north-eastern France. But that's the sort of thing you get if you dress politics and violent hatred up as religious faith. Of course, Erdoğan would never have one of his detractors burned at the stake, but his reaction to criticism is pointing towards a similar type of attitude, albeit at a less deadly and ghastly level. Turkey cannot, of course, be compared with Russia, which, quite



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan



© Kremlin.ru

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

apart from the thousands it has killed in Ukraine, has arrested some 13,500 peaceful anti-war protestors and, it's been claimed, has been inflicting torture on some of them. In a straight choice between inviting Erdoğan around for tea and inviting Vladimir Putin, there is absolutely no contest: Recep clearly wins out over Vlad.

In many fields, Turkey and the EU remain fairly close. As the European Commission states, Turkey plays a full part in EU research and innovation programmes and has done since 2003. In 2004, Turkey launched the Turkish Research Area (TARAL), which is modelled on the European Research Area (ERA). It's said that Turkey has made good progress, especially in the ERA Priorities connected with e-infrastructures, open data and gender mainstreaming in research projects. In 2019, Turkey launched a series of measures that led to the establishment of an Action Plan to boost its own research and innovation capacity, as well as in cooperation and alignment with the ERU's own European Research Area. This could lead to it having a tangible impact on Turkey's participation in Horizon 2020 and its scheduled successor, Horizon Europe. Turkey has made steady progress in Horizon 2020 and turned out to be especially successful in "the European Research Council, in Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and in the area of Energy research," the Commission says on its website. It also points out that Turkey is still a "key strategic partner" on such issues as migration, security, counter-terrorism and the economy, despite, as it puts it, "backsliding in the areas of democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights".

FAR AWAY IS NEAR AT HAND IN IMAGES OF ELSEWHERE

Another point that worries the EU, in addition to its "democratic backsliding", is what seems to be an increasingly unilateral foreign policy. A European Parliament report – called an In-Depth Analysis (IDA) – says that Turkey is still seen as a candidate for EU membership, a key partner in economic matters and trade and a "strategic partner", which is a phrase that is arguably open to interpretation. The IDA argues that recent tensions, over the Mediterranean, Syria and Libya, have affected (the IDA says "shaped") EU-Turkey relations. The report argues that it is various "interchanging dynamics" (not my choice of phrase) that have led to the situation in which we find ourselves.

"It concludes that the differences between EU institutions and their preferences among the array of existing frameworks when it comes to EU-Turkey relations make it very difficult to find a well-functioning way forward." I assume that means simply that they don't agree on several points, making progress difficult, to put it in simpler language. The report says that the EU-Turkey relationship should be 'rebalanced' in terms of 'conflictual cooperation' (it's full of such obtuse phraseology), including sounder cooperation driven by mutual interests and confidence-building measures. Dealings between the two sides also need a 'functional rules-based relationship' that works better than the current negotiations under the accession framework. The IDA also suggests "engaging with Turkey under the umbrella of multilateral organisations". These would include NATO, but also

other international bodies. The IDA also wants to encourage Turkey to join with the EU and other "like-minded partners" in promoting "forward-looking global agendas", more closely integrating Turkey into EU agendas with a longer-term objective, on such matters as public health, the COVID pandemic having demonstrated why that's necessary.

The opening phrase of this paragraph quotes an obscure bit of graffiti that at one time decorated London's Paddington Station. It was a time of much graffiti, and no-one was ever able to identify the "artist", still less what he meant by it (although I suspect his – or her – inspiration came from marijuana or some hallucinogenic drug). The wall on which it was written in paint has long since been demolished. The language of the IDA is almost as obscure, where references are made to Turkey: "Since they hold competences when it comes to foreign and security policy-making, the dynamics of cooperation with Turkey become even more complicated." In some ways, however, Russia's illegal and violent incursion into Ukraine may point the way to a better solution.



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Minister of National Defence Hulusi Akar (right) with Greek Defence Minister Nikolaos Panagiotopoulos (left) at NATO HQ



© NRT

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Russian President Vladimir Putin and former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani

“Europe’s efforts to phase down gas imports from Russia,” comments the Al-Monitor website, “might place Turkey at the centre of routes for alternative supplies from Azerbaijan and Israel.” That would doubtless be a good thing for those concerned, although it comes nowhere near to compensating for all the death and destruction Putin has been unleashing on Russia’s much smaller neighbour. As journalist Muhdan Saglam writes: “European efforts to phase down Russian energy supplies could offer Turkey a fresh opportunity to overcome the deadlocks in its foreign policy, improve its frayed ties with the West and enhance its regional standing. Being both a NATO member and an EU membership candidate makes Turkey a more reliable transit route for gas supplies to Europe.”

It’s one thing to be presented with an opportunity but quite another to seize it. We must remember that Russia is the world’s second-largest producer of natural gas after the United States and the third largest producer of oil, supplying Europe with some 40% of its natural gas consumption and up to 30% of its oil. Isn’t it wonderful what fossilised plants and seaweed can do?

Turkey has been, of course, a very active member of the Council of Europe (CoE), a somewhat looser alliance of European states, mainly committed to the rule of law, human rights and cultural issues. However, the CoE acknowledges a debt to the EU in taking that relationship forward: “Most of the co-operation activities

with Turkey have been undertaken via European Union/Council of Europe Joint Programmes, and Turkey remains the biggest Beneficiary of the technical co-operation with the European Union.” However, it’s mainly in the CoE’s chief areas of competence that its involvement with Turkey is most clear: “The assistance has been provided in the field of fundamental rights, through the provision of support to the strengthening of democratic culture in basic education based on universal core values, and through the capacity building of Bar Associations and lawyers on European human rights standards.” The CoE has also been working in close cooperation with the EU on the very sort of reforms Turkey’s critics have been requesting and trying to work towards: “This support contributes to the strengthening of the institutional capacity of the Court of Cassation and to building public confidence in the Turkish judiciary (particularly in administrative matters) by enhancing its efficiency, effectiveness, independence and impartiality.” Not for the first time, it’s necessary to cite Erdoğan as a major obstacle to progress.

PLAYING BY THE RULES?

The Turkish authorities have been criticised many times over their response to judicial matters. Quite recently, the CoE’s Committee of Ministers urged Turkey to pay the “just satisfaction” awarded by the European Court of Human Rights to the relatives of nine Greek Cypriots who ‘disappeared’ during Turkey’s military invasion of Cyprus in 1974. The lack of effective investigations



Banner with the text We Will Enforce the Istanbul Convention

into the disappearances were found by the European Court back in 2009 to have violated the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court ruled that Turkey must pay €108,000 in damages and a further €72,000 in costs and expenses to relatives of the people who vanished. The money remains unpaid and in an interim resolution, the CoE’s Committee of Ministers expressed grave concern at what it called “flagrant disrespect of Turkey’s international obligations as a member of the Council of Europe and party to the European Convention on Human Rights.” Since Turkey chose to invade and occupy the northern part of Cyprus, the whereabouts of hundreds of people remain unknown. It has been suggested that Turkey may even get expelled from the Council altogether. What’s more, Turkey has declined to impose sanctions against Russia as the EU (and many other countries) wanted. It condemned Russia’s invasion and attempt to annex Ukraine but it could hardly do more, given that it has been occupying a quarter of Cyprus since 1974.

Turkey, under a previous president, ardently pushed to get its own Convention on preventing gender violence, the Istanbul Convention, through the Council of Europe and onto the statute books, and it succeeded, for which it was widely applauded. As the Council puts it on its own website: “The Istanbul Convention recognises violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women. Based on a victim-centred approach, it offers practical tools to ensure the protection of women and girls, their safety and empowerment. It links these to the wider goal of achieving equality between women and men.”



Ursula Von der Leyen, the European Commission's first female president, forced to sit on a nearby sofa at the Turkish presidential palace

It is the most comprehensive legal framework that exists to tackle violence against women and girls, covering domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, female genital mutilation (FGM), so-called honour-based violence, and forced marriages. Under Erdoğan, however, Turkey has now withdrawn from it, which shocked and disappointed many of its partner countries. Last November, the German newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* sought to explain Erdoğan's disregard for the rule of law. "The Turkish president won't be intimidated by the criticism from the West," Istanbul correspondent Susanne Güsten wrote: "He controls most of the media in Turkey and claims that his country is a squeaky-clean constitutional state of which America and Europe are so envious that they continually hurl baseless accusations at it." The Istanbul Convention was opened for signature in Istanbul on 20 May 2011 and Turkey itself was the first to ratify it in 2012. Since then, it has been adopted by 45 countries and the European Union itself. Quitting it will not help Turkey's supposed bid to join the EU.

Where domestic or any other form of violence against women is concerned, however, Erdoğan, who insists he is devout in his Muslim faith, should, perhaps, recall the Qu'ran, which demands that women should be treated fairly, although, in the verses about women, it also suggests that violence is allowed, at least between man and wife. The passage is phrased in language that few today would endorse: "Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over another," reads part of Verse 39 of the Sura headed *An-Nisa*, 'The Women', "and for that they have expended of their property. Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret of God's guarding. And those you fear may be rebellious, admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat



Turkish human rights defender Osman Kavala

them." Not a solution I would endorse or recommend.

Perhaps, however, that's why Erdoğan chose to disassociate himself from the Convention his country had drafted and fought for in the Council, persuading other countries to support it. After all, apart from that suggestion that it's OK for a man to beat his wife, elsewhere the Qu'ran insists that men and women are equal in the eyes of God: "Surely, men who submit themselves to God and women who submit themselves to Him, and believing men and believing women, and obedient men and obedient women, and truthful men and truthful women, and men steadfast in their faith and steadfast women, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their chastity and women who guard their chastity and men who remember Allah much and women who remember Him – Allah has prepared for all of them forgiveness and a great reward." Allah may have done, but apparently Erdoğan has not.

Nor has Erdoğan complied with a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights demanding the immediate release of human rights defender Osman Kavala, a ruling that Turkey has been ignoring for two years. As a result the Committee of Ministers has started infringement proceedings against Turkey that could see it forced out of the Council altogether. The campaigning organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that: "The court found that by using detention for political ends, Turkey had violated Kavala's rights, including the right to liberty, and had abused the discretion given to governments to impose legitimate limitations on rights, under articles 5 and 18 of the European Convention on Human Rights, respectively." Expulsion would not be immediate, but a suspension of Turkey's voting rights could be. Turkey must be aware that this is a serious development. As HRW points out: "The Kavala judgment is legally binding, yet the Turkish authorities have snubbed the Strasbourg court and ignored the decisions of the Committee of Ministers, which represents the Council's 47 member states, calling for his release and the full restoration of his rights." It would seem that Erdoğan doesn't feel obliged to fulfil his obligations, even at



the risk of losing his country's chance for membership of the CoE and with it any hope of joining the EU.

Not everything is going well for Turkey, even if you ignore the impasse over EU membership and application of European Court of Human Rights judgements. By early March this year, the Turkish lira had lost yet more of its value, while annual inflation hit a record high of 54% because of the rising cost of fuel. Supporting – or not supporting – Putin's Russia comes at a price. The Turkish Statistical Institute announced that the prices of consumer goods rose by almost 5% in February alone because of the cost of energy. According to the figures, producer prices have increased over the past year by a staggering 105%. The lira has lost close to half of its value over the past 12 months. Predictably, Erdoğan blamed the lira's fall and the disastrous price rises on what he called "foreign financial tools" without really specifying what they are. It's never his fault. One of the Court's judgements wasn't enacted, his government protested, because it had been 'poorly translated'. I love Turkey, or at least I love that wonderfully chaotic and colourful city of Istanbul. I'm afraid my deep affection doesn't really extend to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The last time I was in Istanbul, the walls of coffee bars, restaurants and public buildings were covered with images of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the father of the modern Turkish state. I don't know if they're still there, but I hope so. Countries should be proud of their histories. With Turkey's deepening divide with Europe – and its apparent abandonment of the rule of law – I cannot see Erdoğan's picture taking their place any time soon.

T. Kingsley Brooks



TOO SMALL TO SEE, TOO BIG TO IGNORE

The decomposed remains of microorganisms from half a billion years ago are essential to modern life

There was nothing that we would recognise as ‘a creature’ wandering through the shallows of the Ediacaran seas. Indeed, ‘wandering’ may be too modern a term to be appropriate for things that still reproduced by cloning and that, in many cases, oozed, rather than walked or crawled, across the sandy or muddy sea floor, eating even smaller marine microorganisms. Five hundred and fifty million years ago life was still struggling to assert itself on this globe of ours, at that time devoid of land-based living things. The tiny fossil trilobite I keep on my desk would not creep about on a sea floor for another one hundred million years. But those microorganisms I mentioned that definitely did exist were vital: it was cyanobacteria that produced oxygen, after all, as a by-product of early photosynthesis, and that oxygen would swell in volume over the millennia and prove to be vital for the biota that followed, like

ferns, eozoa, jellyfish, charnia, dickinsonia, and eventually us. These microorganisms were made up of plankton: zooplankton in the case of what we must class as ‘animals’ (based on the shapes of their cells) and phytoplankton for those, such as algae, we would class as ‘plants’. There were a few microbes in the mix, too.

Those tiny microorganisms, too small to be seen without a microscope, would continue to be vital to the present day. They often got mixed in with the mud and silt on the sea floor and then buried when a landslide brought a heap of sediment down whatever river discharged nearby. Only the more energetic creatures



Shell's Fram gas and condensate field in the UK central North Sea off the coast of Aberdeen, Scotland

© Shell International Limited

of the time would have the energy to escape; those things left behind, living but not in a way most of us would readily recognise, would become subject over the eons of time to heat and pressure in their anaerobic tombs, and that would gradually turn them into hydrocarbons, trapped under impermeable rock. It's widely believed (although unproven) that the plants and creatures of the Ediacaran era died out and were replaced on the tree of life when the Cambrian era began, bringing with it creatures of a predatory nature that ate them. History has a habit, it seems, of repeating itself.

Bringing the resulting natural gas that developed from these long-dead microorganisms to the surface is – not surprisingly – big business. Very big indeed. And there is no shortage of predators. For Azerbaijan, the industry of extracting fossil fuels is very old; the country was exporting oil from as long ago as the 7th century BC and is sometimes described as the world's most ancient oil-producing country. Now it's being asked to produce more. The reason for the extra demand is, of course, Russia's vicious invasion of Ukraine. This has resulted in the West trying to reduce its dependence on imports from Russia. The European Commission has talked of replacing it with liquid natural gas, LNG, but Europe would need a lot and would face fierce competition to obtain it. The Commission has estimated that it could obtain some 10-billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas from other pipeline sources, getting another 50-bcm from LNG. But 50-bcm would be around 10% of the annual global supply and Europe won't be alone in trying to secure a share.

According to the Brussels-based think tank, Breughel, Russian gas mainly arrives along three routes: Nord Stream (the original one, since Nord Stream 2 was never signed off and now seems unlikely ever to be), Yamal, which comes through Poland, and Turkstream, which comes via Turkey. Russian President Vladimir Putin has threatened to turn off the gas supply if Europe turns its back on Russian oil. He may, of course, although the Russian economy is suffering from all the boycotts and sanctions and turning off its gas exports to Europe



The Turkstream pipe line

would hurt it further, despite Putin's huge war chest. It's believed that his war in Ukraine is costing Russia \$20-billion (€18.08-billion) per day, while the country's economy is actually shrinking, largely because of rampant corruption.

Putin and his oligarch friends have syphoned billions out of their country's economy to fund their lavish lifestyles and to pay for pleasure palaces, ludicrously elaborate yachts and to treat pliable but influential Western politicians to luxurious holidays. Even so, Russia's GDP in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) comes to an estimated \$4.1-trillion (€3.7-trillion), the second largest in Europe and the 6th largest in the world. So, Putin can afford to attack his neighbours; Alexander Lukashenko, the accident-prone President of Belarus, appears to have revealed a map suggesting that Putin has his eyes on Moldova next.

PIPING IN THE FUTURE

Which brings us back to the subject of energy. The EU imported energy from Russia worth \$108-billion (€99-billion) in 2021. That's a reduction on 2012's figure of \$173-billion (€157-billion) but it's still a lot of gas. If the figure is to be cut further, Europe needs to find an alternative source, even if it's unlikely ever to be able to turn off the taps completely. After all, Europe is heavily dependent on Russia for energy, with two-fifths of its gas and more than 25% of its crude oil originating there. Step forward, Azerbaijan, which increased its production of natural gas by 36% between 2017 and 2019, and in 2021, Azerbaijan oil and gas

condensate production rose by a further 0.1 percent from the preceding year to an impressive 34.581-million tonnes. Natural gas output increased by 18.1 percent to 43.864 bcm.

It also has a new pipeline link to Europe. The gas mainly comes from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz field, situated offshore in the Caspian Sea. There are several pipelines in service, the latest completed in October 2020. Azerbaijan also has the South Caucasus pipeline (SCP), connecting to neighbouring Georgia and Turkey, from where it is connected to the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline. This in turn links to the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), feeding gas to Greece and, through Albania, to Italy.



