

EUROPE

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THE KREMLIN'S DARK MASTER

Are Putin's oligarchs
facing a reckoning?



GLUCKSMAN AND UYGHURS

French politician
condemns inhumanity
of China towards its
Uyghur population and
others for staying silent

THE GIANT, THE GNAT AND WONDERWOMAN

China's ham-fisted determination to seize back Taiwan



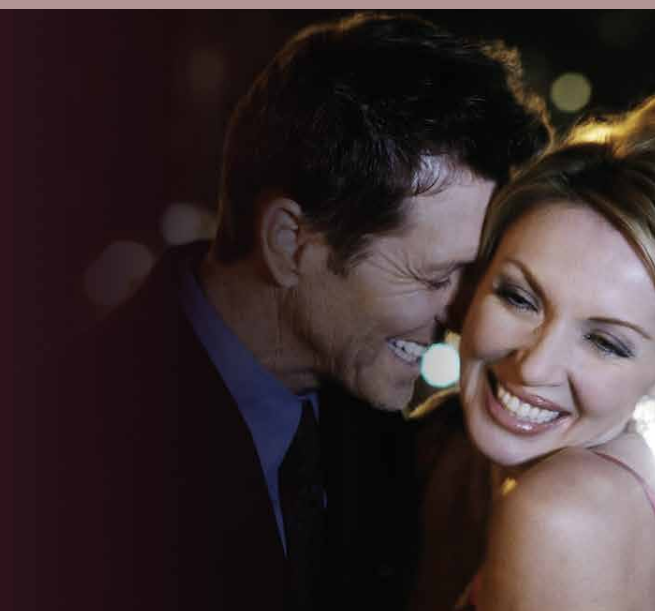


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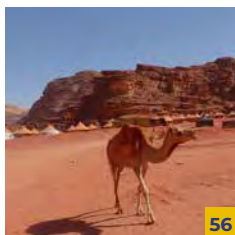
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Nikola Hendrickx

EDITORIAL



Illegitimate Elections

The Russian regime may be planning to hold referendums in key Ukrainian cities in the coming weeks. Russia employed these tried-and-true methods in 2014 when they annexed Crimea.

Referendums during times of war are illegitimate and run counter to the rule of law. According to the Ukrainian constitution, any such referendums or political processes are illegal while the country is under a state of martial law; as such, any attempts by the Russian regime to seize control through manipulating political processes is unconstitutional. In addition to this, given the large number of citizens who have fled Russian violence, it's unlikely that the requisite quorum could even be reached.

Any election or referendum held in Ukraine now is illegal under the Ukrainian constitution, and should not be allowed to stand. The international community must take a common and united stance against any such interference in the Ukrainian government, or the Russian regime will attempt to use them to legitimize its illegal invasion.

Judging from Russia's history on such political interference, any such elections or referendums are almost certainly falsified or inflated. The Russian regime has been known to bribe or threaten participants, bring in invalid voters to sway the vote in a particular direction, and simply make up the results that suit them at a given time. Voter intimidation and deceit are also common. This is part of the same playbook the Kremlin has used to intimidate their own people and occupied territories for decades and is their method for prepping the battlefield.

Russia is not well positioned to provide good governance in these areas of Ukraine - they did not do this well in the Donbas, and will have even less success during this current conflict. The people they are bringing in are puppets who are not native to the communities and don't understand how they need to be run, because no legitimate Ukrainian politicians would work with the Russian regime after the atrocities it has committed. As a result, this model of governance will make life for Ukrainians even worse.

While the Ukrainians can and should refuse to comply, it must be recognized that such actions are dangerous in a Russian-controlled territory. It is the duty of the international community to stand up and impose consequences on Putin's regime to ensure such illegal actions do not stand.

If the Russian regime succeeds in claiming control over these parts of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, Ukrainian citizens will simply be used as cannon fodder in the fighting in other parts of Eastern Ukraine.

