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The growth of authoritarianism  
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RUSSIA - THE GANGSTER  
STATE ATTACKS

Putin proves his criminal  
credentials in Ukraine

## VLADIMIR PUTIN

### *Self-Styled Avenger*

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Nikola Hendrickx

# EDITORIAL

## **RUSSIA'S PSYCHOPATHIC LEADER REVEALS HIS HAND – How the invasion of Ukraine proves Putin's insanity**

*by Jim Gibbons*

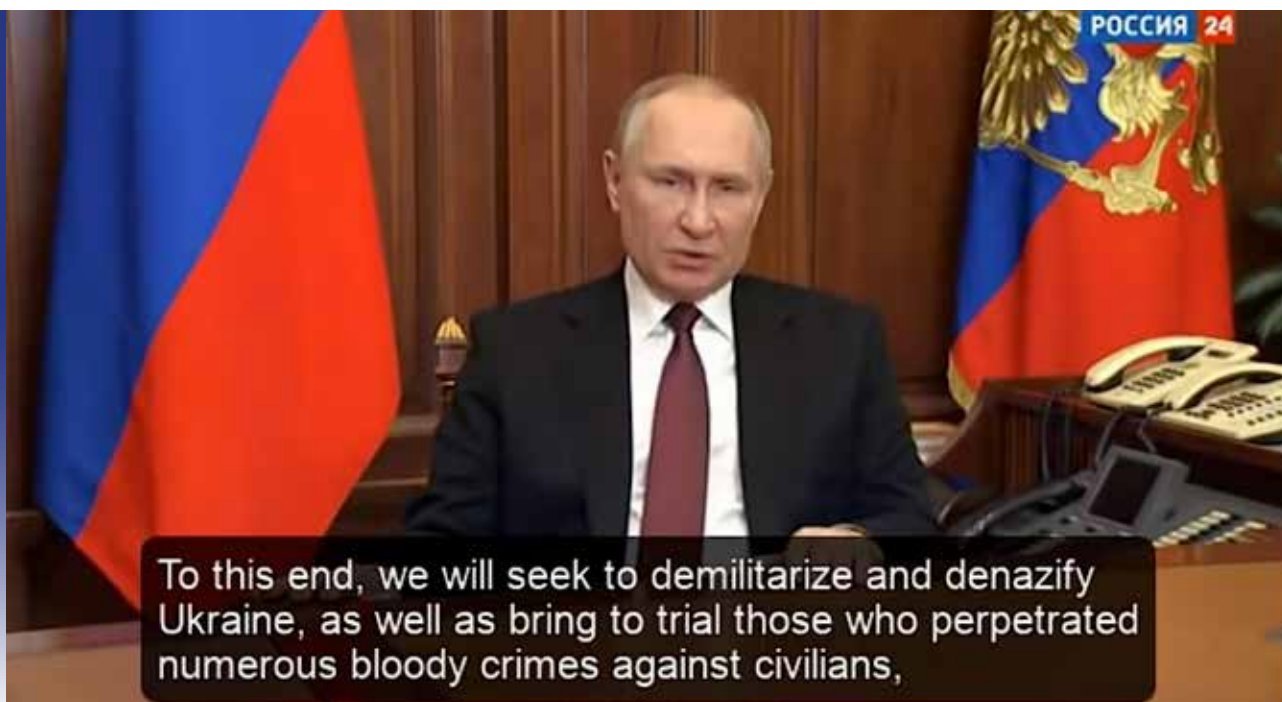
"These are the actions of a mad man!" So said Andrius Kubilius, the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Russia during an emergency debate the day after Russian president Vladimir Putin's illegal and unjustifiable incursion into Ukraine. He called it a "peacekeeping" mission, but Ukraine was largely peaceful before Putin's army arrived to shoot border guards and civilians and to roll its tanks through the streets of the capital, Kyiv. He also told me: "It is not only war against Ukraine, it is war against democracy and a crime against international peace. For this crime Nazi criminals were sentenced in Nuremberg trials. Putin and his allies must be brought to international justice." Strangely, Putin has accused Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, of being a Nazi. Zelensky countered that it would be hard for him to be a Nazi as he's actually Jewish. Perhaps Putin didn't spot that discrepancy.

During the debate, held in Brussels but with most participants joining it remotely, Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, a member of the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, expressed her anger that 15 hours after the invasion, the EU had yet to impose any sanctions at all. She reminded MEPs that what was needed was "real action against an aggressor that has been lying to the whole world." Putin wants to replace Ukraine's home-grown politicians with his puppets, and Klympush-Tsintsadze said the affair must be blamed on all Russians. "It's not Putin who is killing our people," she said, "it's the Russian people." Since then, dozens of Russians who went out in the streets of Russia's cities to protest against the war have been arrested by Putin's police. Their attitude to disobedience against Putin would have been recognised by Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the Gestapo. No-one was allowed to question the decisions of Adolf Hitler either. Klympush-Tsintsadze also pointed out that the €1.2-billion promised by the EU to help Ukraine will fall woefully short of what is needed. The fear in Europe's capitals must be that any money sent to Kiev will be seized by the kleptocratic Putin. As MEP David McAllister, chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs tweeted: "The attack on Ukraine is not only a blatant violation of international law but also an attack on our freedom, democracy & security in Europe."

In his book 'Corruptible', Brian Klaas, Associate Professor of global politics at University College, London, explains that psychopaths are incapable of normal emotions, "However, just because psychopaths don't naturally feel for others doesn't mean they're unemotional. In fact, one emotion comes extremely naturally to psychopaths: anger." During Putin's rise to power, several people were to witness examples of his anger. When Mikhail Manevitch of the St. Petersburg property department tried to restore the voting rights lost by the City Hall, which would have disadvantaged Putin, he was murdered on his way to work by a sniper. According to Catherine Belton in her very scary book, 'Putin's People', Putin didn't take any chances of losing his power battles, while true democracy seems to be an anathema to him. It's even been suggested that it's his horror of 'people power' that urged him to attack Ukraine. He didn't want to see democracy spread. At least, certainly not to Russia. With the Duma, the Russian parliament, packed with his obedient 'yes-men' he has nothing to fear. Representatives confident to speak their minds might pose a threat to his autocracy.

McAllister admitted during the session at the European Parliament that: "we couldn't imagine war." He described the invasion as an "unjustified and barbarous attack." As for what Russia will do while running the country it has stolen, McAllister is not hopeful. "They provide no welfare, no freedom," he said. But he admitted that the EU is not a military union. Even so, he told MEPs: "We are facing a war. A war! This is going to change the face of history, not only for Europe but for the whole of mankind." Sanctions are Europe's only weapon, but with Putin sitting on a war chest of some €640-billion he may feel he can survive this, backed up by threats of military escalation, safe in the knowledge that his Duma members support him, even if many ordinary Russians don't. Neither, it seems, do some EU member states. Ukrainian Duma member Halaichuk Vadyn Serhiiovych pointed out to MEPs that "some EU countries are blocking such measures as excluding Russia from the SWIFT financial transaction service." He wants a no-fly zone to be imposed. But with a divided Europe, Putin is home free. "Europe can only be successful," argued German Green MEP, Reinhard Bütikofer, "if we overcome our divisions and work together." Of course, while Putin apparently wants to be king of the world, the real king is – and always has been – money. The West's best hope, perhaps, is that Putin's oligarchs will start to complain that they're losing money because of him. But not too loudly: those who have opposed his edicts in the past, for whatever reason, have suffered death, prison or penury. Not much hope there, then...





## VLADIMIR PUTIN

### *Self-Styled Avenger*

After weeks of attempts by Western leaders to negotiate through diplomatic channels, Russian president Vladimir Putin finally launched a massive military operation in Ukraine, in the early hours of Thursday 24 February. It amounted to a full scale invasion of that country. Nothing and no one could stop him. A few minutes before ordering his troops to attack, Vladimir Putin addressed his people and the whole world from his office in the Kremlin. It was a most incredible speech...it was a declaration of war!

Two days after recognising the independence of Ukrainian separatist territories in Donbas, he said he wanted to "defend" them against Ukrainian aggression. *"I have decided on a special military operation,"* Putin announced in a surprise statement on television, before 6 a.m. (0300 GMT). *"We will strive to achieve*

*demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine,"* said Russia's strongman, sitting at a desk.

He repeated his unfounded accusations of a "genocide" orchestrated by Ukraine in the pro-Russian secessionist territories in the east of the country, stressed the call for help from the separatist leaders allegedly made the previous night, and reiterated the "aggressive policy" of NATO with regard to Russia and of which Ukraine was supposedly the tool.

Shortly later, a series of explosions were heard in Kiev, in Kramatorsk, a city in the east which serves as the headquarters of the Ukrainian army, in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, and in Odessa, on the Black Sea. Air-raid sirens sounded every 15 minutes in Lviv, the western city where the United States and several

other countries have moved their embassies.

But let us go back in time to March 18, 2014. Following the Winter Olympics that he had hosted in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, Russian president Vladimir Putin addressed the nation from the Kremlin before a large assembly of high ranking officials and parliamentarians.

He also signed the documents that officially reunited the Russian Federation and Crimea, the home base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Crimea had seceded from Ukraine only two days earlier, on March 16. The Russian president gave a historic speech that was filled with references to several centuries of Russian history.

At the centre of his narrative was Crimea. Putin declared that Crimea



Anti-government protests in Kiev, February 26, 2014



Vladimir Putin and Viktor Yanukovich in december 2013

*“has always been an inseparable part of Russia” and that Moscow’s decision to annex it was rooted in the need to right an “outrageous historical injustice.”*

That injustice had begun with the Bolsheviks, who incorporated lands that Russia had conquered, into their new Soviet republic of Ukraine. Then, in 1954, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev made the fateful decision to transfer Crimea from the Russian Federation to Ukraine. And when the Soviet state collapsed in 1991, Russian-speaking Crimea was, according to Putin, left in Ukraine *“like a sack of potatoes”*.

Putin’s speech and the ceremony reuniting Russia with its ‘lost province’ came after several months of political upheaval in Ukraine. Towards the end of November 2013, demonstrations had begun as a protest against Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich’s decision to back out of the planned signing of an association agreement with the European Union. These soon turned into a large-scale protest movement against his government, known as the Euro Maidan protests.

By February 2014, clashes with Ukrainian police erupted that left over 100 people dead on both sides. On February 21, 2014, talks between Yanukovich and the opposition were brokered by outside parties, including Russia.

But a provisional agreement, intended to end the violence and pave the way for new presidential elections at the end of 2014, fell apart when Yanukovich suddenly fled the country and took refuge in

Moscow. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, the opposition formed an interim government and set May 25, 2014 as the date for presidential elections.

At about the same time that Yanukovich left Ukraine, unidentified armed fighters who came to be known as the ‘little green men’ began to seize control of strategic infrastructure on the Crimean Peninsula. On March 6, the Crimean parliament voted to hold a snap referendum on independence and the prospect of joining Russia. On March 16, the results of the referendum showed that 97 percent of voters had opted to unite with Russia. It was precisely this referendum that Putin used to justify Russia’s annexation of Crimea. Most foreign observers felt that the Russian president, by so doing, had dealt the severest blow to European security since the end of the Cold War.

As Western leaders argued over how to punish Putin for seizing Crimea and deter him from similar actions in the rest of Ukraine and elsewhere, many questions arose: Why did Putin do this? What does he want? Many commentators turned back to questions that had been asked nearly 15 years earlier, when he first emerged from near-obscure to become the president of Russia: “Who is Vladimir Putin?” For some observers, the answer was clear: Putin was who he had always been—a corrupt, avaricious, and power-hungry authoritarian leader. In their view, what Putin did in Ukraine was just a logical next step to what he had been doing in Russia

since 2000: trying to tighten his grip on power.

They argued that annexing Crimea and the nationalist rhetoric Putin used to justify it were merely ploys to bolster his flagging public support and distract the population from problems at home.

Other analysts however saw Putin’s shift toward nationalist rhetoric and his decision to annex Crimea as evidence of new “imperial” thinking, and as dangerously genuine. Putin’s goal, they proposed, was to restore the Soviet Union or even the old Russian Empire.

But if that was true, where were the patterns and key indicators of neo-imperialist revisionism in Putin’s past behaviour? Many world leaders and commentators wondered what they had missed. Unable to reconcile their old understanding of Putin with his behaviour in Ukraine, some concluded that Putin himself had changed. A “new Putin” must have somehow appeared in the Kremlin.



Russian soldier guarding an helicopter in Crimea

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

If, in fact, Putin’s behaviour in the Ukraine crisis was really different from the past, it could provide an opportunity to understand him better. It has been argued that it is precisely when people break with previous patterns of behaviour that we can begin to gain an understanding of their real character. But patterns of past behaviour are often a poor predictor of how a person will act in the future. Contexts change and alter people’s actions. Pattern breaks are key for analysing individual behaviour. They push us to focus on



the invariant aspects of the person's self. They help reveal the hidden drivers, the underlying motivations, and what a leader values most.



In 2006, Vladimir Putin was named 'Person of the Year' by Time magazine. Between 2013 and 2016, he was voted "most powerful person in the world" four times, by the influential American magazine, Forbes. From a very early age, he manifested the desire to become a personality apart. However, he has often left people with the feeling of being a man of many faces, hiding his true nature and feelings behind a succession of masks. His gaze, sometimes vague, sometimes intense, and his frowns or an impatient movement of his lips testify to an iron will, while he seems to slip from one's grasp.

As a secret service officer, he undoubtedly learned to play more than one role and he has projected the image of a man who excels in the art of covering his tracks. Many



© Nf  
Putin in KGB uniform 1980

have been struck by the ability of the future president of Russia to adapt his speech to the circumstances.

The most obvious reason we cannot take any story or so-called fact at face value when it comes to Vladimir Putin is that we are dealing with someone who is a master at manipulating information, suppressing it, and creating pseudo-information.

In today's world of social media, the public has the impression that it knows, or easily can know everything about everybody. Nothing, it seems, is private or secret. Yet, after some twenty years, Vladimir Putin's private life is kept under wraps and he still remains shrouded in mystery. When he was named prime minister in 1999, he asked a few trusted journalists to write his official biography, and ever since, any research into Putin's path to power has been strictly forbidden. We still don't know some of the most basic facts about a man who is arguably the most powerful individual in the world and the leader of an important nation.

As the official story goes, Vladimir Putin was born in Leningrad -

today's Saint Petersburg - in October 1952 and was his parents' only surviving child. The family lived in communal housing with the young Vladimir growing up very much in the shadow of World War II. After school, he studied law at Leningrad State University, graduated in 1975, and immediately joined the Soviet intelligence service, the KGB. After completing one year of study at the KGB's academy in Moscow, he was posted to Dresden, in East Germany, in 1985 where he served as an undercover agent and liaison officer for the Stasi and KGB. It was in 1990, just as the USSR was on the verge of collapse that he was recalled from Dresden to Leningrad.

There, he moved into the intelligence service's 'active reserve' and returned to Leningrad State University as a deputy to the vice rector. He became an advisor to one of his former law professors, Anatoly Sobchak, who left the university to become chairman of Leningrad's city soviet, or council. Putin worked with Sobchak during the latter's successful electoral campaign to become the first democratically elected mayor of what was now St. Petersburg.

But some biographers have noted his "often disreputable" skills acquired while in the KGB. For instance, he had corrupt companies pay dirty money to Sobchak and his staff on a number of occasions during his time at Saint Petersburg city council.

By all accounts Putin's grandfather was a cook in the service of Stalin, and of Lenin before that. So, what is the grandson's favourite recipe? One may well be tempted to answer, "chaos, spiced with suspense and intimidation"!



© Nf  
Putin's Stasi ID card



Vladimir Putin and St. Petersburg Mayor, Anatoly Sobchak (right) during a ceremony to name Austrian Square in St. Petersburg on September 28, 1992



After the collapse of the Soviet Union, 15 new countries, including the new Russian Federation came into being. In Vladimir Putin's eyes, Russia had just lost 2 million square miles of territory. The government had to sell off nearly 45,000 public businesses such as energy, mining and communication companies that had been run by the communist regime. And it was chaos. The Russian economy was in a free fall and all these companies ended up in the hands of a few, extremely wealthy men...the oligarchs.

At the same time, the new Russian state was having a hard time establishing itself. Russia's first president, Boris Yeltsin was highly unpopular for cooperating with the West, and to make matters worse, he was an alcoholic; many Russians felt he was an embarrassment.

In order to stay in power, he sought the support of these oligarchs, surrendering immense political power to them. This is when Vladimir Putin entered the world of politics.

In June 1991, he became a deputy mayor of St. Petersburg and was put in charge of the city's Committee for External Relations. He officially resigned from the KGB in August 1991.

In 1996, after Mayor Sobchak lost his bid for re-election, Vladimir Putin moved to Moscow to work in the Kremlin in the department that managed presidential property. In March 1997, Putin was elevated to deputy chief of the presidential staff. He assumed a number of other

responsibilities within the Kremlin before being appointed head of the Russian Federal Security Service FSB (the successor to the KGB), in July 1998.

Putin used his position to give special treatment to friends and allies in the private sector, helping them to structure monopolies and to regulate their competitors. He rapidly became a favourite among the oligarchs and assembled a support network of oligarchs and security officials, mostly fellow former KGB officers like himself. With their help, he rapidly ascended to the upper echelons of the new Russian state.

In August 1999, Vladimir Putin was named, in rapid succession, one of Russia's first deputy prime ministers and then prime minister by President Boris Yeltsin, who also indicated that Putin was his preferred successor as president.

Yet this fierce nationalist felt that Yeltsin was letting the US dominate Russia and that NATO, the alliance that worked for decades to contain Soviet influence, would expand into the newly liberated countries and surround Russia. Putin's goal then became to build a strong Russian state, one that would be both stable at home and capable of exercising more influence over its neighbours.

And he didn't have to wait long... during the post-Soviet chaos, there was escalating violence in Chechnya, a region that had unilaterally seceded from Russia in the mid 1990s. Chechen warlords and terrorists were pushing into Russian territory and attacking the border. In August 1999, a series of deadly bombings killed more than 300 people in several Russian cities, including Moscow. Putin, the new prime minister, immediately blamed Chechen separatists for the attacks. He appeared regularly on television, claiming he will avenge Russia. The population rallied around him and his approval ratings jumped from 2% before the bombings to 45% after the bomb attacks.

Later, journalists uncovered evidence that suggested Russian security services could have been complicit in the Moscow bombings, perhaps knowing they would spark more support for a strongman like



Chechen refugees filing past a Russian tank

Putin. But a tightly-controlled official investigation rapidly quashed any dissenting theories. However, certain oligarchs who were not in good terms with Putin, such as Boris Berezovsky threatened to lay out documentary evidence that Russian security services were involved in the apartment house explosions of September 1999.

Be that as it may, Russia launched a popular but devastating war in Chechnya. The capital, Grozny was levelled by such intense bombing that close to 80,000 people were killed. Putin had attained his objective; in less than one year, Chechnya was successfully brought back under Russian control.

On December 31, 1999, Putin became acting president of Russia after Yeltsin resigned. He was officially elected to the position of president in March 2000 and began to shape the Russian state to his vision. Patronage and corruption remained some of his key tools, but he quickly suppressed the oligarchs under his rule. Those who supported



Russian President Boris Yeltsin shakes hands with Putin, whom he'd appointed to head the Federal Security Service in July, at a meeting in his Gorki Residence in Moscow on November 10, 1998



Mikhail Khodorkovsky

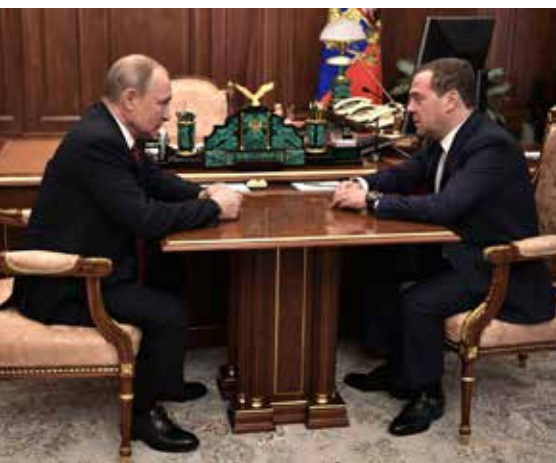
him were rewarded and those against him imprisoned and harassed. The most striking example was Mikhail Khodorkovsky, former oil magnate and at one point, Russia's richest man. He was convicted to 14 years in jail on a charge of embezzlement. This was seen as a vendetta from Putin, for Khodorkovsky getting involved in opposition politics.

Putin served two terms as Russia's president from 2000 to 2004 and from 2004 to 2008, before stepping aside - in line with Russia's constitutional prohibition against three consecutive presidential terms. He was named prime minister by his hand-picked successor and friend, Dmitry Medvedev.

He very soon imposed a vertical hierarchy, with himself as the strong, undisputed leader of a state which he ambitioned to bolster. He developed a glamorous cult of personality around himself to give Russians the impression that after years of struggle, they finally had a real leader who is in charge.

He gradually adopted a growingly nationalist stance, positioning himself against the West both in foreign affairs and on social issues. As an alternative to what he sees as Western decadence, Vladimir Putin offers the image of a strong Russia, a disciplined Russia. He sees himself as a guide not just for his own people, but for anyone around the world who believes in conservative values.

In March 2012, Putin was re-elected, once again amid chaos, to serve another term as Russia's president until 2018.



Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev

This was made possible thanks to a constitutional amendment, again pushed through by then-President Dmitry Medvedev in December 2008, extending the presidential term from four to six years. He doubled down on his authoritarian style of governance at home and his militaristic strategy abroad, but in both cases, he displayed his mastery of controlling information.

Since he first took office, Putin has kept a tight leash on Russian media. Essentially, all news outlets are state-owned propaganda machines and his regime decides which stories air and how, always depicting him as the strong Russian, nationalist leader. In 2012, he cracked down on human rights and civil liberties, making clear there was no room for dissent in his Russia.

Unsurprisingly, he was re-elected for a fourth term as president, obtaining 76% of votes. And following the constitutional amendments that were approved in July 2020, Putin can potentially remain in office until 2036.

These basic facts have been covered countless times in books and newspaper articles over the years, yet there is still some uncertainty in the sources about specific dates and the sequencing of Vladimir Putin's professional trajectory. This is especially the case for his KGB service, but also for some of the period when he was in the St. Petersburg mayor's office, including how long he was technically part of the KGB's 'active reserve.'

## MYSTERY MAN

Personal information, including on key childhood events, his 1983 marriage to Lyudmila Ocheretnaya (whom he divorced in 2013), the birth of two daughters in 1985 and 1986, and his friendships with politicians and businessmen from Leningrad/St. Petersburg is astonishingly meagre for such a prominent public figure.

For example, his wife, daughters, and other family members are conspicuously absent from the public domain. Information about him that was available at the beginning of his presidency and the period leading up



Vladimir Putin and Lyudmila Ocheretnaya on their wedding day in 1983

to it seems to have been suppressed, distorted, or lost.

In fact, very little information concerning Vladimir Putin's life is definitive, confirmable, or reliable.

Although there are many rumours circulating that Putin is a corrupt multi-billionaire, it would be impossible for investigators to prove it or track his personal fortune. Moreover, some Putin specialists speculate that he himself is behind the rumours, in order to keep kleptocrats and businessmen guessing. Putin's private life remains enveloped in a mantle of dense fog.



Vladimir Putin dismissed claims by opposition leader Alexei Navalny that he owns a luxury property on the Black Sea worth US\$1.35 billion

Journalists and media outlets that report on his private affairs suffer swift and deadly reprisals. In 2020, Proekt Media, specialising in investigative journalism revealed the existence of Svetlana Krivonogikh, a 45 year-old Russian millionaire with whom Putin allegedly began an affair while still married to Lyudmila Ocheretnaya. The journalists further linked her financial assets to Putin, after the Panama Papers in turn, revealed the extent of her assets overseas. And last but not least,



it was alleged that Putin had also fathered Krivonogikh's daughter. Proekt was shut down immediately by the state media watchdog.



Alina Kabaeva

Putin is sometimes credited with an affair here and there, but nothing really substantial comes of all that. No woman ever accompanies him on the side-lines of international events. His health is not the subject of any official report, despite unexplained absences which make Moscow rustle with rumours.

In 2009, Russian publication Moskovsky Korrespondent reported that Putin was having an affair with Alina Kabaeva, a 26 year-old former Russian Olympic gymnastics gold medalist and a State Duma deputy from the United Russia Party. The newspaper was promptly shut down. Other news reports had noted that the couple wore wedding rings during the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, where she was a torchbearer during the opening ceremony.