President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan (r) and Charles Michel, President of the European Council in Baku, July 2021

Italy is the largest buyer of Azerbaijan gas, it was revealed in a report from TAP AG. The report says that Azerbaijan has exported 10-billion cubic metres (bcm) through the TAP pipeline, with 8.5-billion cubic metres going to Italy. In a TAP AG press release, Managing Director Luca

Schieppati said: “10-bcm is a symbolic but important milestone. Just over a year after starting commercial operations, we have provided our shippers with efficient, reliable and uninterrupted transport services, making an important contribution to Europe’s energy security and supply diversification. Now we can reach TAP’s full transport capacity of 10-bcm per year. In addition, we can add additional capacity through short-term auction.”



© TAP AG

TAP AG Managing Director Luca Schieppati

According to US Energy Information Administration, Azerbaijan’s Energy Minister, Parviz Shahbazov, has said that his country’s gas exports to Italy this year will reach 7.4-bcm. TAP’s Head of Commercial Operations expects the field’s gas output to double as development continues.

It’s certain that cutting off supplies of Russian energy would cause pain for Europe, although the Brussels-based economic think tank, Bruegel, believes it would be temporary; Europe would adjust. The United States, Canada and the UK have placed embargoes on Russian energy, but they are less dependent than the European Union and can easily afford to. Instead, the EU has launched what it calls REPowerEU (yes, I know it’s



© Gazprom

Russian Gazprom's UGS natural gas storage facility in Rehden Germany

a silly name) which aims to reduce imports of Russian gas by two thirds by the end of this year. Its founders want Europe to be completely independent of Russian fossil fuels before 2030. According to Bruegel, a number of market players have been paring back their purchases of Russian oil and gas, fearing damage to their reputations or the possible impositions of further sanctions. In December 2021, Russia exported 5-million barrels per day (mb/d) of crude oil and 2.8 mb/d of oil products, with more than 70% going to European and US markets. Overall, oil and petroleum products accounted for 37% of Russia’s export revenue last year.

The Chinese believe that the desire to cut reliance on Russian hydrocarbons will help Chinese exports by boosting demand for solar and wind power installations, possibly quadrupling it by 2030. That would mean 480 gigawatts (GW) of wind power and 420 GW of solar farms, raising the EU’s installed solar energy capacity to 585 GW in 2030, all in a bid to compensate for the loss of 20-bcm of gas from Russia. The withdrawal of Russian energy, though, would cause a massive global shock, with some 3-mb/d of Russian crude oil and a further 1-mb/d of oil products being

taken off-line. It seems unlikely that other producers could make good the shortfall. The strategic oil reserves of 1.5 billion barrels currently held by members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) could only compensate for one year, at best. Dipping into it would have to be accompanied by a serious search for alternative sources. The EU requires its member states to retain emergency stocks that are equivalent to 90 days of net imports or 61 days of consumption, whichever is higher.

The website of “The Conversation” lays some of the blame for the difficulty in resolving the Russian gas issue at the EU’s own door, for making over-complicated rules. With Russian gas making up around 40% of the EU’s gas consumption, EU leaders have been looking at alternative gases, such as hydrogen and biogas, but that’s not the answer, according to the website. “The more efficient solution would be to swap fossil fuel burning boilers for alternatives that run on electricity, such as heat pumps. These new proposals supplement the original 2030 climate target plan, published in September 2020.” Of course, the electricity itself will need to be generated somehow. It will be far easier to replace Europe’s imports of crude oil than it will be to replace gas. Much of the crude still comes by ship, whereas the gas is piped.



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The European Commission’s presentation of a toolbox of measures to tackle exceptional situations and their impacts

TURN ON THE TAP (WHICH TAP?)

In total, the EU must look to replace some 155-billion cubic metres of natural gas, but The Conversation argues that the EU is wrong to step up production of alternatives, such as



Pumpjacks and drilling rigs in Azerbaijan

“renewable gases”, by which it means things like hydrogen and biogas, whilst seeking new routes to bring gas into the European Union from Qatar, the United States, Norway, Algeria and, of course, Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, the Commission wants to see Europe producing between 25 and 50 billion cubic metres of hydrogen by 2030, which will require massive and very costly infrastructure investment, while getting an extra 18-billion cubic metres of biogas by the same target date, which would mean paying farmers to expand their production of crops in ways that would harm the environment, such as by the massive use of chemical fertilisers. The birds, mammals and pollinators would not be happy. The website argues that switching to heat pumps would be less environmentally damaging.

It's known that Israel has massive supplies of natural gas but they are largely untapped. The question is: how would the gas – supposing Israel starts utilising it – be transported to Europe? On 9 March, Israel's President, Isaac Herzog, visited Ankara amidst speculation that if it taps into its massive Leviathan gas field, it will be able to pump it to Europe through Turkey, although arranging and constructing the required infrastructure would take time and be expensive. Azerbaijan's Energy Minister, Parviz Shahbazov has confirmed that his country is sitting on some 2.6-trillion cubic metres of gas, which he told journalists would be: “enough for its neighbours and European countries”.

EU Energy Commissioner Kadri Simson has reached an agreement with Baku to “step up our

partnership”. With the best will in the world, however, Azerbaijan's gas reserves will certainly help but cannot take the place of the gas coming from Russia. Even if its goal of increasing output to 20-billion cubic metres per year is realised, it's still only a fraction of the volume coming in from Russia. So, Russia still holds the whip hand on energy. Indeed, from Europe's perspective, it's rather worse than that. Russia also supplies part of the essential supply chain for the nuclear industry.

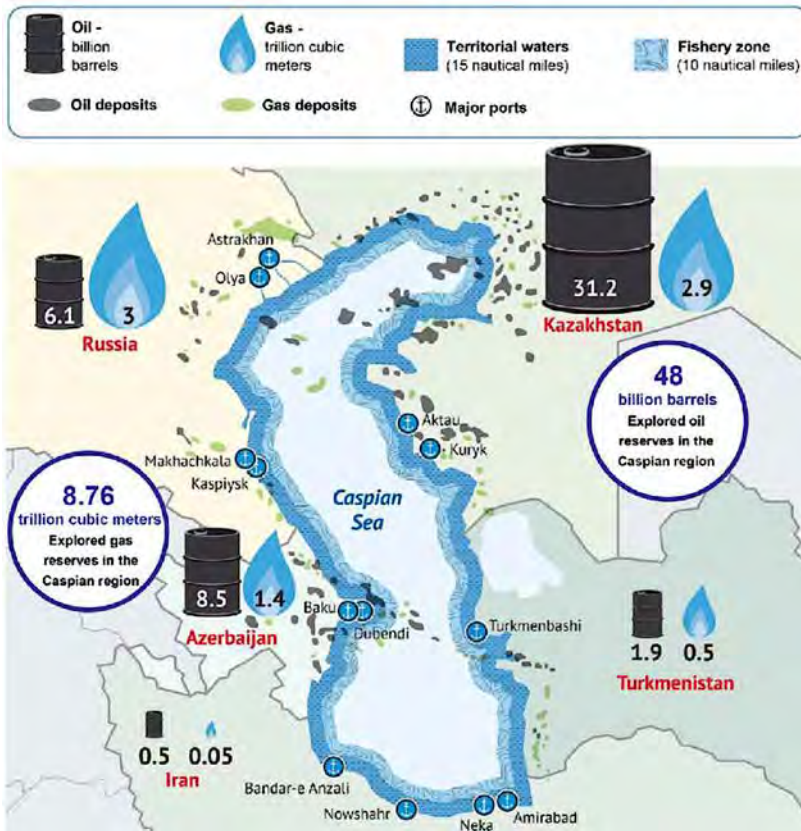
That matters more than it may appear at first glance. 32 countries use nuclear power – in France's case, it gets 69% of its electricity from nuclear power, while Ukraine gets 51%, Hungary 46%, Finland 34% and Sweden 31%, according to India's excellent “The Economic Times”. Virtually all of the world's 440 commercial nuclear power stations obtain at least some of their nuclear fuel from Rosatom, a Russian state-run enterprise. Relatively few companies possess the facilities or the expertise to process raw uranium ore, enrich it and turn it into fuel rods. Rosatom is one of them and a leading exponent. Raw uranium ore is not found just anywhere. Kazakhstan produces some 40% of the global supply, with smaller amounts coming from Canada, Australia and Namibia, but most of it is shipped through Russia for processing before it hits the world market. Even the US relies on Russia for up to 20% of its yearly uranium supply. China buys from Russia, too. If Russia were to retaliate in response to Western sanctions by withholding supplies, The Economic Times has calculated that it would start to affect the US and Europe “within 18 to 24 months”.

Before everyone in Europe starts cheering about Azerbaijan's gas, it's worth noting that there are political problems. Azerbaijan has been accused of deliberately interrupting the supply of its gas to Artsakh, also known more commonly as Nagorno-Karabakh. The disruption of supply has already affected educational establishments there, according to Human Rights Ombudsman Gegham Stepanyan. In a Tweet, he wrote that the interruption has created a lot of problems in schools and kindergartens, which rely on gas for heating and cooking. Stepanyan wrote that: “70% of hospitals in Artsakh are heated by gas, 400 patients are receiving inpatient treatment, 46 are children of different ages, 50 are mothers of new-borns and their children. Azerbaijan continues to deprive the people of Artsakh of gas supply in the absence of international reaction.” The interruption was caused by a damaged pipeline – claimed with some justification to have been deliberately caused – but it is now under repair. The row, which became yet another a war, involved Armenia and Azerbaijan, both of which claim Nagorno-Karabakh, whose own citizens call the place Artsakh. Several cease-fires have broken down (there is one in place at present that is supposed to signal the end of hostilities, although it's unlikely to be), putting gas and crude oil exports at risk. Russia is pledged to defend Armenia, Turkey is pledged to defend Azerbaijan, while Iran also has a large Azeri minority. The two sides hardly speak to each other if they can avoid it, which creates the risk of fighting breaking out and making peace efforts fairly useless. There were sporadic low-level clashes throughout last year.



Gegham Stepanyan

© Twitter



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WHERE? WHAT? WHY?

Azerbaijan is a large flat area of landlocked low land with the Caucasus mountains to the north and the Karabakh upland of Qarabag Yaylasi to the west. The capital, Baku, is on the Apsheron Peninsula, which juts into the landlocked Caspian Sea, described by geographers as an endorheic basin, a drainage basin that lacks an outflow so that inflowing water is trapped there. With a total surface area of about 386,400 square kilometres, the Caspian is about 1,200 km long and 320 kilometres wide, making it the world's largest inland sea. Some describe it as a saltwater lake instead, although endorheic basins are often the remains of larger bodies of water subsequently cut off by tectonic changes, denying them access to the sea. The Mediterranean was one before the Atlantic broke through at Gibraltar. The Caspian probably became cut off from the Black Sea by an uplift in the Miocene Epoch, some 13.8 million years ago. Previously, it may have even had links with the Barents Sea in the far-away Arctic Ocean.

The Caspian Sea itself has a complex geology, its northern sea bottom being extremely ancient

and dating back to pre-Cambrian, almost certainly Ediacaran, times, when those microscopic organisms flourished before being turned into gas and oil by later earth movements. The more southerly part of the Caspian rests on a very ancient basalt crustal structure, now buried under sedimentary layers that are tens of kilometres thick. Azerbaijan, which abuts the Caspian to its western shore, is an ancient country, too: pictures on rock there – petroglyphs – show what look like dancing figures and date back to the 10th century BCE, but the country could hardly have been placed in a region so predicated towards conflict, surrounded as it is by Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Georgia. Most importantly, to its west is little Armenia, with whom it has been at war, on and off, since the break-up of the Soviet Union and almost certainly for far longer. Indeed, tensions between the populations led Stalin to declare Armenia an independent oblast within Soviet Azerbaijan. The population of Azerbaijan is mainly Turkic and Shia Muslim, although the country itself is secular. Nagorno-Karabakh is ethnically Armenian, by and large, and therein lies the root of the problem.

Since gaining its independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has significantly reduced poverty and has redirected the profits from its petrochemical industries to improve infrastructure. According to a report by America's CIA, however, it is still plagued by corruption, with unfair elections, the suppression of political opposition and the abuse of human rights. The presidency remains in the hands of the Aliyev family, despite "serious shortcomings" in the most recent election that were spotted by Western observers. Aliyev's government is trying to diversify the economy to reduce the country's dependence on gas and oil, but the CIA says it also needs reforms to address weakness in government institutions, especially in the fields of education, health and justice.

Officially, the long-running war is over, although occasional casualties are still being reported. In a post for New Geopolitics Research Network, Benyamin Poghosyan, who chairs the Center for Economic and Strategic Studies in Yerevan, Armenia, wrote: "More than 13 months after the end of the 2020 Karabakh (war), the keyword in describing the future of Nagorno Karabakh is ambiguity. Russian troops provide a minimum level of security for Armenians living there; however, the recent incidents that resulted in the killings of three Armenian civilians have sent a clear signal that Russians cannot prevent such cases. Azerbaijan has a clear-cut strategy regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh – war has solved the conflict, there can be no return to the discussions about any status for Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan rejects the mere existence of Nagorno-Karabakh." Which presumably means that the residents of Nagorno-



Benyamin Poghosyan, Vice President for Research, Armenia National Defense Research University, Yerevan

© Wikicommons



Map of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war

Karabakh can forget the name 'Artsakh'. This may indeed be what Aliyev would like but geographically, geologically, it is very much still there, and for gas-hungry Europe, very important indeed. Observers admit that Armenia is unlikely to do anything about Azerbaijan's refusal to recognise the existence (and certainly a degree of independence) of Nagorno-Karabakh. As Poghosyan wrote: "Yerevan argues that the war has not solved the conflict and that the OSCE Minsk Group should resume the negotiation process based on the Madrid principles and basic elements elaborated back in 2007 or on their updated versions." It seems very unlikely to happen, however: Baku seems to work on the principle of: "quit while you're ahead".

STILL WAR AND NOT MUCH PEACE

Azerbaijan recently said that it will now start to return its refugees to the regions of Nagorno-Karabakh that it captured from Armenian separatists last year. It's believed that some three-quarters of a million Azerbaijanis were displaced when Baku lost control of the region. When the dormant conflict flared up again in September, it claimed some 6,000 lives. After six weeks of fighting, Russia brokered a ceasefire that led to Armenia ceding large areas of territory to Azerbaijan. But an ending of hostilities, of course, doesn't mean that everyone is at peace. Armenia has, for instance, protested over the participation of UN representatives at an event organized by Azerbaijan in the Karabakh town of Shushi (also known as Shusha, in Azerbaijan. It is

the capital of the Karabakh Khanate. Its official name is Şuşa). Yerevan says the UN demonstrated a lack of neutrality and has demanded that it return to its traditionally neutral position over the suspended conflict (I can't say "ended", because it is probably not). The acting UN Coordinator in Armenia, Lila Pieters, was requested to attend the Armenian Foreign Ministry to be informed that Armenia "strongly condemns the involvement of the UN office in Azerbaijan" in the event, on 18 March, which was held to celebrate Azerbaijan's 30 years of UN membership. Yerevan also delivered an official note of protest. After all, Azerbaijan could have held the event in Baku. Holding it in Shushi is a bit like rubbing salt in an open wound.

Strange as it may seem, with the conflict being officially 'over', Yerevan still has a Foreign Ministry, which issued this protest statement over the Shusha event: "Official Baku, in line with its style, continues to wage a destructive policy aimed at legitimizing the results of its aggression against Artsakh, trying to involve and exploit the international



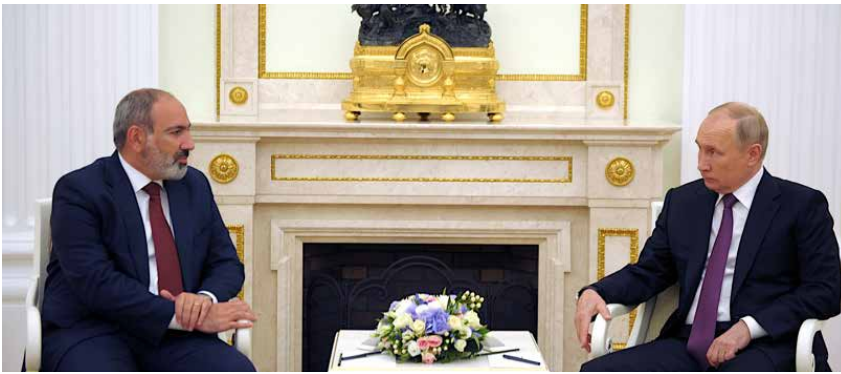
Acting UN Resident Coordinator Lila Pieters Yahia

community and various structures in that process. The organization in Artsakh's occupied town of Shushi of a solemn ceremony dedicated to the 30th anniversary of Azerbaijan's membership to the United Nations and the participation of representatives of the UN and its structures in this event is another manifestation of this policy. The Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Artsakh strongly condemns the holding of such an event in Shushi." It doesn't seem that the two sides are much closer to becoming friends.