Trajan Dereville



Chinese President Xi Jinping and Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen

THE GIANT, THE GNAT AND WONDERWOMAN

China's ham-fisted determination to seize back Taiwan and the bold resistance of its first female president

It was never going to be sorted out quickly, easily, nor, perhaps, without a resort to arms. When two fundamentally different governments, opposed in political philosophy, and everything else, both see themselves as the rightful rulers of an extremely large country, and who fervently believe that they should be in sole charge of a particular piece of land (an island, in this case), how can anyone come up with a completely satisfactory solution? Nobody can, of course; it's simply

not possible. That leaves a seemingly insoluble problem that could cost many lives, even though both parties say they believe in good will. Only one of them has shown any, however. The root cause of this tension and propensity for violence on a massive scale is, of course, Taiwan, more than 36,000 square kilometres in size. Taiwan, whose official name is the Republic of China, is one of a string of 168 islands situated in the East China Sea of the western Pacific Ocean some 160 kilometres to the south of mainland China. It's officially known as the Republic of China. Once called Formosa, which basically means "beautiful island" in Portuguese (it was discovered and named by Portuguese sailors in the 15th century), its indigenous peoples are thought to have settled there more than 6,000 years ago and the place has been inhabited, one way or another, for around 25,000 years. It claims the group of islands it calls Diaoyutai, which are also claimed by Japan as Senkaku and by the People's

Republic of China as Diaoyu. Until the 1980s, it was a one-party military dictatorship, which is never a recipe for peaceful living. The fact that it has not already been swallowed up by mighty (if greedy) China is due, at least in part, to Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan's first-ever female president, now in her sixties and still a tough cookie.

She has presided over this small but very populous country since 2016. The population of Taiwan is made up of four ethnic or subethnic groups: aboriginal peoples, the Fukien Taiwanese (Fukienese [Fujianese], or Hoklo) and the Hakka—and Chinese who came from the mainland in the mid-1940s and after. Aboriginal peoples, who were once the only residents, today make up only some 2 percent of Taiwan's total population. Its capital is New Taipei City, which covers an area of just over 2,000 square kilometres with a population of over 3.9 million, which makes it a very busy place indeed.



Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen



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Confucius Statue at the Yushima Seido Confucian temple located in the Yushima district near Akihabara Japan

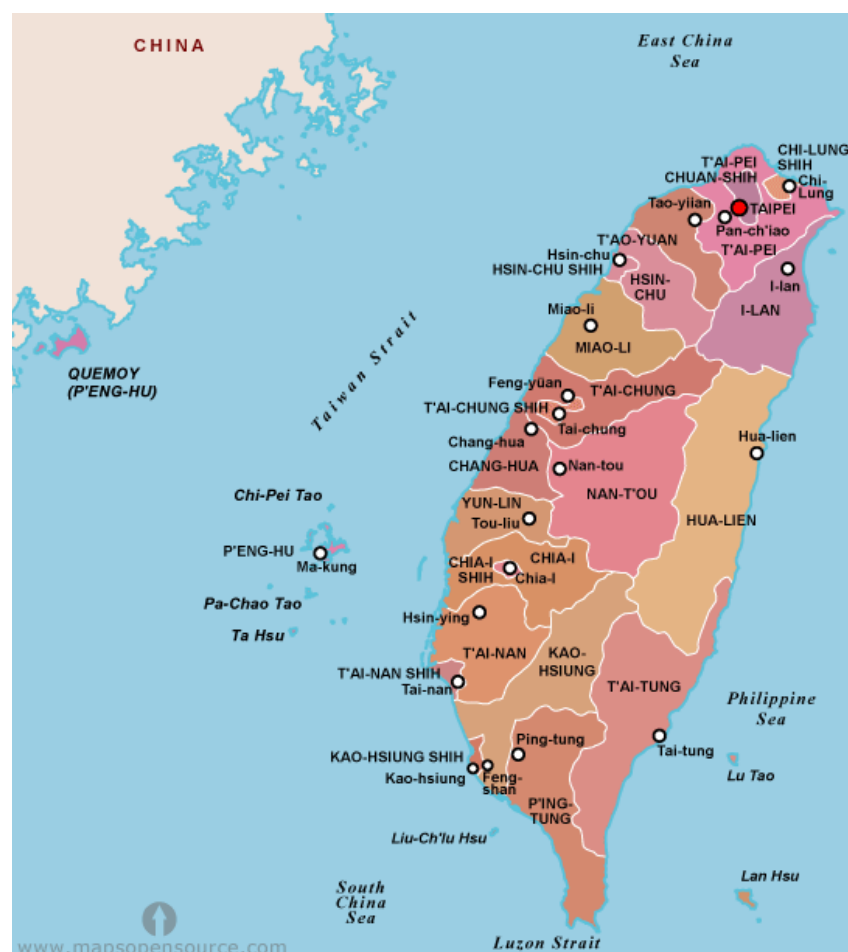
China is, of course, a massive country with a long and not-always-peaceful history. The rule of the Zhou dynasty was China's longest, lasting 789 years (1046 BCE – 256 BCE). It does not appear to have interacted with Taiwan, which only began to develop agriculture in around 3,000 BCE. It was undergoing 'civilising' from the Palaeolithic era (50,000 – 10,000 years ago) period. Chinese people do not appear to have crossed the 100-or-so kilometres to the island to settle there until the late 13th century and later. Apparently, it was never ruled by the Zhou dynasty, who may not even have realised it was there. In the vulnerable seagoing vessels in use at the time, a 100-kilometre crossing of an often-turbulent strait was no easy matter. Now, of course, we think in global terms and on greater scales. To the Chinese rulers of today, it's clear that Taiwan must be a part of China. In the 17th century, it was the Dutch and Spanish empires that competed to control it. Later, China's Qing dynasty took over but considered Taiwan 'wasn't worth fighting over'.