## A NEW RUSSIA

**“There is no such thing as a former intelligence agent,” says a Russian proverb, and Vladimir Putin seems**

**to continually demonstrate the validity of the saying.**

To avoid national disaster, Putin advocated a single antidote when he was elected president in March 2000 : the rebirth of state structures destroyed by post-communist chaos. The Russian president divided the country into seven super-regions, thus trying to strengthen the state. He also considered the former republics of the USSR to be “a zone of vital interest” for Moscow. To impose his plans, Putin has consciously brandished the threat of Russia breaking up, presenting it as a collection of islands run by the local mafia and oligarchs. His approach however, remains marked by his past as a KGB officer: gagging the press through closures and other restrictions, he defines his objectives, and to achieve them, all means are good.

Thus Russia has begun to live in a kind of 'controlled democracy'.

What is the role of the state in the new Russia? Are democratic rules to be respected?

Is Russia marked by neo-imperial tendencies aimed at, at least, a partial reconstitution of the USSR? These were the questions that President Putin addressed during his two terms of office from 2000 to 2008.

This period in Putin's presidency was marked by a return to the heritage of the USSR. Its framework was, as in every totalitarian country, its secret police, the KGB. Once the political system had collapsed, the security apparatus remained. The FSB (the new Russian secret service) ended up wearing the clothes of the KGB.

Vladimir Putin has famously declared: *“The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. For the Russian people, it was a real tragedy. Tens of millions of our citizens and compatriots found themselves outside the Russian borders. What's more, the epidemic of disintegration also spread within Russia itself.”*



KGB head Yuri Andropov and subsequently, Soviet General Secretary, who led the decision to invade Afghanistan in 1979

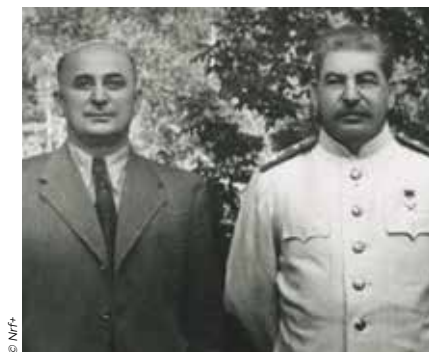
According to Vladimir Putin, the new Russian national identity, is that of an empire-building people. The essence of this idea took its roots from the mid-nineteenth century, from a form of state organisation, characterised by a central power, an effective mechanism of succession and the presence of a strong leader. Marked by the influence of Orthodoxy, this became the ‘de facto’ state ideology of post-Soviet Russia. The extent of the crimes of the totalitarian system was never recognised and Putin therefore rehabilitated both the tsarist past and the Soviet past, to build a historical continuity.

Relying on his expert advisors in public relations, he used - in parallel with his hunt for oligarchs - the phobias inherited from the Stalinist period, in particular the visceral fear complex of the population, known as ‘The besieged fortress ideology’, reflecting the mass perceptions of Russians facing hostile forces from outside; in this case Chechens, Georgians, NATO and the West generally. After the 1917 revolution, Soviet leaders seemed to think that this sentiment would sooner or later compel Western countries



Vladimir Putin takes the oath during his inauguration as President in 2000

to attack. But today's 'besieged fortress' mentality could be more dangerous than the Soviet one. The state is trying to convince its citizens that foreigners hate Russia simply for what it is and for the good it is trying to bring to an ungrateful world.



© Nrf

Chief of the Soviet security Lavrentiy Beria, known as Stalin's Himmler, with Joseph Stalin

This process gained momentum under Vladimir Putin, with the restoration of the Soviet anthem, the glorification of the KGB, the rewriting of history in favour of its Stalinist version, and the gagging of the press and censure of the West, which were both accused of giving lessons in democracy to Moscow, with the unavowed aim of weakening the state.

But more than two decades into the 21st century, Vladimir Putin is still at the helm, making him the longest serving head of state since Stalin. However, Russia still seems to be searching for itself, and its 70 year-old leader still remains largely unknown.

With Russia controlling 17% of the world's gas reserves, oil and gas have been the main sources of economic



© Svein Are Enes/Staroil

The Kharyaga oilfield, 60 km north of the Polar Circle in the Nenets Autonomous Territory in Russia's oil-rich Timan-Pechora province

performance in the Putin era. In the field of international relations, Russia has sought to regain its former influence by wielding the gas weapon and associating with authoritarian regimes in Central Asia. On all external fronts, the Kremlin was determined to make people forget the humiliation of the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and the more recent democratic revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia that reduced its influence.

President Putin has openly announced his intention to put Russia back at the centre of world politics. His strategy: disrupt the rules of the game wherever he can. Somewhat isolated after its intervention in Ukraine, Russia has used the Syrian conflict as a springboard to regain power in international affairs. The all-powerful man in charge at the Kremlin unashamedly uses off-field methods of destabilisation, and resorts to its shadowy networks of operatives in Europe, the United States, in the post-Soviet republics, in Africa, in Asia, and even in the Far North.



© Nrf

Russian police containing an anti government demonstration

All means are good: interference in elections, elimination of opponents, political and economic pressure, cyber-attacks and military interventions. Faced with this global offensive, a divided, hesitant and at times, even a benevolent West seems unable to find an effective response. Yet Moscow is in the process of shaping a tougher, more unstable and conflictual world. A world where the balance of power prevails over cooperation, where human rights are eroded, where democracy

yields to autocracy. A world faced with the ambitions of the Kremlin; an ambition that Vladimir Putin is striving to impose through his strategy of chaos.

Vladimir Putin has long since eradicated any form of internal opposition. Candidates who are seen as a threat to power are systematically prevented from running for elections under various pretexts. Or worse. Boris Nemtsov, former governor of Nizhny Novgorod and a former minister under Boris Yeltsin, who had become the most vocal critic of Vladimir Putin, was shot several times from behind in February 2015, on the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge, close to the Kremlin walls. He was due to speak two days later at a peace rally against Russian involvement in the war in Ukraine.

Five years later, in August 2020, Alexei Navalny, a virulent critic of the regime's corruption and number one opponent of the Kremlin was the victim of a highly publicised poisoning attempt by Russian intelligence agents, as he was about to board a flight to join his supporters in Siberia. In Germany, where he was transported in a coma at the request of his wife, doctors confirmed that they had found traces of Novichok in his urine and blood, as well as on the water bottle in his possession. This powerful military nerve agent had already been used in 2018, in the attempted murder of the former double agent, Sergei Skripal in England.

In both cases, the elimination and attempted elimination of the two Russian opposition figures



© Wikipedia

Alexei Navalny



correspond to specific events. Just as the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya on October 7, 2006 - Vladimir Putin's birthday - was related to the Russian-Chechen war, the murder of Boris Nemtsov, who was about to reveal accusatory documents on Putin and the war, was linked to Ukraine. And the poisoning of Alexei Navalny is directly linked to Belarus. What Vladimir Putin fears more than anything is a contagion of protest movements in Russia, especially when these emanate from populations in neighbouring countries.

Even when suspected of the worst, secret service agents are rewarded. Andrei Lugovoi was promoted to MP after the polonium poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, a former Russian intelligence officer who died in London in November 2006. Others are welcomed as heroes, like the sleeper KGB agents Andrei Bezrukov, alias Donald Heathfield and Elena Vavilova, alias Tracey Foley, who were expelled from the United States in 2010. On their return to Russia, the couple were received with full honours by president Putin in person.



Andrei Bezrukov, alias Donald Heathfield and Elena Vavilova, alias Tracey Foley

## SAVIOUR OR ANNIHILATOR ?

*"It's better to be hanged for loyalty than be rewarded for betrayal"*  
Vladimir Putin

How a leader sees himself often defines the destiny he seeks for his nation. Vladimir Putin sees himself as the liberator of the Russian soul, a mythical warrior confronting powerful empires.

Putin, who is often referred to as 'the Tsar' by his admirers and detractors - an honour he ostensibly belittles - is on a mission to restore his country to its former glory as an empire and a superpower. He wants certain of the former satellite states of the Soviet Union, notably Ukraine, to return to the fold and to rule them like Stalin, but without the same ideological trappings. When he became president, Putin told young Russian troops that their task was to "restore the honour and dignity of Russia."

Possibly driven by a desire for revenge after the erasure of Russia as a central player in a bipolar world, Vladimir Putin steadily increased his grip on Russian society, just as he did on the neighbouring countries considered as posing a problem. In 2008, after a blitzkrieg campaign lasting only a few days, Georgia was amputated of 20% of its territory after Moscow unilaterally recognised South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. In 2014, Russia simply annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea while an armed conflict - unresolved to date - has ravaged the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine and resulted in an estimated 14,000 deaths.

He also bolstered his aggressive foreign strategy. He used traditional military methods such as sending weapons and fighter planes to help Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad fight a bloody civil war. But Putin's regime has also developed and fostered the most effective cyber army in the world and it has used it to wreak havoc in the West.

State-sponsored hackers have stolen classified US information, hacked politicians' email accounts, even totally shut down Georgia's internet while Russian troops invaded. And



The capture of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea on 27 February 2014 in which Russian armed forces without insignias took over the Crimean Parliament

of course, they tried to sabotage the American presidential campaign in 2016. Russian hackers also launched propaganda campaigns in support of right-wing candidates in Europe, including an attempted sabotage of the French presidential election of 2017. With all of this, Putin hopes to exploit and deepen the political divide in Western democracies.

The strongman of the Kremlin denounces the encirclement of Russia by the forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but above all he denies the right of the former republics and satellites of the USSR to freely choose their political destinies.

And the old antagonism against the United States that has been rekindled, now extends to all of Europe as Vladimir Putin discovers that despite his best efforts to drive a wedge between the twenty-seven members of the European Union, a consensus on decisive sanctions in reaction to events in Ukraine remains intact.

The world erupts in protest, but Putin doesn't give in; he sees his aggressive foreign policy successfully weakening his neighbours while also rallying Russians around him. But he has achieved all this at the expense of his own people. His invasions have prompted harsh sanctions from the West, barring Russian businesses from trading in Western markets. The Russian currency has plummeted in value and the energy industry that Russia relies on so heavily is under heavy strain, and it is hard to imagine how Russia can continue normally under these circumstances.



© Sputnik/Alexei Nikolsky

Russian President Vladimir Putin (C), Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu (R) and Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy Vladimir Korolev

Abandoning the 'duplicitous' West, Putin tends to see himself as Eurasian rather than European. This became evident during the Valdai summit in 2019, held in a gigantic hotel in the alpine ski resort of Rosa Khutor in Krasnodar Krai, Russia.

The Russian President was accompanied by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte and King Abdullah II of Jordan. The summit, established in 2004, is a private gathering of Russian and international politicians, thinkers and government officials mostly from China, Iran, Pakistan and India, as well as some Europeans.



© Nrf

Vladimir Putin at the Valdai summit

The five leaders together are meant to represent a unified Eurasia - a new economic and geopolitical entity, which Russia wishes to lead. Putin's hostility towards the West and his newfound complicity with China are

the two new pillars of his thinking. Certain analysts believe that Russia, having understood that it could not reproduce China's economic miracle, wants to manipulate it for its own benefit.

In February 2022, Putin travelled to Beijing and was busy pressuring Chinese president Xi Jinping for support - China backed Russia's demand that NATO refrain from expanding.

The Russian president is playing a cunning but dangerous game. While he hopes he can both ride and control the Chinese dragon, Xi Jinping probably has his own plans to take over the planet.

In the meantime, president Putin's control over Russia and his popularity are not as weak as some in the West make out. He presents

himself as the champion of Russian conservative values, supported by the Russian Orthodox Church. He likes to be seen as a man of the people, a fellow traveller from the era of Soviet deprivation to a prosperous Russia. He stirs up €€€ exploits Russian nationalism - after the annexation of Crimea, he spoke of the military victories of the former Russian Empire on land and sea. Despite the arrest and imprisonment of critics among artists, billionaires and rock stars, he remains popular with his people.

So, now that Putin has sent in his troops to invade and possibly annex Ukraine, what form will the Western retaliation take ? Short of direct military involvement, US president Joe Biden, European Union leaders, as well as other Western heads of state have responded with extremely severe economic sanctions on Russia that are hoped will prove decisive. The human cost of these sanctions however could be immense.

What should perhaps be given more public attention is Moscow's response, once it has been hit by the Western sanctions which will affect Putin and his oligarch cronies. But the Russian president is not without recourse. Russia is the world's third largest oil producer after the United States and Saudi Arabia, and the world's second largest producer of dry natural gas after the United States. Around 40% of Europe's natural



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping during a cruise tour on the Neva River in St. Petersburg, Russia, June 6, 2019





US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin during recent talks about Ukraine at the Kremlin

gas comes from Russia. If Europe opposes Putin, Russia can throttle winter energy supplies, causing deep distress on the continent.

And Russia is also a key exporter of other critical natural resources which, if disrupted, can have major knock-on effects in other markets. And as we now know after the US elections in 2016, Russia also has powerful cyber-hacking capabilities to disrupt government, private security and financial systems in the US and Europe.

So far, the West has been lucky to avoid open warfare in cyberspace. There have of course been cyberattacks, intelligence operations and online crime, but open warfare in cyberspace has not yet taken place.

There is also the possibility of Russia stepping up its campaign of political warfare. Moscow could ramp up its efforts to exacerbate existing divisions within European countries and the United States, including through online manipulation.



Russian tanks destroyed by the Ukrainian Armed Forces

Moscow has demonstrated its ability and interest in intervening in elections, and although it has so far refrained from intervening overtly, it could change course and move on to something more direct.

Would the Russian president risk initiating bolder and more aggressive actions, seeking to increase the pressure elsewhere? This is where the dynamics of escalation become more concerning. Crises and responses tend to create their own inertia and momentum.

Some are of the opinion that Putin believes chaos is the fundamental energy of power, because only a strong leader who overcomes chaos can bring stability to a country and a society. Even if it involves creating that chaos himself; this probably explains why he invaded Ukraine.

Putin's declaration of war was accompanied by a warning to Westerners who might be tempted to intervene, threatening them with "consequences that you have never experienced before in your history". These are words that are difficult to believe possible on the part of the leader of a major nuclear power and a permanent member of the Security Council. These are the words of an angry man who denied the very existence of a Ukrainian identity before declaring war. The world probably underestimated the determination of an aging dictator, obsessed with taking revenge on history.

In the meantime, Ukraine is alone against Russia. The Ukrainians have known this from the outset, they are

alone despite all the proclamations of solidarity, the last-minute arms deliveries and the first sanctions against Russia. This war is a global disaster but it is the Ukrainians who will obviously suffer most from the Russian firepower.

This conflict has thrown us into a different world and a different time. But Putin is committing the irreparable here... he is plunging the world into a new cold war which will take years to overcome.

Be that as it may, the unprovoked military assault on Ukraine and tragic loss of human lives will be Vladimir Putin's biggest challenge so far. It will be a turning point for Russia, and surely determine his position and that of his country in the world hierarchy...or it could destroy them both.

On 27 February, the fourth day of the conflict, Russian and Ukrainian officials agreed to hold emergency talks at a location on or near the Belarus-Ukraine border, despite Vladimir Putin's defiant and ominous gesture; ordering his defence minister and chief of general staff to put Russia's nuclear forces on 'special alert' in response to what he described as Nato "aggression".



The Russian RS-24 Yars (strategic missile)

So, who then is the real Vladimir Putin? A megalomaniac with a death wish or a master of illusion and realpolitik?...Or a man completely apart? We may soon find out.

*Hossein Sadre*

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## EURO BANKNOTE COUNTERFEITING AT HISTORICALLY LOW LEVEL IN 2021



- 6347,000 counterfeit euro banknotes withdrawn from circulation in 2021, a historically low level in proportion to banknotes in circulation
- About two-thirds of total withdrawn counterfeits were €20 and €50 banknotes
- Euro banknotes remain a trusted and safe means of payment
- Authenticity of euro banknotes can be verified using “feel, look and tilt” method

Some 347,000 counterfeit euro banknotes were withdrawn from circulation in 2021 (180,000 in the second half of the year), a decrease of 24.6% when compared with 2020. €20 and €50 notes continued to be the most counterfeited banknotes, jointly accounting for about two-thirds of the total. 95.4% of counterfeits were found in euro area countries, while 4.2% were found in non-euro area EU Member States and 0.4% in other parts of the world.

There is little likelihood of receiving a counterfeit, as the number of counterfeits remains very low in proportion to the number of genuine euro banknotes in circulation. In 2021, 12 counterfeits were detected per 1 million genuine banknotes in circulation, which is a historically low level.

Low-quality reproductions are continuously withdrawn from circulation. Counterfeits are easy to detect as they have no security features, or only very poor imitations of them. The public does not need to be concerned about counterfeiting, but should nevertheless remain vigilant. You can check your notes by using the simple “feel, look and tilt” method described in the dedicated section of the ECB’s website and on the websites of the national central banks of the euro area. The Eurosystem also helps professional cash handlers by ensuring that banknote-handling and processing machines can reliably identify counterfeits and withdraw them from circulation.

Using counterfeits for payments is a criminal offence that may lead to prosecution. If you receive a suspect banknote, compare it directly with one you know to be genuine. If your suspicions are confirmed please contact the police or – depending on national practice – your national central bank or your own retail or commercial bank. The Eurosystem supports law enforcement agencies in their fight against currency counterfeiting.

The Eurosystem has a duty to safeguard the integrity of euro banknotes and to continue improving banknote technology. The second series of banknotes – the Europa series – is even more secure and is helping to maintain public trust in the currency.

*Source: European Central Bank.*

## CEPOL STRENGTHENS ITS TIES WITH SWITZERLAND

The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training



(CEPOL) has concluded this week a Working Arrangement with the Swiss Police Institute. CEPOL and Switzerland have been working closely together since June 2011, when their cooperation agreement entered into force. The new Working Arrangement, signed by the Executive Director of CEPOL, Dr. h.c. Detlef Schröder and the Director of the Swiss Police Institute, Mr Stefan Aegerter, repeals the cooperation agreement of 2011 and marks the beginning of an even more enhanced and productive collaboration.

Switzerland is associated with several EU policies, in particular regarding the implementation of the Schengen acquis and its development, as well as its participation in the related forms of cross-border law enforcement cooperation. Both the EU and Switzerland have a mutual interest in further enhancing the effectiveness of their law enforcement bodies in the fight against crime. Switzerland has been an important partner of CEPOL for more than a decade. The new Working Arrangement reflects the developments that have taken place during this period, including CEPOL’s legal mandate in 2016, and the new GDPR requirements.



It will also allow to further coordinate standards on law enforcement training, especially regarding cross-border crime, enhance the exchange of best practices and continue to offer Swiss law enforcement officials access to training resources available on CEPOL's online learning platform, LEEEd. Last year, more than 200 Swiss law enforcement officials attended CEPOL online training activities, while over 130 officials attended 54 CEPOL Webinars, covering a wide variety of topics, such as Cybercrime, Schengen & SIS II for SIRENE officers, drug trafficking, money laundering and environmental crime. Law enforcement officials from Switzerland have also participated during the last decade in numerous CEPOL onsite training activities, while experts have been engaged in their implementation.

The agency is looking forward to work even more closely with its Swiss partners in the future, to further improve cross-border law enforcement cooperation.

### FALCON 6X FLIGHT TEST PROGRAM PASSES 600-HOUR MARK EN ROUTE TO 2022 CERTIFICATION



It's been a rapid-paced flight test program for the Falcon 6X, with its remarkable crew completing more than 180 flights and 600 hours on three 6X aircraft. One aircraft crossed the Atlantic in December for cold weather testing and another in January for interior installation in Little Rock, Arkansas. Aircraft Number 3 operated from Paris-Le Bourget Airport, where Dassault Falcon Service technicians performed routine line service, and flew on a Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) mix from TotalEnergies. "We could not be more pleased with our progress to date," said Chief Test Pilot, Philippe Duchateau.

### CREW NUDGES THE SOUND BARRIER IN TEST BEYOND MMO

This January, Chief Test Pilot, Philippe Duchateau, and Senior Test Pilot, Bruno Ferry, pushed the Falcon 6X's throttles up and the nose over to Mach .95, in a first behavior test beyond the maximum operating speed (Mmo) of Mach .90. In coming weeks, the 6X will fly even closer to the sound barrier, requiring the utmost precision from both pilots. Not your typical day at the office. They'll also test flight controls, rolling left and right to 30 degrees, and deploying full-up air brakes. Envelope dive tests and others are also ongoing. Aircraft 1 and Aircraft 2 have been successfully evaluated for takeoff and landing performance under multiple power, flap and CG conditions. Next they'll fly in high wind conditions, including tailwinds and crosswinds.



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### EUROPEAN DEFENSE AGENCY STUDY CALLS FOR STRONGER FOCUS ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SUPPORTED DETECTION & RECOGNITION OF TARGETS

EDA has accomplished a two-years study (2020-2021), called ARTINET, into how Artificial intelligence (AI) applications can be used to improve the automatic detection, recognition, identification and tracking of small, fast-moving targets in a complex battlefield environment. In such a hostile and difficult context, high-performance electro-optical (EO) imaging systems together with high spatial resolution radars seem to be best solution to efficiently detect and mitigate these new threats. One of the main conclusions of the study, is that AI significantly enhances the performance of those two technologies related to image pre-processing, fusion and inference. Another finding of the study points to the future: additional research efforts should be put into these promising technologies which can make a difference for defence capabilities. Hence EDA's proposal to launch a dedicated project in 2022.

The study developed and analysed new image processing techniques of imaging systems relying on AI based on deep learning paradigm. For that purpose, images captured by high-resolution cameras and Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) operating with Wide Field of View (WFOV) fed the different algorithms tested. The different techniques implemented and tested are designed to be integrated in a dedicated HW/SW architecture for an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV). ARTINET analysed all the required steps for the deployment of this kind of system.

### Urban area & open sea

Concretely, the study used two scenarios for object identification: one in an urban area and one focused on ship detection/recognition at open sea. For each of the two scenarios, two data sets were created, composed of both EO and radar images, and two AI algorithms were developed: one for the segmentation in urban scenario (mainly critical building identification) and one for the detection/segmentation of ships. New AI-based image fusion and resource management techniques were also developed.

The study revealed that the usage of the new AI-based algorithms leads to a considerable improvement of the

identification and detection performances, also due to the automatic and 'intelligent' choice of the images supported by machine learning and neural networks.

### Additional work to be done

The study also highlights the necessity of further work on topics such as:

- The creation of an EU military image data base for AI-based system training and testing;
- Further algorithm developments;
- Standardisation, certification and validation of AI algorithms;
- Hardware architecture implementation;
- Extended measurement campaigns for AI processing performance analysis and validation.

### EDA project in the starting blocks

That's why the Agency has proposed to Member States to launch a dedicated EDA Cat B project, called AIDRIT (Artificial Intelligence for Automatic Detection Recognition, Identification and Tracking of Difficult Target) which, if accepted, could start in 2022. Along others, it would look into the afore-mentioned additional work highlighted in the ARTINDET study. Both the study and the potential AIDRIT project idea are perfectly aligned with EDA's action plan on AI. There is also realistic possibility that this topic could be the subject of one of the next calls for proposal under the European Defence Fund (EDF).

### Background

Small targets coming from different directions and new intelligent and sophisticated weapons operating in complex scenarios represent nowadays the new asymmetric threats in the battlefield. In this hostile and difficult context, the new high-performance electro-optical (EO) imaging system allows to efficiently detect and contrast these new threats. High resolution multidimensional (multiband/multispectral, hyperspectral, multiresolution) EO sensors are designed to have enough diversity for improving detection, recognition,

identification and tracking (DRIT) of difficult targets. The main challenge stems from the huge quantity of data produced. On the one hand, this is good because it gives a certain level of completeness in the information; on the other hand, it represents a raising of computational costs and an increase of the image processing complexity. Low contrast distributed targets make their identification and visualization by the operators still really demanding and sometime impossible. Against this backdrop, automatic processing would be helpful with a drastic reduction of reaction time for decision, often crucial in military missions.