Shah Deniz natural gas field, Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan sector

Yerevan, however, is unlikely to prevent Azerbaijan selling its much-needed gas to Europe, with Turkey's help. At a meeting of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, Azerbaijan's Energy Minister, Parviz Shahbazov, stressed again that his country's 2.6 trillion cubic metres of gas will be enough to satisfy Europe, as well as satisfying Azerbaijan's neighbours. "The expansion of the Southern Gas Corridor project will definitely begin," he told the media, "And in this direction, we have started dialogue with European countries, Western Balkan countries, and other Eastern European countries." The Anadolu Agency (AA) website reported on the meeting, where it was stressed that the biggest section of the Southern Gas Corridor, which carries gas from the Shah Deniz 2 gas field through Turkey and on to Europe, known as the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project (TANAP), has been transporting gas to Turkey for almost four years. Attendees agreed that the OPEC+ organisation of oil and gas producing countries is not in a position to "solve the political events, military conflicts and some other



© Kemi.ru

Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin

problems in the international arena.” Russia’s invasion of Ukraine fits into this impossible category, of course.

Shahbazov told AA: “I think that in the next meetings, the new situation will be discussed and the necessary decisions will be taken for the regulation of the international oil markets.” Azerbaijan’s President, Ilham Aliyev, has visited Ankara for talks with the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan about bilateral ties and the war in Ukraine, which cannot avoid seriously affecting the trade in oil and gas. Shahbazov told AA that the two leaders discussed the Southern Gas Corridor project. “Azerbaijan has an estimated \$19.3-billion (€17.45-billion) investment in Turkey, of which \$17-billion (€15.4-billion) is in energy,” he said. He also talked about Azerbaijan’s plans to build various projects through the Zangezur corridor, which, he said, would be: “important not only for Azerbaijan and Turkey, but also for all countries of the region.”

The corridor is being built in the wake of last year’s flare-up in the long war over Nagorno-Karabakh, in which Azerbaijan claims to have “liberated” some 300 settlements “from Armenian occupation”. That is almost certainly not how those events are recalled in Yerevan. Remember, Vladimir Putin claims to be “liberating” Ukraine.

According to the unexpectedly interesting and informative “Weapons and Warfare” website, the upsurge in fighting should not have surprised anyone, whilst still holding lessons for the West: “In the last decade, it was no secret that Azerbaijan was steadily building up its armed forces. But, despite this, few experts predicted

this month’s clear-cut military victory by Azerbaijan over Armenia. Much of this victory is credited to the technical and financial side of the war: Azerbaijan was able to afford more and it had Turkish and Israeli technology that was simply better than what Armenia had to draw on.” Armenia’s air defence systems relied on out-of-date technology, having been developed in the 1980s, and simply had no answer to Azerbaijan’s armed drones. The Weapons and Warfare site says Azerbaijan learned to work around Armenia’s clear advantages: “Before the war, on a tactical level the Armenian army was superior: it had better officers, more motivated soldiers, and a more agile leadership. In all previous wars with Azerbaijan, this proved to be decisive.”

But the drones allowed the Azeris to know exactly where Armenian forces were gathering and in what strengths. It was proof, if any more were needed, that advanced technology delivers massive military advantages to whichever side has it. Even so, as with all wars, misinformation played a part. Azerbaijan claimed that its drone armaments had destroyed more tanks than Armenia actually possessed.

LIFE WILL ALWAYS BE A GAS

Russia’s unprovoked assault on Ukraine has changed the energy market in Europe, almost certainly for good, or at least for a very long time. Natural gas futures in the EU traded at €98 per megawatt-hour, still falling on news of more supplies of liquid natural gas (LNG). Germany has agreed with Qatar to continue negotiations about long-term supplies, following a visit by Germany’s Economy Minister, Robert

Habeck, to Qatar. Habeck has also been urging oil-rich Arab states not to profiteer from the Ukraine war by upping prices as they step into the gap left by Russia. Germany is also considering a hydrogen pipeline from Norway, while Gazprom seems to be making the most of its country’s aggression by ignoring it, continuing to supply gas to the EU because, it says, European consumers have asked it to. Yes, I know: that sounds most unlikely but it is what is being claimed.



© Wikipedia/Sandro Halank

Germany’s Economy Minister, Robert Habeck

When tiny marine organisms, animal and vegetable, were floating in the Ediacaran seas that had warmed, following a “snowball Earth” super-ice age, who would have thought they would come to be weapons in a vicious war? Or that trading in them would become a vital part of diplomacy? Eventually, they settled to the bottom of their sea, of course, became encased in silt and mud, and gradually heated in their aerobic tombs, began the long, long journey towards becoming natural gas. One day, we would trade it. One day we would find it hard to live without it. It’s a very good job the organisms floated, sank and were buried in many different places, because our modern world demands a lot of gas, all supplied by deceased microorganisms. We still have to rely on the flora and fauna of half a billion years ago to supply it, and that is likely to remain the case for a great many years into the future. Never write off microorganisms. They can be very useful, wherever and whenever on Earth they lived.

Toby Bowman-Grant

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Ukrainian refugees in a Romanian gymnasium used as a shelter

FROM ROMANIA:

We Stand with Ukraine

More than 75 years of peace on the European continent (briefly interrupted by the 1990s war in the Balkans), have brought prosperity and stability to a continent which has been the cradle of world civilization, but which was also brought to its knees by two World Wars that reduced it to ashes. Europeans can never forget the horrors that their ancestors have gone through. That is perhaps why, when war in Ukraine started, many were stunned and frightened. Most of us have lived only in peaceful times and never imagined that such horrible destructive actions, of such magnitude, would ever be possible again on European soil. And yet, it is happening, here, close to us. Ruins, bombs, civilian casualties, tension and terror are next door.

One cannot help but be impressed; one cannot help but cry one's heart out for this drama of modern times, that has the potential to affect the entire continent. And after the huge

wave of Syrian refugees in 2015, when Europe welcomed millions fleeing war in the Middle East, we are now facing an even bigger challenge. It was initially estimated by the UNHCR that between 4 and 7 million Ukrainians might flee from their country, ravaged by the Russian assault.

Only one week after the start of the war, over 1 million people (mostly

women and children) had fled Ukraine through the neighbouring countries of Poland, Romania, Moldova, Slovakia and Hungary. The refugees are coming every minute, every hour, by car, train and even by foot in what is already considered the worst humanitarian crisis since the end of WWII. Nobody knows how long this will last and what the future holds for us all, but what we do know for sure is that we must show



© UNHCR/Nihal Eremia

UNHCR protection officer Batyr Sapbyyev talks to refugees from Ukraine on a bus transfer from Moldova to Romania

solidarity, and help our European friends. ‘We have to prepare for millions’ said Ylva Johansson, the EU Home and Affairs Commissioner. Normally Ukrainians may enter visa-free into the EU and stay for up to 90 days. But if things get worse in their country, these people will probably have to stay longer, perhaps permanently. For the first time in its history, the European Union will use a ‘temporary mass protection’ law (which is in place since 2015 but was never used before), allowing refugees to extend their stay in the Union. The European Union will grant work and stay permits for all Ukrainian refugees for up to 3 years. There are already voices saying that a refugee distribution mechanism should be instated. “The EU needs a resettlement mechanism to get the wounded, women and children out of Ukraine” argued Agne Bilotaite, Lithuania’s Interior Minister.



© European Union

Ylva Johansson, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs

Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said: “the humanitarian consequences on civilian population will be devastating. There are no winners in war, but countless lives will be torn apart”. The UNHCR has mobilized to help displaced Ukrainians. It has a strong presence in the region, coordinating the refugee response together with other UN agencies,



© UNHCR

Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

local authorities and NGOs. The UNHCR declared that they are sending staff, resources and relief items “while preparing to provide also cash assistance via cards as needed”.

Because martial law was declared in Ukraine, preventing men aged 18 to 60 to leave the country, most refugees are now women and children, the most vulnerable populations. There are also 2 million people with disabilities and around 800.000 in orphanages who need help across Ukraine.

In the first 15 hours, Poland had already welcomed around 45.000 refugees. The traditional ties between the two countries and its proximity to Germany, where many Ukrainians have relatives, made Poland a prime destination for the refugees. Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Slovakia and even Hungary, with its well-known “no-migrants’ policy, welcomed desperate people fleeing the war in Ukraine.

I have heard critical voices saying that the same tragedies occurred in Syria, Afghanistan or Yemen and that these did not inspire the same amount of compassion from Europeans. I can certainly say that this is not true. I was personally involved in many charity actions to help refugees, 6 or 7 years ago. People showed compassion and also made donations at the time. Human suffering is equally upsetting wherever it happens on the planet, and all lives have the same value. But I also think that it is part of human nature to be powerfully affected

when things happen so close to you, to your own neighbors, when you can see with your own eyes the desperation of those who have lost everything overnight. A good friend of mine from Bosnia wrote to me in the first days of the military conflict saying that the images she saw from Ukraine brought back sad memories from her own childhood and the Bosnian war. They triggered deeply buried feelings of fear and uncertainty. So, the trauma of war never really and completely leaves those who have experienced it.

This is not a time for useless polemics and ‘politically correct’ declarations; it is a time for action and solidarity between Europeans and the world. That solidarity is now being demonstrated daily by all of Ukraine’s neighboring countries.

Romania has a 613, 8 km border with Ukraine, and Romanian-speaking people traditionally formed a large minority in the country. My own grandmother was born in Bolgrad, a small city near Odessa, in southern Ukraine. So, when the refugee wave started, many chose to come to Romania, through its border points at Siret, Halmeu, Sighetul Marmatiei and Isaccea. Many are arriving to Romania also through Moldova. While at the beginning, most of the incoming refugees were just transiting Romania on their way to Western countries where they had relatives, now more and more are deciding to stay. Many have no ‘plan B’, no money, no family or friends to go to and, what is more tragic, no idea when or if they will ever be able to go back to their own homes



© UNHCR/Chris Metzler

Refugees entering Poland from Ukraine at the Medyka border crossing point



Romanian food supply for refugees

in Ukraine. Many are sending away just their children; they help them cross the borders where relatives or friends are waiting, and then return to fight for their country. Doctors, teachers, farmers... they all had a life before. And now, in just the blink of an eye, it's all gone, and all they have left is defending their homeland.

Long waiting hours have been registered at all borders. People even stay for days until they can finally cross the border to Romania. These are all people desperately trying to escape death and destruction. They arrive, horrified and exhausted; one can see that in their eyes, although many try to put on a brave face for the sake of their children. But when one travels by foot for miles (many abandoning their cars and walking to the borders, because of long queues and blocked roads) with one's children in one hand and a small piece of luggage in the other, there is great cause for desperation. Many have even taken their pets with them. The National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (ANSVSA) has granted a

temporary derogation, in order to allow people entering the country with their beloved animals.

Romania has mobilized as never before. More than 40 years of communism showed us where the danger comes from and in a country that was left behind the Iron Curtain for decades and had to endure the oppression and influence of the Soviet Union, the feelings and the will to help those fleeing the Russian aggression are even stronger.

Thousands of people, NGOs, churches, private businesses, together with the state Department for Emergency Situations, mobilized in the first hours of this conflict and anticipated what was to come, as well as the great need for help and organization at the borders. A special decision of the National Committee for Emergency on 25 February, allowed anyone coming from Ukraine to enter the country, even if they had no valid PCR Covid test. Quarantine was no longer required either.

The images of the very first days were simply impressive and have been reported by journalists from all over the world. People rushed to help, in an impressive gesture of human solidarity. Some offered free accommodation, transport to other cities, legal assistance, translation, food, warm gloves and scarves or just a hot cup of tea or soup. Children were given small toys in order to bring a little smile on their worried faces.

Rows of stalls with water bottles, food, clothes, blankets or diapers

are to be seen in the proximity of all the Romanian border crossings to Ukraine. Locals from small villages right next to the crossing points, have rarely seen so many people assembled there. Everyone is in a hurry to do their own part, small contributions which mean the world to the people in need.

Trains carrying refugees are also arriving all over Romania. Train stations have become impromptu refugee centers. Many hotels or tourist pensions opened their doors to the Ukrainians for free. The authorities are managing the reception and triage of the newly arrived, in large tents, right at the border. At Siret, currently the busiest border crossing point in Romania, people are greeted warmly. There is a mobile camp set up nearby, where a team of volunteer psychologists offer free counseling.



Distribution of clothes

The refugees are then taken to accommodation facilities or transported to the airports, if they want to travel further. There are also other nationalities trapped in Ukraine. Over 1000 foreign students have fled Ukraine so far and entered Romania, from where they were extracted by their own countries. People from India, Ghana, Nigeria or Tunisia escaped Ukraine through Romania recently. Also, Romania welcomed over a 1000 Ukrainian orphans. Arrangements have been made for some of them to be adopted.

Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu in Moscow to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the USSR

Ukrainian refugees are coming at a very rapid rate; over 20,000 people per day are crossing the Romanian borders, and quick solutions have to be found for all of them. They are either asylum seekers, temporary refugees or just transiting the country, but they all need support of some kind.

Ioana Moldovan, a talented Romanian photographer and freelance journalist, travelled to the Siret and Isaccea borders and shared touching photos and stories of the people fleeing the war. (<https://instagram.com/ioanacmoldovan>). She told me that each day, things are getting more and more organized at the borders as authorities and volunteers work together. At Isaccea where people cross the Danube by ferry from Ukraine, she said that there are now also volunteers from Bulgaria and Moldova. Some Ukrainian refugees even decided to stay and help, especially with translation for people who do not speak other languages.

The Romanian Government has currently a special section on its official website dedicated to the crisis. Entitled 'Ukraine-Together we help more', it offers precious information about access to Romania for Ukrainian citizens, and steps they need to follow if they seek asylum. There is also information in Romanian, English and Ukrainian about medical services and the right to work in Romania. (www.gov.ro). A special 119 telephone number has been set up to treat emergencies related to children (including children without families).



The Moldovan and Romanian Governments, supported by the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration, IOM have set in place the transfer of people who fled Ukraine, including third country nationals, from southern Moldova to Romania, a journey of some 230 kilometres. The first convoy departed Palanca Border Crossing Point on March 11th, transporting 250 refugees to Huși in Romania

A special platform dedicated to Ukrainian refugees <https://refugees.ro/>, has been created with the aim of 'streamlining the support and resources offered by Romanian citizens'. It is a completely private initiative, inspired from an idea by Alexandru Panait, a successful, young Romanian entrepreneur who has recently been involved in supporting the accelerated digitalization of the Romanian administration, launched a crypto-currency and developed the first block-chain technology in Romania. There is also 'E-primariata', the first app intended to help Romanian citizens in dealing with the bureaucracy in state institutions. He was selected as part of the European 'Next Generation Internet' (NGI), which is to set the digital infrastructure of the future Digital European Union. Alexandru Panait told me that the idea for the refugee.ro website came to him after seeing the Facebook support Group 'Uniti pentru Ucraina' (meaning 'United

for Ukraine'), which gathered more than 200,000 members in its first days.

He quickly understood that all the offers for help needed to be channeled and so, in just 4 hours, he set up a platform where offers and demand were organized. They now have a call center with a chatbot which is an interactive agent, and they plan to expand the operation in Europe, and receive offers for help from all over the continent. He, like many Romanians, including myself, cannot remain impassive in the face of suffering. We understand only too well what Ukrainians are going through now, and we remember from our own history, what it means to be deprived of freedom; we won ours through a bloody revolution in 1989.

Another support platform, www.dopomoha.ro, available in Romanian, Ukrainian, English and Russian, is a project initiated and developed by 'Code for Romania', in partnership with the Department for Emergency Situations (ISU), the UN Refugee Agency, International Organization for Migration (OIM) and the National Romanian Council for Refugees. They have a help line in Ukrainian language where people fleeing the Ukrainian war can find all relevant, reliable and official information about seeking protection in Romania.

'Red Cross', one of the oldest Romanian humanitarian organisations, has been one of the most active. They have provided support with food supplies, necessity goods and phone cards, at the borders but also inside



A refugee family with 11 children entering Romania at the Isaccea border crossing. They are from Ismail, near Odessa. They left the country immediately, by bus, and they took the ferry to arrive in Romania. UNICEF/Moldovan



© IFRC/Maksym Trebukhor

The Ukrainian Red Cross in action, distributing food and hygiene parcels and assisting with the evacuation of disabled people

Ukraine. In March, the largest Romanian humanitarian live concert was organized in cooperation with PRO TV, one of the most popular TV stations in the country, in the National Stadium in Bucharest. All proceeds went to help Ukrainian refugees.

'Save the Children' Romania is actively helping Ukrainian refugee children. Stefan Mandachi, a businessman in Suceava, has transformed his hotel into a refugee center, offering free accommodation. The other day I heard about a real estate developer who offered 8 newly built villas in Corbeanca, near the capital Bucharest, to families in need. Also, one of the fanciest wedding venues near Bucharest, Padurile Regale, has opened its luxurious ballrooms to refugees. It is currently hosting foreign students waiting for flights to their home countries.

The National Theater in Bucharest has offered its bus for transporting refugees from the borders. Many other transport companies have also offered free transport for refugees.

Radisson Hotel in Bucharest offered 10 rooms free of charge, and Romanian universities all over the country provided dormitory spaces. The Sport Ministry opened its training facilities as temporary shelters. Everywhere, people are mobilizing to help. The website www.romanianunitedfund.org can be used for donations sent even by Romanians living abroad.

Corina Dima, a Romanian blogger, posted on her website, www.de-corina.ro, a complete list of restaurants in Bucharest that offer free meals upon presentation of an Ukrainian ID.