They should have listened to the Zhou dynasty's great philosopher. "Better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without", said the great Kōng Fūzǐ, better known as Confucius, or 孔子 in Chinese, (it means Master Kōng, by the way), China's greatest and certainly most famous philosopher, who lived some 2,500 years ago, at the time of that long-lasting Zhou dynasty. He is still regarded with deep respect, although at the time the Zhou rulers began to doubt his wisdom and finally decided that they didn't like him after all. Confucius had argued that stability in a country

depended upon basic relations between the ruler and the ruled and that a king should not issue laws, nor set out fixed punishments. Rather, people should observe 'codes of morality', conduct all the various religious ceremonies properly (he didn't want them to annoy the gods), seek an education and be loyal to their parents. Not everyone agreed. A period of civil strife persuaded the leaders of the Zhou to seek alternative advice and all of the writings of Confucius were burned on the advice of his replacement, Shang Yang. Why does that matter? Because the history of China as a separate country, a political entity in its own right, goes back further than most of the others (the oldest of all is Armenia). But let's concern ourselves with the 20th century, which proved to be a decisive one for China and its people.

Take the case of Manchuria. For years, Japan had been benefiting from conflict between Chiang Kai-Shek's nationalists and Mao Zedong's Communists. Japan even installed a puppet government there in 1931. Tensions with China continued to rise and on July 7, 1937, Japanese soldiers undertook some night-time training exercises not far

from Beijing, close to a stone bridge named after the Venetian merchant Marco Polo. During the exercises, a Japanese trooper called Private Shimura Kikujiro got lost in the dark while taking a toilet break and thus failed to return to base. The Chinese guards refused to allow his worried Japanese comrades access to the adjacent town of Wanping to search for him and the argument turned violent. It became known as 'The Marco Polo Bridge incident' and, for the only recorded time in history (as far as I know), one man taking a break to relieve his bladder ignited a global conflict: first of all the Second Sino-Japanese War, which in turn led by circuitous routes to the Second World War. In 1940 and 41, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt extended credits to China to allow the country to buy weapons, and then blocked its trade with Japan in aircraft and scrap metal. That was one of the principal reasons for Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour. Small arguments have a habit of growing exponentially where national pride and large weapons are involved.



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Taiwan

WAR DAMAGE

As is well known, the Second World War eventually came to an end after a terrifying amount of bloodshed. Taiwan had been ceded to Japan in 1895 under the Treaty of Shimonoseki and following the Japanese surrender at the end of the Second World War, it was handed over to the Kuomintang government of China. Administration was placed in the hands of Chen Yi, a nationalist, but his rule was terribly corrupt as well as inefficient, and the island's economy was failing. In 1947, the arrest of a cigarette seller led to violence in which a bystander was killed, and that in turn led to violent clashes between residents and the police and eventually an uprising against Chen Yi. The KMT government sent troops to suppress the crisis and a large number of residents who had not been connected with the trouble were killed. Even so, the Americans came to see Taiwan as a strategic place during the Korean War, and the US Seventh Fleet began to patrol the Taiwan Strait. Tensions remained in a bizarre game of cat and mouse, then in 1971, just before the United Nations recognised the Communists as China's legitimate rulers, the nationalist representatives walked out of the UN, leaving Mao Zedong and his followers as China's undisputed government. At least, undisputed by most countries.