New techniques based on AI making use of deep learning and/or machine learning, seem particularly useful for image processing of high-resolution camera, when operating with wide field of view (WFOV) for the detection of difficult targets (low contrast, low signature, small size and operating in degraded visual environment). Moreover, applications on camera mounted on unmanned air vehicle (UAV), where full images cannot be streamed to the ground station, or when multiresolution imagery is needed, are new challenges where AI can also help. AI can have applications and provide benefits on data fusion coming from homogenous or heterogenous sensors, particularly from imaging radar and cameras, for a better situational awareness picture, and on the implementation of aid decision making tools and missions' planning. AI can also be efficiently exploited in modelling and simulation for data generation and user training

## EUROPEAN WEB SURVEY ON DRUGS: RESULTS

### Latest European Web Survey on Drugs finds cannabis and ecstasy use most impacted by COVID-19

New survey results released by the EU drugs agency (EMCDDA) reveal that cannabis and ecstasy use are the drug-consumption patterns most impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. The European Web Survey on Drugs found that, while herbal cannabis use increased, use of 'party drug' MDMA/ecstasy declined. The survey ran between March and April 2021 in 30 countries (21 EU and 9 non-EU) when many populations were under COVID-19-related lockdowns. Targeted at people aged 18 and over who have used drugs, the survey aims to improve understanding of patterns of drug use in Europe and help shape future drug policies and interventions.

### Key findings from 50 000 Europeans

Close to 50 000 adults (48 469) responded to the survey from 21 EU Member States and Switzerland. Cannabis was the drug used most, with 93% of survey respondents reporting to have used it in the previous 12 months and with little variation between countries. MDMA/ecstasy (35%), cocaine (35%) and amphetamine (28%) were the next most reported illicit substances, with the order of the three drugs varying by country. Around a third of respondents (32%) reported using more (herbal) cannabis and 42% using less MDMA/ecstasy.

The survey revealed that one fifth (20%) of the sample reported using LSD in the last year, 16% using new psychoactive substances (NPS) and 13% using ketamine.



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Emcdda Director Alexis Goosdeel

Heroin use was reported by 3% of respondents. Although the sample reporting heroin use was small, over a quarter of these respondents (26%) reported using this drug more during the period studied.

The data presented refer to a self-selected sample who have used at least one illicit drug in the 12 months prior to the survey. While web surveys are not representative of the general population, when carefully conducted and combined with traditional data-collection methods, they can help paint a more detailed, realistic and timely picture of drug use and drug markets in Europe. Over 100 organisations took part in the initiative, including the Reitox national focal points, universities and NGOs.

### Western Balkans: results mirror EU country findings

New to the 2021 round was the participation of the agency's partners from the Western Balkans, through an EMCDDA technical assistance project (IPA7).

Over 2 000 adults (2 174) from Albania, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia responded to the survey. Most respondents (91%) reported using cannabis in the previous 12 months, followed by cocaine (38%), MDMA/ecstasy (22%) and amphetamine (20%). Again, around a third of respondents (32%) reported using more (herbal) cannabis and 34% using less MDMA/ecstasy.

Almost one in six (17%) respondents reported using NPS in the last year, while 9% reported use of LSD. Use of both heroin and methamphetamine was reported by 8% of respondents.

### From nightlife to homelife

Home was reported as the most common setting for drug use during the period (85% of respondents in the EU-Switzerland survey and 72% in the Western Balkans), a pattern accentuated by COVID-19 lockdowns and closure of nightlife venues. Motivation for the use of different substances sheds some light on these results. The most commonly reported motivations for cannabis use were relaxation, getting high and aiding

sleep, while for MDMA/ecstasy, they were its euphoric and socialising effects.

EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel says: 'Web surveys are a key ingredient in our monitoring of Europe's shifting drugs problem. They help us reach an important target population through innovative online methods. Today's results reveal the wide variety of drugs available across Europe and provide valuable information on emerging trends and changing patterns of use during the COVID-19 pandemic. An impressive 100 organisations joined us this time in building, translating and disseminating the survey, ensuring that this is now an invaluable tool to help tailor our responses and shape future drug policies.'

In 2021, three European Neighbourhood Policy countries (Georgia, Lebanon, Ukraine), also took part in the survey for the first time, through an EMCDDA technical assistance project (EU4MD). These results will be released in the Spring. In non-EU countries, the EMCDDA collaborated on the surveys with national contact points and NGOs.

## INTERNATIONAL HIT AGAINST BRAZILIAN NARCOS SHIPPING BOLIVIAN COCAINE TO THE EU

**Brazilian, Spanish and US authorities shut down criminal organisation which was coordinating its operations via encrypted communications platform SKY ECC**

An extensive investigation involving the Brazilian Federal Police (Polícia Federal), Spanish Civil Guard (Guardia Civil), the US Drugs Enforcement Administration and the Paraguayan SENAD, coordinated by Europol, has led to the dismantling of a major criminal organisation involved in



large-scale cocaine trafficking and money laundering. The criminal network was shipping cocaine in maritime shipping containers. Since September 2020, authorities from Belgium, Brazil, Italy, Netherlands and Spain have seized about 10 tonnes of cocaine and BRL 11 million (about EUR 1.85 million).

### The action day on 15 February 2022 led to:

- Around 40 locations searched in Brazil, Paraguay, and Spain

- Around 30 arrests (in Rio De Janeiro, São Paulo, Santos e Volta Redonda, Brazil and 7 in Barcelona, Spain)
- Seizures included: drugs, vehicles, firearms, cash and several bank accounts in Brazil, Paraguay and Spain

### Multi-tonne cocaine trafficking to the EU

The investigative activities revealed that the criminal organisation could ship several multi-tonne cocaine consignments to Europe every few months. Authorities discovered a production infrastructure based in Bolivia with logistical and supply lines in Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. The investigation also uncovered the command and control centres of the organisation in Dubai. The members of the network used encrypted communications to coordinate their criminal activities. This included SKY ECC, a platform which was taken down in 2021. The suspects used these encrypted communications platforms to supply drugs to Europe and launder the criminal assets. The criminal organisation set up a network of companies to enable the import of drugs from South America and the laundering of the related proceeds. Front men in the payroll of the organisation controlled this network of companies.

The exchange and proactive collection of criminal intelligence, supported by Europol, led to the discovery of a distribution network based in Valencia and Barcelona which was responsible for receiving the cocaine shipments and circulating them on the European market. Brazilian and Spanish authorities then intercepted a number of these shipments and identified some of the companies involved in the criminal scheme.

Europol facilitated the exchange of information and provided continuous analytical support. The intelligence developments provided by Europol allowed the investigators in the field to create a detailed picture of the networks operating across countries and continents. On the Action Day, Europol deployed officers to Brazil and to Spain to support intelligence developments during the field activities.



Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, Europol supports the 27 EU Member States in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime and other serious and organised forms of crime. Europol also work with many non-EU partner states and international organisations.

### AIRBUS SIGNS AGREEMENT TO STUDY HYDROGEN HUB IN SINGAPORE



Airbus has signed a Cooperation Agreement with Changi Airport Group, global industrial gases and engineering company Linde and the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) to study the potential for a future hydrogen hub in the city state.

The agreement was signed at the Singapore Airshow by Sabine Klauke, Airbus Chief Technical Officer, Han Kok Juan, Director-General of the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore, Yam Kum Weng, Executive Vice President of Changi Airport Group, and John Panikar, Executive Vice President, APAC of Linde.

It reflects the four partners' shared ambition to leverage their respective expertise to support the decarbonization of the aviation industry and to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Under the collaboration, the partners will look at how hydrogen can be transported, stored and delivered to aircraft at existing and new airports. This expands on an earlier agreement with CAAS to evaluate hydrogen infrastructures, widening the scope to include the airport and energy provider.

Airbus will provide characteristics on aircraft configuration and fleet energy usage, insight on hydrogen-powered aircraft for ground operations, and data on the estimated hydrogen aircraft ramp-up at airports.

"The Asia-Pacific region will play a key role as we work towards making climate-neutral aviation a reality," said Sabine Klauke, Airbus Chief Technical Officer. "By partnering with Changi Airport and with Incheon Airport, Airbus will leverage the operational and technical expertise of two of the world's leading hubs. The studies we will carry out together reflect the need for a cross-sectoral approach, including manufacturers, airlines, regulators, airports, energy providers and academia. We need bold and coordinated action to achieve our goals."



The use of hydrogen to power future aircraft is not only expected to reduce significantly aircraft emissions in the air, but could also help decarbonise air transport activities on the ground. In 2020 Airbus launched the “Hydrogen Hub at Airports” programme to jumpstart research into infrastructure requirements and low-carbon airport operations, across the entire value chain.

To date agreements have been signed with partners and airports in Paris, Seoul and Singapore.

## SWEDISH GOVERNMENT APPROVES PLANS FOR UNDERGROUND REPOSITORY FOR SPENT NUCLEAR FUEL

**Local residents at Forsmark site in Östhammar have voted in favour of the plans**

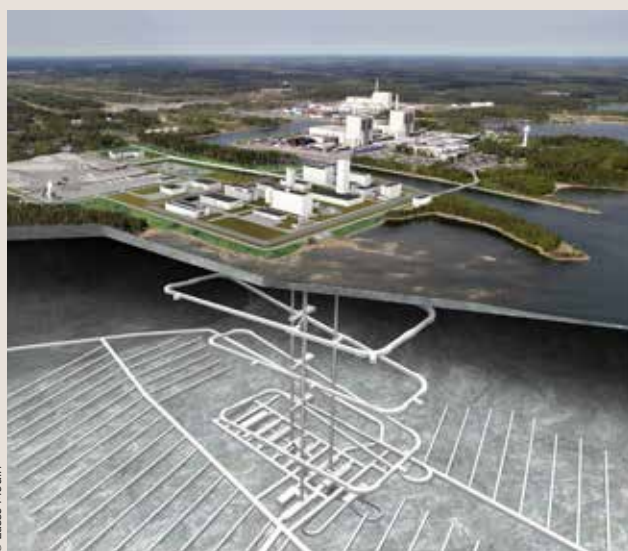


Photo montage showing the final repository for spent nuclear fuel in Forsmark, above and below ground, seen from south east. The total length of the tunnel system is over 60 kilometers. Below ground the repository covers three to four square kilometers. It is placed at a depth of 500 metres

The licence allows SKB, the developer of the GDF in Sweden, to take final steps and preparations for initial construction of the site.

The process stipulated by the Act on Nuclear Activities can now continue, the first step being a hearing in the Land and Environment Court concerning specific permit conditions for the facility. The case is also referred to the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority for their continued review of SKB's further work.

The UK's GDF programme lead Karen Wheeler said:

We're thrilled to see the Swedish Government approve plans for an underground repository for spent nuclear fuel at the Forsmark site in Östhammar.

As we make progress at home and engage with communities



Deep underground tunnel in Sweden's experimental rock lab at Äspö

about a GDF to safely deal with radioactive waste for the long-term, it's encouraging to see progress around the world too.

We will continue to work with international colleagues, incorporate latest knowledge and technologies, and learn from their experience.

In 1992, every local authority in Sweden was invited to take part in the site selection process and the search was eventually narrowed down to 2 communities in Östhammar and Oskarshamn.

Comprehensive site investigations over 5 years, covering geology, hydrology, ecology and social impact, led to a decision in favour of the Forsmark site in Östhammar, close to an existing nuclear power station and where the granite rock is 1.9 billion years old.

Approximately 800 scientific reports were produced during the Forsmark site investigations, 25 cored boreholes were drilled, up to 1,000 metres deep. Altogether, 16 kilometres of drill core samples were extracted.

Residents in both communities had consistently returned strong votes in support of the project.

When fully developed, some time in the 2080s, the repository will comprise around 60 km of tunnels with space for more than 6,000 canisters of spent fuel.

Sweden already operates a repository for shorter-lived radioactive waste, which opened in 1988 and extends to a depth of 50 metres below the seabed of the Baltic. An application to extend this repository was submitted in 2014 and granted by the government in December 2021, following approval by the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority and the Land and Environment Court, as well as the municipality (or local authority) of Östhammar.

RWM has collaborated with overseas partners, including SKB, on numerous research projects, sharing knowledge and pooling resources to ensure its GDF programme is fully aligned with international best practice and the latest technologies.



Section of mural depicting victory of general Zhang Yichao who expelled the Tibetans from Dunhuang. Cave 156, Late Tang Dynasty

## FLOGGING A DEAD HORSE TRADER

*The once-mighty horse soldiers of the Tang dynasty fall victims to Xi Jinping's China*

Life has seldom been easy for the Uyghur people, either historically or in the present day. China's notorious treatment of them in modern times has led to sanctions by other countries and a lot of criticism, although China denies doing anything wrong, of course. It sees the treatment of the Uyghurs as "an internal matter" in which other countries have no right to criticise or interfere. But slave labour and genocide have never counted as "an internal matter" and nor can they now. Once upon a time the Uyghurs, originally a nomadic Turkic people, were valuable horse soldiers, employed in defence of the Tang dynasty. The Uyghurs also annoyed the Tang by insisting on receiving silk and other goods in exchange for the horses. The Tang, apparently, didn't even want the horses but it's hard to say 'no' to a man with a big spear and a powerful bow strung across his back. So it was that the Uyghurs and the Tang eked out

an uneasy trading relationship in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. The (relatively) peaceful relationship was underwritten by the brilliant female emperor, Wu Zetian, who must go down in Chinese history as one of the Country's greatest-ever leaders, not to mention one of its cleverest. By the time this happened, the Uyghurs were recognised as the inhabitants of what is now Mongolia, although their arrival largely coincided with that of other Turkic groups, such as the Kyrgyz and the Khitan, then later the Jurchen, Mongol and Manchu.

Apart from trying to sell the Tang horses they didn't want, they did help to retake the city of Luoyang from Shi Chaoyi, the final emperor of the Yan state that rebelled against the Tang Chinese. They were good fighters and useful enough for the Tang not to get too upset over the superfluity of unwanted horses. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), to give it its complete name, is

an area of 1.6 million square kilometres on the north-west frontier of China. It is bordered by China, of course, and by Mongolia to the north-east, Kazakhstan to its north-west, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia, Kashmir, India, and Pakistan. Its current main inhabitants are the Uyghurs, who inhabited Tarim Basin,



Empress Wu (Wu Zetian)





now a desert but at one point a small sea (or large lake). It's where the famous mummies were found. It's what known to geographers as an endorheic basin, which has limited drainage and so retains water because there's nowhere for it to go, mainly creating seasonal swamps which eventually evaporate.

The Uyghurs were not Muslims at the time. The Uyghurs themselves believe that they are of both Caucasian and East Asian descent. They think that the amazing Tarim mummies, which look so human that one could almost imagine them getting up and walking away (although you'd get a shock if they did) and which are quite unlike the mummies of ancient Egypt, are ample proof of the Uyghurs' right to the Xinjiang region. One of the mummies, known as the Beauty of Loulan, even inspired a power ballad in 2013 from the popular 26-year-old Chinese singer, Yan Duo, on an album she recorded.

The Uyghurs began as Buddhists and their adoption of Islam started slowly in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, it was probably the Sogdian refugees, survivors of an ancient civilisation fleeing subjugation at the hands of Arabs, who converted the Uyghurs, initially to the strange hybrid religion of Manichaeism, which began in Persia in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE by a man called Mani, known to his followers as the "Apostle of Light". Manichaeism is an odd mixture, sometimes described as a Christian heresy, although it contains traces of Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and other dualist faiths. Even a young Emperor Augustine was a follower at one point. Severe repression by the Muslim Abbasid caliphate changed that and Islam became (gradually) the reigning faith. Among the Uyghurs, of course, it still is.

In fact, resistance to incoming "foreign" faiths, such as Manichaeism, was so strong that any Sogdian preachers

caught proselytising in the Xinjiang streets were regularly beaten, tortured or even murdered. Even so, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century most Uyghurs would identify as Muslims. The current Chinese government insists that the Uyghurs were captured by Muslims, enslaved and 'forced' to convert but there is very little evidence for this; like so much that politicians of all nationalities say these days, it seems not to be actually true. In fact, it's also been claimed that the Tang never paid for many of the horses the Uyghurs brought to them, and so they remain an unpaid debt. Understandably, the Tang kept trying to negotiate lower prices for these horses they didn't actually need, nor want, although other sources claim that the trade continued for a century, with the Chinese emperor sending the Uyghur Kagan (or emperor) up to 500,000 pieces of silk every year, which doesn't sound like something anyone would do if they were really fed up with receiving horses in return. Later, the Uyghurs accepted tea instead. It's thought by some experts that the Uyghurs were developing a prosperous urban class in which silk, horses and tea became a kind of trading currency, while Karabalghasun, the Uyghur capital at that time, became considerably larger

and much richer than it had been when it was founded in 744. If the Uyghur and the Tang got on reasonably well back then (admittedly not all the time – there were some serious fallings-out, too), what has so poisoned the relationship in more modern times?

### FORGET THE TRUTH, WE'LL INVENT A NEW ONE

Today, the CCP denies everyone the right to question what they regard as their internal issues. In any case, Xinjiang, the name by which the Uyghur territory is known in China, means "new territories" or "new border" in Chinese; most Uyghurs prefer to call their land 'East Turkistan'. Dulkan Isa, President of the World Uyghur Congress and Vice President of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation was roughly expelled from a public event at the United Nations in New York because he asked a question. The UN security people appear to have acted on behalf of the CCP in silencing a potential opponent. The next time Isa applied for accreditation to the UN it was refused, and only intense lobbying by the German, EU, and American representatives succeeded in restoring it. Isa says that afterwards, Chinese officials followed him and took seats beside him in the hopes of intimidating him.

He claims they also wrote to the security services of the European Parliament, claiming he was a terrorist and should be denied access to speak to MEPs. It didn't work in the European Parliament's case, but the sort of mindless collaboration the Chinese seek – and obtained at the UN from American security people – is



Mosque in the city center of Yanqi, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China



Dulkan Isa, President of the World Uyghur Congress

a gift to the CCP and helps to promulgate their false narrative about the Uyghur people. And it is a false narrative; just as they claim to be saving the Uyghurs after their allegedly 'forced conversion' to Islam, they now claim that the Chinese 're-education camps' are to help the Uyghurs assimilate better into Chinese society. The thing we in the West are inclined to forget is that by seizing control over Uyghur land, China is also gaining control of the vast reserves of petroleum, coal, and uranium that can be exploited there. But first, truth must be eliminated.

"There's a massive on-line network of trolls, bots, automated accounts, but also real people," award-winning British journalist Isobel Cockerell told a press conference organised by Index on Censorship. "There are thousands and thousands of these accounts that are sort of programmed to undermine the Uyghur story, the Uyghur narrative, and I think it goes beyond disinformation in many cases." It would seem, in fact, that the agents of the CCP are not just trying to erase the Uyghurs' real story but that they are keen to replace it with fiction. In Thomas Pynchon's novel, 'Mason and Dixon', about the British surveyors who ran the boundary line between Pennsylvania and Maryland in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that is still known as the Mason-Dixon line, there is a Chinese character who says: "To rule forever, it is necessary only to create, among the people one would rule, what we call 'Bad History.'" The novel is, in the main, a work of fiction (and my favourite book, incidentally), but that particular quote seems oddly true and somewhat pertinent in this case. Cockerell also mentions "extreme left outlets" that apparently dismiss the Uyghur claims as "conspiracy theories" about what's happening in Xinjiang. It

comes down to "a denial of everything that's going on there, a denial that there are concentration camps, a denial that there is forced labour there; a denial that there is anything at all wrong," she continued, that the offending websites try to portray Xinjiang as a happy place, and that if only you visited it you would see for yourself. The Chinese authorities, however, keep the tourists away, especially journalists, or at least under strict control, while the resources being pumped into this programme are, Cockerell said, "absolutely enormous, and relentless as well."



Chinese police in Urumqi (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region)

It's the false narrative that is, perhaps, most interesting, and most dangerous. World leaders are well aware that Beijing tells lies, but sometimes it is less troublesome and more convenient to believe the lies (or at least to say you do) and set aside one's doubts, even if only in public. "When I was growing up, at school there was no chance to learn Uyghur history, only China's history," Dulkan Isa told the press conference, "Uyghur history is a part of China's history since ancient, ancient, ancient times, and all the time China claims that Uyghurs are part of China since ancient times." Back in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, Tang Empress Wu Zetian clearly didn't think so; the Uyghurs were useful soldiers who helped to protect the dynasty (even if they did try to sell her horses). Incidentally, the expression "flogging a dead horse" means continuing to work at something that is completely pointless; these days it is the Uyghurs themselves that get – quite literally – flogged.

The Uyghurs did fall out of favour with the Tang because of ill will over the terms of a coalition between the Tang and the Uyghur khaganate, which perhaps suggests a long-term festering dislike between the Uyghurs and the Han Chinese, especially after the Manichean regional leader Bögü Khagan was murdered by his

ambitious and disloyal cousin, Tu Baga Tarquan, who, unlike Bögü, encouraged xenophobia. The CCP seems to continue to believe that flogging the Uyghurs themselves may quieten dissent. The Tang dynasty period of China's and Xinjiang's history run parallel and are really interesting, too. "If you look at China's history seriously," Isa said, "not the version told by the Uyghurs, in China's version it is completely changed, and you can see new things." In other words, carefully constructed fiction. Isa went on to warn that quite a lot of respectable historians, "historians who know the Uyghur story well", including Russians, have been denied visas, at least if they have expressed an interest in researching the Uyghurs. Only the history dreamed up by CCP propagandists is acceptable; anything else (such as the truth) is vehemently denied. The CCP seem determined to follow the dictum of Winston Churchill, who wrote: "'History will be kind to me for I intend to write it.'" And somewhat unfairly, it has been. "If you don't know history," wrote author Michael Crichton, "then you don't know anything. You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree." It would seem that the Uyghurs, by and large, do know; it's just that the CCP keeps trying to chop down the tree.



Qianling Mausoleum, Tomb of Emperor Tang Gaozong and Empress Wu Zetian

Uyghurs who have left China and started new lives elsewhere are not immune to the pressure exerted by the CCP to ensure that Beijing's narrative is the only one seen or known.

"What matters to China is business, reputation and the access to slave labour," said English Conservative MP Nus Ghani, who was sanctioned by China because she was instrumental in writing the UK's flagship Trade Bill, aiming to prevent the British government from giving preferential trade deals to countries guilty of committing genocide.





© ParliamentUK

MP Nus Ghani

She led a campaign which resulted in the UK parliament unanimously agreeing that the current situation in Xinjiang is quite adequate proof that China is guilty of genocide. She has spoken at a wide range of events on the situation in Xinjiang and the rest of China and is an active member of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China. She is also keen to halt the harvesting of data. It was for exposing China's use of slave labour and its harvesting of British consumers' data that Beijing sanctioned her. "We know that the Chinese Communist Party wants to be legitimised at international institutions," she told the Index on Censorship press conference, "the fact that there are a number of us that now hold positions, whether it's the UK Parliament, myself on the Select Committee, and I'm also a member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, what I have done, and will continue to do, is to raise the plight of the Uyghur people, whether it's security... you know, how are we going to reach net zero if we're going to continue buying products that are made in Xinjiang? How can we say we're going to deal with human rights, or women's rights? There is no other place on Earth where more women are being abused at any one time; it is the Uyghur women." As Ghani told the House of Commons: "'I will not be intimidated or silenced by these Chinese Communist Party sanctions and neither must our Government. It is a sign of weakness that, rather than allowing the UN full access to Xinjiang, the Chinese Government has resorted to sanctions.' The sanctions, against Ghani and several others include a ban on travelling to China or to Kong Kong and also a ban on Chinese citizens doing business with them. It is highly unlikely to have any effect, other than to annoy people. Not that the CCP sees things that way; it still appears to believe that with enough bullying any criticism can be swept aside. Ghani reminded MPs:

"This is a wake-up call for all democratic countries and lawmakers that we will not be able to conduct our day-to-day business without China sanctioning us for exposing what's happening in Xinjiang."

The Chinese organisers of the Beijing Winter Olympics made much of their choice of a Uyghur athlete, Dinigeer Yilamujiang, from Altay in Xinjiang to carry an Olympic torch into the arena, but Dolkun Isa dismissed it as "window dressing". Nus Ghani flagged up the absence of diplomatic attendance to legitimise the competition. "There is no diplomatic presence from the British," she said, "there is no diplomatic presence from the Americans and many other countries, that is a shameful exposé of the Chinese Communist party that many countries have refused to allow a diplomatic presence, and that is what matters to the Chinese Communist Party."