Adi Hadean, one of the most popular Romanian chefs is collaborating with World Central Kitchen, and together with his own team of volunteers (he has his own volunteer project, 'Solidar Social') offers daily, warm, free meals at the Sighet border point, just a few meters away from the crossing point (<https://activsocial.adihadean.ro/>).

ARBO media announced that its 35 local newspapers, 80 radio stations and 45 TV stations offer free media coverage for people offering their help to Ukrainian refugees. (www.arbomedia.ro).

Donorium, a Romanian blood donation platform, is encouraging Romanians to donate blood and help the wounded in Ukraine.



Maximilien Caradja Johnson

The Romanian government also announced the donation of 11 fully-equipped ambulances to Ukraine.

BCR, one of the largest Romanian private banks, together with the 'Jobful Playground' start-up, initiated the 'jobs4ukr' platform (<https://jobs4ukr.com/>), which helps Ukrainian refugees to find jobs in Romania and abroad.

I talked to Maximilien Caradja Johnson, the president of one NGO which has been collecting and distributing donations. Member of an old, aristocratic Romanian family and a successful businessman, he launched his foundation in 2022 in memory of his grandmother, Ecaterina Caradja, who had taken care of an orphanage of 3000 children before the communists came to Romania and took everything away. While the NGO was initially seeking to protect Romanian cultural heritage, the current situation compelled him to act quickly. In just one day, impressive amounts of donations were collected, sorted and transported to the borders and also inside Ukraine, to help people wanting to enter Romania and who had been waiting for days. Together with his team of 40 volunteers, they have so far collected more than 1.000.000 Euros worth of necessity goods. They are also cooperating with Uber for free transport of donated materials.

On 1 March, Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis announced that Romania is creating a regional hub to collect and transport international humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

Similar efforts are reported from all the countries around Ukraine. Everyone is doing their part to help, but now it seems that politicians and diplomats need to act together and stop this war spreading even further. War is no good to anyone.

'We share the same biology,

Regardless of ideology,

Believe me when I say to you,

I hope the Russians love their children too' (Sting, 'Russians' song)

Alexandra Paucescu



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



A view of a damaged building after a Russian missile attack in Kharkiv

DO ECONOMIC SANCTIONS WORK?

It certainly hasn't escaped you that Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th 2022, on one ordinary Thursday morning while the rest of Europe was sleeping.

In the few hours that followed the unprovoked attack, the White House pronounced a set of "severe and immediate" economic sanctions in response to Putin's war of choice against Ukraine, targeting at first Russia's financial system and access to cutting-edge technology. Two days later, the 27 countries of the EU also imposed several packages of sanctions on Russia, and it is interesting to note that Japan had already imposed sanctions on the Russian Central Bank on February 23, on the eve of the attacks.

Among these sanctions, the embargo on Russia's oil and banning large Russian banks (with the exception of Gazprombank) from the SWIFT international payment system are supposed to be the important ones aiming to weaken the Russian

economy enough to bring the Kremlin to its knees.

The White House sanctions on Russia are nothing new. These in fact just add up to those dating from 2014, when the first Russian invasion of Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea took place.

In the meantime, a number of other allegations, namely malevolent cyber activities and influence operations (including election interference), human rights abuses, use of a chemical weapons, weapons proliferation, illicit trade with North Korea, support to the governments of Syria and Venezuela and use of energy exports as a coercive or political tool, not to mention the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 with 300 civilians on board over the conflict zone in Ukraine's Donetsk region in July 2014, were made against Russia and were paired with sanctions each time.



Sanctioned Sovcombank headquarters on Krasnopresnenskaya

Exactly 8 years ago, in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea on March 18th 2014, the peninsula became the darling of the Kremlin and was flooded with money and subsidies. Numerous exorbitant development projects were implemented almost overnight, while the rest of the Russian Federation watched. Simultaneously, the newly announced independent Republic of Crimea became also increasingly militarized.

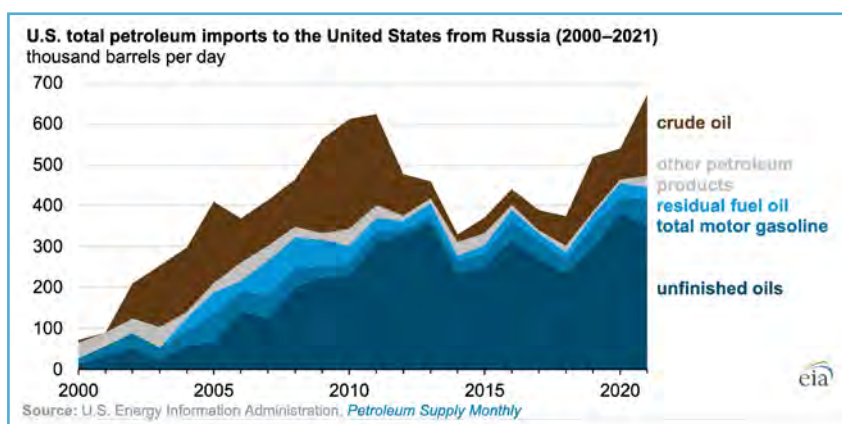
With Russians taking over, the local competition diminished, followed by larger Russian firms entering the peninsula and replacing their smaller counterparts. As a result, while there were 15,553 private SMEs and 116,200 entrepreneurs in Crimea in 2014, these figures had plummeted to 1,382 and 55,328 respectively by July 2018, according to the Ukrainian Times.



Headquarters of Mir National payment card system Moscow

The EU, US and Canada then started to prohibit the importation of products originating in Crimea or Sevastopol, and banned investments in the two regions. This affected tourism, trade, banking, cellular communications, transport, manufacturing, and basically every indispensable industry.

Visa and Mastercard stopped operating in Crimea and Sevastopol, no online payments nor deliveries were possible, Russian goods replaced Ukrainian and Western goods on the shelves, and so the import costs added up to increased prices. So, although surveys keep repeating that the citizens of Crimea are happy to have been annexed “back” to Mother Russia, the reality of day to day living there might have been something very different than



the official Russian surveys, and the fate of the region is still hanging in the balance.

Western sanctions on Russia and Crimea in 2014 and the price that ordinary people payed for it, didn't stop the Russian government invading a fully independent state 8 years later, knowing full well that severer sanctions could follow and strike its economy again.

The recently pronounced sanctions against Russia are amongst the sharpest in modern history, hitting rich and poor alike, especially since numerous countries around the world have also taken part.

Yet there is no evidence that the sanctions have caused the Kremlin to have second thoughts about whether it should end its “special operation” and withdraw or even to envisage a compromise. Russia has been under sanctions for the last eight years. “Bring it on!” Putin must have said, while issuing the order to attack on that fateful morning of February 24.

Perhaps he did underestimate the Ukrainian resistance, as well as the worldwide condemnation of his invasion, but he knew that the European dependence on energy and its shortage at the height of winter will make it almost impossible for the sanctions to do serious harm to its minerals and fossil fuel exports. 59% of Russian exports.

The Russian Central Bank sees the inflation rate hitting 20%, with GDP declining by 15% this year, and by the latest accounts, 300 Western firms have closed down their offices in the country. Yet none of these figures have deterred Putin from executing his plans.

Sanctions have worked in countries like Panama, Peru, Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone, and South Africa.

While these kinds of sanctions could destroy small, fragile economies based on two way trades with many countries, it is a different story for larger and relatively independent economies. For example, punitive economic measures have worked in the past in countries such as Panama, Peru, Equatorial Guinea or Sierra Leone, and even in South-Africa, in an attempt to abolish the apartheid regime in the 1960s.

Bilateral trade makes up 36% of the Chinese GDP, and 25% of the Russian GDP, but these governments could just order their people to tighten their belts, stay in and wait for the storm to blow over.

Similar heavy sanctions have been imposed on other countries in the course of recent decades, and their authoritarian governments have always survived.



Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein before his execution

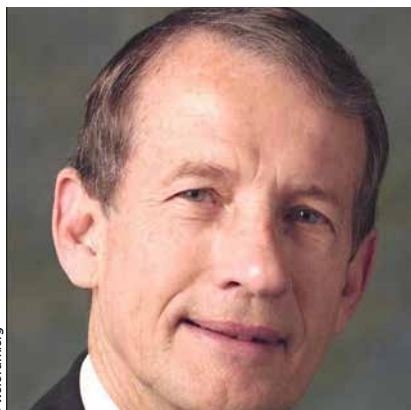
North Korea, Cuba, Iraq, and Iran have suffered comparable punishments, and although their local masses are drowning in misery, none of these governments have ever shown the slightest modification of their agendas.

Even worse, these governments have turned economic wars into a tool for leveraging their own domestic propaganda. They tell the masses that the West is their enemy, thus isolating them from the rest of the world and then increase their own influence and dominance over the masses even more.

As a matter of fact, in some cases, the sanctions have given these governments the legitimacy and the perfect pretext to remain in power and protect the people from the “evil outsiders”, stimulating corruption even more.

If you want to empower the central government of an already powerful nation, impose sanctions on them. Not only do sanctions not work, but they will extend the lifespan of whoever it is that you are trying to exclude.

In his book *“Economic sanctions reconsidered: History and current policy”*, author and economist Gary Hufbauer, who has been studying 170 cases of economic sanctions since the Cold War, has come to the conclusion that only 30% of sanctioned cases have led to a regime change, usually in small countries. Cuba has been under US sanction for 65 years, and North Korea for 72 years. Yet not only have their systems survived, but with the support of Venezuela, China and Russia, they even have created and developed their own microcosms,



Gary Hufbauer



The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp

and turned their political figures into businessmen who own all the distribution channels of the country.

The gains are not only economic, the bonus is the popularity. In sanctioned countries people – especially the poor – have to get closer to their leaders to gain access to food, money and goods. Clear examples are the Israeli sanctions on the Gaza strip, to punish the so-called extremists. But this has turned Hamas into a sort of Robin Hood figure who, while providing the people with their basic needs using smuggled goods, makes money and demonizes Israel.

Iraq, Iran, Cuba, North Korea and Syria

In 1991 after invading Kuwait, Iraq came under international sanctions. Not long after, the UN introduced an official exploitation measure that could only have come from a colonial mindset; what is known as “Oil for Food”. In this scheme, oil rich countries could sell their crude oil on international markets against food for their people. This resulted in over 2000 corporations offering bribes to Saddam Hussein in return for oil, making him and his elite filthy rich and powerful, while his people still went hungry. This situation prevailed until 2003 when the US invaded Iraq and with military force brought about full regime change... and the rest is history.

In Iran today the Revolutionary Guard Corp is the new emperor ever since the 1979 revolution. It is involved in almost all economic activities, making billions of dollars from the US / EU sanctions.

According to the Statistical Centre of Iran, the annual inflation rate is close to 42%; the real figures are probably higher. The national currency, the rial, has lost more than half of its value in the past three years, and oil exports have fallen from roughly 2.5 million barrels per day in 2017, to less than 0.4 million barrels per day in 2020. There were internal uprisings - which the West was aiming for - and people did take to the streets, protesting against the exorbitant cost of living. But those movements were rapidly and brutally snuffed out in 2018 and 2019. The Iranian government’s position and attitude with regard to its agenda has not changed in the slightest.

After the Western economic sanctions on Iran, Russia became its key trading partner together with China, especially in regard to Iranian excess oil reserves. Among examples of Russian financing, there is the first Russian-built nuclear power unit that was installed in 2011 in Bushehr. Then in 2014, Russia signed a deal with Iran to build up to eight more nuclear reactors in the country. According to an agreement signed in July 2016, Russia started providing a loan to fund 85% of the construction costs of a 1,400-megawatt thermal power plant in Sirik. China is also superactive in Iran; according to the original plan for cooperation proposed by Chinese leader Xi Jinping during 2016, China agreed to inject \$300 to \$400 billion by foreign direct investment into the Iranian oil, gas and petrochemical industries.

Another example is Cuba, which has been living under a US economic



© Nrf

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping

blockade for the past six decades. Decided by US president John F. Kennedy on February 3, 1962, the embargo has so far cost the Cuban economy around \$150 billion, and there are no signs that it will be lifted anytime soon.



© Edm

Cuban dictator Fidel Castro in 1991

The economy was crushed even further recently with the global pandemic that badly hit tourism, one of the most important sources of income for the country. Similar to the uprisings in Iran, a series of serious protests against the ruling Communist Party of Cuba began in July 2021. These were triggered by a shortage of food and medicine, and were considered as the largest since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution. The Cuban government responded with a bloody crackdown. In the meantime, the Cuban Supreme Court has sentenced hundreds of protesters in Havana to between 4 and 30 years in prison for violence committed during island-wide demonstrations last year. These took place mostly by poor and marginalized sections of the population.

The Biden administration has introduced new measures on top of

existing economic sanctions. But no significant change seems to be taking place in the Cuban political landscape. As a Cuban activist puts it; "The real blockade is imposed by the Cuban state". The embargo would only be lifted, she believes, through "a transition to representative democracy."

The friendship between Cuba's communist party and the Soviet Union is historical, established in 1959 after the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro. As of then, Cuba became dependent on Soviet markets and military aid and was a major ally of the Soviet Union during the Cold war. That friendship is still intact; following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Cuba formally recognized the Ukrainian peninsula as a part of Russia. In exchange, Vladimir Putin touted a decision to wipe clean 90 percent of the island's \$35 billion debt to Moscow and announced deals to invest in Cuba's offshore oil industry.



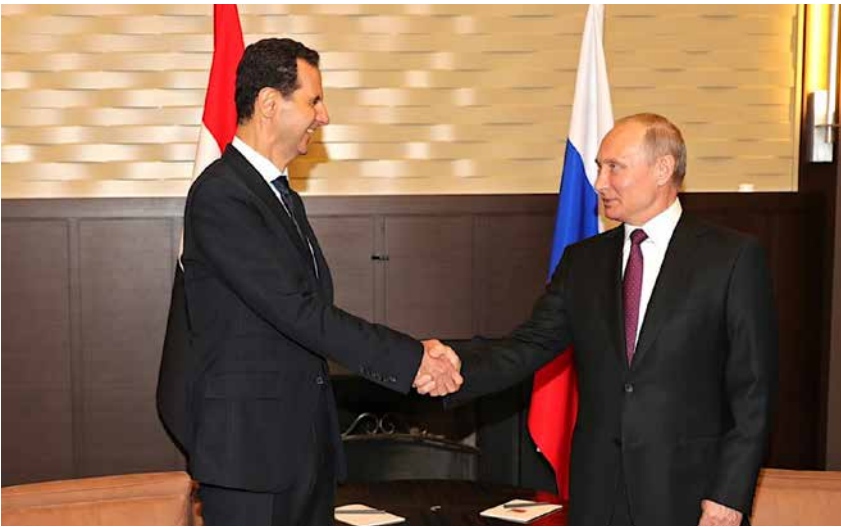
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North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un

On the other hand, China is Cuba's second-largest trading partner after Venezuela, which is also under US and EU sanctions. Bilateral trade between China and Cuba in 2005 totaled \$777 million, of which \$560 million were Chinese exports to Cuba. China is sending a growing amount of durable goods to Cuba, with bilateral trade between China and Cuba totaling \$1.6 billion.

In the case of North Korea, the regime is also still in place, despite the sanctions that were imposed by the US in the 1950s and tightened further after international bombings against South Korea by North Korean agents during the 1980s. In 1988, the United States added North Korea to its list of state sponsors of terrorism. The European Union and the United Nations Security Council have also joined the US since 2006, by introducing a complete set of sanctions, targeting the country's trade and finance.

But despite international sanctions, China continues to be North Korea's most important trading partner. The two countries have maintained considerable economic ties; according to figures from the Seoul-based Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, bilateral trade increased tenfold between 2000 and 2015, peaking in 2014 at \$6.86 billion. Although, the trade growth has slowed with the advent of tougher sanctions, Pyongyang is still dependent on Beijing for economic activity. Some speculate that among other reasons, China is supporting North Korea to avoid regime collapse and in so doing, prevent a refugee influx across their 1,352 Km common border.



© Kremlin.ru

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin

In 1979, the United States put Syria on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, following allegations of possession of weapons of mass destruction by the Syrian regime, its grip on Lebanon and its willingness to destabilize Iraq, as well as its support for terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Later, with the civilian unrest in the early spring of 2011, nationwide protests began against President Bashar Al-Assad's government, followed by violent crackdowns and suppressions. These resulted in a decade long war and the imposition of new Western sanctions. The measures taken by the United States and the European Union include the ban on the export of US products, an oil embargo and financial sanctions.

Syria has historical ties with Russia, and before that with the Soviet Union, going back to the Cold War (1947–1991) when it received about \$294 million from the Soviet Union

in military and economic assistance. That friendship continues, and Russian investments in Syria were valued at \$19.4 billion in 2009, according to The Moscow Times, while its exports to Syria were worth \$1.1 billion in 2010, just before the war. Russia has intervened in Syria not only militarily but also as a supplier of weapons during the civil war that started in 2011 and it has continued funding Al-Assad's regime. Other than funding Syria's infrastructure, energy and tourism industries, the Russian natural gas facility construction company Stroitransgaz, maintains the largest operation in Syria involving projects worth \$1.1 billion. While the war has torn the country apart and Syria is still excluded from the rest of the world, Bashar Al-Assad remains in power.