From Beijing's point of view, where does that leave Taiwan now? Another Confucius quotation may not sit too well with Xi Jinping's uncompromising and profit-obsessed administration in Beijing. "He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place, and all the stars turn towards it." I'm afraid I don't see other countries turning enviously towards China to enjoy its far-sighted and kindly virtues. China has become a bully, ruled by an autocrat, inflicting itself on others whether they want it or not. Most often they do not. As



Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen sitting in a prototype of the Taiwanese Brave Eagle Jet

for Socialism and Marxism, and, indeed, humanity, Xi falls woefully short by any measure. Karl Marx and Leon Trotsky would have had a fit. It would seem that Xi's only interest is in profit, thus enriching himself and his acolytes and forcing compliance upon those who find themselves, however unwillingly, under his power. Xi is certainly not a star to whom other stars turn in admiration; he's more like a rogue planet, drawing others, possibly against their better judgement, into his orbit. On the other hand, Tsai Ing-wen could perhaps qualify as that star, standing bravely against her mighty neighbour.

When she took office, her basic policies – without mentioning defence – included pension reform, long-term care for the elderly and justice reform: a mild, widely-acceptable raft of policies. She also set up a human rights commission and talked about shifting her country's economy even more towards the semiconductor manufacturing industry, in which Taiwan excels. She rejects Xi Jinping's proposal for a "one country-two systems" solution, because she knows that really means having Xi in charge of everything, preferring to see both sides of the Strait co-existing amicably. That's certainly not a view shared by Xi. For him, only Taiwan's total submission will suffice. Tsai informed Xi, in response to a letter of his suggesting that 'one country, two systems' was the inevitable, mutually agreed outcome of a 1992 summit at which, he said, 'consensus' had been reached. Tsai wrote back to deny the existence of this 'consensus', while hoping that negotiations would continue. Ever-irritable, Xi called Tsai's response 'incomplete' and broke off further cross-strait communications, other than through official channels. During a speech in 2021, Tsai again rejected the 'one country, two systems' solution, saying the two countries do not belong to each other.

They do face each other across the Taiwan Strait, however and Tsai has increased military spending as a proportion of Taiwan's GDP because of it and the risk of expansionist tendencies by mainland China. The defence spending budget had been set in 2018 at \$327-billion (€10.56-billion), rising to \$347-billion (€11.2-billion) in 2019. In 2020 it rose to \$411-billion (€13.26-billion), an 8.3% increase on the previous year. Tsai has also boosted interest in self-sufficiency in defence and developing home-grown industries to construct submarines, missiles and the AIDC T-5 Brave Eagle jet trainer, which successfully conducted its first test flight in 2020. In November 2021, French MEP Raphael Glucksmann led the first official EU visit to Taipei, while Taiwan, under Tsai, has tried to become more open by making more of the many languages official. She wants even the rarely used old indigenous languages to enjoy the same respect and protection as Mandarin. So, who is this courageous woman, defying the mighty Xi?

WHO COULD CHOOSE TO LEAVE XI JINPING?

The Chinese Communist Party views her as the architect of separatist policies. She knows that she is and will remain a target for Xi and his allies. "They will come right up the Tamsui river to get me," she told a foreign visitor. China is alleged to have plans to capture and/or kill her. Tsai, however, is no firebrand. She's a lawyer who helped her country gain access to the World Trade Organisation and is a lover of technical details who is known for her caution. One member of her own Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) described her as "subdued, prudent, thoughtful and cautious". None of those words could apply to Xi. Tsai has earned respect, holding a professorship at Soochow University School of Law



President Tsai Ing-wen visiting the Republic of China Air Force Tianju Unit at Penghu



© Nrf

These Japanese peasants had to kneel before the invading Japanese forces

and the National Chengchi University. She supports LGBTI rights and wants Taiwan to legalise same sex marriage. Of her personal background, Tsai's paternal grandfather came from a prominent Hakka family in Fangshan, Pingtung. Her grandmother, from Shizi, Pingtung, was of aboriginal Paiwan descent. Tsai's father, Tsai Chieh-sheng owned a car repair business, while her mother is Chang Chin-fong, the last of her father's four mistresses. A busy man, clearly. Tsai is thus the youngest of four children and has seven elder half-siblings on her father's side as well as a half-brother on her mother's side. She is the first Taiwanese president of aboriginal descent, and the second of Hakka descent. Genetics is a busy topic in Taiwan.