© Dini0503/Instagram

Dinigeer Yilamujiang

### WE KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE...

Isobel Cockerell recalled how a tribunal of Uyghur people held in London had attracted interference on a huge scale by the CCP. "I reported on the massive efforts that they used to try to undermine and to discredit the proceedings," she told the press conference. "This was a people's independent tribunal, and I think that most of the witnesses – plenty that I spoke to – the judges, people who were working on the administrative side – were all targeted by the CCP in some way. Someone at the tribunal showed me their phone and all their social media accounts with notification after notification on Signals, Telegram, Face Book, What's App. Some of them faced continuing sign-in attempts. They were being brute force attacked by Chinese operatives to see what was happening at the tribunal, trying to get intelligence

about the feelings, so absolutely they care!" The attempts didn't end there, either. "There have been massive attempts to penetrate the World Leaders Congress and the work that they do," Cockerell said.



© Isocockerell/googlemail.com

Isobel Cockerell

"The way that they (the CCP) send agents to Germany, the way they try to get in, the way they try to see what's going on. And so yes, there are huge attempts to undermine all aspects of Uyghur access." Sadly, a number of Uyghurs now living in Europe (and elsewhere) have stopped answering telephone calls and emails from China, fearing what they may contain and despite being eager to talk to loved ones back home.

It's hard to tell the truth, according to Dolkun Isa, because if any historian, however senior he or she may be, tries to write what's really happening they are then denied a visa, and this loss of access leaves people afraid to write what they know. Some Uyghurs in the diaspora report receiving a lot of messages and telephone calls, often from numbers they recognise as a relative's, but when they answer, the person who speaks identifies himself as an official of the CCP and points out that they are in the house of a parent or other close relative, so they obviously know where they live, and they go on to talk about their children, or their nieces and nephews, and how important it is for them to remain at their school, with the clear implication that the situation is not guaranteed to continue if the person being called should say anything negative about things back in Xinjiang.

Concentration camps? What concentration camps? Forced labour? Never heard of it. These sorts of techniques, perfected by the Mafia and other Chicago gangsters in the

first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are just as effective today. One Uyghur woman who preferred to remain anonymous told a representative of the foreign media: “Not speaking out causes guilt; but speaking out causes fear.” It would seem that the CCP has started to practise gangsterism, determined to preserve their lucrative area of activity at any cost. Al Capone would have understood and probably applauded (as long as he got a cut). Oddly, another reason put forward for the development of anti-Uyghur sentiment in 8<sup>th</sup> century China is the fact that the Uyghurs practised usury, possibly at rather exorbitant rates, and expected to be repaid.



Chinese re-education camp for Uyghurs

Which brings us to Russia. Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin have met to talk about collaboration but both sides are considering it for different reasons and working together more closely may help neither of them. Russia fears damaging sanctions in the build-up to confrontation with the West over Ukraine; China fears further retaliation over its treatment of the Uyghurs and its use of slave labour in creating goods for export. It would seem that a picnic involving a bear and a giant panda would not be a happy get-together. For the Uyghurs, whatever China says or does won't erase memories of their place of origin. The poet, writer and academic Aziz Isa Elkun, a long-time resident of London and now in the Sardinian city of Cagliari, says he still feels strong ties with his original homeland in north-west China, Xinjiang, or as many Uyghurs prefer to call it, East Turkistan.

He has written a poem about how he misses his old home, which can be found on the website of Index on Censorship. Coincidentally, Index on Censorship was created half a century ago to give a voice to Soviet dissidents whose views were being suppressed by Moscow.



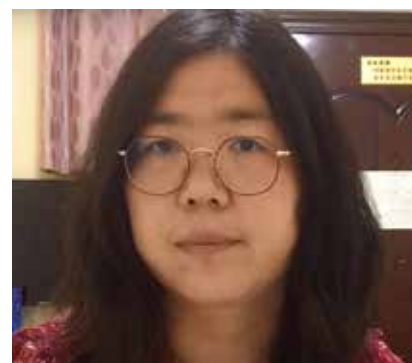
Uyghur poet Aziz Isa Elkun

### WHEREVER YOU GO, WE FOLLOW...

It's common knowledge that the Uyghurs face tough times in China, and campaigners in the West are trying to prevent those who have got away and now live abroad from being deported back there. The Uyghurs may be getting the headlines because of China's inhumane treatment of them, but they are not the only Turkic people to suffer. Others who share languages of the Altaic group include Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and a lot of others you may never have heard of (I hadn't). The US Congressional Executive Commission on China is especially strong on the issue, accusing Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan of seeking to send its Uyghur residents back to the People's Republic, where they can expect some form of retribution. The Executive Commission has written to Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, asking him to intervene to stop the deportations of Turkic Muslims back to a land where, it's claimed, they face the confiscation of their Qur'ans and their prayer mats, at the very least. While atheism is a perfectly legitimate belief (or lack of belief) to hold, the CCP wants to stop those who observe any sort of faith from practising it. The European Parliament, in a resolution condemned by the CCP, pointed up Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, which “guarantees all citizens the right to freedom of religious belief” and also to Article 4, which “upholds the rights of minority ethnicities”.

We shouldn't forget that the CCP is just as savage in its treatment of non-Turkic Chinese. Journalist Zhang Zhan is not expected to survive until spring unless she is released from her 4-year prison sentence, imposed for reporting on the coronavirus outbreak in China.

A former lawyer, Zhang was detained for making on-line reports about the spread of the virus. She is on hunger strike but has been force-fed and has to wear shackles at all times. She is not the only journalist to suffer because the CCP believes that only it has the right to report on China through its (untrue) propaganda. Zhang has had her hands restrained, it's claimed, 24 hours a day for three months, despite the efforts of Amnesty International. Disagreements between oppressor and oppressed seldom end well for either side: “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.” Surely the CCP cannot object to that quote: it comes from *The Communist Manifesto*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who would not have like forced labour.



Zhang Zhan

But while China's Communist leaders would like to restrict the ability of the Uyghurs to reproduce, as well as seeking to exterminate their religion completely in Xinjiang, supposedly to prevent terrorism, they are now so attached to capitalism that they are prepared to use forced labour to win and retain contracts overseas. They are being assisted in this endeavour by foreign corporations turning a blind eye to issues with their supply chains, despite laws insisting that they must not. One must assume that for their boards of directors, the bottom line is of much greater importance than the abuse of the workers' human rights. It involves a lot of workers, too, according to a European Parliament report.





The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing

“According to credible reports,” it says, “more than one million people are, or have been, detained in what are being called ‘political re-education’ centres, in the largest mass incarceration of an ethnic minority population in the world today.”

As for religious freedom, despite Articles 4 and 36, “credible reports have revealed the deliberate and systematic destruction of mosques, churches and other places of worship, mostly since 2017, reducing their numbers to the lowest level since the Cultural Revolution.” The Parliament also notes a March 2020 report from the respected Asia Society Policy Institute (ASPI – but be careful if you look them up; the same initials are used for a number of very different bodies), “which identified 27 factories in nine Chinese provinces that are using the labour of at least 80,000 Uyghurs transferred from Xinjiang between 2017 and 2019; whereas these factories supply at least 82 global brands, including those owned by many European multinational companies.” The report “calls on the Chinese authorities to cease government-sponsored programmes of forced labour and mass sterilisation.” It also “strongly condemns the extensive use of digital surveillance technologies to monitor and control the population in Xinjiang.”



© Uyghurcongress.org

Travelers leaving Xinjiang are also required to undergo thorough security control procedures

If you're a European living in Europe, don't cheer up too soon; the manufacturer has sold the system to Western countries, too, as well as to repressive regimes around the world. The equipment can identify Uyghur nationals by facial recognition, which has led to harassment and to pressure being put on Uyghurs living in Europe and elsewhere to either return to Xinjiang or else to serve as informants against other Uyghurs, with the pressure by the CCP being applied: “sometimes by detaining family members”.

The EU is very concerned by China's “comprehensive supervision” of Xinjiang through the “installation of Skynet electronic surveillance in major urban area, GPS trackers in all motor vehicles, the use of facial recognition scanners at checkpoints and at train and petrol stations, using software based on artificial intelligence camera systems aimed at identifying Uyghurs and other members of ethnic minority groups, and the blood collection campaign by Xinjiang police in order to further expand China's DNA database.” It makes the CCP sound more like Count Dracula than defenders of the peace.

One Chinese company engaged in the surveillance business may suffer lost orders, over an issue that flags up the EU's own lack of care over the supply chain, because the report “criticises the procurement of thermal cameras from Hikivision by Parliament's administration and by the Commission; insists on the introduction of a circumspect procurement policy that takes human rights concerns duly into account.” It also urges “its President to immediately sever any direct or indirect business relationship with Hikivision, and to improve the transparency of its procurement activities.” It's no good telling others not to do something, after all, if you do it yourself.

This whole issue is being taken very seriously by the US Department of State, which wants to put an end to forced labour. From a social perspective, it is cruel and dehumanising. From a purely capitalist perspective, it distorts competition. It's hard to compete

with a country whose workers are neither paid nor adequately fed and housed. “Over the last four years,” it explains, “the People's Republic of China (PRC) has carried out a mass detention and political indoctrination campaign against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang), a large region in western China.” The on-line article goes on: “The courageous voices of survivors, their family members abroad, researchers, and international advocacy groups have thoroughly documented the PRC's discriminatory use of surveillance technologies and trumped-up administrative and criminal charges to abduct and detain more than one million Muslims, including Uyghurs, ethnic Hui, ethnic Kazakhs, ethnic Kyrgyz, ethnic Tajiks, and ethnic Uzbeks, in as many as 1,200 state-run internment camps throughout Xinjiang. Detention in these camps is intended to erase ethnic and religious identities under the pretext of “vocational training.”



Hikivision Hangzhou office

According to the US State Department, “The PRC initially denied all allegations, dismissing them as international “interference” in its domestic affairs. Confronted, however, with eyewitness testimony and thoroughly researched reporting from multiple sources, the PRC eventually admitted the existence of the camps. PRC officials then defended the facilities as necessary measures to counter “terrorism,” while also claiming that many of them had already been closed.” This, like many of the claims emanating from Beijing, was a lie. In fact, the

## CBP Issues Region-Wide Withhold Release Order on Products Made by Slave Labor in Xinjiang

Release Date: January 13, 2021

**WASHINGTON** — Effective January 13 at all U.S. ports of entry, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will detain cotton products and tomato products produced in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.



number of camps has risen. There has been action to counter China's measures to both use and abuse the Uyghurs. In the United States, for example, the Departments of State, the Treasury, Commerce and Homeland Security have released the 'Xinjiang Supply Chain Business Advisory' to alert businesses to the risks to their reputation – and to their profits – if they get involved with Xinjiang, issuing ten 'Withhold Release Orders' against goods and companies linked to forced labour practices.

According to a report in Al Jazeera, "China continues to carry out discriminatory work policies,

such as forced labour, impossible production expectations and long working hours, against the Uyghurs in its northwest province of Xinjiang, a United Nations committee said on Friday, urging Beijing to bring its employment practices in line with global standards.

The report from the International Labour Organization stressed that China has violated various articles of the Employment Policy Convention of 1964, which Beijing ratified in 1997, including the right to freely choose employment." The International Trades Union Confederation is vehement in its condemnation of China's practices,



On July 13, the U.S. Departments of State, Commerce, Homeland Security, Labor, and the Treasury, and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, issued an updated advisory on the risks for businesses with potential exposure in their supply chain to entities engaged in human rights abuses in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang). This advisory outlines risks that businesses and individuals should consider when assessing business partnerships with, investing in, sourcing from, or providing other support to companies operating in Xinjiang, linked to Xinjiang, or with laborers from Xinjiang

reports Al Jazeera: "Some 13 million members of the ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang are targeted based on their ethnicity and religion, the ITUC said, adding that Beijing justified its methods as 'poverty alleviation', 'vocational training', 're-education through labour' and 'de-extremification,'" a word that they seem to have made up; it's not in any dictionary. China insists that the workers are paid and have "freedom".

Ordinary working people – poor working people with families to feed and no income – took action against slavery in the Confederate states during the American Civil War, risking starvation to do so and winning the praise of US President Abraham Lincoln, whose statue now stands close to the Manchester Free Trade Hall, because despite closed mills and evictions, Lancashire's cotton workers took a stand against slavery. "I cannot but regard your decisive utterances," Lincoln wrote in 1863, "on the question as an instance of sublime Christian heroism which has not been surpassed in any age or in any country." The workers wanted Lincoln to continue his blockade of the ports shipping slave-grown cotton to Lancashire. He did, and the Confederacy was defeated, of course, despite meetings organised by mill-owners urging the British government to take military action on the Confederacy's side. They didn't. Slavery has never been an "internal matter", as China insists. It also now looks as if a Chinese-designed nuclear reactor will not be built in England. The politics of Chinese investment in the UK has changed and few feel inclined to risk putting Beijing in such a powerful position with its revolutionary reactor design. Cancelling the project will cost the UK government millions, but Prime Minister Boris Johnson told the House of Commons that he would block "undue influence by potentially adversarial countries". Would today's workers take a stand against slavery in Xinjiang? Only time will tell.

*Toby Bowman-Grant*





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



© Sarah Johnson

Young girl vaping on e-cigarette

## YOUR LOVE LIFE UP IN SMOKE?

*Can vaping harm relationships with the opposite sex?*

Since I last wrote an article for Europe Diplomatic Magazine about the downsides of vaping – the use of e-cigarettes and suchlike – a couple of years ago, more has been learned, none of it terribly good. Whether it's worse for you than puffing away on an ordinary cigarette remains unlikely, admittedly, and I say that as an ex-smoker who gave up the habit more than three decades ago. I'm very glad I did, too; at least I cannot blame my current health problems on cigarettes; they're all the fault of that unavoidable ailment that I call 'anno dominitis' – the passage of time, or simply old age. I'm absolutely certain that if I still smoked, my symptoms would be far worse. The latest research suggests that some of the chemicals in many commercially available vaping fluids can even lead to erectile dysfunction (ED) in quite young men. I think most males, given a choice between having something to smoke and being able to participate in the reproductive act or make love to the female of their choice would choose

the latter. And there is, of course, a good side to vaping, the one the manufacturers harp on about: it helps smokers to quit. Ordinary tobacco has even worse side effects (such as killing you) and every smoker should strive to give up what is, after all, an unhealthy, unpleasant, and anti-social habit. Vaping wasn't an option when I gave up cigarettes and quitting wasn't easy. I've never regretted doing it, however.



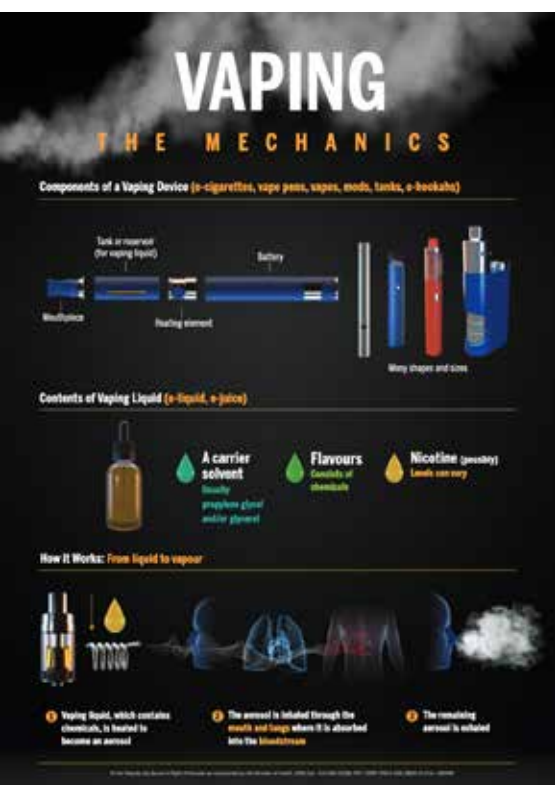
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Georges Simenon

There are an estimated nine-million users of e-cigarettes or vaporizers around the world. In most cases, the e-cigarettes or whatever are used as substitutes for cigarettes or cigars, perhaps even for pipes, although you don't often see people smoking tobacco in pipes these days (whatever happened to Popeye the Sailor Man or Georges Simenon's clever French detective, Maigret?) Perhaps they, too, suffered the side effects of smoking (or vaping) that left them unable to reproduce. Or simply dead. I smoked a pipe for a time when I first gave up cigarettes, but it does make the atmosphere muggy and wins you few friends in a public bar, however restful I found it at the time (but also messy and inclined to burn holes in one's pockets). The advent of e-cigarettes in 2004 gave tobacco addicts a new alternative to smoking cigarettes or whatever else they used. Small substitutes such as e-cigarettes look like the real thing but vaping devices that are battery-powered use a heated coil to turn the liquid to vapour that the smoker can inhale. In



most cases, the vapour contains such things as propylene glycol, vegetable glycerine, flavourings (a wide variety are on offer) and even – and often – nicotine. It seems a bit pointless to wean oneself off nicotine by inhaling nicotine, however. Such devices may not be completely safe, but they would seem to be a step in the right direction. Public Health England has stated that e-cigarettes and vaping are much safer than ordinary smoking. We should recall that the World Health Organisation reports that very nearly 7 million people die from the effects of smoking ordinary cigarettes every year. But we must also consider the bad effects vaping can have on a man's sexual performance. Yes, it's worth pointing out that the consumption of nicotine – by whatever means – has also been linked to erectile dysfunction (ED). CNN reported that otherwise healthy men who vaped nicotine daily were more than twice as likely to report experiencing ED as these who didn't.



On the US National Institute for Health (NIH) website, vape users are reminded that whatever they choose to vaporize and inhale is still an “alien substance” that our lungs did not evolve to cope with. We all know that



smoking tobacco is bad for us, so we ought to realise that putting smoke or vapour of some kind – or indeed any other extraneous substance – into our bodies is also unlikely to be to our long term benefit. According to the SomaTherapy-ED website, an American information source, tobacco, in whatever form, contains more than 40,000 chemicals, some of them known to be carcinogens. That's in addition to the established links between smoking and such medical conditions as heart attack, stroke, lung disease, various cancers and – it seems – men's sexual health.

Nicotine, for instance, damages blood vessels, and therefore affects the flow of blood to a man's penis, the maintenance of which is essential to developing and maintaining an erection. The Massachusetts Male Aging Study concluded that smoking ordinary cigarettes almost doubles the likelihood of developing moderate-to-severe ED. Incidentally, the study focussed predominantly on younger men, showing that smoking is one of the major causes of ED in men under the age of 40. Nicotine can have a cumulative effect, too. According to SomaTherapy-ED, in relatively young men, aged between 18 and 44, the smoking of 20 cigarettes per day can cause a 2-fold increase in the risk of developing severe ED when compared with men who smoke less. Furthermore, unlike other symptoms that a man may develop, ED may not be reversible when (if) they subsequently give up smoking, although the status of a man's erection has been found to improve in 25% of formerly heavy

smokers within one year of quitting. The website also points out that since ED is caused in proportion to the amount of nicotine consumed, replacement therapies that still involve doses of nicotine – even these that deliver through a patch – may not help to overcome ED. Indeed, research shows that nicotine damage can have a serious effect on sexual arousal, with one study centred on men with the average age of just 21, and who had not been heavy nicotine users. It was found that the use of a single high-dose nicotine patch substantially reduced erectile response to any kind of stimulation.

### LIGHTING THE WAY OR SNUFFING IT OUT?

Perhaps most significantly, the British Medical Journal (BMJ) published an on-line article about the effects of vaping in terms of helping a smoker to quit. The original article said ‘yes’, it did, but this was later subject to an updating that changed the verdict to ‘no’, it did not, with Jørgen Vestbo, Andrew Bush, and Jonathan Grigg arguing that there is already enough nicotine addiction. “For decades, smoking rates in the UK have been declining, and few teenagers see themselves becoming smokers,” the report said. “This has been achieved without e-cigarettes, and the decline in smoking has not accelerated after the introduction of e-cigarettes.” There has been a move to have e-cigarettes licenced as a medicine, partly (it's claimed) so that availability could be controlled by the medical profession, but a number of experts have opposed this



Italian MEP Pietro Fiocchi

idea, largely because it gives a kind of respectability to the manufacture and sale of these products. The BMJ conducted a survey of the available literature on the subject.

According to this research, it: “revealed a total of 40 articles out of which 29 were included in the review. Electronic cigarettes (ECIGs) achieved modest cessation rates with benefits of behavioural and sensory gratification. On the contrary, in many studies where ECIGs were introduced as an intervention, participants continued to use them to maintain their habit instead of quitting.” The scientific research found a total of 22 toxic substances apart from nicotine in the liquid of ECIG cartridges and their emissions. “Many compounds had lower concentrations in ECIG compared to tobacco smoke. There existed a wide variation in the content of ECIG cartridges and strengths of nicotine in refill solutions. It has been observed that the second generation ECIGs delivered nicotine with a similar kinetic profile to conventional cigarettes.” In 2013, the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave market authorization to ECIGs “for quitting smoking and cigarette substitutes. The United Kingdom also advocates ECIGs as a medicinal aid to quitting but bans it from workplaces and other public spaces”. India along with many other countries has yet to come up with a formal regulatory stand regarding ECIGs.

In early 2021, the World Vapers’ Alliance organised what they called a “Covid-friendly demonstration” (friendly to the attendees, not to SARS-CoV-2 viruses) of their products at the European Parliament in a bid to persuade MEPs that



Croatian MEP Tomislav Sokol

E-cigarettes and other vaping devices can help defeat or reduce the consumption of ordinary tobacco. Speaking about the demonstration, Michael Landl, Director of the World Vapers’ Alliance said: “While we can’t be there in person, we wanted to make sure that MEPs hear us and see us. 700,000 people die every year in the EU due to smoking induced cancer but as vapers, we have seen first-hand how vaping helps to quit smoking. Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan must endorse vaping as an effective method to help smokers move to a safer alternative and reduce cancer in Europe.”

As a neutral observer (who managed to give up smoking without the aid of such devices) I feel I must point out that, understandably, he wants to sell his members’ products. After all, he must want to see more people obtaining and using vaping devices. At the special meeting, Italian MEP Pietro Fiocchi of the centre-right European People’s Party (EPP), highlighted studies showing the much lower cancer risk of vaping compared to smoking, while MEP Tomislav Sokol from Croatia, also EPP, asked about how the concept of ‘harm reduction’ could help in fighting cancer.



German MEP Peter Liese

Additionally, another EPP member, German MEP Peter Liese, highlighted the need to ensure vaping is not as restricted as smoking saying: “Stop smoking is easy to say, but for those who are addicted it is very difficult.

That is why I think we need to be a bit more open towards e-cigarettes. So at least we need to make sure that e-cigarettes are not more difficult to access than tobacco.” Difficult, yes, but as I have proved, far from impossible. Welcoming these comments (none from other political groups were quoted), Michael Landl said: “I’m encouraged by the increasing open-mindedness of MEPs to how vaping can help reduce smoking and help reduce cancer.” Of course he is.



CDC, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), state and local health departments, and other clinical and public health partners are continuing to monitor e-cigarette, or vaping, product use-associated lung injury (EVALI)

America’s National Library of Medicine (NIH) is less impressed, reminding the readers on its website that its own research, using standard e-cigarettes with a variety of flavourings, is more ambivalent in its results. “This laboratory study examined the relationship between liquid nicotine concentration and plasma nicotine concentration and puffing behaviour in experienced ECIG users. Sixteen ECIG-experienced participants used a 3.3-Volt ECIG battery attached to a 1.5-Ohm dual-coil ‘cartomiser’ (which consists of a metal or plastic casing housing a single of dual coil atomizer wrapped in a roll of polyfill material to absorb the e-liquid) loaded with 1 mL of a flavoured propylene glycol/vegetable glycerine liquid to complete four sessions, at least 2 days apart, that differed by nicotine concentration (0, 8, 18 or 36 mg/mL).”



The report then goes into considerable scientific detail not suitable for an article like this. However, in another report the NIH mentions how in the United States there has been an “outbreak of lung injuries and deaths linked to vaping.” The report goes on to mention a range of other health issues: “Vaping exposes the lungs to a variety of chemicals,” it states. “These may include the main active chemicals in tobacco (nicotine) or marijuana (THC), flavourings, and other ingredients that are added to vaping liquids. Plus, other chemicals can be produced during the vaporizing process.” The real problem here is the frequent inclusion of nicotine in commercially available vaping liquids, which must surely be a hindrance to anyone using vaping as a means of giving up smoking. The study seems to suggest that inhaling nicotine through a vaping device is slightly less harmful than smoking a cigarette in cases where regular smokers make the switch to vaping completely, but it’s still hazardous to your health. According to Dr. Thomas Eissenberg, an expert on tobacco research at Virginia Commonwealth University who is quoted on the NIH website: “Your lungs aren’t meant to deal with the constant challenge of non-air that people are putting into them – sometimes as many as 200 puffs a day – day after day, week after week, year after year.”