Russia is being sanctioned by the majority of the world, but its allies and all those countries that benefited

from Russian funding during all these years will be there to offer their aid and participate in whatever way they can. At the top of the list, there is China that will most probably offer its support from behind the scenes. Most importantly, having survived under Soviet rule from 1922 to 1991, Russia is quite experienced when it comes to self-sufficiency.

McDonalds, the symbol of Uncle Sam, besieged by thousands of Russians in 1991 and eager for a bite of Western liberalism, has ceased its operations in Russia. Instead, "Uncle Vanya", the Russian equivalent with a strangely similar logo is to replace the burger giant. The new logo has the same yellow arches but is turned on its side, so that it looks like the letter B, which stands for the letter V - for Vanya - in the Cyrillic script.

The new restaurant takes its name from the play "Uncle Vanya" by world famous, 19th century Russian author, Anton Chekhov. Beyond literary or artistic considerations, the move is simply an example of a somewhat childish act of defiance, following the imposition of international sanctions. On 12 March, Vyacheslav Volodin, chairman of the lower house of the Russian parliament, said that Russian brands should take over McDonald's venues, "They announced they were closing. Well, okay, close. But tomorrow, in these locations, we should not have McDonald's, but Uncle Vanya's," he said. "The jobs should be preserved and the prices should be reduced."

Officials also said Russia would ignore patents held by entities from countries Moscow considers hostile, while Vladimir Putin has approved a plan to nationalize foreign companies that have left the country. He said Russia should "introduce external management" over the departing companies "and then transfer these companies to those who want to work". These measures will pave the way for "the Russian Uncle Vanyas" to fill the vacuum left by "the American McDonalds" in the country.



© McDonald's

McDonald's on opening day on Moscow's Pushkin Square, Jan. 31, 1990

Vianne Savoli



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DRAGONS, BUT KINDER

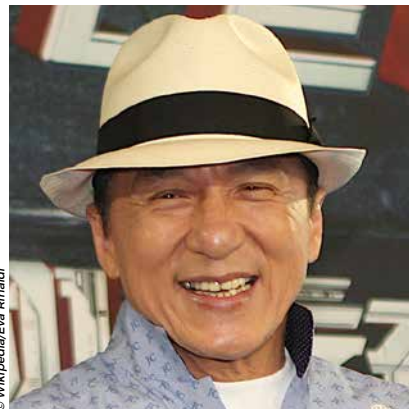
Nepal's Kung Fu nuns are recognised for their good work, helping others

Back in the early 1970s there was a craze for martial arts movies, such as *The Way of the Dragon* in 1972 and *Enter the Dragon* in 1973, both starring the Hong Kong American, Bruce Lee. His uniquely flexible way of fighting won him a massive legion of fans, spellbound by his acrobatic style. It encouraged lots of people – especially young men – to try to study martial arts, although most found that the strict discipline required gave way when the prospect of a glass of beer offered a tempting alternative. Another great martial arts star was Jackie Chan, whose kung fu moves, although equally athletic and acrobatic, were tinged with humour. Chan became a pro-Communist politician in 2013 and, at the age of 68, now sits in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Bruce Lee died in 1973 at the age of just 32.

Martial arts involving the unarmed style involving fists and feet were not invented by the Hong Kong film companies, of course. There have been a very great number of martial arts movies since

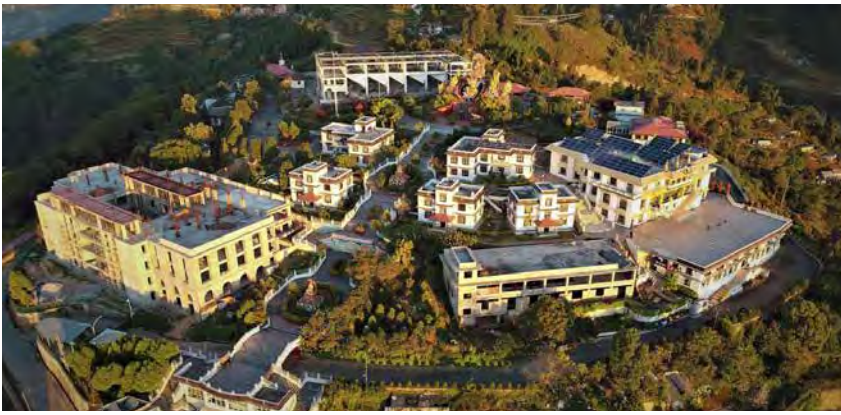
then, including some involving a female protagonist. 'Kill Bill' and its sequel spring to mind. Even so, the early 1970s craze seems to have come to an end.

Kung Fu is a style of combat that was employed by members of the Yihetuan Movement, an anti-Christian, anti-colonial uprising of a group calling itself 'The Militia United in Righteousness'. Their style was characterised by the British as "Chinese Boxing", and their understandable attempt between



Jackie Chan

1899 and 1901 to get rid of the British became known as the Boxer Rebellion. There was also a TV series called *Kung Fu* about a Shaolin monk seeking his brother through the Wild West armed only with his martial arts skills, with David Carradine in the part of the monk. The series showed frequent flashbacks to his childhood in the monastery, where his blind 'master' called him 'Grasshopper', which is strange: Buddhist novices are nothing like those notorious plant-eating members of the suborder caelifera. It could be dangerous to call a child 'grasshopper', too, in case it incites various birds, frogs and snakes to eat them, believing them to be rich in vitamins A and B, calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese and potassium, as real grasshoppers are. They're also low in cholesterol, although you may not fancy trying one as a healthy meat alternative. I don't. In the TV series, I recall, there were at least two big choreographed fights in each episode, plus occasional scuffles and other examples of the hero's skills. I hear it has recently been remade by Warner



© Druk Amitabha

Druk Amitabha Mountain DGK Nunnery

Brothers, who also made the original, this time setting it in the present day. As for Kung Fu, the first word, Kung (more accurately pronounced as “gong”) can mean hard or skilful work, while “Fu” means time spent, so together they mean time spent doing something difficult.

It established the idea that this particular style of unarmed combat had religious connections, although it’s said by some to have originated as a set of exercises based on animal movements and aimed at improving physical fitness.

It is now closely linked in the public mind with the Shaolin Temple in China, whose monks are said to be brilliant exponents of Kung Fu, using its exercises mainly to sharpen their minds and to aid their concentration, as Buddhist monasticism demands. The Buddha, after all, preached peace, not kicking people. The Kung Fu nuns of the Drukpa order, mainly based at the Druk Amitabha Mountain Nunnery in Nepal, located in the hills overlooking Kathmandu, follow this ancient tradition and have been honoured for their achievements with the International Women’s Day Award, in a ceremony held at Delhi’s Stein Auditorium. The award recognises their contribution to the empowerment of women, disaster relief, environmental improvement and for breaking societal barriers. Looking at them in their Buddhist nuns’ robes, you would be convinced that they could break anything, if they chose to! It’s certainly not the first award they have received, nor is it likely to be their last. In 2021, they were runners-up for the Václav Havel award and their achievements were recognised in a joint statement by the Council of Europe, the Václav Havel Library and the Charta 77 Foundation. “Inside the nunnery in Nepal we are about 300, but altogether there are about

800 nuns,” Jigme Ghamo told me. “It’s a big group, which is spread in two parts of India, mostly in the northern part.” Jigme Ghamo and her fellow-nun, Jigme Konchok, agreed to meet me by Zoom link to talk about their work and their lives, which sound far from easy.

Not all of the 800 have begun kung fu training but there is a waiting list of those wishing to do so.

NEVER BE AFRAID

All the Drukpa nuns share the first name ‘Jigme’ and it’s a highly appropriate title for them: in Nepalese it means ‘fear-not’ or ‘fearless’.

Drukpa, on the other hand, means ‘dragon’. But however devout the nuns may be, they know there is much more to life than contemplation, important though that is. Each nun has her own mantra to chant to herself and to think deeply about. “Out in the world, sitting on a mat and meditating doesn’t help that much,” Jigme Ghamo conceded, “so if we want to go out in the world and help people, we have to be physically very fit and mentally very strong to understand the problem and to solve it, so I think kung fu has helped us in that way a lot.” But kung fu, for the nuns, is much more than just a means of energetic contemplation. “Yes, we have learned a lot of self-defence techniques also, but



Jigme Yangchan Gamo

luckily we never had to fight someone off in real life.” She smiles at the thought of it; she has never had to and is relieved at that, but there is no doubt in her mind that she could.

“The nuns practise their kung fu for two hours every morning,” Jigme Ghamo said, “and the day starts at 3 in the morning with our own personal meditation, then we have English classes, then we have Tibetan classes. We have drum classes, we have music classes...we have lots of classes, but what is compulsory for all are the English classes, because if you are out in the world you have to know English, so everyone tries to learn it, and also Tibetan because everything we learn is in Tibetan.”



The nuns practise their kung fu for two hours every morning

It sounds like a breath-taking day of endless study, but Ghamo assures me that other classes (yes, there are more) are optional. “If you want to learn, if you have an interest in music or if you have an interest in drums, it’s up to you, if you want to study it.” “It’s really fulfilling work,” says Jigme Konchok with a big smile, “and for several years we have not wanted to do anything else.” It’s not all study and exercises, however; there is often much, much harder work to do. For instance, they went on a 5,200-kilometre bicycle ride, which they called the “Bicycle Yatra for Peace”, riding from Nepal to Ladakh in India, over the course of three months, stopping along the way at literally hundreds of villages to educate the locals about environmental matters and to speak out against human trafficking, which still goes on there. The Yatra is now an annual event, with nuns encouraging others to help them gather up the garbage left in streams, rivers, fields and along roadsides. They provide



Himalayan earthquake of 2015

a real rôle model for local people, too, refusing to be evacuated after the disastrous Himalayan earthquake of 2015 (magnitude 7.9) in order to deliver critical aid and supplies to neglected regions. “It is tough,” admits Jigme Konchok, “and really hard.”

They soon realised that the earthquake had resulted in more human trafficking, especially of young girls, as families, broken up and with many members killed, had taken to selling off their most financially valuable members, invariably young women, in a massive trafficking exercise. The nuns consistently campaign against trafficking, which has earned them enemies amongst those who make a disgusting living from the trade in human bodies. The nuns preach the evil of trafficking and try to equip young women and girls with the tools needed to resist the traffickers, by training them in martial arts and encouraging them to speak out about abuse. A group of them even travelled to New York to speak at the United Nations General Assembly about the effects of the earthquake and their own battle against human trafficking. Their monastery and living accommodation had been severely damaged in the earthquake, too, leaving them more exposed to the wild natural elements of the area, but afterwards, each morning after they had finished their prayers and said their mantras, the nuns headed out to the nearby villages to help clear away the rubble and assist in the construction of new roads and pathways.

They also helped retrieve household goods buried under the rubble and to assemble and erect prefabricated community halls. One of the nuns, Jigme Jamyang Sherab, told journalists that the nuns’ priority had been to provide buildings to shelter the villagers before the onset of the monsoon season. Her parents asked her to leave the nunnery

and go home to Himachal Pradesh in India, but she told them she would prefer to stay “to help recouping survivors who have witnessed the large-scale death and destruction.” Meanwhile, the nuns erected tents in the nunnery grounds because the more solid walls that offered better protection had developed worsening cracks.



Jigme Konchok Lhamo

Getting around such mountainous terrain on bicycles is a tribute to the women’s kung fu-based fitness, while they also run free health clinics, where they have helped to restore sight to more than 1,500 Himalayan people. Amazingly, that’s not all: they respond to emergency calls to rescue animals in distress and have collected for disposal thousands of kilos of plastic waste, which had been littering the fields and roadsides. The nuns do have enemies, Jigme Konchok admitted; not everyone approves of women having such high status and respect, but so far this has not led to them being forced to defend themselves. “We hope one day we can use our kung fu,” she told me, with what I can only describe as a mischievous smile, “but so far this hasn’t happened. But we are confident we could if we had to, as we travel around the villages. Some

people speak to us really rudely. But we stay confident.” Having seen videos of the nuns at practice, I’m not surprised they’re confident. I’m surprised anyone has the temerity to be rude to them, however.

IT PAYS TO BE TOUGH

Their training programme is not something anyone would take on lightly. “A very normal day of our lives starts at 3 in the morning,” Ghamo explained, “We do our personal meditation until 5. Then from 5 to 6 we have our morning session in the temple. Then at 8 we eat our breakfast and after that, from 9 until 10, we do our housework and cleaning and then at 10 everyone goes to their different classes, whatever they like. They all know, at 10 they do what they choose.” It was clear that they had to choose something worthwhile to study, however; sitting chatting over coffee with a friend clearly isn’t an option. “At 12 o’clock there is a class,” she continued, “then we have lunch. (They are all vegetarian, of course) After lunch we are free until 2, then we do meditation and housework. We are free then to do what we like. Then we have classes until 4, after 4 we have our evening tea. We don’t have dinner. After that we have free time to sit, to do more housework, more meditation. At 6 we have our evening session in the temple. In summer, we do kung fu at night, from 8 to 10, and in winter we do kung fu in the morning. So it depends on the weather.” Both nuns laughed at this point. They have obviously had to explain their routine many times and to many people, most of whom, I suspect, were as amazed as I was.

The contemplative life seems to involve a lot of vigorous, perhaps sometimes painful, activity. It’s not something I could undertake. But Buddhism is



Bicycling nuns



Max Müller photographed in 1883 by Alexander Bassano

supposed to depend on the principle of self-sacrifice. According to Doctor Max Müller, the orientalist and first Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford University, in his book 'Sanskrit Literature', Buddha encouraged people to take responsibility for other people's problems, in a way that may be familiar from other world religions. "Let all the sins that were in the world fall on me," Buddha is claimed, in Müller's book 'Sanskrit Literature', to have said, "that the world may be delivered."

That passage by Müller is also quoted in Edward Carpenter's 1920 book, 'Pagan and Christian Creeds: Their Origin and Meaning', a copy of which, ironically, was given to me as a child by my godfather. The oddness of such a gift from such a relative did not escape him, even though he had made many annotations in the text to soften its otherwise atheistic tone. There is more in a similar vein in the Metta Sutta, a Buddhist text intended to encourage kindness towards others: "Let him cultivate boundless thoughts of loving kindness towards the whole world," it reads, "above, below and all around, unobstructed, free from hatred

and enmity. May all beings be well and safe, may their hearts rejoice. Just as a mother would protect her only child with her own life, even so, let him cultivate boundless thoughts of loving kindness towards all beings." Such sentiments would certainly seem to guide the kung fu nuns

Their most recent award came from the Delhi Commission for Women, with the award itself being given out in front of a number of Delhi dignitaries, including the speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, Ram Niwas Goel, and Deputy Speaker Rakhi Biria, with the chief guest, Chairperson Arvind Kejriwal presiding.

The Delhi Commission for Women established the International Women's Day awards in 2016 as way of rewarding women and women's groups that have been inspirational in helping the cause of women' and girls' rights. At the ceremony, Jigme Ghamo described the nuns' activity as "breaking a centuries-long social order favouring men in leadership." She then explained that: "The kung fu nuns are taking on kindness in its fiercest form – empowering themselves and others to serve the world." She and fellow-nun Jigme Konchok told me the award was important to them because it raises their profile, which helps them in their work, but it's not their first award and is very unlikely to be their last. "We are honoured to be recognised for our efforts," she told the crowds at the ceremony, "and this award will help us spread our message of empowerment and further strengthen our mission to help women and girls to be their own heroes." The nuns teach martial arts to promote self-defence to young girls within their communities, where reporting violence against women is

rare. Sadly, it seems too many men still interpret their apparent lead rôle in traditional societies as a licence to use violence against women.



His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa

There have been other objections to the nuns' allegedly "unfeminine" activities. "Sometimes older people will tell us we should just stay in the temple and read, or stay in the kitchen," Jigme Konchok told the Matters India news website, when the nuns were finalists in March 2021 for the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, which is awarded annually by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Another of the nuns, Jigme Chosdon, indicating their badly damaged kung fu practice room, said: "The earthquake shook the buildings but not our strength and energy," going on to explain: "It's all due to intensive training of the martial art and meditation." Maybe it will catch on further? One woman, having seen a report about the nuns' martial arts regime on BBC Television, commented: "Apparently it helps them to concentrate better on their meditation and has also increased their confidence. Maybe we should all be taking it up?" Having seen the nuns, in their maroon garments and with almost shaven heads, it's not easy to imagine them in a kitchen or sitting primly around a parlour somewhere, eating biscuits and sipping tea.

The nuns' spiritual leader, the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa, is actively encouraging gender neutrality. The nuns themselves don't need much encouraging. The Gyalwang Drukpa started teaching the nuns kung fu in 2008, after seeing Buddhist nuns in Vietnam doing it. He was impressed. "I became a nun when I was 12," says Jigme Ghamo, "but we didn't have kung fu then. That was in 2006. Kung fu was



Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal presided over the ceremony, in the presence of several dignitaries, including DCW chairperson Swati Maliwal, Delhi Legislative Assembly speaker Ram Niwas Goel, and deputy speaker Rakhi Birla

introduced in 2008, and at that stage it was only exercises, just basic exercises. Then in 2012 we started learning the martial art of kung fu.”