China had suffered terribly in the Second World War and in the brutal Japanese occupation that preceded it. During that period, more than 14-million Chinese people were killed or wounded. Thousands of them, soldiers and civilians alike, were locked up by the Japanese; when the war ended only 56 of those prisoners were found to be still alive. The Japanese soldiers had massacred men and committed mass sexual assaults on women because they could and because it amused them, apparently believing in their racial superiority. Even the dropping of atom

bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki didn't bring the fighting to an end. China was familiar with war and had been especially since the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 (the dynasty had been founded in 1644), and having suffered mass starvation, revolt and foreign invasion for much of the previous century. The old imperial system was finally extinguished by Sun Yat-Sen and his Nationalists with the aim of achieving true independent nationhood, kicking out all foreign occupation forces and restoring relative wealth (or at least welfare) to China. It was not about to happen, at least not straight away. China was plagued by local war lords who insisted on obedience with threats of death. The writer and journalist Robert Payne told me, when I interviewed him many years ago for the BBC's "Woman's Hour" radio programme, that the forced obedience included the warlord and his men turning up at the house of any attractive young woman due to marry the next day to insist that the lord and his top men raped her first, as was their right, they believed. They seemed to think it was an honour for a peasant girl to be raped by the local war lord and his clan of bullies. At least the CPC has put an end to that kind of wickedness.

China Daily describes it as "Sinofication", the process of fusing various aspects of culture, Chinese and foreign, and adapting them to suit present day reality, or at least Xi Jinping's interpretation of it. Part of his master plan is to bring Taiwan under his total control. President Xi Jinping has said "reunification" with Taiwan "must be fulfilled" and he has not ruled out the possible use of using force to achieve this. It's worth remembering that the Chinese Communist Party is only just over a century old. Its founding in 1921 was arguably the most important event in China's 20th century history, apart from its involvement in

wars. Its founders, such as Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, espoused Marxism and drew inspiration from the Bolshevik revolution next door, listening to the clarion call of Vladimir Lenin and the Communist International. They were hopeful that they could build a classless society of true equals. Some hope. It would seem that the creation of a truly classless society is not one of Xi Jinping's aims in life. If it were, it's unlikely that he would have created slave labour camps for his Uyghur population. It's far from impossible that the sight of how Xi treats the Uyghurs further encourages the Taiwanese to resist any moves towards unification. It seems certain that the Uyghurs themselves would love to free themselves from Chinese rule if only the world's Muslim countries would come to their aid. And they should: it was the Prophet Muhammad himself, after all, who wrote that: "A Muslim shall never leave another Muslim helpless in the time of need." It would be hard, perhaps, to blame the Uyghurs for hoping that a brother Muslim country would take up arms on their behalf, although China is, of course, very powerful. Mainland China, after all, has many more troops, much more powerful weapons and a more blindly obedient citizenry than little Taiwan. And Xi is unbelievably prickly, taking offence at very little.

REPEATING THE MISTAKES OF THE PAST

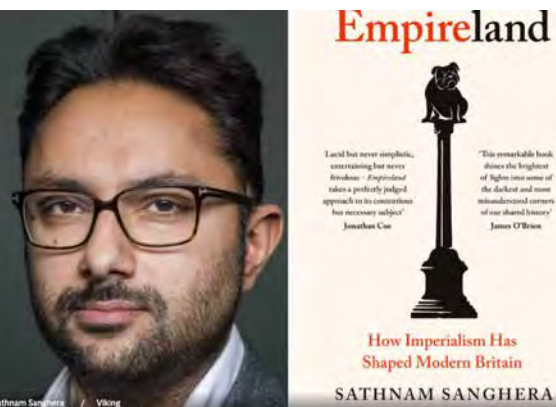
Britain made a great many mistakes in the 18th and 19th centuries, even when putting a reluctant (on Britain's part) end to slavery. The British paid £20-million (€23.72-million) in compensation to the former slave owners for depriving them of what they clearly saw as their "property", but they gave nothing to the slaves, despite their indisputable years of hard, unpaid work. Britain also went to war with China to ensure it could sell its narcotics there.