Nicotine is, of course, a natural pesticide, produced by the tobacco plant, the *nicotiana* in its various varieties, to make its leaves taste unpleasant to invading insects and, if they persist, to kill the attackers. It was used by native Americans to protect their crops from pests. The trouble is that it also kills bees, birds,

fish, and any mammals snacking on the plant. Its main effect, however, is to repel carrot flies and flea beetles, and also whiteflies, gnats, aphids, thrips and leaf miners. It’s a nerve toxin, and if it can kill off these persistent pests, just imagine what it can do to your lungs. However, there is evidence that vaping is safer than smoking tobacco. Public Health England (PHE), a government body, is convinced.

On its website it says: “The estimate that e-cigarette use is around 95% safer than smoking is based on the facts that the constituents of cigarette smoke that harm health – including carcinogens – are either absent in e-cigarette vapour or, if present, they are mostly at levels much below 5% of smoking doses, mostly below 1% and far below safety limits or occupational exposure.” PHE also states that: “the main chemicals present only in e-cigarettes have not been associated with any serious risk.”

### HE WHO DIES THIS YEAR IS QUIT FOR THE NEXT (Shakespeare, Henry V)

That’s very different from the findings of some American researchers, and even PHE adds a cautionary note: “But e-cigarettes are not risk free, and more research is needed on how long-term vaping can affect the lungs and overall health. For example, we know that vaping can have some impact on inflammation in the airways which might cause harm over long periods. We don’t recommend anyone using e-cigarettes unless they are trying to stop smoking.” In other words, they may be safer than cigarettes but they’re still not really safe, although they may help you to give up the far

more dangerous cigarettes. They can still cause or worsen chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, although some of those who switched from ordinary cigarettes have reported an improvement in that condition, in cases where they were already sufferers. Furthermore, according to PHE, “e-cigarettes could be contributing to at least 20,000 successful new quits per year and possibly more.”



In the United States, the National Academies of Science are similarly enthusiastic, up to a point. “Evidence suggests that while e-cigarettes are not without health risks, they are likely to be far less harmful than conventional cigarettes,” the report said when published in 2018. “They contain fewer numbers and lower levels of toxic substances than conventional cigarettes and using e-cigarettes may help adults who smoke conventional cigarettes quit smoking. However, their long-term health effects are not yet clear.” It also points out that: “There is substantial evidence that nicotine intake from e-cigarettes among experienced adult e-cigarette users can be comparable to that from conventional cigarettes.” In which case, making the switch is a case of “out of the frying pan, into the fire.” The medical profession, it seems (or most of it, at least) can see mainly benefits, rather than danger, from vaping, but only if it used as a way of helping to stop the user from being addicted to conventional cigarettes. “Our new review,” states the PHE, “reinforces the finding that vaping is a fraction of the risk of smoking, at least 95% less harmful, and of negligible risk to bystanders. Yet over half of smokers either falsely believe that vaping is as harmful as smoking



Electronic cigarette



High Tech Electronic cigarette



or just don't know." The report makes an interesting comment on the toxicity of nicotine that any carrot flies, flea beetles, whiteflies, gnats, aphids, thrips, or leaf miners might find surprising, if reading this while coughing in the flower beds: "People smoke for the nicotine, but contrary to what the vast majority believe, nicotine causes little if any of the harm." That sentence may come as a surprise. "The toxic smoke is the culprit and is the overwhelming cause of all tobacco-related disease and death."

It all sounds very positive for the makers and purveyors of vaping equipment and liquids, but the World Health Organisation (WHO) sounds a note of caution: "E-cigarette emissions typically contain nicotine and other toxic substances that are harmful to both users, and non-users who are exposed to the aerosols second-hand," says the website. "Some products claiming to be nicotine-free have been found to contain nicotine. Evidence reveals that these products are harmful to health and are not safe. However, it is too early to provide a clear answer on the long-term impact of using them or being exposed to them." The use of electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) is known to increase the risk of heart disease and lung disorders, as well as posing "significant risks to pregnant women who use them, as they can damage the growing foetus."

Recently there has been growing evidence that the use of vaping devices could be associated with

lung damage, known as "e-cigarette or vaping associated lung injury", or EVALI, with enough cases to get the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) involved. This led the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to activate an emergency investigation into EVALI on 17 September 2019. By then, a total of 2,668 cases of EVALI had been reported from all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, with 60 deaths confirmed. "Among 2,022 hospitalized cases with information on substances used," says the WHO report, "1,650 (82%) reported using any THC-containing product, and 1,162 (57%) reported using any nicotine-containing product; 669 (33%) reported exclusive THC-containing product use, and 274 (14%) reported exclusive nicotine-containing product use." In that case, perhaps not typical of most vapers, but still a worrying development.

## SEX AND SMOKING

We started, however, by talking about the possible effects of vaping on male sexual performance and fertility. It remains an issue, according to the ExSeed website: "Essentially it affects all functions related to reproduction including semen volume, sperm motility (movement), sperm morphology (shape), sperm genetic material, and causes erectile dysfunction." ExSeed admits that research into the relationship between male sexual ability and vaping has been scant, but it believes what little scientific evidence there

is looks to be negative: "There is not much research on vaping and its effects on fertility," it admits on its website, "but the limited research out there suggests that it affects fertility in a negative way. One small study, which took place at the University College of London, indicated that the e-liquid in itself could damage sperm cells." One problem would seem to be that such evidence as exists is based on tests carried out on rodents. "The only study on e-liquids, which was published in 2016, showed that male rats exposed to e-liquids with and without nicotine for four weeks, showed a significant decrease in sperm count of both groups, with the biggest decrease in the nicotine exposed rats, suggesting that e-liquid may harm fertility even without nicotine."



But rats are not habitual smokers as a rule, so it's not clear how much notice we should take of it. I do feel sorry for the rats, however.

As I mentioned earlier, it's not just the intake of nicotine through a cigarette or even an e-cigarette that causes



concern. According to ExSeed, it's also chewing tobacco, snuff, and nicotine replacement therapy that might harm male fertility. Another website, Conceive, shares ExSeed's concerns. "We know that smoking (cigarettes) affects male fertility, largely due to 4,000+ chemicals in the cigarette themselves. But what about just nicotine alone? What about the other products in vape liquid?" the website asks. "Turns out, nicotine itself is a problem. It significantly lowers sperm count, sperm motility, sperm viability, and increases the percent of sperm with abnormal morphology. It also reduces the weight of the testes, testosterone level, and testicular antioxidant status."



E-Liquid Bottles

The problem for anyone trying to assess the dangers by reading the many and varied reports by various experts and examining their scientific research is that you can find virtually any opinion you like, seemingly backed up by well-researched facts. Disentangling them is the challenge, along with drawing definitive conclusions. The American medical website, Smart Surgery, Warns on its website: "There is no such thing as 'safe smoking, as more research is still required before we know the full revelation on vaping's health effect on the human."

Health researchers in New York have come up with an unexpected conclusion : since some 90% of the nicotine inhaled from cigarettes is excreted in the urine, there's a strong possibility that nicotine from e-cigarettes could lead to a risk of bladder cancer. Further research, following on from this, led them to conclude that e-cigarette smoke could damage the DNA in human bladders in much the same way as can

second-hand smoke from ordinary cigarettes. Even here, though, the report concludes, despite its apparent opposition to vaping, that e-cigarettes are safer than the conventional kind. "E-cigarettes also contain nicotine but not as much as regular cigarettes," says the website. "The nicotine content in a single cigarette varies but may contain about 6 milligrams (mg) on the low end to as much as 28 mg. The average cigarette contains about 10 to 12 mg of nicotine. In comparison, e-cigarettes contain, on average, 0.5 to 15.4 mg." The same website also expresses a negative viewpoint regarding a man's sexuality. "More than 20 million American men suffer from erectile dysfunction (ED). This inability to either achieve or maintain an erection firm enough for sexual intercourse is directly impacted by men who smoke or are exposed to second-hand smoke. ED is the result of poor blood flow to the penis. Men who smoke are harming the blood vessels that supply this blood flow, resulting in a man's inability to get or keep an erection."



E-cigarette samples provided at an event

The 'Inverse' website by Katie MacBride from October 2021 is equally worried about the effects of vaping on male sexual health, when it's already known that ordinary smoking adversely affects it: "Because nicotine and other additives are also in e-cigarettes," Omar El-Shahawy, Assistant Professor at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine and lead researcher on

the study, told Ms. MacBride. His colleagues wanted to know if the relationship between e-cigarette use and ED would be similarly strong. After all, in a recent study published in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine, researchers revealed that men who vape with nicotine on a daily basis are more than twice as likely to experience erectile dysfunction as those who never used e-cigarettes. So, one must conclude that vaping may – and I stress the word 'may' – be less harmful to a man's sexual capability than smoking a normal cigarette, but it's a value judgement that leaves a residue of risk: "Long-term studies have shown that the intensity of cigarette smoking is correlated with a greater degree of erectile dysfunction. That's because nicotine is a vasoconstrictor, causing blood vessels to narrow, reducing blood flow. Erections rely on good unrestricted blood flow to the penis, thus this constriction makes that less likely to happen." So, take the risk if you want to (or if your addiction to nicotine leaves you little or no choice) but don't do so without considering what the side effects may be.

## DEATH OR DYSFUNCTION

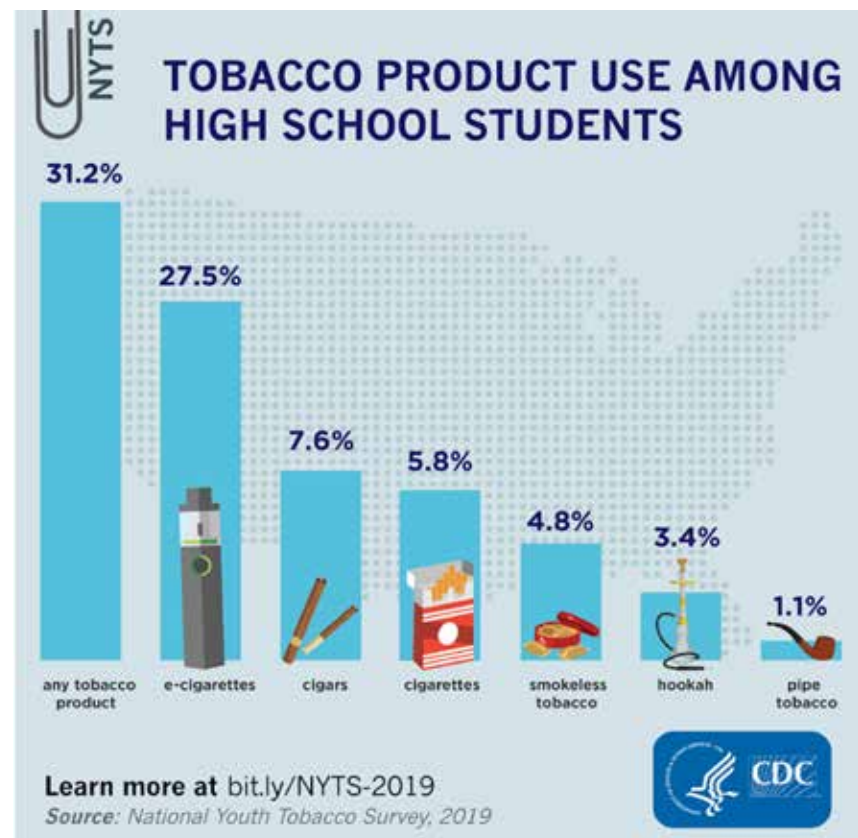
Research reported on the Inverse site would be bad news for regular vapers. The researchers looked at the experiences of a range of men with a varying degree of problems. Of the 45,971 survey respondents, the researchers focused on two groups: a full sample of 13,711 males aged 20 and older who had answered a survey question about erectile dysfunction, and a subset, made up of a restricted sample of 11,207 males aged 20 to 65 years with no prior cardiovascular disease diagnosis.



Katie MacBride

“Compared to those who never vaped,” it said, “daily users were more than twice as likely to report having erectile dysfunction — this was particularly true for the men in the restricted sample: 2.2 times as likely for the full sample, and 2.4 times as likely for the subset. In the subset, 10.2 percent of respondents reported having erectile dysfunction to some degree. Of these men, 5.5 percent were occasional vapers; 2.5 percent were daily users.” El-Shahawy says this was not unexpected. “Nicotine is nicotine in any form — the theory is that e-cigarettes can deliver high nicotine levels perhaps — at least some of them do,” he explained. It depends on the vaper’s individual choice of vaping liquid.

El-Shahawy admits that he does not yet know if the effects of vaping in sexual performance are as severe as those from ordinary smoking. That requires further research. “This is the first study [looking at the connection between e-cigarettes and erectile dysfunction and we can’t quantify the risk based on one study,” he told the website. “Also, more comprehensive analysis with other measures for [erectile



US statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

dysfunction] assessment is needed,” he added. El-Shahawy wants to study whether e-cigarette use also affects female sexual health and he hopes to look at longer-term

patterns linking erectile dysfunction and e-cigarette use.

“Ultimately, it makes sense that vaping nicotine would have some of the same effects as smoking nicotine on the body,” he said.

One thing is certain: smoking of any kind, whether using old-fashioned cigarettes, vaping devices of some sort or any other nicotine delivery system is definitely bad for you. The question is: how bad? It would seem that vaping is the healthier option, if only slightly and only if it leads to the vaper giving up normal smoking, and it’s nowhere near as safe as abstinence. If it came to a choice, which would most men prefer? The ability to have sex with a partner or a quick puff on a smoking device? I don’t think we need concern ourselves with the answer. When I was in my teens, I recall being told a joke that went like this: “Question: what are the three best things in life? Answer: a drink before and a smoke afterwards.” It would seem that doing it the other way round may not be advisable. In the longer term, it may not even be possible.

Robin Crow





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Russian Tank T-14

## RUSSIA - THE GANGSTER STATE ATTACKS

*Putin proves his criminal credentials in Ukraine*

Whether or not the Nord Stream 2 gas pipe from Russia will ever be completed and brought into service, warned David McAllister, leader of Germany's Christian Democratic group in the European Parliament, "depends definitely on the actions and the behaviour of the Kremlin." We now know that talk of the Russians going home was optimistic; the ever-unpredictable Vladimir Putin has decided that a full-scale world war is preferable to letting Ukraine join NATO. Of course, he refers to it as "the Ukraine", suggesting it's really just a region of Russia. McAllister was responding at a press conference in Brussels to a question about Germany's commitment to defending Ukraine and about German dependence on imported energy supplies. The press conference took place just before McAllister headed off to Ukraine to lead a delegation from the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and Security and Defence Sub-Committee on a fact-finding visit to the supposedly threatened country. "If the conflict with Ukraine does escalate militarily, this project from my point of view cannot move on," said McAllister, whose views echo those of the US State Department. Europe – especially Germany – needs reliable, affordable supplies of gas, but Russia also needs the money the pipeline would generate, even though its economy looks to be sound; It has central bank reserves of almost \$640-billion (€574-billion). In terms of threats and counter-threats, we appeared to be a stalemate, but such a state of affairs has seldom served to prevent conflict and Russia later bragged about how much more expensive gas would be in Europe. Many pundits thought that's all the rhetoric was – gas



© European People's Party

David McAllister

Germany has come in for criticism for refusing – so far – to send arms to Ukraine to help with defence against a possible Russian attack. The threat, though, seemed to be more in the minds of certain Western leaders and Western media. It's not weakness on Germany's part, according to those who are familiar with German

political history. In a field just to the east of Berlin, farmers often plough up human remains. They are all that is left of a massive and ultimately successful, if costly, Soviet advance on last-ditch Nazi defences. Putin now claims, quite falsely and with no justification, that the government of Ukraine is 'Nazi'. It helped to end the war by defeating Hitler's forces, albeit



at a terrible cost in human lives. After starting two terrible wars that killed millions, Germany became a nation committed to peace. Following the Red Army's arrival on German soil towards the end of the Second World War, its soldiers were encouraged to take revenge for the deaths of so many Soviet troops and for their actions in the extermination camps that the Red Army had liberated, such as Majdanek and Auschwitz.



© Gregory Vayl

Soviet General, Georgy Zhukov

The great Soviet General, Georgy Zhukov, had issued an order to the soldiers of the First Belorussian Front, saying: "Woe to the land of the murderers. We will get our terrible revenge for everything." And they did. Having seen the appalling things the Nazis had done, they were happy to kill and imprison Nazi troops (often in terrible and inhumane conditions) and, most of all, to rape any German women they could find. The numbers of women said to have been violated by the triumphant Red Army have been estimated at between tens of thousands and the low millions. According to Geoffrey Roberts' fascinating book about Zhukov, "Stalin's General", the Red Army troops also raped up to 100,000 women in and around Vienna, despite Austria being considered by Stalin to have been a victim of the Nazis. The Russian soldiers knew, though, that many Austrians had joined up in support of their fellow countryman, Adolf Hitler. When the Red Army "liberated" Vienna, its women suffered a similar fate to the those in Berlin.

German popular opinion, then, tends towards the pacifist these days, which is why Germany doesn't export offensive weapons. There is widespread awareness that Germany started the First World War, in

which some 37.5-million people died, and also World War Two, which killed a further estimated 68.8-million. Reticence, then, is perhaps understandable. And in any case, Putin most definitely has a point: why does NATO need to expand so far to the east? As NATO itself proclaims on its website: "The North Atlantic Alliance was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War. Its purpose was to secure peace in Europe, to promote cooperation among its members and to guard their freedom – all of this in the context of countering the threat posed at the time by the Soviet Union." In case you hadn't noticed, the Soviet Union no longer exists. Nobody these days would claim that "the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat", as Karl Marx claimed, nor would they (well, not many of them anyway) espouse the demand for a system based on the argument: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs".



Russian President and Armed Forces Supreme Commander-in-Chief Vladimir Putin and Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov on board of the Russian Northern fleet's Marshal Ustinov missile cruiser watching the joint drills of the Northern and Black sea fleets in the Black Sea, Crimea, 09 January 2020

It was on the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve 1999 that outgoing Russian president Boris Yeltsin officially handed over the reins to his successor, Vladimir Putin, who looks unlikely to hand them over to anyone else. It's worth bearing in mind that, just as western leaders take note of popular opinion, so does Putin – normally – although he also controls the Russian media, allowing him to shape public opinion to suit his needs. His seizure of Crimea may have annoyed western politicians and western media, but it played very well in Russia, where Ukraine is still seen by many as part of Russia itself. A letter to The Economist

magazine from Robert Morley, former staff member of America's National Security Council, points out that: "Russians find it difficult to understand how NATO membership for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania enhances the security of countries like Belgium, France and Iceland." He has a point. Morley blames the West for facilitating Putin's rise to unchallengeable power and his demagoguery since, as he quietly waves his fist and raises his hand in rude salute to Western leaders. Ukraine's dislike of Putin and his rule in Russia goes back a long way: when I was last in Kyiv, more than a decade ago, on a street market, I was offered toilet rolls with a picture of Putin on the outermost sheets (the seller told me they didn't extend all the way through) and words in Cyrillic, one of which was "Putin", while the other was not suitable for repetition here (I had to look it up).

### RUSSIA ENCOURAGED BY WEST'S FIGHTING TALK?

In any case, Ukraine's military top brass didn't think Russia had either the number, nor the matériel to stage a full-blown invasion, however much it might impress Russian citizens back home. They didn't expect

Indeed, Ukraine believed that the near-hysterical talk of an imminent incursion originated in the United States and the UK, both of which are keen to divert public attention from more embarrassing reports from closer to home (vacillation and weakness in Biden's case, blatant dishonesty and drinking parties at 10 Downing Street during a COVID lockdown for Johnson).



Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy visiting the Kharkiv and Donetsk regions

Also, of course, widespread public concern would help to justify NATO's expansion eastwards. Meanwhile, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has accused Washington and the western media of stoking up panic while pointing out that there were "no tanks in the streets", at least at that time. That hasn't stopped the Deputy US Secretary of State Wendy Sherman from saying that the US saw every indication that Putin was going to use military force sometime between then and the middle of February. She was right.

She was speaking in late January and US President Joe Biden also stated, when asked, that "I will be moving US troops to Eastern Europe and to NATO countries in the near future." Could that have provoked Putin's decision to invade, or was it his long-held fear that real democracy might spread to Russia and unseat him? Mark Milley, who chairs the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon, told a press conference: "With 100,000 troops, you've got combined arms formations, ground manoeuvre, artillery, rockets, you have got air and all the other pieces that go with it, there's a potential that they could launch on very, very little warning. That's possible." A less-than-cheery thought, but in case you are not yet sufficiently frightened, there's more: "This is larger in scale and scope and the massing of forces than anything we have seen in recent memory." Russia has refrained from tackling the West before, believing that the US had better weapons; we must assume that having weighed up human determination against matériel, he decided to go for broke.

This martial rhetoric had failed to impress French President Emmanuel Macron, who talked with Putin by telephone more than once. Macron's spokesperson said both leaders agreed that the whole issue needs to be "de-escalated" (a popular expression that will crop up again in this narrative), although Macron also pledged France's support for Ukraine if the worst should happen. The same is not true of Germany, which has led others to question its commitment to NATO when the chips are down. While Spain and Lithuania have sent warships to the Baltic and France has offered to send troops to Romania, Germany has seemed very hesitant, despite its offer of 5,000 military helmets (described by the Mayor of Kyiv, former boxer Vitali Klitschko, as a "joke").

It has led to Germany's new Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, looking weak and uncertain in the face of a real (or supposed) military threat. Those who see it that way perhaps have forgotten the way in which (and why) the German people turned against warfare after World War II. Naturally, there are plenty of people who would use this disagreement between allies as a way to weaken the EU and make Germany look feeble. In the UK, it is mainly the newspapers that campaigned for Britain to leave the EU that warned of Russian expansionism. Former US President Donald Trump, however, has claimed that "Russia controls Germany", because of its reliance on Russian gas. He said the Russia-Ukraine crisis is "a European problem", despite the fact that a world war would involve everybody.

You will no doubt recall, however, that Trump and Putin were reportedly good friends with one another at one time. It all gets very messy. In late January, President Biden held a video call with EU leaders, which he said went "very, very, very" well and even before it happened, Germany's Chancellor Scholz warned that Russia would suffer "high costs" in the event of a military incursion. Scholz met with Macron in Berlin while Russia conducted military exercises close to the Ukrainian border and he warned that "a military aggression calling into question the territorial integrity of Ukraine would have consequences." That sounds very much like a threat from Germany of armed response.



Units of the Russian engineering regiment of the combined arms of the Western Military District conducting tactical exercises

Since then, Scholz has shared a platform with France's Macron and Polish President Andrzej Duda during which, according to the New York Times, he assessed the current situation to be "the most difficult since 1989" and issued a warning to Putin that an invasion would lead to dire consequences, "politically, economically and surely strategically." Another warning, another sign of German determination, but according to Kremlin insiders, Macron's claim to have made a breakthrough in talks with Putin is not true: only Biden has the power to make a deal, in Putin's view, and that seemed unlikely.

It all looked uncomfortably like the board game "Truth or Dare", in which players must tell an (often embarrassing) truth or face carrying out a dare put forward by another player. So here we have the contestants: Joe Biden, daring Vladimir Putin to stage an invasion of Ukraine, as he did (very successfully in Crimea), while Putin demands the truth: "are you prepared to go to war to defend



Vladimir Putin and Emmanuel Macron



a country most Americans and most Europeans, for that matter, know very little about". I don't know very much either, in truth, although I still have that (now very faded) toilet roll. It was the British Prime Minister of the late 1930s, Neville Chamberlain, who shamefully dismissed the Nazi invasion and takeover of Czechoslovakia, describing it as "a faraway country of which we know little." The speech proved to be Chamberlain's undoing and led to his replacement by Winston Churchill. Americans sometimes display a lack of knowledge of other countries, largely because their own is so huge, but Donald Trump has taken on the Chamberlain rôle in this case by accusing Washington of not knowing what's happening in Ukraine and therefore being unable to evaluate it.