BEING READY FOR ANYTHING

When they are travelling round their vast and very mountainous territory, the nuns are not completely alone; it would be a dangerous place to have a fall, which is why they try to keep their burdens to a minimum. Jigme Ghamo again: “When we are on our bicycles, we only carry what is really necessary on our backs, but we hope in the future to carry more things. Now we only carry what is really necessary in our little bags. We have a vehicle for emergencies and three hundred nuns are at the ready. If anything happens on the way, if you fall down and get hurt and you need immediate emergency help, if we are in a village where we cannot get an ambulance, you cannot get to a hospital, so we have an emergency car with us all the time. Other than that, we are very self-sufficient. We have solar panels and solar lights and so on, so that it’s easier for us to carry on.” Buddhist orthodoxy holds that there are “Four Noble Truths”. This basically comes down to the following: “life is painful and frustrating”. That would seem to be self-evident; a glance at things around you and at the news channels is ample proof. Secondly, Buddhism says that suffering is caused by our strong attachment to what is familiar, “the known”. Thirdly, in Buddhism, pain and suffering can be brought to an end by getting rid of our expectations and attachments. It argues that we can still have meaningful relationships but without the sort of needy, clinging attachments that come

from a fear of loss and of being left on our own. Finally, it says we should all engage in meditation, or the practice of mindfulness and awareness. That is why the nuns spend so much of each day in deep meditation.

One of the things upon which they must meditate is what Buddhists call the “noble eightfold path” to enlightenment: seeing things as they really are without passing judgement; working with pure intentions; speaking from the heart; surrendering a tendency to complicate things with our own expectations; do our best whatever life throws at us (“bloom where you’re planted”); do things the right way; be mindful of our tiniest thoughts, emotions and actions; discipline our minds in order to concentrate on the here and now, rather than on another time or place. The idea is to achieve “Nirvana, which is not what other faiths call “heaven” but is instead a state of mind free from suffering and having got rid of aggression, struggle and drama. You can see why Buddhism appealed to the hippies of the late 1960s. It was a break from their parents’ religious observations, an excuse not to get up early enough to go to church, mosque or synagogue on a day-off from school or work and it appeared to leave more room for ‘self-fulfilment’ (although few could have explained what that meant, beyond ‘please yourself’). It also didn’t require an attempt to explain where we all came from. Not all church officials of the Middle Ages were blind to the contradictions between doctrine and observation. Take the 14th century scholar, philosopher and mathematician Nicole Oresme, for instance. In one section of his famous book *Livre du ciel et du monde* (Book of the Heavens and Earth), book II, chapter 25, he examines whether the apparent diurnal motion of the heavens is due to the earth spinning on its axis, or the heavens moving around a stationary earth, as the church preferred. Oresme provides an excellent analysis of this problem. He concludes that, contrary to much church teaching,

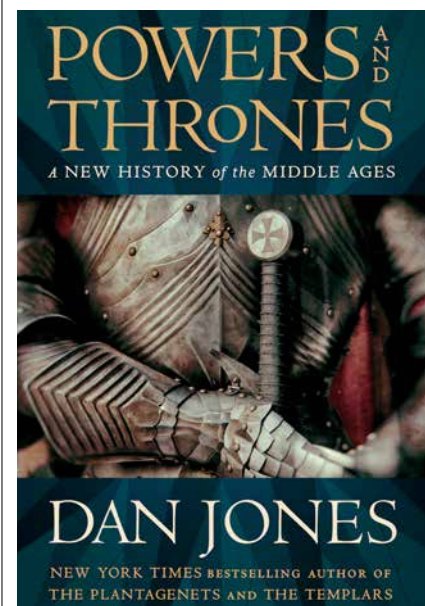
“The primary argument is for the economy of motion: it is much less motion for earth to rotate than for the whole of the heavens to hurtle around the earth daily. Indeed, due to their vast circumference, the speed at which they would have to travel would be excessive.” Clever chap, Oresme; it’s been said that he considered that it was in the space beyond the part of the universe we



Portrait of Nicole Oresme

can see that God was hiding. I wonder. Buddha didn’t seem to mind much either way and his modern followers are somewhat ambivalent about God. He is said to have followed the doctrine of Shunyata, which means ‘emptiness’. On God, he maintained ‘a noble silence’, apparently.

In any case, the whole debate, taken together with the hippy desire to ignore things one doesn’t like or in which one is not interested, is a universe away from the sometimes violent Christian sects, mainly in the American deep south, whose cries of “Deus Vult” were once used in the 12th century to rally potential fighters to the crusading cause of Pope Urban II. It means “God wills it” and it followed a sermon by Urban in which he urged people to lay down their work, leave their homes and families and go off, armed to “liberate” (defeat and occupy) the city of Jerusalem. As Dan Jones points out in his excellent book about the Middle Ages, *Powers and Thrones*, “Deus Vult has more recently



The Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) has honored the “Kung Fu Nuns” of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism with the International Women’s Day Award at a ceremony held in Delhi on 8 March

been adopted as a watchword and a meme, notably by the alt-right, white supremacists and anti-Islamic terrorists,” adding the warning: “Be careful before shouting it in polite company.” Given the Crusaders’ attitude to those of other faiths and races, perhaps Urban II would have approved of its modern appropriation by violent extremists.

The nuns don’t have to worry about sword-wielding religious fanatics these days, but they still have to cope with the climate, which is very hot in summer and very cold in winter, when, as Jigme Konchok told me, “it’s very hard to take a bath.” Since it involves water from an ice run-off, I should imagine it is, but so, it seems, is a visit from their teacher. “He comes for a month or two every year,” says Jigme Ghamo. “That part is the hardest part because we have to train for ten hours every day. That’s ten hours every day for one to two months, because we have to learn a lot of things so that we can practise it the whole year. That time is very hard, because we still have to continue our normal practices and we have to follow the rules of the nunnery.” It’s a very far cry from ‘The Sound of Music’, isn’t it? But their faith is important to the nuns, even if it’s not what they are most famous for. “If I only talk about Buddhism,” Jigme Ghamo says, “If I only talk about my faith, if I only talk about what I want, you know, that doesn’t appeal to all kinds of audiences. For us, helping people is our religion. We do not bring our religion (religious faith, in other words) into any kind of work we do. In any kind of conversation we have outside our nunnery we do not bring up the subject of religion. As soon as somebody brings up the subject of religion there is sort of division: ‘you are a Buddhist’, or ‘you are a Muslim’, or ‘you are a Christian’, so there is a barrier. It builds a wall between us.” At first appearance, the kung fu nuns, with their severe haircuts, extreme fitness, adoption of kung fu fighting stances and nunnery robes would seem like unlikely adversaries for anyone who is ill-intentioned to choose to come up against.

FIGHTING THE DEMON

One enemy against whom even kung fu training provides few if any options for dealing with is the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the cause of COVID-19. It has provided extra challenges for the nuns to cope with, but you cannot defeat it with a



Statue of the emaciated and fasting Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha

fighting fan (a hard-edged fan used in some forms of kung fu) or a well-aimed flying kick. But Buddhists, through studying their scriptures, are used to coming up against Mara, the demon and “Lord of Death”, in some early Buddhist writings. He is said to have tried to tempt the young Siddhartha Gautama – the future Buddha – while he was meditating by presenting him with a stream of stunningly beautiful young women.

In some versions, they are Mara’s daughters. He is the equivalent of Satan, the Devil, Iblis or Lucifer in other faiths, who also try to lure the faith’s central figure away from the paths of righteousness. The “Lord of Death” seems an appropriate enemy for those fighting COVID-19, an enemy even the Kung Fu Nuns cannot defeat, although they are still doing their best. “We still found ways to help others,” Jigme Konchok tells me, “by taking supplies to the villages. Also the animals were not being fed, so we took food to them and looked after them.” If you want to use the Buddhist allusion, then at least Mara didn’t get everything his way.

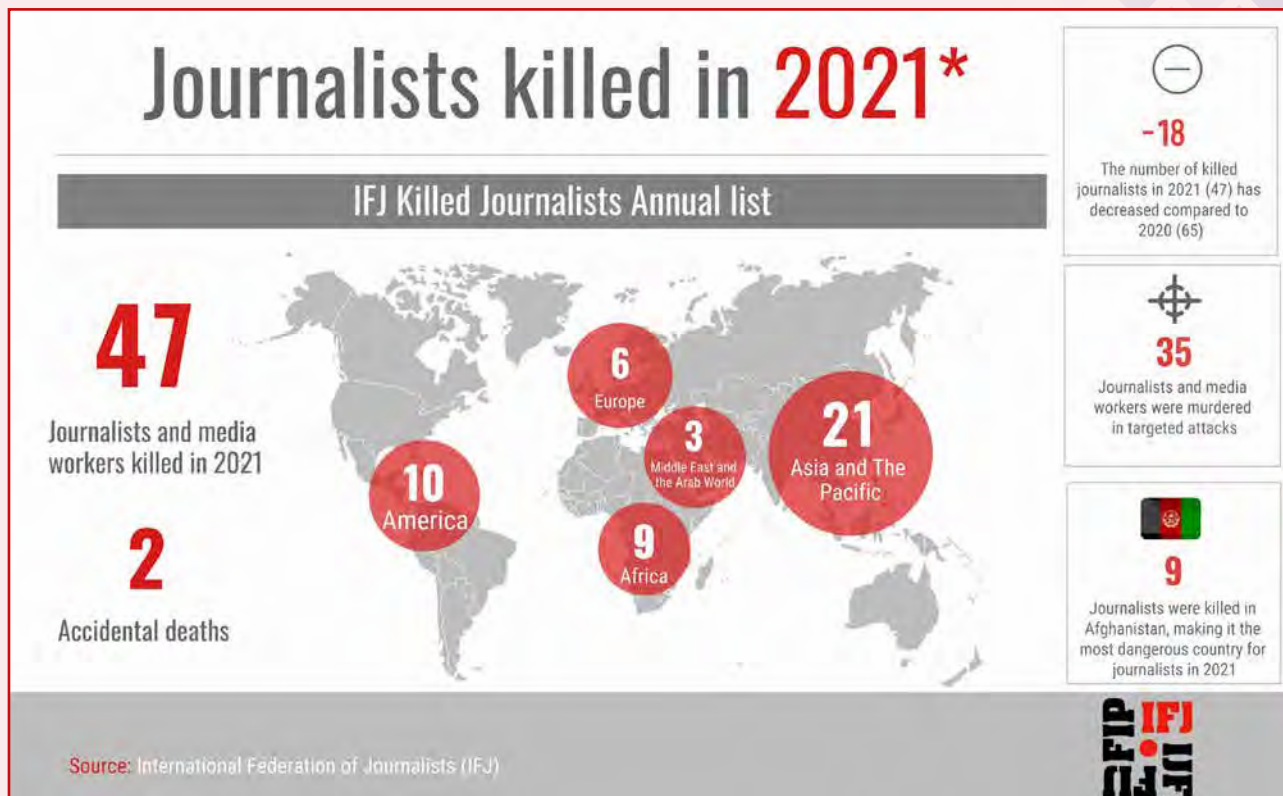
Strangely, the Devil is often portrayed in religious works as a dragon and dragons were generally associated with evil in the West. Where I come from, in North East England, there is even the story of the Lambton Worm, a dragon-like creature that turned up to eat the locals because wicked Lord Lambton had failed to observe Sunday as a holy day and had gone fishing in the River Wear instead.

Unfortunately, he caught the Worm, which went on to terrorise the land around Penshaw Hill (around which the dragon, in some versions, was said to curl itself) until Lambton returned from the crusades to tackle it. Again, he broke his promise to a witch who had helped him to win and as a result the Lambton family was cursed, the men of the next nine generations not dying in their beds. That part of the story came true and even as recently as the 1970s, another Lord Lambton, Anthony, was embroiled in a scandal involving prostitutes and cannabis that ended his ministerial career in government, much to the delight of the tabloid newspapers of the time, several of which raked up the tale of the Lambton Worm to explain his downfall. There is still a hill at Fatfield, near Washington in County Durham (not the one in the District of Columbia, of course) known as ‘Dragon Hill’, claimed to have been the Worm’s favourite resting place (as distinct from Penshaw Hill). There is a popular and very funny music hall song from 1867 about the legend. However, in Far Eastern mythology, dragons are good, and the Kung Fu Nuns, of course, take their Drukpa name from a dragon. One assumes that the propitious dragon in this case was never thrown down a well nor did it impoverish a rich estate by drinking the milk of nine cows, as the Lambton Worm is supposed to have done.

The Kung Fu Nuns, of course, are associated only with good deeds, courage, fortitude and kindness. Whilst praising their selfless devotion to helping others, we must remember that they are, first and foremost, nuns, dedicated to the religious monastic life. They believe in Buddha and follow his teachings. As members of a religious order, they are what is called ‘bhikshu’ in the Dhammapada, the book supposedly of the Buddha’s sayings, translated by Doctor Max Müller. Chapter 25, verse 382, would seem to apply to the nuns, if we change the gender used in the reference: “He who, even as a young Bhikshu, applies himself to the doctrine of Buddha, brightens up this world, like the moon when free from clouds.” It would seem that the nuns do exactly that.

Jim Gibbons

IFJ LIST AND REPORT OF KILLED JOURNALISTS IN 2021

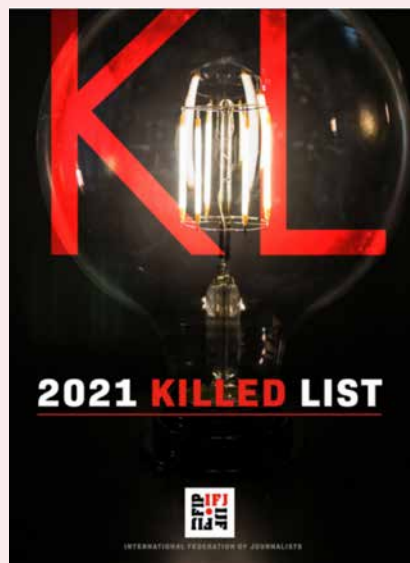


The International Federation of Journalists has published the most comprehensive report on journalists and media staff killed in work-related incidents around the world during 2021.

The annual report, in its 31th edition, details the circumstances of the 47 killings which occurred during targeted attacks, bombings and cross-fire incidents as well as 2 accidental killings.

This is the fifth lowest death toll since the IFJ began publishing annual reports on journalists' killings in 1990 and brings the total to 2725 journalists and media workers who lost their lives to violence in the world since then. 2021 registered 18 fewer killings than in the previous year (65).

Despite this decrease, 2021 was also a year in which threats against journalists and media freedom



https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/IFJ_KILLED_LIST_2021_FINAL.pdf

witnessed a significant increase. The IFJ registered record numbers of journalists in detention, with 365 behind bars because of their reporting, a considerable increase from 235 recorded last year. This onslaught on press freedom has had a chilling effect on media.

Commonly, journalists have been arrested and accused of wrongdoing for simply covering protests or trying to report on the coronavirus crisis, both of which are issues of significant public interest.

In 2021, we also discovered a threat to press freedom in the form of Pegasus, the spying software for surveillance through mobile telephones which was used to target journalists among others. With its ability to eavesdrop on telephone conversations, access contacts and emails without raising

a single suspicion from the owner, Pegasus has shattered the safety of most handheld devices. The confidentiality of sources and the privacy of personal communications of journalists can no longer be taken for granted.

WOMEN JOURNALISTS

This year, at least seven women journalists have been killed in the course of their work around the world. Afghanistan is the country paying the highest price. The IFJ Gender Council is particularly concerned about the situation of Afghan women journalists and believes that efforts must be redoubled to protect their lives and those of their families and urged international action to address the critical situation of Afghan women journalists, who are particularly targeted by the Taliban.

The IFJ also condemns the online harassment of women journalists around the world and calls on newsrooms, online platforms and governments to take action to put in place sustainable solutions to eradicate this scourge.

IFJ SAFETY FUND: LIFELINE FOR JOURNALISTS IN DANGER

In 2021, the IFJ's International Safety Fund continued to help journalists and media staff and their family members from the four corners of the globe to meet multiple needs.

The IFJ International Safety Fund paid over 90.000 Euros in relief to help them relocate to safety, receive medical treatment or pay for legal assistance. The Safety Fund provided support in 2021 in:

- Nigeria: Humanitarian grant to a journalist who needed an eye operation.
- Haiti: Medical treatment for a journalist and support to cover relocation costs of a second journalist to escape danger in their own country.
- Afghanistan: Support to dozens of journalists for various reasons such as food, medical care and relocation to safe areas.
- Myanmar: Financial support to a journalist who had been a victim of police brutality during pro-democracy demonstrations.

- Philippines: Another journalist seeking refuge in exile because of threats received assistance to cover the cost of the administration process needed for residence in the country.

- Belarus: Financial support to 8 journalists in exile, including relocation assistance and help with daily living costs.

- France: The Safety Fund contributed to costs of legal representation in a case brought by a journalist over threats to her physical integrity and safety.

- Turkey: One journalist in exile received financial help with living expenses.

- Palestine: Two journalists were given assistance for medical treatment after they were injured while covering clashes and protests.