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Pipelaying vessel 'Audacia' operating near the German island of Ruge

He may have a point: Biden's Vice-President has admitted that any sanctions imposed on Moscow can be lifted if Russia co-operates on other matters, making it a reversible threat. Not much of a threat at all, really. As far as Germany is concerned, the current US administration has always been keen to bury the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which they fear would place Russia in a very powerful position vis-à-vis Europe, but the Germans may do it for them. As David McAllister told me, if Russia should invade Ukraine, it would mean an end to the Nord Stream 2 project with

immediate effect, with or without Jo Biden, and that, indeed, is what has happened.

It would mean an end to the Nord Stream 2 project with immediate effect, with or without Jo Biden.

## JAW-JAW IS BETTER THAN WAR-WAR



Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, chairman of the board of the Russian oil company, Rosneft

Germany, though, is more likely to fall back on a sanctions regime than to commit troops to the Ukrainian border or permit the sale of offensive weapons. German Social Democratic Party foreign policy spokesperson Nils Schmid told journalists: "We must not rule anything out when it comes to sanctions, including Swift and Nord Stream 2." SWIFT stands for 'The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, whose payments system facilitates the rapid transfer of money to complete orders and settle accounts. Germany forcing out Russia would certainly inconvenience Russian and other businesses, but the payments system is headquartered in Belgium, so it wouldn't prove fatal to the overall system.



German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock

Schmid also warned that if the worst happened then Nord Stream 2 "will probably be unsustainable", which was also David McAllister's view. Germany's Social Democrats have been openly questioning the seriousness of the invasion threat for Ukraine, with former chancellor Gerhard Schröder warning Kyiv against "sabre-rattling". He also argued that Russia's military build-up is merely a reaction to NATO manoeuvres in Poland and the Baltic. The contradictory views being expressed within Germany's coalition partnership are not helping Scholz to get across his message that Germany has, in fact, toughened its stance towards Putin.

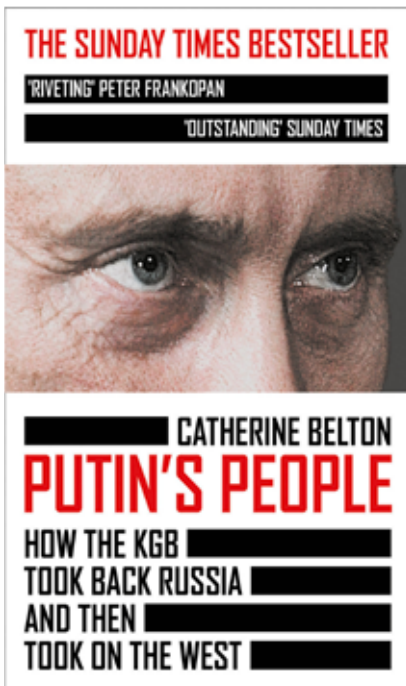
Germany clung to its Ostpolitik thinking during the existence of a separate East German state, which Berlin refused to recognise. However, it has been noted in other European capitals that Schröder still chairs the board of the massive Russian oil company, Rosneft. Kyiv mayor Klitschko has demanded that such influential and well-connected lobbyists should be banned from working "for the Russian regime". The Social Democrat party's general secretary Kevin Kühnert has warned against 'talking up' international tensions as a way of getting rid of projects (like Nord Stream 2) that other parties don't like. German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht, also a Social Democrat, argued in early January that the pipeline's future should not be linked to the Ukraine crisis, although she backtracked under orders from Scholz.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, meanwhile, has made clear that, quite apart from any qualms about exporting arms to Ukraine,



German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz

Berlin is distinctly displeased by Russia's behaviour. She pointed out that in recent weeks, more than 100,000 Russian troops with tanks and guns have gathered near Ukraine for no understandable reason, unless it is to invade (Russia says they're on exercises). Scholz clearly has a credibility problem, although it appears to be rooted in his pacifistic tendencies against the aggressive rhetoric of those who are spoiling for a fight they wouldn't like (and may not survive).



It all comes down to power. Scholz emerges as an insufficiently tough leader, at least in the eyes of his detractors, and certainly so when faced with such a seemingly warlike foe as Putin. Much of the media seems to share that view, while Putin comes across as a ruthless despot intent on broadening his power base. Putin told the Russian people that his aim was to “disarm” and “de-Nazify” Ukraine, which he accused of “genocide”, albeit without any evidence. A superb, if controversial, new book, ‘Putin’s People’ by Catherine Belton, documents Putin’s rise to power and the heavy-handed and frequently dishonest methods he has used to get there and stay there. Plenty of the people who helped him to reach the Kremlin’s presidential suite have since been side-lined, eliminated or else live in fear for their

lives. Putin wants to control Russia, but more than that, some argue, he seems to want to rule the world. The book quotes Sergei Tretyakov, a former colonel in the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), stationed in New York. In the book’s foreword, he warns Americans that today’s SVR is trying to undermine and destroy the United States with even greater determination and ability than did the KGB of old. Where is James Bond when you need him? But Putin is not trying to expand the Soviet Union: it no longer exists.

Belton alleges that it’s so that Putin can make himself richer monetarily. As he allegedly embarked on this course, he turned against the former allies who had assisted his rise. After all, some of them still had money, albeit less than before, and were privy to his secrets. The Kremlin embroiled its latest victims in legal coils with the help, it’s alleged, of expensive British law firms. It seems much remains today as it was in the days of the 19<sup>th</sup> century English writer Charles Dickens, who was not keen on engaging with the law. “Keep out of Chancery,” advises a character in Bleak House (in the UK that means the Lord Chancellor’s court, which is a division of the High Court of Justice). “It’s being ground to death in a slow mill; it’s being roasted at a slow fire; it’s being stung to death by single bees; it’s being drowned by drops; it’s going mad by grains.” Some who have been thus targeted have managed to slip out of the country in which the action was being pursued, albeit with very little of their money left, but a t

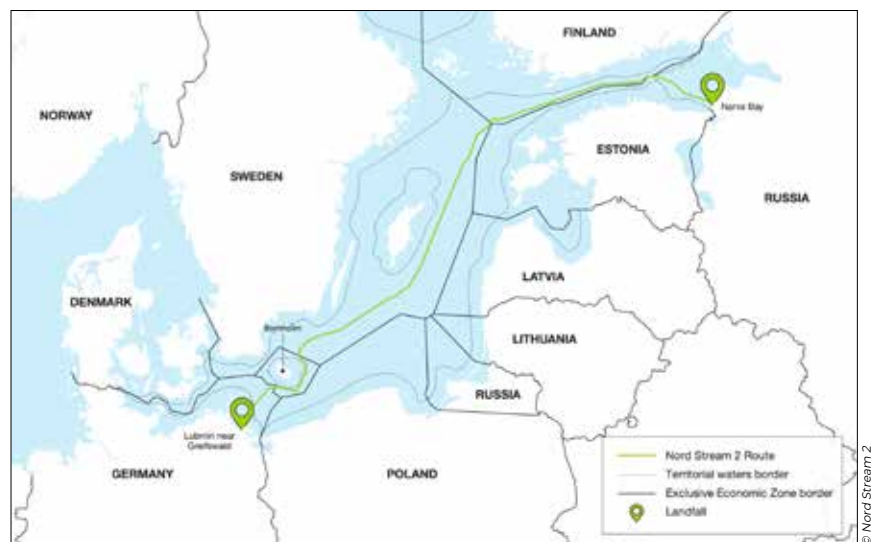
least having escaped with their lives. Those thus victimised have described Putin as a ravenous monster.



Nord Stream opening ceremony on 8 November 2011 with Angela Merkel, Dmitry Medvedev, Mark Rutte and François Fillon

## MONSTROUS POWER

Brian Klaas writes in his fascinating book “Corruptible” that: “Not everyone who ends up in power is a great person. Right now, we have a mix. Some great people are in positions of leadership: kind coaches, bosses who empower, politicians who genuinely try to make life a bit better for others. But many, many authority figures are nothing like that. They lie and cheat and steal, serving themselves while they exploit and abuse others.” Klaas writes that they are ‘corruptible’ and do a lot of damage. Which of these two types is Putin? His former – now ex-allies – have no doubts. One thing is certain, with the threat of the war expanding, Europeans have begun to realise what the effect of Nord Stream 2 might be on the balance of power. They know, for instance, how important Russian gas is to Europe. The concern led to an unusual joint statement from Biden and European



The Nord Stream 2 Route



Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen. “The United States and the EU,” they said, “are working jointly towards continued, sufficient and timely supply of natural gas to the EU from diverse sources across the globe to avoid supply shocks, including those that could result from a further Russian invasion of Ukraine.” Now we shall see if it was worthwhile. So, let’s take a look at the project. The pipeline runs for around 1,224 kilometres from Ust-Luga in the Leningrad region, just south-west of St. Petersburg in Russia, to Greifswald in north-east Germany. Like the already existing Nord Stream, it has been placed under the Baltic Sea, right next to the original Nord Stream 1 and, also like it, can transport 55-billion cubic metres of gas a year, enough to supply some 26-million households. The actual construction phase was completed in September 2021. If Germany’s European partners came to rely on this supply, a threat by Russia to turn off the taps would give Moscow enormous leverage.



Landfall facilities in Germany

It’s a joint project of Russia, Germany, the Netherlands and France, but its opening had to await a decision from the EU in Brussels; we now know that answer is “no”. It’s worth bearing in mind, however, that Germany used around 53 cubic metres of Russian gas in 2017, roughly 40% of the country’s total consumption, and the new pipeline would double current capacity. The original Nord Stream 1 opened in 2011. Nord Stream 2 is based in Zug, Switzerland and is owned by Gazprom international projects LLC, a subsidiary of PJSC Gazprom, the largest supplier of natural gas in the world. It accounts for some 15% of total world gas production. Gazprom

belongs to the Russian state and paid for more than half of the €9.5-billion project. The European Commission was always unhappy about it; it’s too much like putting all one’s eggs in one basket, saying in 2017 that: “it could even facilitate a single supplier to further strengthen its position in the EU gas market and be accompanied by a further concentration of supply routes.” Washington isn’t a fan, either. In November 2018, the former US ambassador to the EU, Gordon Sondland, warned that “dependence on Russian gas for Europe is geopolitically wrong”. Poland is uneasy, too.

They were right. In late January, Poland’s Secretary of State in the Foreign Ministry visited Berlin and Potsdam and expressed his country’s doubts over whether or not it could still rely on Germany and its opposition to Nord Stream 2 in the event of a Russian-Ukrainian conflict. According to the ministry, Germany should be giving a clear “no” to the launch of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, “the existence of which may become a tool of blackmail on the part of Russia, as well as consent to the supply of weapons from Estonia to Ukraine.” A Polish government spokesperson, Piotr Muller, has stated that “Nord Stream 2 is not only a business project - it is mostly a geopolitical project.” Poland has no right of veto over EU certification of the project, however.

### PRAYING FOR CHANGE?

Meanwhile, what about those pro-Russian rebels in Eastern Ukraine? They have been fighting their own war, ostensibly to re-unite Russia and Ukraine (or at least the part of it under their control), since 2014. Russia’s present invasion began there, as Russia absorbed the territories illegally. This war, almost forgotten by the world at large, it seems, has so far killed some 14,000 people. The rebels call their separatist enclave the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics and the disagreement with Kyiv has had some very serious repercussions, such as in July 2015, when the rebels brought down Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 with a Russian-made rocket, having mistaken it for a warplane, and killing all the 298 people on board.

The separatists are often referred to in the media as “Russian-backed”, but in fact Russia had relatively little to do with them of late – until their co-operation became militarily convenient. In January, a group of members of the Duma (the Russian parliament) voted to appeal to Putin to recognise the independence of the two breakaway regions, but at the time Putin didn’t favour the idea. The eleven parliamentarians involved are headed by Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of Russia’s Communist Party.



Armed formations, established and supported by Russia, in the Ukrainian occupied territories

The two regions had already declared themselves to be Russian Orthodox in religion and have banned other forms of worship or belief, jailing or fining some preachers of other faiths, as well as their followers. According to the Pakistan Christian Post, the religious rights group Forum 18 said the Luhansk People’s Republic also prevented church leaders from outside the territory from visiting their fellow believers. “Officials have barred access by the Greek Catholic bishop and a Greek Catholic priest, the bishop of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and many Protestant leaders,” the group claim. The rebels adopted the Russian Rouble as their currency and their schools follow the Russian curriculum, while citizens of the two supposed republics can get fast-track Russian citizenship if they wish. Moscow has issued more than 600,000 Russian passports to residents of the region since 2014. As for recognising Donetsk and Donbass as independent states, Putin feared it would serve to stoke up further the tensions over East Ukraine and the Russian troop build-up.



Coat of arms of the self-proclaimed Lugansk People's Republic

According to the International Crisis Group, Russia aimed to make the east's reintegration into Ukraine less costly to the separatists and more advantageous to Moscow.

That would seem unlikely to happen, but Putin said that he wanted to avoid steps that could increase tensions, just in order to score political points. His reticence would seem to contradict the scare stories circulating in the West over his alleged intention to invade Ukraine. However, if the threat of war should recede and not in a way that's favourable to Russia, Putin may reconsider. Meanwhile, elderly residents of the two regions who don't support the rebels, many of them now in their 80s, will continue to suffer the depredations visited upon them by the armed separatists, including the destruction of their homes. Some residents there now effectively camp out in the shells of their wrecked houses.

It's worth remembering during the arguments over Nord Stream 2 and Europe's need for Russian gas that Gazprom also supply gas to Ukraine and Belarus. Mikhail Kasyanov, who began his career until Boris Yeltsin, rose to ministerial status in Russia under Putin. They fell out most seriously when he tried to reform Gazprom, now under the control of a Putin ally. Putin was using gas bills to control the two former Soviet republics, but Kasyanov proposed liberalising reforms, which he hoped would boost competition in the economy. He called a press conference to announce his plans, but just before it started, according to Catherine Belton's book, 'Putin's People', Putin telephoned him, saying: "I insist you remove this item from the agenda." It had been at the top of that agenda,

but Putin clearly saw his control over gas supplies as a potential weapon, which he was not about to surrender. It's perhaps a point upon which the new German government may wish to ponder, although Kasyanov has also been found guilty of corruption and earned the title "Mister 2%", for allegedly demanding a 2% cut in every deal that passed across his desk.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, according to Catherine Belton, ex-KGB people like Putin were taking much larger cuts of totally corrupt deals.



Mikhail Kasyanov

Meanwhile, Germany has seen itself as performing a vital task, keeping open communication channels with Moscow, while being virtually the only NATO member not spoiling for a fight. As the Financial Times said: "In the first crisis of the post-Merkel era, Germany is floundering." Or playing peacemaker, if you prefer. Conciliation but with an edge seemed to be the theme of the visit to Ukraine by nine members of the European Parliament, led by German Christian Democrat David McAllister and Nathalie Loiseau of the Renew Europe group, a pro-EU, liberal-leaning party. On their first day in the country they visited the EU office for Ukraine and the security services, where they were told about various ceasefire violations and the need for strengthened security, as well as finding out what has been happening in the Sea of Azar before arriving at the Port of Mariupol, where they gave a brief press conference. McAllister assured local journalists of the delegation's: "Solidarity with Ukraine and its citizens in this hour of uncertainty. The European Parliament clearly and unequivocally supports the independence, the sovereignty, and the territorial integrity of Ukraine."

Referring to the current crisis, he also told the media that: "The Russian military build-up at the border with Ukraine is of huge concern for all of us in Europe, because the security of Ukraine is closely linked to the security all over our continent." Those sentiments were echoed by Nathalie Loiseau: "We are serious in diplomatic efforts to de-escalate and defuse the crisis because we know that Ukraine does not want a war, and we are serious in our firmness in case Russia would consider military aggression towards Ukraine. We stand ready to take unprecedented sanctions against Russia." Now their words will be put to the test.



Nathalie Loiseau, MEP and Former French Minister for European Affairs

The whole affair reminds me of the British music hall song of 1878, written by G.W. Hunt and made popular by 'The Great Macdermott', G.H. Macdermott, a much-loved performer. The words refer to Russia's seizure of Bulgaria and its claim upon Constantinople at that time. There is much talk in it about "the rugged Russian bear":

We don't want to fight but by jingo if we do...

We've got the ships, we've got the men, and got the money too!

We've fought the Bear before... and while we're Britons true,

The Russians shall not have Constantinople...\*

Nor Ukraine?

\*The term "jingoism", to mean chauvinistic sabre-rattling, is thought to have originated with this popular 19<sup>th</sup> century music hall song.

Jim Gibbons





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Flags of the OECD Members

# THE ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

*A convention for a better life*

‘Together, we create better policies for better lives’ is the guiding motto of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an international intergovernmental organization aiming to shape global policies in order to promote equal opportunities and enhance prosperity and global cooperation.

OECD practically reformed and continued the ideas of the initial Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), which saw the light of day in 1948, after the World War II. OEEC had been designed to manage the Marshall Plan in Europe and to acknowledge and develop the European economic interdependence.

Twelve years later, four of the most influential leaders of that time,

Dwight D. Eisenhower, Charles de Gaulle, Konrad Adenauer and Harold Macmillan, met in Paris and discussed ways to enhance economic cooperation worldwide. Upon their discussions, on December 14<sup>th</sup> 1960 in Paris, 20 founding countries signed the convention and OECD was officially created. Among them were the original OEEC members (among them France, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Greece, Portugal, UK or Spain) plus US and Canada, extending

the membership to non-European states and becoming international. The convention was signed in 1960 and came into effect in September 1961.

Over its 60 years history, the organization has extended further with 18 additional members, who joined at later dates (Australia, Japan, Israel, South Korea and so on). After 1990, a large number of European countries have expressed their wish to become part of the respectable



© OECD

1948 - The OEEC Charter signed by 16 European states



1960 - Signing of the OECD Convention at Quai d'Orsay, Paris France



organization. Malta, the countries of the former Visegrad group, the Baltic States have successively joined. There are now voices who argue that all European Union states should be part of it. The OECD assigned a special working group to supervise and plan all future enlargements. In January this year, a wave of new members has been announced, with OECD opening accession talks with six candidates: Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria. In March 2014 Russia's membership negotiations have been paused, as a response to the Annexation of Crimea by the Russian state. The newest OECD member is currently Costa Rica, who officially joined in May 2021.

The organization is now going through an internal reforming, meant to ease the decision making process among members and to raise the global impact of its role and actions. For a member state, being part of OECD is a global recognition of its fully functional market economy and established democracy. It offers prestige, a good international image and enhanced cooperation possibilities with major economic forces as USA, China or Japan but also access to essential information and the chance to help shape the global policies.

'Today, the global world looks to the OECD for leadership' (Queen Rania of Jordan).

The member states are generally high-income economies, regarded as developed countries and with a certified high Human Development Index.

OECD new accessions are guided by a set of rules and common values among all its members, defined as 'like-mindedness' (recognized strong democracy and functional market economy), 'significant player' (acknowledging the size and economic importance of each future member), 'mutual benefit' (meaning that the accession decision will be beneficial for all parties involved) and 'global consideration' (aimed to establish a much-needed geographical balance between the OECD member distribution). Technically the accession process is quite elaborate, as more than 20 OECD committees must agree upon the accession of a new state to the group.

Over the years the organization contributed to the creation of some relevant agencies and agreements, as the International Energy Agency (in 1974), the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering, the European Free Trade Area and European Nuclear Energy Agency.

As declared on their website ([www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)), the organization works 'to build better policies for better lives, to shape policies that foster prosperity, equality and well-being for all'.

Achieving economic and employment growth in member states and contributing to world's financial stability, helping economic expansion of all economies and contributing to the development of the world trade, on a non-discriminatory and multilateral basis, are the three main objectives of OECD.

The OECD produces reliable statistics and reports, quoted and used to shape policies for economic growth and social progress. Economic data are collected using a single format for all member states.

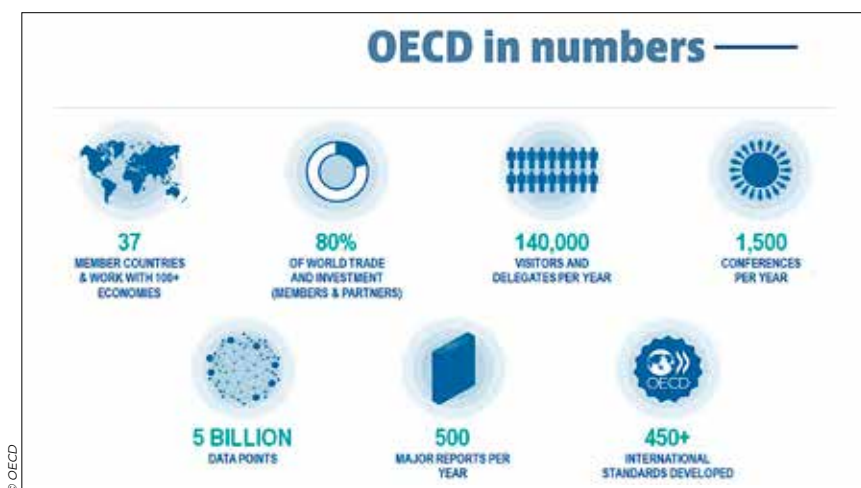


© Wikimedia Commons  
OECD Secretary General, Mathias Cormann

'The OECD plays an important role in sharing information, data and measuring progress on poverty eradication or inequality, and in bringing to the forefront solutions pertinent for the betterment of humanity and children' (Kailash Satyarthi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate).

How does OECD work? As stated, 'consensus is at heart of the OECD approach and decision making'. Member representatives work together in committees and groups to develop strategies, aligned with the directions given by the OECD council, which is chaired by its Secretary General and a deputy. General Mathias Cormann, a former Australian Finance Minister, born in the German speaking part of Belgium, has been appointed as the 6<sup>th</sup> OECD Secretary General in June 2021, for a five year term. The organization's headquarters are in Paris, and has four additional regional offices in Berlin, Washington, Mexico City and Tokyo.

With an estimated yearly budget of 386 million \$ (2019), funded by its member countries, the OECD is considered a highly reliable reporter of the global economic situation.



Over the last 60 years the organization elaborated more than 450 international standards, releases more than 500 yearly major reports and country surveys and engages with more than 140000 policy makers each year. More than 300 OECD committees meet regularly to analyze the collected data. OECD cooperates with the United Nations (where it is an official observer), World Trade Organisation, G7 and G20 and a few other regional cooperation groups, and it has received, under the Global Leaders platforms, visits from 160 Heads of State and Government. Throughout its existence, it has developed more than 450 International Agreements, Declarations, Recommendations and Decisions, which contributed to enhanced cooperation and coordination between countries. Its standards refer to principles of corporate governance, anti-bribery fight, gender equality, artificial intelligence, tax regulations, export agreements, education, work policies and much more. The results are often quite tangible: 309 million dollars annual savings through Health & Safe testing established standards, 445 million dollars in additional collected tax by promoting the Tax Inspectors without Borders (TIWB) initiative, 14,8 billion Euros of excess VAT revenues, by adopting the VAT International Guidelines, millions of students evaluated through the famous OECD Program for International Student Assessment, worldwide known as PISA, leading to better and more efficient educational methods.



OECD Headquarters, Château de la Muette, Paris, France



OECD evaluates and reports yearly the tax level for each country and publishes tax templates for good practices recommendations between countries. While traditionally taxes were paid in the country of capital origin, not where the capital was invested, potentially creating unbalance and injustice to weaker economies (often not OECD members), 2021 brought some changes to that. Promoted by the OECD and supported by the new White House Biden administration, a new international tax policy was agreed upon by 130 countries, on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2021. This new policy will determine every country to pass economic laws which will require that any multinational corporation will have to pay at least 15% income tax in countries where they actually operate, not only where they have their declared headquarters. It is also hoped that this new regulation will end the quite common corporate practice of declaring company base in countries with low taxation rates and in the so-called 'tax havens', in order to evade proper taxation. 'This historic package will

ensure that large multinational companies pay their fair share of tax everywhere' (Mathias Cormann, OECD Secretary-General). Only by this new international taxation plan, OECD hopes to redistribute up to 240 billion dollars in yearly revenues.

The OECD official list of countries, ranked by their GDP per capita, it is considered an important landmark in international economic decisions and relations. The latest available report ranked Luxembourg, Singapore, Ireland and Switzerland on top. The data also show the lending/ borrowing levels, the household spending or the government deficits.

OECD actions are permanently revised, in order to adapt quickly to present realities. Over the past two years, OECD has provided COVID-19 related data and analysis on the pandemic effect on health, economies and society in general.

OECD pledges to continue innovation, support countries in



the digitalization era and continue its leading role in supporting tax policies and reform of a global fair and stable tax system. Published in 2020, the Digital Government Index is a 'first effort to translate OECD Digital Government Policy Framework (DGPFG) into a measurement tool to assess the implementation of the OECD recommendations on digital strategies and reforms across OECD members and key partner countries' ([www.OECD.org](http://www.OECD.org)). It aims to support countries in their decision making process, recognizing the importance of digitalization and the use of digital technologies and data-driven strategies, to be more flexible and quick in reaction and response.

OECD ranks Korea and UK as digital champions, but also mentions lacking relevant information from the USA, Australia and other few member states. However, a list of recommendations followed, stating the importance of creating a data-driven culture in the public sector,

of enhancing the use of technology to support and improve government decision process or of maintaining a high level of digital security while protecting privacy.

Another interesting OECD study analyzed the number of online activities used by more than 50% of population. Entitled 'How's life in the Digital Age', it documents how today's digital realities transform and influence people's lives, their jobs, income and well-being, but also highlights the risks related to it. The conclusions were that, while digitalization may improve the life of those capable of using it, offering free access to information, it may also lead to deep society division, manipulation through fake news, cyber-banking fraud and bullying, and even cause mental-health serious problems.

One of the most interactive OECD statistics is the 'Better Life Index', which allows anyone to compare well-being across the world while showing what matters most to

people from different countries. OECD has listed eleven aspects of life which are essential to human well-being, from housing, income, job and security to work-life balance, community, education and environment.

Since its launch in 2011, more than 100.000 users from 180 countries have expressed their preferences on [www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org). The responses, grouped by countries, age and gender, are daily updated and reflect the importance that people give to each of the eleven criteria. The responses largely vary but they are an interesting barometer of general interests and how these may shift in time. Cyprus responders gave work-life balance as a top priority (almost 16%), while in Europe the majority of people chose health as being the most important (France, Spain, Norway, Portugal, Italy, Monaco) and also life satisfaction (Germany, Poland, Romania, Ireland). Education, housing and environment were also listed as high priorities in many countries.

OECD member states currently add up to more than 60% of world GDP, 80% of world trade and investment and a large portion of world population. Through its set standards, it helps developing reforms in more than 100 countries, through partnerships, regional programs and development centers.

What's next? OECD present priorities include finalizing multilateral approach on digital taxation, strengthen the engagement of OECD into the Asia-Pacific region and help post-pandemic economic recovery. As stated by its Secretary-General, the convention aims to be influential and effective in achieving its goals for the rest of the decade. It plans to prioritize climate resilience and the transition to green energy, support countries towards net-zero greenhouse gas emissions and develop policies to help close the gap in well-being between countries.

'Together we work towards strong, sustainable, green, inclusive and resilient growth'.

*Alexandra Paucescu*





## DO WHAT I SAY, NOT WHAT I DO

*The growth of authoritarianism disguised as health measures in world politics*

It's not easy to hide behind something that is only between 50 and 140 nanometres wide, but a surprisingly large number of people have done so, or tried to. What's more, they tend to be quite big people, at least in their own estimation. Their tiny hiding place is the SARS-CoV-2 virus, cause of COVID-19 in all its varieties, and the perfect excuse it provides to introduce severe restrictions on freedom in the knowledge that it has to be done to save lives. The laws are essential and good for us, but only as long as they're strictly temporary... The people hiding behind this tiny organism are, however, very often the despotic leaders who seem to be introducing ever more draconian rules that many fear will still be in force long after the virus has disappeared.

Such things have happened before in even worse epidemics. Take the Black Death, for instance, caused by the *Yersinia pestis* bacterium, which is very slightly larger than SARS-

CoV-2 (but still microscopic). It's an ovoid structure measuring up to 3 micrometres in total length. Between the years 1348 and 1350, this tiny living organism, which causes bubonic plague, killed roughly a third

of the population of England. The disease made its way there, hosted by fleas on the rats infesting trading ships. It is thought to have originated – probably, but not certainly – in China and made its way to Europe



Pieter Bruegel the Elder painting The Triumph of Death depicting the results of a pandemic



via India, Persia, Syria and Egypt, infecting them all as it went. When it reached Sicily, on a vessel found to contain mainly dead or dying sailors, it quickly spread across Europe, reportedly killing some twenty million people, despite the vessel being denied permission to dock. Many saw it as God's punishment for mankind's wickedness and non-Christians faced vicious persecution as a result. The Scots did, and took the opportunity to attack northern England, taking back the Black Death as an unfortunate souvenir. Inevitably, it led to changes in the law, although not designed to halt its spread, because nobody knew what it was. In any case, hygiene was not much of an issue then, with people emptying their chamber pots into the street from upstairs windows and allowing their pigs to roam at will. Even when the plague seemed to retreat, it was only a temporary respite. It came back in 1361-64, 1368, 1371, 1373-75, 1390, 1405 and continued into the fifteenth century.

In England, this loss of so many of the mainly working population, strengthened the hand of those who had served the great landowners as serfs or slaves on starvation pay at best. They wouldn't work without adequate reward for their labour afterwards, which obliged the government (invariably the rich) to try to impose some controls. Their aim was to control the class structure of England and also interclass relations. "These changes thereby qualitatively transformed the English government," wrote Robert C. Palmer of the University of North Carolina in 1993, "into a government of 'inherent authority', meaning that the newly intrusive government, 'took responsibility for the regulation and direction of the whole of society.'" The government steadily increased its power and, wrote Palmer, "fostered a spirit of trust and cooperation among Edward (King Edward III, arguably one of England's better historical kings), the nobility, and the clergy." So, a more modern system of governance emerged from this massive tragedy. In other words, we owe a more up-to-date system of running a country to a tiny organism, just 1 to 3 micrometres long. The long-term changes resulting from Covid-19 may not prove quite so beneficial.



Of course, we need to observe social distancing to avoid passing on this nasty little killer virus, just as we should be willing to wear breath masks, even if they steam up one's glasses, to ensure we don't spread it to others. Having a vaccination, if possible, also seems an eminently sensible move. Britain's Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, felt obliged to offer a public apology for allegedly attending a drinks party at 10 Downing Street, at which it's claimed lockdown rules were flaunted, on the eve of the funeral of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.

The next day, his widow, Queen Elizabeth was pictured sitting alone in church by her husband's coffin, isolating herself from other people. The affair did nothing to restore public confidence in the British government or its leader. It has since been revealed that London's Metropolitan Police are investigating twelve separate get-togethers at Downing Street (the media call it 'partygate'), at which at least 5 (and possibly more) were said to have been attended by Johnson. Detectives are trawling through 500 pages of evidence and more than 300 photographs, all of which delays the publication of an internal report by civil servant Sue Gray, much to Johnson's presumed relief.

## LAW AND DOGMATIC ORDER

Of course, laws have been introduced in Britain and elsewhere to ensure people stay a safe distance apart, if possible, and try to avoid catching

and spreading COVID-19. The EU refers to them as "emergency powers" and they were and still are clearly necessary. However, some political leaders around the world who favour being in complete charge of everything and controlling their citizens rather more firmly have taken the opportunity to introduce laws in the guise of anti-virus measures that actually serve to ensure obedience without demur in every circumstance. The European Parliament anticipated this sort of thing and in April 2020, it set limitations to such emergency measures, taken in relation to the pandemic. Its decision states that: "all measures taken at national and/or EU level must be in line with the rule of law, strictly proportionate to the exigencies of the situation, clearly related to the ongoing health crisis, limited in time and subjected to regular scrutiny". Not everything has gone according to plan, the Parliament says: "According to critics, some governments have used the emergency situation as an excuse to propose and approve controversial pieces of legislation that jeopardise freedom of expression or which are unrelated to the fight against Covid-19."



Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary

MEPs are especially unhappy with a decision by the Hungarian government to "prolong the state of emergency indefinitely, to authorise the Government to rule by decree without time limit and to weaken the emergency oversight of the Parliament." Prime Minister Viktor Orbán quickly dismissed opposition concerns about their scope but the press freedom pressure group Reporters Without Borders warned that: "If approved, this new law would grant the Hungarian government a convenient tool to threaten

journalists and intimidate them into self-censorship. We fear this is a step toward the complete repression of media freedom in Hungary that could outlive the pandemic.” Such abstractions were, in the prime minister’s words: “irrelevant in the midst of a health crisis.”

A number of member states agreed that “in this unprecedented situation, it is legitimate that Member States adopt extraordinary measures to protect their citizens and overcome the crisis. We are however deeply concerned about the risk of violations of the principles of rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights arising from the adoption of certain emergency measures.” It certainly isn’t a ringing endorsement of Orbán’s decisions. The CapX website says that Hungary’s citizens: “should be alarmed by Orbán’s increasing centralisation of power and his party’s routine reallocation of funds towards oligarchs and loyalists. Those abroad who may have overlooked Orbán’s misuse of European funds for government projects – not least the €2bn spent on the ‘train to nowhere’ Val Valley Railway – must now accept that in Hungary the EU faces an administration with little regard for the bloc’s common values or rulebook.” Hungarian media outlets are targeted by Orbán’s regime, but they did uncover: “the subsidies made available for the country’s tourism sector in response to the pandemic – and, specifically, the ‘Kisfaludy Program’, which provides non-refundable state grants for the construction and development of hotels, apartments, and other tourism-related providers. In the spring of 2020 the Hungarian Tourism

Agency (MTÜ) distributed HUF 83,5 billion (€0.232-billion), in support to the sector.” Don’t forget: Orbán takes these decisions without a parliament to approve or condemn them. The developers must have loved him.

A Harvard University investigation, albeit from May 2020, noted other irregularities in the Far East: “In South Korea, the government has begun to track the movements of individuals who have tested positive (for SARS-CoV-2), displaying their location data on a publicly accessible website without [revealing] their names. In line with cultural preferences for the collective, many other Asian governments have followed South Korea’s lead.” The report is even more concerned about China.

“A new health code system assigns individuals a colour—green, yellow, or red—based on their risk of carrying the virus,” it says. “Those who are assigned yellow are required to self-quarantine, while those who receive red have their location sent to the police immediately. In almost all public places, including the subway, markets, and workplaces, showing a green code is a prerequisite to entry.”

### GET RICH OR DIE? PROBABLY THE LATTER

Back in Europe, the European Parliament has also queried the steps taken by the Polish Government, namely changing the electoral code against the judgment of Constitutional Tribunal and provisions laid by law in order to hold Presidential elections in the middle of a pandemic, which may endanger the lives of Polish citizens and undermine the concept of free,

equal, direct and secret elections as enshrined in the Polish Constitution. So, what about the pandemic? The Wrocław temporary hospital is part of an extensive chain of medical facilities that support Poland’s health care service in the fight against the pandemic, which affects Poland as it does other EU countries. Such facilities are typically set up in convention centres and sports halls and as many as 19 such temporary hospitals are active, with 16 more standing by to be called rapidly into service if needed. The hospital is capable of providing effective assistance to anyone in need.



Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki visits the Baltic States

© Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland

After visiting the facility, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said: “I spoke with the Rector, and he assured me of the hospital’s readiness to utilise high-flow mechanisms as well, which are ventilation mechanisms that can help patients to avoid having to use respirators.” He said there was no risk of the facility running out of essential supplies: “The entire oxygen system set up here is well prepared from a technical standpoint – it is a major reserve for the long months ahead of us”. More than 77,000 Poles had died of COVID-19 by November last year. The EU, which has widespread support among Poles, would love



© China Daily

Residents queue up for nucleic acid tests at a community in Shenzhen, Guangdong province



Krzysztof Bosak

© Wikimedia



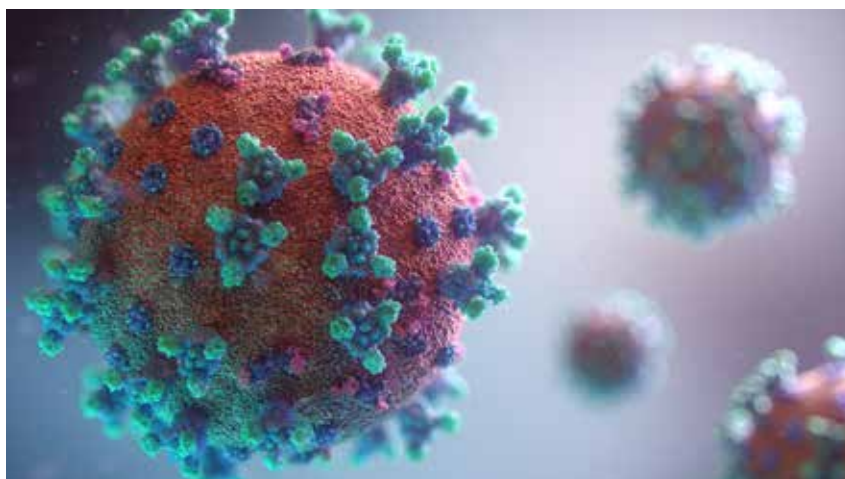
to help, but it is in dispute with the Polish government, which insists that its own laws are more important than the EU's own, which it chooses to ignore, even taking to court those who question this position.

The far-right Confederation, Liberty and Independence party was recently banned by Facebook for publishing misinformation about COVID-19 and also hate speech. Although the party doesn't draw a lot of votes, its website had 670,000 followers, making it one of Poland's most popular. The site had cast doubt on the efficacy of face masks and vaccines and even claimed that COVID-19 was no worse than influenza in terms of causing deaths. Facebook issued several warnings before removing the party's account, but that decision inevitably drew criticism. One of its leaders, Krzysztof Bosak said in an interview that he would sue Facebook for "interference aimed at narrowing the freedom of political choice before the upcoming political season."

Strangely, the figure who came to the far-right party's defence was the Prime Minister, Morawiecki, who described Facebook's action as 'cyber censorship' and arguing that removing the Confederation's hate-filled page "breaches basic democratic values". If the EU is hoping for the current row over whose laws count the most will die down, there would appear to be little sign of it there. Morawiecki, appears determined to appear tough.

Other emergency measures adopted by some member states include limits on international travel, sanitary controls, the closures of schools, universities, shops and public spaces and the confinement of people in their own homes. There is also concern about contact tracing and tracking, which could (and probably will) impact on privacy and data protection standards and airlines are said to believe that the use of face masks during its flights may remain compulsory for many years.

Although some European countries are now relaxing their rules, others are less willing to do so. Albania, for instance, has a night-time curfew from 11 pm until 6 o'clock in the morning (which must be inconvenient for people working night shifts), as well as



New visualisation of the Covid-19 virus

the obligatory wearing of face-masks while indoors or on public transport. Denmark has scrapped most of its restrictions, despite a reported 50,000 cases a day of the Omicron variant in Copenhagen alone. More than 80% of the population have been vaccinated, however, with 60% have had booster jabs. Meanwhile Austria has made vaccination mandatory for over 18s, with exemptions in the case of pregnant women and those who have specific medical conditions. Russia saw its infection rate rise eight-fold over the course of January to a terrifying 121,000 per day, but no nationwide lockdown is under consideration, according to the Kremlin.

In any case, COVID-19 may have been around in Europe for longer than we thought, according to Euronews, which has reported that: "Scientists at Akershus University Hospital near Oslo identified a positive coronavirus result in a blood sample taken from a pregnant woman on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019 and say she was probably infected at the end of November or the beginning of December." The weekly on-line publication, Eurosurveillance revealed that: "The novel SARS-CoV-2 variant Omicron was first detected in samples collected in mid-November 2021 in Botswana and South Africa". It also said that all of those who tested positive on that occasion had been at a party in Oslo on 26 November last year. Roughly 80% of those found to be infected had been fully vaccinated.

## TOUGHER AND TOUGHER

Let's look at some of the newer COVID-19 restrictions. In Germany,

unvaccinated citizens face lockdowns that will bar them from entering public spaces. They will only be allowed into essential businesses, such as pharmacies. Nor can they meet with more than two people from outside their household, even on private premises. Australians who have travelled abroad are confined to state-run quarantine facilities that the government refers to as 'Centres for National Resilience', although others call them COVID-19 camps. Anyone seeking to escape faces jail. An Australian woman called Hayley Hodgson was placed in a Covid internment camp despite testing negative for the virus. "She was confined to a box for 14 days," reports Max Blumenthal, "offered valium when she complained about confinement, and lost her job. 'You feel like you're in prison,' she told Blumenthal. There are reports of people trying to climb barbed wire fences to escape and a disturbing story appeared in The Daily Signal: "In one sickening case, Australia's COVID-19 restrictions prevented a grieving family from traveling across a state border to identify their son's dead body.



The Howard Springs Accommodation Village near Darwin, Australia used as a quarantine facility, can accommodate 3,500 people

Israel imposed a 2-week ban on non-Israelis entering the country. It also added a number of African countries to its 'red list'. We'll come to Africa's situation shortly. In the United States, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio ordered all workers to get vaccinated or be put on unpaid leave. President Joe Biden has ordered companies to get their workers vaccinated or face hefty fines. In France and Greece health care workers must be vaccinated, although plans for a similar policy in the UK have been dropped, largely because of threats by some health workers to quit when there is already a shortage. Vaccination as a condition of holding down a job is already the rule in Fiji and Costa Rica, among other places.



© Wikimedia/Narh Lee

The pandemic has been the cause of much misinformation, false propaganda and – let's face it – outright lies. Keeping abreast of reality hasn't been helped by restrictions placed on journalism while there have also been untrue government statements from various places. The journalistic campaign group, Reporters Without Borders (RWB), has sent a letter to the presidents of the European Commission, Council and Parliament, which it says is to: "to express its profound concern about the risk that governments use the COVID-19 pandemic to undermine fundamental rights and free flow of information." RWB demands that the leaders of a country should not be allowed to hide behind the virus: "In a period when our citizens' fundamental rights are being suspended around Europe, the need for media scrutiny to ensure no abuse of these new powers [is] stronger than ever," they warn. "We therefore call on you to use the power of your offices to ensure that

fundamental human rights and press freedom will be guaranteed as the European Union strives to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic." Not every leader will take much notice, I fear.

Another press freedom lobbying group, this one representing the Third World media, TWMN (Trade With Me Now), echoes the findings of RWB, saying that: "With reporters attacked and arrested, their incomes falling and media undermined by disinformation and draconian laws, the coronavirus pandemic has compounded the huge difficulties for journalism in sub-Saharan Africa." Any dictator wanting to act in a dictatorial way now has the perfect excuse and can perhaps receive praise for doing so, even when he (or she) oversteps the mark: "An average 23 of the 48 countries (two more than in 2020) were marked as red or black on the World Press Freedom map, implying that the situation is classified as bad or very bad," the group wrote. "The coronavirus crisis has made it evident that African journalists' rôle in nurturing democracies, built on fact-based and pluralist public debate is still far from assured." Journalists' work is vital, too. Nothing helps to spread disease and panic about the disease faster than ignorance. However, certainly in Africa, as elsewhere, journalists have faced obstacles to carrying out their work: "While reporting on lockdown measures, one journalist ended up with a broken leg in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)," says the report. "A woman reporter was hit by rubber bullets in South Africa while a WebTV director spent 11 months in prison in Rwanda before finally being released in March last year." As the English non-conformist preacher, Charles Spurgeon wrote in 1859, "A lie will go around the world while truth is pulling its boots on." The Harvard report linking COVID-19 with authoritarianism makes the point clearly: "At a time when the world is willing to accept individual sacrifice for the common good, leaving citizens everywhere vulnerable, recognising these threats is imperative. Many measures that have been taken, and many of those that will be taken, are temporary and necessary to fight the virus. Others are neither."



© Wikimedia/Paul Becker/1999 Becker

Anti Vax-Mask protest

In the United States, far-right militia groups have marched through Washington and other cities to protest against measures to contain the virus. They included the neo-fascist 'Patriot Front' and anti-abortion groups. Many of the marchers carried banners, bearing pro-Trump, anti-scientific and right-wing libertarian slogans, such as "Free to Infect Others," "Trump Won," "Vaccines are Mass Bio-Weapons" "Resist Medical Tyranny," "Jesus is My Vaccine" and "No Socialism." Many members of militia groups have described the attack on the Capitol in January 2021 as "just a protest", although the protestors, numbering up to 2,500 people, mostly quite heavily armed, were trying to overturn the election result because their candidate didn't win. The 'protest' left five people dead. Some support for the militia groups and fake -news spreading conspiracy theorists like QAnon, has dropped off because QAnon's prediction that, once in power, Joe Biden would declare martial law clearly didn't come true.



© City of Detroit

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer



The militias (there are many in the US, almost exclusively white, ex-army or ex-police and misogynistic) remain an obstacle to effective COVID-19 containment. The Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness for the State of New Jersey issued this interesting but disturbing statement: "Militia extremists arrested between October 7 and 15 for violent plots targeting government officials were primarily motivated by their opposition to government-mandated COVID-19 restrictions."

They didn't all get away with it, however, "The FBI charged six individuals with plotting to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. The state's attorney general charged seven others with threatening public officials and supporting plans for terrorist acts, while an eighth individual faces only the latter charge." Remember, these are people who would argue that they are "defending the US constitution". In this case, they had discussed kidnap and murder, both of which are against US law, of course, and against the constitution they claim to be defending. "The suspects focused on Whitmer, the governor of their own state, but also discussed targeting Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, referring to both as "tyrants." Tyrants for trying to keep their citizens alive. Heaven knows how they'd react to a leader like Viktor Orbán.

## AN EPIDEMIC OF LIES

Some leaders, for understandable (but misjudged) reasons tried to encourage citizens to get vaccinated by overstating the death rate. It happened in Germany, where in the Hamburg area a reported 11,600 people per 100,000 became 160,000 virtually overnight. German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach blamed it on 'a software error'. A supposedly Christian website, Health Impact News, has praised three politicians who have spoken out against stringent COVID-19 measures, US Senator Rand Paul, Deena Hinshaw, the Chief Medical Officer of Alberta, Canada, and Australian Senator Malcolm Roberts.

In a talk on Fox News, Rand Paul urged people to ignore the restrictions. "Resist. They can't arrest

us all. They can't keep all your kids home from school. They can't keep every government building closed – although I've got a long list of ones they should." Paul has a long history of defying authority, including choosing to eat at a Washington diner that had just lost its liquor licence for flouting pandemic rules. He was accompanied by other senators.



US Senator Rand Paul

But while people like Paul choose to disregard safety rules, other organisations and companies have come in for criticism for enforcing rules that are, frankly, silly. The Traveller website lists some of the most interesting. Take Virgin Atlantic, for instance. Just before Christmas, a rule was brought in forbidding pilots and cabin crew from eating or socialising together. One assumes they have to meet up and pass each other, even exchange a word or two, while performing their professional duties. The airline says it's trying to clamp down on what it calls "a party culture". It's not the only new set of rules that defy explanation. The President of the Canary Islands, Angel Victor Torres, has introduced a ban on smoking in the street as an anti-pandemic measure. He said a ban was needed because "infected smokers could blow droplets carrying the virus when they exhale." Presumably they will still exhale, even if they're not smoking. Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro has banned the use of pillows on aircraft because they can harbour viruses (one supposes they can be washed and/or disinfected, too?).

Cambodia insists that people arriving there must not only prove they've had a negative COVID test but

must also hand over a deposit of \$3,000 (€2,650) to cover the cost of any COVID-19 services a traveller may require during a stay. That will do wonders for the tourist trade. Kosovo, meanwhile, clearly doesn't welcome pensioners. The authorities there have introduced a curfew from 10.30 pm until 5 o'clock the following morning, while those over the age of 65 are only permitted to leave their place of residence between the hours of 5am to 10am and 6pm to 9pm." New York wants everyone to wear a face mask in public and has suggested that people should even wear them while having sex. Interestingly (but less kinky, perhaps) Russia and Ukraine have insisted that travellers on public transport wear not only a mask but also rubber gloves. In South Africa, shoe shops have been told not to sell open-toed footwear, although I don't recall toes being talked about as a likely COVID risk.



Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro

## STAY RIGHT THERE!

Elsewhere, some of the more draconian measures proposed were overturned by the local parliament. These include a proposal in Bulgaria for jailing anyone spreading disinformation. But perhaps it's the mobility restrictions that have been most obvious. The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) has produced a report. "Domestic mobility restrictions have ranged from nationwide and localised lockdowns to measures restricting interregional travel, nationwide and regional curfews, quarantines

and measures targeting the mobility of specific groups,” it says. “Countrywide lockdowns imposed in the early phase of the pandemic disregarded the largely regional and local development dynamics of the COVID-19 crisis.” CEPS also hints that in some cases, governments have gone a little too far.