- Yemen: Support to journalists to cover medical expenses

Source: IFJ

For more information, please contact IFJ on +32 2 235 22 16

The IFJ represents more than 600,000 journalists in 146 countries

Journalists in prison in 2021

IFJ Jailed Journalists Annual list

357

Journalists and media workers are currently in jail



+ 122

There are 128 more journalists in jail now than in March 2021



102

China (102) is the biggest jailer of media workers. Turkey (34) and Belarus (29) follow

Until December 31, 2021

Source: International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)





© UC San Diego

The researchers fastened 48 steel columns of varying dimensions into a hydraulic system called a shake table that thrusts one end of each column back and forth, replicating the shaking motions of an earthquake

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS IN BUILDING TECHNIQUES FOR BETTER SEISMIC PROTECTION

Since the mid-1990s, a type of steel column that commonly features slender cross-sectional elements has become more prevalent in buildings along the West Coast of the United States and in other seismically active regions. Although these columns have complied with modern design standards, our understanding of how they would perform during an earthquake has been limited by a lack of full-scale testing.

Using an earthquake-simulating device known as a shake table, researchers at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and the University of California San Diego (UC San Diego) identified deficiencies in the performance of these columns, with many buckling prematurely. Based on the results, documented in a NIST report, and a detailed analysis of the test data, the researchers devised new limits for column slenderness, described

in a paper published in the *Journal of Structural Engineering* last April. The American Institute of Steel Construction (AISC), a standards organization, has adopted the proposed limits in a draft for public feedback of the 2022 edition of AISC 341, a standard that provides guidance on designing earthquake-resistant steel buildings.

“A lot of current design provisions are based on scaled-down column tests or a very small number of full-scale tests. But the full-scale testing we conducted here has allowed us to begin filling in the knowledge gap regarding the performance of these kinds of columns under extreme loading conditions,” said NIST structural engineer John Harris. “The results have supported the development of enhanced guidance for new buildings and could inform decision making on modifying columns in existing structures.”

Throughout the 1990s, engineers gained substantial insight into the way structures respond to real earthquakes, such as the 1994 Northridge earthquake, which devastated the greater Los Angeles area. As a result, building codes began to impose strict requirements on the degree that buildings could sway during earthquakes — a measure known as story drift.

Steel columns in multistory buildings, with cross sections shaped like a capital “I,” are good at supporting the downward forces created by the weight of the floors and roof resting upon them. But a shaking ground can introduce additional forces in all directions, potentially causing columns to sway laterally, contributing to story drift. Before 1994, the middle part of columns’ I-shaped cross sections, known as webs, were often relatively short in buildings with steel frames. But since then, building designers have

satisfied story drift requirements by selecting columns with longer, or deeper, and typically more slender webs to boost their lateral stiffness.

According to the current building standards, these deep columns were acceptable to use as long as their web dimensions did not surpass certain depth-to-width ratios — known as a slenderness limit — meant to reduce the risk of columns losing their capability to carry weight during earthquakes, Harris said. However, some engineers were unsure of how these columns would hold up against real earthquake motions.

When the slenderness limits were developed decades ago, engineers did not have the capability of testing the seismic performance of full-scale columns like those actually used in buildings. Instead, they based the limits on reduced-scale model columns, creating some uncertainty about their effectiveness in reality. But full-scale tests have since become possible with the availability of very powerful facilities, known as shake tables, designed to put full-scale structural components through the seismic gauntlet.

To assess the slenderness limits, Harris worked with fellow structural engineering experts at the Jacobs School of Engineering at UC San Diego, with access to one of

the campus' shake tables, called the Caltrans Seismic Response Modification Device (SRMD) Test Facility.

The researchers tested 48 deep columns — donated by AISC and the Herrick Corporation, a steel fabricator — each 5 1/2 meters long and with webs of varying slenderness. Using the SRMD, they recreated the effects of earthquakes (which can differ greatly from quake to quake) on the columns.

The machine simulated the weight of buildings on the columns by applying either constant or fluctuating compression, the latter representing the forces that pulse through the structure as the building sways back and forth. By jolting one end of the column back and forth with the SRMD's hydraulic system, the team simulated a range of quake-induced lateral motions, the degree of which, in reality, depend on a building's distance from the fault line that earthquake ground motions emanate from.

The team measured the response of each column during the test, taking note of any permanent changes to its shape. In addition, they coated the columns in a layer of white paint that would begin to chip off as the steel bent, making permanent deformation more visually apparent.

They tested every column until it could no longer oppose the forces exerted by the machine, driving some to buckle near their ends and others to contort along their entire length. Among the deformed columns, they picked up on a telling pattern.

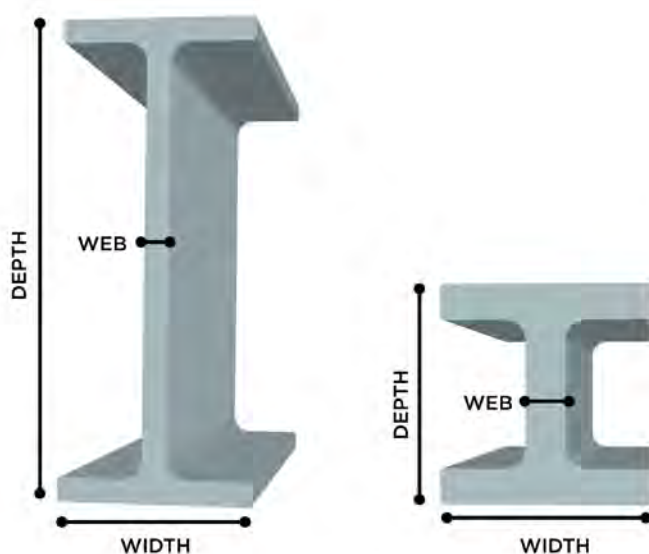
“We noticed that, as the columns became stockier and less slender, they can more easily go through the entire loading protocol without losing a significant amount of their capability to withstand the earthquake motions,” Harris said.

Their findings suggested that the previous small-scale tests were not painting a complete picture of deep column performance and that column webs meeting the limits prescribed by today's codes may still be too slender.

Keeping the story drift requirements in mind, Harris and his research partners at UC San Diego were able to propose new slenderness limits with the data from the full-scale experiments. Columns with webs sized according to the new limit could potentially meet drift and stability requirements at the same time.

The researchers brought the revised limits before the AISC for review, which resulted in the organization including the limits in a draft of the 2022 edition of AISC 341. When the new version is published this December, the more stringent limits on steel column webs could soften the blow of earthquakes, potentially saving newly designed buildings from unnecessary damage or partial collapse.

In the future, the researchers aim to incorporate the limits into standards for evaluating existing buildings as well, enabling engineers to identify deep columns in need of corrective actions such as the addition of bracing. But for now, AISC is accepting public feedback until Feb. 21, 2022, on its draft standard, which is available for download on its site.



© N. Hanaček/NIST

Before 1994, the webs of steel columns were often relatively shallow (right) in buildings with steel frames. But since then, building designers have satisfied drift requirements by selecting columns with longer, or deeper, webs (left) to boost their lateral stiffness.

EQUINOR AND BP SIGN AGREEMENT TO TRANSFORM SOUTH BROOKLYN MARINE TERMINAL INTO CENTRAL HUB FOR OFFSHORE WIND INDUSTRY

Equinor, and its partner bp, has announced an agreement to turn the storied South Brooklyn Marine Terminal (SBMT) complex in Brooklyn, New York into a major regional hub for offshore wind.



Artistic rendering of concept for site development of the South Brooklyn Marine Terminal (not final)

Under the agreement, the terminal will transform into a world-class offshore wind port capable of staging and assembling the largest, most sophisticated offshore wind technology components for the Empire Wind and Beacon Wind projects and for the growing U.S. offshore industry on the East Coast.

The agreement was co-signed by terminal operator Sustainable South Brooklyn Marine Terminal (SSBMT) and New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC).

The offshore wind projects on the US east coast are key building blocks to accelerate profitable growth in renewables and Equinor's ambition to install 12-16 GW of renewables capacity by 2030.

Equinor and bp will create an operations and maintenance (O&M) hub and staging area at SBMT, with a total investment of USD 200 – USD 250 million in infrastructure upgrades, while also pursuing the development of SBMT as a low-emissions facility. The port will become a cutting-edge staging facility for Equinor and bp's Empire Wind and Beacon Wind projects that will supply 3.3 gigawatts (GWs) of energy—enough to power nearly two million New York homes—as well as become a go-to destination for future offshore wind projects in the region.

The redevelopment will inject the Sunset Park waterfront with substantial investment from the new renewable energy economy, creating new jobs and providing an economic boost to the community. Equinor and bp's activities at SBMT are anticipated to support over one thousand jobs annually in the region.

“This agreement marks a major step forward in our commitment to New York State to both provide renewable power and to spark fresh economic activity, while creating enduring jobs,” said Siri Espedal Kindem, President of Equinor Wind U.S.

“With the support of NYCEDC, SSBMT and our partners in the community, Equinor and bp are ready and eager to invest in the revitalization of SBMT, an historic port that will soon become a major part of New York's energy future. New York has shown unflinching determination to become a focal point of the region's offshore wind industry, and this agreement offers tangible evidence that this vision is quickly coming to life.”

“We are enormously proud to lay the groundwork today for our vision of making New York City a nation-leading hub for the offshore wind industry. This agreement builds on the City's \$57M commitment to reactivate SBMT as a key manufacturing and operations base



Siri Espedal Kindem, president of Equinor Wind U.S.

and will help make New York a leader in climate resiliency as well as air quality through clean energy investments,” said NYCEDC Chief Strategy Officer and Executive Vice President Lindsay Greene.

“Working together with our partners at Equinor, bp, and SSBMT, we are also advancing economic recovery and increasing diversity in waterfront construction, by helping local minority- and women-owned business enterprises benefit from the growing offshore wind industry and take advantage of the green jobs of the future.”

Felipe Arbelaez, bp's senior vice president for zero carbon energy, added: “Today marks the first of many positive ripple effects from this project – and we want them to reverberate far and wide. As we reinvent energy, we also want to help reinvent the communities that help deliver it by investing in the skills and capabilities needed. By creating this regional hub we are able to do just that and it brings us all one step closer to delivering this incredible offshore wind development.”

At approximately 73.1 acres, SBMT will be one of the largest dedicated offshore wind port facilities in the United States. It is the only industrial waterfront site in the New York City area with the capacity to accommodate wind turbine generator staging and assembly activities at the scale required by component manufacturers.

Equinor recently announced the opening of the New York offshore wind project office, adjacent to SBMT in Industry City, to serve as the hub for Equinor and bp's regional offshore wind activities. The office will also be home to an offshore wind learning center that will provide New Yorkers an opportunity to learn about this growing new industry.

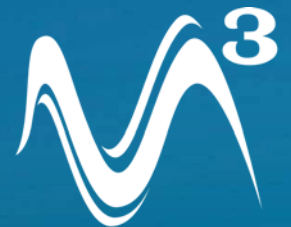


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A BREATH OF FRESH AIR WITH CLEAN SKY'S ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL SYSTEM

It's easy to take for granted that it's possible to breathe normally in an airliner cabin as it flies at cruising altitude, even when the air beyond the external skin of the aircraft is too cold and lacking in oxygen to sustain human life.

To make the air suitable for passengers and crew during flight, aircraft are equipped with an Environmental Control System (ECS). Typically this involves ingesting air from outside the airplane which is bled off the engine (near the intake) which is then pressurised and heated to a comfortable temperature using an air cycle system. This breathable air is then routed into the aircraft cabin. The air in the cabin is blended with a fresh intake of air in a 50:50 mix which is recirculated every two to three minutes.

This method of supplying breathable air has served aviation reliably for over 60 years. And it's also the subject of curiosity in the mindset of the general public, as heightened concerns related to the pandemic oriented around the air we breathe in public spaces and on public transport. As Clean Sky project officer Paolo Trinchieri notes, 'the Environmental Control System is a key system in an aircraft, because it's linked to air quality and it's very relevant in this

period of Covid.' The focus of this paper will not address specifically air quality in detail but the energy consumption of such environmental systems with the ultimate goal to contribute to emissions reduction.

One of the downsides of today's aircraft air conditioning systems is that bleeding air off the engines reduces their thrust output by between approximately 5-8%.

'For that reason, Liebherr Aerospace Toulouse and Airbus are working together on a Clean Sky 2 initiative to create a more energy-efficient Electrical Environmental Control System (EECS) that will be applicable to the next generation of more electric aircraft — a system that contributes to saving fuel burn, thereby cutting CO₂ and NO_x emissions.'

A more energy-efficient system for supplying breathable air will contribute to Clean Sky's objectives for sustainable flight as well as the European Commission's EU Green Deal ambitions. The project runs until 2023, and is underpinned by the development of two key techno-bricks developed in Clean Sky 2: a turbomachinery-based 'Air Cycle System' (Clean Sky Demonstrator D11), and a 'Vapour Cycle System' (Clean Sky's D13 Demonstrator).

A SMART TWO-STEP SYSTEM

The air cycle system brings in a 'fresh flow' of ambient air from outside the aircraft (though not from the engine as in conventional aircraft environmental control systems) which is then pressurised and conditioned to a temperature appropriate for passenger and crew comfort in the cabin. This air cycle system is coupled with a vapour cycle system, powered by a centrifugal compressor, which provides additional cooling capacity for the thermal (temperature) control.

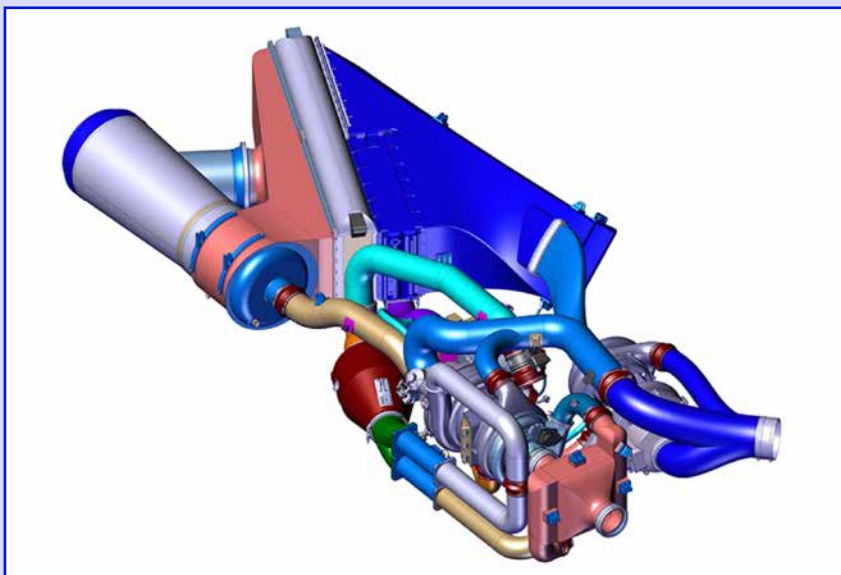
This combination is innovative in itself (today's cabin air conditioning systems do not have a vapour cycle system), but the innovation goes further, in that the overall system does not rely on air offtake from the engine.

'And the significance of this,' notes Trinchieri, 'is that the engines can be optimised for thrust — which is key during take-off and climb phases of flight — while the EECS saves weight and energy off-take through being more electrically, rather than pneumatically, oriented. It's a win-win approach that translates, ultimately, into fuel burn savings and a reduction in CO₂ and NO_x emissions.'

The engines can be optimised for thrust — which is key during take-off and climb phases of flight — while the EECS saves weight and energy off-take through being more electrically, rather than pneumatically, oriented. It's a win-win approach

'The idea behind our EECS is that instead of taking air from the engine, our system takes and uses the ambient air from outside the aircraft which we use for both pressurisation and air conditioning,' explains Kader Benmachou, Head of R&T programs and IP at Liebherr-Aerospace Toulouse.

Benmachou points out that one of the main motivations behind the project is that 'air conditioning systems are



one of the main energy consumers in the aircraft, so we're introducing new innovative technologies mainly to reduce the energy offtake in order to keep it competitive.'

While the major stakeholders in the project are Liebherr and Airbus, Benmachou says that 'this demonstrator is more than an enabler to mature the technology — it's also the result of cooperation with several partners across Europe. Through Clean Sky 2 we selected 12 consortia from 5 European countries, including academics and SMEs, that support the demonstrator with various technologies and modelling capabilities to simulate the complex architectures integrated within the air cycle and vapour cycle systems.'

ONE SIZE FITS ALL

The EECS model is developed around a specification based on a single-aisle short-medium aircraft type. However, Benmachou points out that Liebherr is undertaking analyses to define the 'boundary conditions' — the limits of size of aircraft that this technology is applicable to. The methodology will enable the system to be tailored to different sizes of aircraft.

'We have to do some analyses in order to evaluate the quality of such technology for both smaller and larger platforms, though ultimately the choice will be in the hands of the airframer. From Liebherr's side, we want to be ready for whatever platform will be selected by the airframer.'

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENERGY SAVING

What makes this project particularly relevant to the more electrical aircraft of the future is the fact that the system is electrically driven versus today's pneumatically based systems. This presents the opportunity for 'mutualisation,' whereby the same power electronics used to drive the EECS can also support other power electronics-driven functions, such as the start-up mode function for the main aircraft engines.

Instead of taking air from the engine, our system takes and uses the ambient air from outside the aircraft which we use for both pressurisation and air conditioning.