“There is a clear trend towards the criminalisation of non-compliance with COVID-19-related mobility restrictions. In terms of the sanctions associated to non-compliance, several Member States have introduced specific penal provisions in their criminal codes or health codes.” These decisions would seem to go against a European Parliament resolution of April 2020, urging: “the Member States to adopt only necessary, coordinated and proportionate measures when restricting travel or introducing and prolonging internal border controls, after careful evaluation of their effectiveness to address the public health issue and based on existing legal provisions, namely the Schengen Borders Code and the Freedom of Movement Directive and in full observance of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.” Even so, several did introduce dramatic restrictions which are now being gradually lifted. On 25 January, EU Ministers of European Affairs established new rules for travelling across the Union, with only a valid COVID passport being required, regardless of the traveller’s country of origin, and with



Lockdown in 2021 in Shanghai, China

quarantine restrictions removed and no need to provide a negative COVID test on arrival.

The pandemic has even impacted on judicial procedures in Europe. Several member states have suspended court hearings or postponed their deadlines and changed their working methods, resorting to written procedures or meeting on-line in settings more akin to video-conferencing. But in most countries, restrictions are being gently eased, sometimes despite a surge in cases of the Omicron variant. Not everywhere, however.

The British government, under cover of controlling the spread of the virus, proposed a number of measures that the country’s upper chamber, the House of Lords, subsequently rejected. Many of the proposed measures were added to a planned Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts bill at the last minute, too late to be debated in the House of Commons. The measures included the power to stop and search anyone attending

a protest, or even someone walking past such a protest, without the need for ‘reasonable suspicion’ of crime or criminal intent. The measures would also have empowered the courts to ban people from attending future protests, even if they had not been convicted of any previous offences. The government called them ‘precautionary powers’, which are normally used to prevent terrorism or serious crime, rather than peaceful protests. Police could also intervene if the protest was judged to be ‘too loud’. Some critics have suggested the government is trying to turn scenes of protest into crime scenes. It will, though, help to prevent or at least discourage gatherings where the pandemic could be spread, I suppose.

The new powers would also have included changes to the Official Secrets Act, increasing sentences for those – including journalists – who make disclosures the government doesn’t like. The government says that: “there are cases where an unauthorised disclosure may be as, or more, serious in terms of intent and/or damage.” Don’t criticise this government, in other words, or reveal facts we find uncomfortable, or you may go to jail. The UK government has also promised a “more punitive” approach to asylum seekers and benefit claimants. It promises a future Britain that few citizens may recognise, but it could save its ministers from embarrassing revelations. At least Mr. Orbán would understand. And despite the defeat in the House of Lords, the UK government has said it will reintroduce its proposed new measures in full. Isn’t it amazing how much you can hide behind something that is only 50 and 140 nanometres wide?



Boris Johnson visiting The Edward Jenner Institute for Vaccine Research in Oxford

*T. Kingsley Brooks*



# MIGRANT SMUGGLERS AND HUMAN TRAFFICKERS:

*More digital and highly adaptable*



Migrant smuggling activities increased significantly in 2021, says the latest report by Europol's EMSC

The increased digitalisation brought about by the pandemic has significantly influenced the functioning of every aspect of our society. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, criminals have adapted to the new rules and restrictions and exploited those most vulnerable as a result. Migrant smugglers and human traffickers in particular have continued to thrive in spite of these changes, and they have adapted the way they recruit, transport and exploit victims.

Europol's Executive Director Catherine De Bolle said: "Migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks are highly dynamic and use any crisis as an opportunity to increase their illegal profits. More digitalised than ever, they abuse social media platforms, mobile applications and encrypted communication tools to offer their illegal services, organise their logistics and secure their profits. Swift information exchange, cross-border cooperation and online referrals, facilitated by Europol,

have proven instrumental in tackling these smugglers and traffickers. The information shared by Member States with Europol has been the backbone of the analytical support we have provided to more than 800 priority investigations over the past six years. Europol will further strengthen its partnership with the authorities of Member States and other EU bodies and will forge new alliances in Europe and beyond to curb these crimes, both in the digital and the physical space."

The Head of the European Migrant Smuggling Centre Robert Crepinks added: "There are numerous reasons to believe that the law enforcement community has never been better connected, better trained, or better equipped to counter the criminal activities of migrant smugglers and human traffickers. Yet there is still a lot to be done. Rapid technological developments in particular are forcing Europol's EMSC to join forces in order to shape new investigative techniques. Europol remains the perfect platform for fostering law enforcement innovations."

2021 has seen an increase of the role that digital technologies play in migrant smuggling and the trafficking of human beings. Migrant smugglers have expanded their use of social media platforms and mobile applications in order to offer their illegal services. Human traffickers have abused the anonymity of the internet environment to target vulnerable individuals and then exploit them via both escort websites and even dating platforms. To respond to this new threat, Europol has coordinated the first referral action day targeting the facilitation of illegal immigration services offered online, amongst other responses.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EUROPEAN MIGRANT SMUGGLING CENTRE'S ACTIVITIES IN 2021

- 6 139 new cases of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings supported by Europol in 2021;

- 55 on-the-spot action days with Europol experts;
- 1 246 operational reports produced;
- 26 high-value targets identified.

## NEW DEVELOPMENTS

- Increase of border crossings into the EU and in secondary movements within the EU;
- Enhanced use of digital technologies in both facilitation of illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings;
- Increased number of arrivals has placed Cyprus ahead of Greece as the prominent landing area on the Eastern Mediterranean;
- The migratory pressure on the eastern borders route via Belarus has influenced the increase of the presence of criminal networks facilitating secondary movement along that route;
- Smuggling activities on the passage by sea to Italy almost doubled, while the fee for this journey jumped from EUR 6 000 to EUR 12 000;
- Increased poly-criminality of migrant smuggling networks active along the Western Mediterranean and Western African routes;
- The process of human trafficking, including recruitment and logistical arrangements, is becoming increasingly digitalised while the locations of physical abuse remain the same.

The new report by the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) at Europol looks back at the operations supported by the centre in 2021 and the intelligence gathered. This report provides a clear outlook into the evolution of these crime areas and anticipates possible developments. It offers recommendations for enhanced preparedness in the fight against these criminal activities threatening which directly threaten the lives and dignity the lives of the victims.



Europol's Executive Director Catherine De Bolle

# EUR 3.9 MILLION EU GRANT TO CARBFIX FOR A NEAR ZERO ENERGY PRODUCTION PROJECT



© Am/Saeborg, CarbFix

Scientists at Hellisheidi geothermal power plant in Iceland have demonstrated a carbon capture and storage cycle at half the cost of previous estimates. Image

**D**irik Beckers, Director at the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency, and Edda Sif Pind Aradóttir, CEO of Carbfix, have signed a EUR 3,9 million grant agreement where the EU Innovation Fund supports further development of the Carbfix carbon sequestration method at Hellisheidi Geothermal Power Plant.

The grant amounts to almost half of the total cost of the project, called Silverstone, which aims at near-zero energy production at the power plant.

The signing took place in Brussels at one of the COP26 side events, where the European Union's General Director of the Directorate-General for Climate Change, Raffaele Mauro Petriccione announced EU's support for three projects, all of which aim at carbon neutrality. Edda Sif delivered a speech at a seminar hosted by the European Union on the occasion of the agreements.

Carbfix had already been brought to the attention of COP26 attendants,

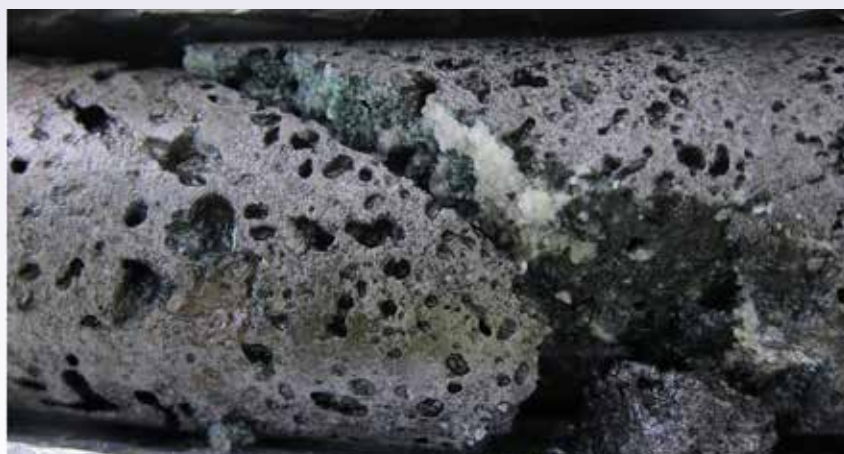
but Icelandic Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir paid special attention to the company and its method of permanent carbon sequestration in an address at the opening session of the Glasgow climate conference.

"The goal of the Silverstone project is to build a new treatment plant at the Hellisheidi power station, which will capture almost all of the carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide from our power plant's

emissions, which will then be pumped into nearby basalt rock layers for permanent mineralisation with Carbfix technology. With this, ON Power will be at the forefront of green geothermal utilization with uninterrupted production of electricity and heat," says Berglind Rán Ólafsdóttir, ON Power's CEO.

## THE CARBFIX METHOD WORKS AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

Carbfix has been developing technology for the permanent sequestration of carbon dioxide at the Hellisheidi Geothermal Power Plant since 2007 in collaboration with domestic and foreign research institutes. The technology only requires electricity and water, and the operation has an insignificant environmental impact. The technology involves dissolving carbon dioxide in water and pumping it into the basalt bedrock, where natural processes permanently absorb the greenhouse gas through mineralisation. In this way, the carbon dioxide is permanently bound in the rocks deep in the bedrock, thus preventing its impact on the climate. The



© Sandra O. Snaebjornsdottir, CarbFix

The CarbFix2 project in Iceland injects CO<sub>2</sub> in liquid form, rather than as a gas, into porous basaltic rock underground. The CO<sub>2</sub> reacts with the rock to form less harmful calcite



method can also be used for other gases such as hydrogen sulphide, but that geothermal gas has also been captured from the power plant and mineralised since 2014.

## LARGER TREATMENT PLANT

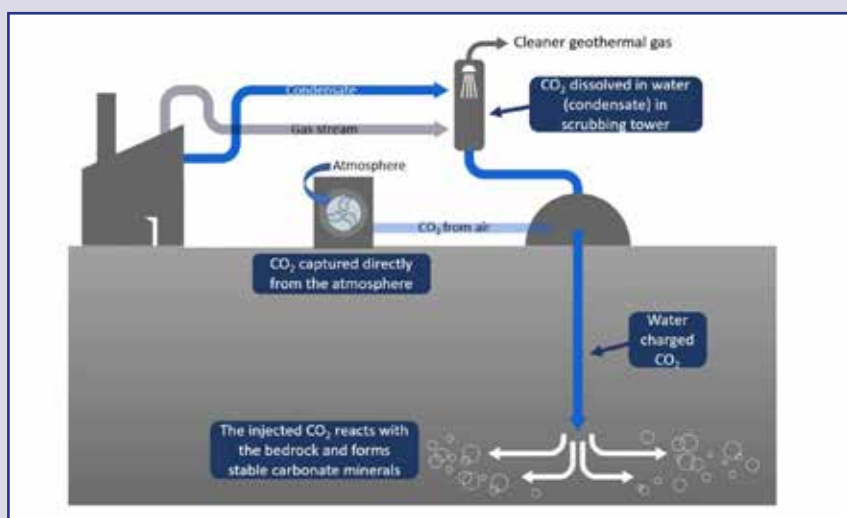
The current treatment unit at Hellisheidi Geothermal Power Plant captures about 30% of carbon dioxide and about 75% of hydrogen sulphide from its steam-emissions, or about 12 thousand tonnes of carbon dioxide and about 7 thousand tonnes of hydrogen sulphide per year. The grant received by the Silverstone project will be used for the design and construction of a larger and more powerful unit at the power plant, which is planned to be commissioned in 2025. This will absorb almost all carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide emissions from the power plant, or about 34 thousand tons of carbon dioxide and about 12 thousand tons of hydrogen sulphide per year.

Edda Sif Pind Aradóttir, CEO of Carbfix: "It is a great recognition for a young innovation company like Carbfix to receive such significant support from the Innovation Fund and a sign that carbon disposal with Carbfix technology is both an economical and environmentally friendly climate solution that can have an impact far beyond Iceland."

## CARBFIX – PERMANENT CO<sub>2</sub> MINERAL STORAGE

The Carbfix process captures and permanently removes CO<sub>2</sub>. The technology provides a complete carbon capture and storage solution, where CO<sub>2</sub> dissolved in water – a sparkling- water of sorts – is injected into the subsurface where it reacts with favourable rock formations to form solid carbonate minerals via natural processes.

Carbfix is a research and innovation driven technology which has, since 2007, been led by Reykjavik Energy,



Ongoing activities at the Hellisheidi Geothermal Power Plant where CO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>S are captured and separated from the other geothermal gases from the plant, dissolved in condensed steam and injected into the subsurface for permanent mineralisation. CO<sub>2</sub> is also captured directly from the atmosphere in cooperation with the Swiss company Climeworks and co-injected with the other gases

the University of Iceland and CNRS in Toulouse, as well as several other universities and research institutes. The Carbfix process has been applied to significantly reduce CO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>S emissions from the Hellisheidi Power Plant since 2014, following successful pilot-scale injections in 2012. The technology can be adapted to other carbon emitting industries, such as steel, iron and cement production.

Carbfix has been operated as an independent subsidiary of Reykjavik Energy since 2019. It has been proven to be an economic and environmentally friendly solution for the permanent removal of these gases.

CO<sub>2</sub> capture for Carbfix can be carried out via different processes:

- Gases from the Hellisheidi Geothermal Power Plant are captured in a dedicated water scrubbing tower with an annual capacity of about 15,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> and 6,000 tonnes of H<sub>2</sub>S, about 30% and 75% of the plant's emissions respectively. The capture capacity at the power plant will be scaled up to reach near zero-emissions in the coming years.
- Direct air capture (DAC). A DAC demonstration plant from the Swiss clean-tech company Climeworks has been operating since 2017 with the

capacity to capture about 50 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually. Preparation for scaling the annual DAC capture up to ~4000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> is underway.

- Carbfix will work in combination with any other CO<sub>2</sub> capture technology provided it delivers CO<sub>2</sub> in high concentration.

The CO<sub>2</sub> is dissolved in water and injected into basaltic formations at >400 m depth where the fluid reacts with the bedrock and forms stable carbonate minerals in less than two years.

The injected fluids are monitored in nearby wells and their fate is modelled using state of the art simulation tools. In accordance with a pre-defined traffic-light protocol, preventive steps are followed to minimize risks of induced seismicity. Any induced seismicity that occurs due to injection activities is monitored and analysed. Cost of industrial scale CarbFix operations at Hellisheidi are less than \$25/ton, which is comparable with current price of ETS carbon quota and far cheaper than conventional CCS methods.

Carbfix has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program.

# TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

## 12 beauty and fashion essentials you will need this spring

From the most trendy shoes to the comeback of the mini skirt, by way of THE perfume that calls to mind spring, we have listed 10 must haves so that you can enjoy your most chic season ever.

### The «mini mania»

Hasn't it been said that fashion is an endless cycle? Well, the proof is that Spring 2022 is all about miniskirts, worn as a holdover from the going-out styles of the 1960s or early to mid-2000s. The choice is yours.

#### Must haves:

We were particularly excited to see the return of the super-micro miniskirt, which dominated Miu Miu's and Prada's collection, among others.



**1960s inspiration:** this tweed miniskirt defined by its slightly flared silhouette expresses simple, yet refined charm

([miumiu.com](http://miumiu.com))

**2000s inspiration:** micro-studs are embroidered all over this mini skirt with a fluid cut that blends a bold character and precious allure

([prada.com](http://prada.com))



© SAINT LAURENT



Saint Laurent platform sandals with 8,5 cm heel height and 4 cm platform height

([ysl.com](http://ysl.com))

### Platforms for all

After too long a period of flats and cozy footwear (we know whose fault it is), fashion lovers have developed an appetite for pieces with some panache, and among them, the "platform shoes". Among the leading brands of the moment: Valentino et its platform pumps, seen here worn by the German fashion influencer Caroline Daur.

Valentino patent leather platform pump with 15,5 cm heel height and 5,5 cm platform height

([valentino.com](http://valentino.com))



© VALENTINO



# TIMELESS CHIC

## Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

### Blazer for ever

At first sight, the blazer may not be the most exciting piece of clothing, but it has become one of the most stylish since a few seasons ago, and can be worn with almost everything : jeans, skirts and shorts, but also with a more sporty look.

How is the blazer worn in its 2022 version ? Large, even oversized, and in any colour we could possibly fancy, from the most neutral to the most eye-catching. A bit like the fashion influencer Leonie Hanne, definitive expert in the 'blazer stylish' look.



© INSTAGRAM @LEONIEHANNE



© MAJE

Double breasted midi blazer

([uk.maje.com](http://uk.maje.com))



© BASSH

Oversized blazer with a glam rock style

([ba-sh.com](http://ba-sh.com))

**Celebrate the rose:** Clear and romantic, Red Roses Cologne is inspired by a voluptuous blend of seven of the world's most exquisite roses. With crushed violet leaves and a hint of lemon, it unfolds like a bouquet of freshly cut flowers.

([jomalone.eu](http://jomalone.eu))



© GUERLAIN



© JO MALONE

**Cherry blossom season:** Flora Cherrysia belongs to the Aqua Allegoria collection, the first collection of intensely fresh fragrances in perfumery created in 1999. It evokes an escape along Tokyo's Sakura river, shaded by blossoming cherry trees; a must-see spectacle that takes place generally from mid-March to the beginning of April.

([guerlain.com](http://guerlain.com))

### Spring is in the air

What makes a spring fragrance? Fresh, green and delicate bouquets, often with a fruity touch. Here are some of the fragrances that best embody the inimitable spirit of spring.

### Mask attack

No, this is not about face masks, but sheet masks. This is a beauty trend that is becoming increasingly popular and which, above all, comes in a very wide range that caters to your every desire and skin type. After this winter which seemed to last for an eternity, here are two very welcome masks to celebrate the arrival of spring.



© RITUALS

**Cocoon mask:** Made from roses and aloe vera among other ingredients, this Thirst Trap Rose & Aloe Vera Soothing Sheet Mask is specifically designed for problem skins such as dryness, dullness and uneven texture.

([hudabeauty.com](http://hudabeauty.com))

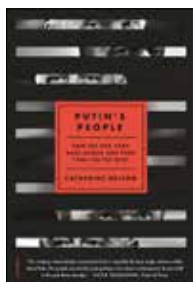


© WISHFUL

**The Glow must go on:** The Ritual of Namaste Glow anti-ageing sheet mask is soaked with an anti-ageing serum that provides a rich infusion of moisture for deeply hydrated and ultra-smooth skin. The formula is enriched with Saffron Flower, famous for its antioxidant and anti-wrinkle properties, and Holy Lotus for its soothing and caring properties.

([rituals.com](http://rituals.com))

## BOOKS

**PUTIN'S PEOPLE****By Catherine Belton****HOW THE KGB TOOK BACK RUSSIA AND THEN TOOK ON THE WEST**A *Sunday Times* bestseller | A *New York Times* Book Review Editors' ChoiceNamed a best book of the year by *The Economist* | *Financial Times* | *New Statesman* | *The Telegraph*

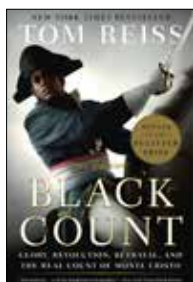
"[*Putin's People*] will surely now become the definitive account of the rise of Putin and Putinism." —Anne Applebaum, *The Atlantic*

"This riveting, immaculately researched book is arguably the best single volume written about Putin, the people around him and perhaps even about contemporary Russia itself in the past three decades." —Peter Frankopan, *Financial Times*

Interference in American elections. The sponsorship of extremist politics in Europe. War in Ukraine. In recent years, Vladimir Putin's Russia has waged a concerted campaign to expand its influence and undermine Western institutions. But how and why did all this come about, and who has orchestrated it?

In *Putin's People*, the investigative journalist and former Moscow correspondent Catherine Belton reveals the untold story of how Vladimir Putin and the small group of KGB men surrounding him rose to power and looted their country. Delving deep into the workings of Putin's Kremlin, Belton accesses key inside players to reveal how Putin replaced the freewheeling tycoons of the Yeltsin era with a new generation of loyal oligarchs, who in turn subverted Russia's economy and legal system and extended the Kremlin's reach into the United States and Europe. The result is a chilling and revelatory exposé of the KGB's revenge—a story that begins in the murk of the Soviet collapse, when networks of operatives were able to siphon billions of dollars out of state enterprises and move their spoils into the West. Putin and his allies subsequently completed the agenda, reasserting Russian power while taking control of the economy for themselves, suppressing independent voices, and launching covert influence operations abroad.

Ranging from Moscow and London to Switzerland and Brooklyn's Brighton Beach—and assembling a colorful cast of characters to match—*Putin's People* is the definitive account of how hopes for the new Russia went astray, with stark consequences for its inhabitants and, increasingly, the world.

**THE BLACK COUNT****By Tom Reiss****GLORY, REVOLUTION, BETRAYAL, AND THE REAL COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO (PULITZER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY)**

General Alex Dumas is a man almost unknown today, yet his story is strikingly familiar—because his son, the novelist Alexandre Dumas, used his larger-than-life

feats as inspiration for such classics as *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*.

But, hidden behind General Dumas's swashbuckling adventures was an even more incredible secret: he was the son of a black slave—who rose higher in the white world than any man of his race would before our own time. Born in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti), Alex Dumas made his way to Paris, where he rose to command armies at the height of the Revolution—until he met an implacable enemy he could not defeat.

*The Black Count* is simultaneously a riveting adventure story, a lushly textured evocation of 18<sup>th</sup>-century France, and a window into the modern world's first multi-racial society. *TIME* magazine called *The Black Count* "one of those quintessentially human stories of strength and courage that sheds light on the historical moment that made it possible." But it is also a heartbreaking story of the enduring bonds of love between a father and son.

**THE LAST GIRL****By Nadia Murad****Foreword by Amal Clooney****MY STORY OF CAPTIVITY, AND MY FIGHT AGAINST THE ISLAMIC STATE**

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

• In this "courageous" (*The Washington Post*) memoir of survival, a former captive of the Islamic State tells her harrowing and

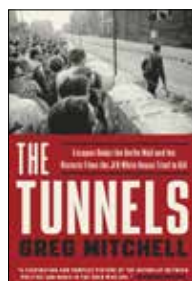
ultimately inspiring story.

Nadia Murad was born and raised in Kocho, a small village of farmers and shepherds in northern Iraq. A member of the Yazidi community, she and her brothers and sisters lived a quiet life. Nadia had dreams of becoming a history teacher or opening her own beauty salon.

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

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

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

**THE TUNNELS****By Greg Mitchell****ESCAPES UNDER THE BERLIN WALL AND THE HISTORIC FILMS THE JFK WHITE HOUSE TRIED TO KILL**

A thrilling Cold War narrative of superpower showdowns, media suppression, and two escape tunnels beneath the Berlin Wall.

In the summer of 1962, the year after the rise of the Berlin Wall, a group of young West Germans risked prison, Stasi torture, and even death to liberate friends, lovers, and strangers in East Berlin by digging tunnels under the Wall. Then two U.S. television networks heard about the secret projects and raced to be first to document them from the inside. NBC and CBS funded two separate tunnels in return for the right to film the escapes, planning spectacular prime-time specials. President John F. Kennedy, however, was wary of anything that might spark a confrontation with the Soviets, having said, "A wall is better than a war," and even confessing to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, "We don't care about East Berlin." JFK approved unprecedented maneuvers to quash both documentaries, testing the limits of a free press in an era of escalating nuclear tensions.

As Greg Mitchell's riveting narrative unfolds, we meet extraordinary characters: the legendary cyclist who became East Germany's top target for arrest; the Stasi informer who betrays the "CBS tunnel"; the American student who aided the escapes; an engineer who would later help build the tunnel under the English channel; and the young East Berliner who fled with her baby, then married one of the tunnelers. *The Tunnels* captures the chilling reach of the Stasi secret police as U.S. networks prepared to "pay for play" but were willing to cave to official pressure, the White House was eager to suppress historic coverage, and ordinary people in dire circumstances became subversive. *The Tunnels* is breaking history, a propulsive read whose themes still reverberate.



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