'If we reduce the number of power electronics in the aircraft we reduce the weight,' says Benmachou. 'And this opens the doors to having some mutualisation with the other loads. By using the same power electronics we can reduce the overall number of components and reduce weight in the aircraft, and this is what we call "multi-use capability".'

STATUS OF THE PROJECT

In 2020 the EECS passed its critical design review (CDR) with the airframer and the combined air cycle and vapour cycle system designs have been solidified. The results were positive and the manufacturing of the demonstrators is underway in preparation for the risk-driven development analyses, where models will be calibrated based on partial hardware component demonstration and previous data in order to reach appropriate representativeness.

'We do not need to develop the entire fuselage and so on as we are developing an air consuming pack whose size is comparable with a conventional pack. This is being tested at Liebherr's testing facilities where we have all the means to simulate the environmental constraints — what is being developed is a full scale demonstration at system level, not at aircraft level,' explains Benmachou.

'We have started the development of the major full scale rigs that will be tested in Liebherr's facilities from the second semester of 2021 until the end of 2022 in order to reach the TRL6 objectives in 2023,' he adds.

Though the original intention was to undertake a flight test campaign to test the EECS, this has been replaced with extensive ground tests at Liebherr's Toulouse facilities, using a system test bench, dedicated rotor and stator test benches, a vibration bench, a bearings test bench, a seals test bench, and a components test bench with ice particle ingestion.

The project has undergone analysis at system level of the benefits of an EECS compared to a conventional ECS with, reports Benmachou, 'some benefit which is between about 5-8% in terms of energy offtake — it's clearly an enabler for the more electrical generation of aircraft.'

However, he qualifies this by saying that 'what is relevant at the end of the day is



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More than 5000 scientists from 30 participating countries have been involved in more than 500 Clean Sky 2 grants

the assessment that needs to be done at airframe level, because the decision to go for an electrical aircraft will be done by the airframer after considering the overall technologies integrated in the aircraft.'

THE CLEAN SKY ADVANTAGE

The development of the EECS is progressing, says Benmachou, 'thanks to the Clean Sky ecosystem, which has enabled the project to create a major high-level demonstrator with partners in order to go a step further and reach the objective in terms of impact analysis and demonstration of the feasibility of the technology.'

'Ultimately,' concludes Benmachou, 'the airframer will only select this technology if it's in the interest of the airlines — therefore competitiveness is an important detail, and Clean Sky has enabled us to make such a high level and representative demonstration.'

"The airframer will only select this technology" if it's in the interest of the airlines – therefore competitiveness is an important detail

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A six-day, spectacular grand tour on France's first private rail company



Throughout the 4,000-kilometre journey, each day holds new surprises, new emotions, special moments, and extraordinary adventures! Far more than a mere journey, Le Grand Tour is a six-day, five-night adventure exploring the splendours of France, where each stopover provides a new venue for unforgettable emotions. Throughout the 4,000-kilometre journey, each day holds new surprises, new emotions, special moments, and extraordinary adventures!

Recognised globally for its brilliant creations, Puy du Fou* has established itself as a unique benchmark across the world for great shows inspired by History.

Puy du Fou has announced the creation of the thrilling Le Grand Tour, which will carry its traveller-spectator guests on a 6-day, 5-night Grand Tour rail journey of discovery through the splendours of France. The experience will be available from summer 2023 but can be pre-booked now.

THE WORLD'S LONGEST SHOW

The 6-day, 5-night show will take its travellers across 4,000 kms in an authentic Belle Epoque train on an experience punctuated by surprises and wonder, filled with stories and legends.

Guests will travel across space and time, and through geography and history on a spectacular journey packed with romanticism and nostalgia.

Following the footsteps of travellers from the late 16th century who rounded off their cultural education with a voyage through France and Europe, once aboard, guests will explore the extent to which the great figures of the past have shaped our civilisation through culture and the arts.



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© Puy du Fou

Travelling from Champagne to Burgundy, from Lake Annecy to the Arcachon Basin, and from the Palace of the Popes in Avignon to the Châteaux of the Loire Valley, each stopover will present an opportunity to learn about great historical figures. The trip terminates at Puy du Fou in the Vendée.

ELEGANCE AND CHARM ON THE BELLE EPOQUE TRAIN

Combining luxury with the wonderful décor of the Belle Époque, the trip is a chance to rediscover the golden age of train travel. Designed as a theatre in motion, the train is a work of art in its own right. It is naturally enhanced by Puy du Fou's trademark attention to detail, apparent in everything from the costumed on-board service to the elegant cabins. Relax in your lounge-style cabin by day until its transformation into a comfortable bedroom at night,

linger over a drink in the convivial bar and dine in the shimmering light of the train's dining car.

AN AUDACIOUS HISTORIC FIRST

This will be the first time in history that a 100% private rail company will transport passengers throughout the year on the French national rail network. Up until now, the SNCF and the companies operating on the French railways are all public or semi-public.

Thanks to the change in law which opened the national network to competition in January 2021, Puy du Fou has been able to create the first new national passenger rail network for

nearly a century – since the inception of the SNCF in 1938. Working in close collaboration with SNCF Réseau, the tour of France will be punctuated by selected stopovers.

Far more than a mere journey, Le Grand Tour is a six-day, five-night adventure exploring the splendours of France, where each stopover provides a new venue for unforgettable emotions.

Throughout the 4,000-kilometre journey, each day holds new surprises, new emotions, special moments, and extraordinary adventures!

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© Wikicommons/Benoit.SANSON

LE GRAND TOUR – FACTS & FIGURES:

6 days and 5 nights

4000 kilometres of shows

30 travellers per week; 6,000 travellers anticipated in 2023

15 comfortable cabins, ranging from 10-30m². Cabins include private bathroom with shower and toilet

15 crew members

2 gourmet dining cars and 1 bar car

Booking available now for all dates from summer 2023.

Once a booking is made, travellers are contacted by a Grand Tour ambassador to assist with adding personal touches to the trip.

PRICES: Le Grand Tour costs from €4.900pp for a 5-night/6-day fully inclusive trip.

**Puy du Fou is a historical theme park in Les Epesses (between Cholet and La Roche-sur-Yon) in the heart of the Pays de la Loire region of Western France. The park receives more than 2 million visitors every year, making it the second most popular theme park in France after Disneyland Paris.*

TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

How to colour block: look cool in hot shades

Joyful and vibrant colours are re-entering into our closets, and outfits are changing according to the sunny weather. Green and pink will dominate this spring-summer season. A bold colour combo, for a daring look. For inspiration and a list of must-haves, read on!

Leonie Hanne, the German influencer with over 4 million followers knows how to both match colours and boost her spring outfits!



© INSTAGRAM @LEONIEHANNE

The future is green

Emerald Green may have started off as a micro-trend in 2020, but it has blown up and is still relevant for 2022.

And if you believe in the psychology of colours, this green is said to reflect harmony, growth, royalty and refinement.



© INSTAGRAM @LEONIEHANNE

Pink is the new black

For the most striking suiting this summer, think pink. The numbers prove hot pink's dominance. On the fashion shopping app Lyst (*), searches for pink items have increased by 24 percent in the past month. The fastest-growing categories range from blazers (+34 percent) to dresses (+16 percent) to bags (+45 percent).

Must have



© VALENTINO

Shoulder bag in calfskin with metal Vlogo signature
(valentino.com)



© JACQUEMUS

"La Veste Sauge" line-blend jacket
([Jacquemus spotted on mytheresa.com](http://jacquemus.com))



© BOTTEGA VENETA

Padded "intreccio" leather cross-body bag
(bottegaveneta.com)



© POMELLATO

Ring in 18K rose gold and 36 emerald 0.4 ct
(pomellato.com)



© VALENTINO

Logo-detail tweed dress
([Valentino spotted on farfetch.com](http://valentino.com))



© TONY BIANCO

High-heeled mule with ruffled top strap
([Tony Bianco spotted on revolve.com](http://tonybianco.com))



© JIMMYCHOO

Suede sandals with crystal buckle
(jimmychoo.com)



© RALPH LAUREN

Silk shirt with a timeless style
(ralphlauren.co.uk)

(* Lyst, the self-proclaimed "definitive fashion shopping app" is a global fashion search engine, where you can shop items from retailers all over the world.

TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

Summer ahead of time

Discover the new fashion and beauty products that will make you want to travel. The one thing they have in common: the sun and the summer heat are already here.

Provence in a jewel case

The luxury jewellery brand, Freywille, has one feature in particular: its talent to pay tribute, through its creations, to the works of famous painters. So, what's new this spring? A collection of jewellery (rings, earrings, bracelets and other pendants) called "Provence", dedicated to Vincent Van Gogh and the region where he lived and painted more than 300 pictures. Clouds dancing in the sky form the essential character of the design, emphasised by a shimmering bouquet of colours.

(shop.freywille.com)



Calabria in a bottle

Feel like buying a one-way ticket to Calabria? It's possible with just one spray of the new perfume by Guerlain: Aqua Allegoria "Nerolia Vetiver". A very vibrant and luminous, woody floral fragrance, where the floral scent of Calabrian neroli, accentuated by vetiver and refreshed by basil, is fused with a delicious fig accord.

We also appreciate the brand's environmentally-responsible approach and the powerful symbol of Guerlain's commitment to the planet. Indeed, Aqua Allegoria's fragrances contain up to 95% of natural products. Also, the Aqua Allegoria fragrances are contained in screw-top, refillable and recyclable bottles made in France, from at least 15% recycled glass.

Ibiza in your closet

Among the fashion inspirations of this spring-summer, let us present you beautiful Ibiza with its countless beaches, perfect "boho vibes", non-stop parties and the best hippie markets in the world! Let's fall in love with the "Ibiza style fashion" and the true hippie spirit of the island!

Boho style is characterised by long, flowing or tiered skirts and dresses, peasant blouses, ethnic touches such as tunics or wood jewellery, embroidery or embellishments with beading, fringed handbags, and jewelled or embellished flat sandals (or flat ankle boots). AND for the most demanding fashionistas, THE special touch of 2022 will unquestionably be the "crochet" style. Give in to the temptation!



Lace-up leather sandals

(Gianvito Rossi spotted on farfetch.com)



Medium size contrasting raffia and crochet handbag
(unisa-europa.com)

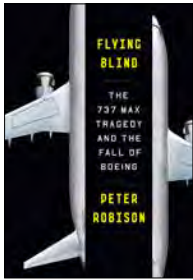


Ruffle mini dress with crochet details
(vila.com)



Crocheted-look bikini
(bananamoon.com)

BOOKS



FLYING BLIND

By Peter Robison

THE 737 MAX TRAGEDY AND THE FALL OF BOEING

NEW YORK TIMES BUSINESS BEST SELLER • A suspenseful behind-the-scenes look at the dysfunction that contributed to one of the worst tragedies in modern aviation: the 2018 and 2019 crashes of the Boeing 737 MAX. An “authoritative,

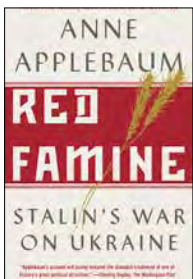
gripping and finely detailed narrative that charts the decline of one of the great American companies” (New York Times Book Review), from the award-winning reporter for Bloomberg.

Boeing is a century-old titan of industry. It played a major role in the early days of commercial flight, World War II bombing missions, and moon landings. The planemaker remains a cornerstone of the U.S. economy, as well as a linchpin in the awesome routine of modern air travel. But in 2018 and 2019, two crashes of the Boeing 737 MAX 8 killed 346 people. The crashes exposed a shocking pattern of malfeasance, leading to the biggest crisis in the company’s history—and one of the costliest corporate scandals ever.

How did things go so horribly wrong at Boeing?

Flying Blind is the definitive exposé of the disasters that transfixed the world. Drawing from exclusive interviews with current and former employees of Boeing and the FAA; industry executives and analysts; and family members of the victims, it reveals how a broken corporate culture paved the way for catastrophe. It shows how in the race to beat the competition and reward top executives, Boeing skimped on testing, pressured employees to meet unrealistic deadlines, and convinced regulators to put planes into service without properly equipping them or their pilots for flight. It examines how the company, once a treasured American innovator, became obsessed with the bottom line, putting shareholders over customers, employees, and communities.

By Bloomberg investigative journalist Peter Robison, who covered Boeing as a beat reporter during the company’s fateful merger with McDonnell Douglas in the late ‘90s, this is the story of a business gone wildly off course. At once riveting and disturbing, it shows how an iconic company fell prey to a win-at-all-costs mentality, threatening an industry and endangering countless lives.



RED FAMINE

By Anne Applebaum

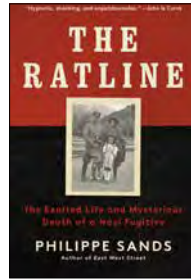
STALIN’S WAR ON UKRAINE

A revelatory history of one of Stalin’s greatest crimes, the consequences of which still resonate today, as Russia has placed Ukrainian independence in its sights once more—from the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Gulag* and the National Book Award finalist *Iron Curtain*.

“With searing clarity, *Red Famine* demonstrates the horrific consequences of a campaign to eradicate ‘backwardness’ when undertaken by a regime in a state of war with its own people.” *The Economist*

In 1929 Stalin launched his policy of agricultural collectivization—in effect a second Russian revolution—which forced millions of peasants off their land and onto collective farms. The result was a catastrophic famine, the most lethal in European history. At least five million people died between 1931 and 1933 in the USSR. But instead of sending relief the Soviet state made use of the catastrophe to rid itself of a political problem. In *Red Famine*, Anne Applebaum argues that more than three million of those dead were Ukrainians who perished not because they were accidental victims of a bad policy but because the state deliberately set out to kill them. Devastating and definitive, *Red Famine* captures the horror of ordinary people struggling to survive extraordinary evil.

Applebaum’s compulsively readable narrative recalls one of the worst crimes of the twentieth century, and shows how it may foreshadow a new threat to the political order in the twenty-first.



THE RATLINE

By Philippe Sands

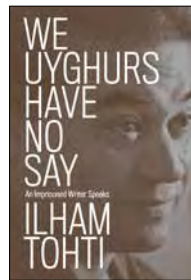
THE EXALTED LIFE AND MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF A NAZI FUGITIVE

A tale of Nazi lives, mass murder, love, Cold War espionage, a mysterious death in the Vatican, and the Nazi escape route to Perón’s Argentina, the *Ratline*—from the author of the internationally acclaimed, award-winning *East West Street*.

“Hypnotic, shocking, and unputdownable.” —John le Carré, internationally renowned bestselling author

Baron Otto von Wächter, a lawyer, husband, and father, was also a senior SS officer and war criminal, indicted for the murder of more than a hundred thousand Poles and Jews. Although he was given a new identity and life via “the Ratline” to Argentina, the escape route taken by thousands of other Nazis, Wächter and his plan were cut short by his mysterious, shocking death in Rome.

In the midst of the burgeoning Cold War, was he being recruited by the Americans or by the Soviets—or perhaps both? Or was he poisoned by one side or the other, as his son believes—or by both? With the cooperation of Wächter’s son Horst, who believes his father to have been “a good man,” award-winning author Philippe Sands draws on a trove of family correspondence to piece together Wächter’s extraordinary life before and during the war, his years evading justice, and his sudden, puzzling death. A riveting work of history, *The Ratline* is part historical detective story, part love story, part family memoir, and part Cold War espionage thriller.



WE UYGHURS HAVE NO SAY

AN IMPRISONED WRITER SPEAKS

By Ilham Tohti

TRANSLATED BY YAXUE CAO, CINDY CARTER AND MATTHEW ROBERTSON

The words of China’s most famous political prisoner

In Xinjiang, the large northwest region of China, the government has imprisoned more than a million Uyghurs in reeducation camps. One of the incarcerated—whose sentence, unlike most others, has no end date—is Ilham Tohti, an intellectual and economist, a prolific writer, and formerly the host of a website, Uyghur Online. In 2014, Tohti was arrested; accused of advocating separatism, violence, and the overthrow of the Chinese government; subjected to a two-day trial; and sentenced to life. Nothing has been heard from him since.

Here are Tohti’s own words, a collection of his plain-spoken calls for justice, scholarly explanations of the history of Xinjiang, and poignant personal reflections. While his courage and outspokenness about the plight of China’s Muslim minorities is extraordinary, these essays sound a measured insistence on peace and just treatment for the Uyghurs.

Winner of the PEN/Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award and the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought while imprisoned, this book is the only way to hear from a man who has been called “a Uyghur Mandela.”

Praise: “Ilham Tohti is the world’s foremost expert on Uyghurs and Chinese policy in Xinjiang, and we are extremely fortunate to have the first collection of his writings and interviews in English. These texts provide a politically illuminating introduction to the many dimensions of Uyghur oppression. This is an absolute must-read for anyone trying to understand the origins of one of the 21st century’s great human catastrophes.”

– Eli Friedman, Cornell University, author of *The Urbanization of People: The Politics of Development, Labor Markets, and Schooling in the Chinese City*.

“Ilham Tohti should be read not only as a tragic victim of state violence, but as a primary source for understanding the underlying conditions at the heart of the Xinjiang emergency. With the skill of a diplomat balancing on the knife-edge of a capricious state, *We Uyghurs Have No Say* calls all people of conscience to stand in opposition to Islamophobia and against an emergent settler colonialism at a frontier of our shared global economy.”

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