China wanted to ban the importation of opium, which was harming its citizens, but Britain invaded to change China's mind by force. Drug dealing was a profitable trade. China refers to the period that followed, with opium in ready supply, its profits all going to British companies, as "the century of humiliation". Sathnam Sanghera's superb book, "Empireland", about British imperialism and its long-term consequences, quotes the Chinese



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Chinese President Xi Jinping reviews the armed forces as part of the commemorations to mark the 90th founding anniversary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)



scholar, Yan Fu, who, writing in 1895, said: "A group of island barbarians wearing wild clothes, with a birdlike language and animal-like faces, sailed to our shores from thousands of miles away and knocked on our gates, requesting access. When they failed to attain their aims, they breached our coastal defences, imprisoned the officials of our land, and even burned the palaces of our emperor." One might imagine that China's leaders of today would prefer to emulate the dignified Chinese leaders of that time, despite their defeat, rather than the barbarians (the British) at the gate. But Xi Jinping is a very 'tetchy' man, seeing insults and threats where none were intended as an excuse to roll out and show off his military hardware. It's been done before but it seldom ends well.

However, the majority of countries in the world share China's belief that the visit to Taipei by Nancy Pelosi, the House Speaker in the United States House of Representatives, was a provocation and could be viewed as "interference" in China's affairs. Although China sees Taiwan as a "breakaway" province it wants to reclaim, the island has been running its own affairs as an

independent country since 1949. It's a status the Taiwanese are reluctant to see brought to an end. Xi Jinping is not the first man of that name to have sought to rule China in a way 'he' saw as fair. In 244 BCE, there was a scribe, also called Xi, who took up his post under the Zhou dynasty when he was just 19 years old. He was clearly gifted and began to try legal cases as a judge less than a decade later. The documents found in his tomb confirm that he must have consulted a great many legal papers and statutes day-by-day on matters of administration and legal precedent. He earns several pages in Fernanda Pirie's ambitious and far-reaching book about the birth and evolution of law and order throughout the world over the last four millennia, "The Rule of Laws". It's a fascinating and compelling read, by the way.

The historic Xi seems to have been more firmly committed to imposing and administering a fair and just system of laws and punishments than his present-day namesake. The Xi of long ago looked after granaries, currency and the appointment of officials, among many other things, also serving as the investigating officer into alleged crimes. He was, perhaps, a kind of ancient Chinese Hercule Poirot. He was inclined to reduce the prescribed punishments for various crimes, preferring leniency to a show of brutal power.

There's not much to indicate that Xi Jinping would choose to follow that path during the more recent post-war years. However, we must remember the terrible state into which China had sunk after the Second World War and eight years of bitter fighting: the economy was wrecked; much of the infrastructure had been destroyed (or stolen and taken away, either by the Japanese or the

Soviets). Many cities had been bombed out of existence by either Japanese planes in the early years of the war or later by American planes whose pilots believed the defeated Japanese forces were hiding there. Agriculture had been very severely hit and there was widespread famine, providing insufficient to feed the millions of refugees, let alone the starving citizens. The Xi of long ago never had to face such dreadful conditions. With the Japanese gone or going, the various towns and cities were claimed either by the Kuomintang nationalists or the Chinese Communist Party, while Manchuria was in the hands of Soviet armies, albeit not for very long.

JAPAN ADMITS DEFEAT

Then there was the issue of the Japanese surrender. There were literally millions of Japanese soldiers on Chinese soil. Some of them surrendered to the Kuomintang while more than half a million of them were captured by the Soviet Red Army and taken back to the Soviet Union, allegedly as slave labour.

There was also a massive wave of confiscations of formerly Japanese properties: schools, factories, railways, vehicles, and houses alike were seized, in many cases by Soviet forces, and even travel using China's widespread and useful network of canals became impossible because the Japanese had seized (for which read 'stolen') every vessel they could find, while many railway locomotives and rolling stock ended up in the Soviet Union, also the victims of theft. Much of the material seized back by the Chinese ended up in the hands of the Kuomintang, which made no attempt to make itself popular by, for instance, giving it back to its former Chinese owners. The remote and unfriendly Chiang Kai-Shek believed in the military and in elitism, which would never endear him to a country recovering from such a vicious war, while Mao Zedong was gaining in popularity through people-friendly actions. The Communists also controlled an army of almost a million soldiers and something like twice that number of militiamen, while a skilfully-planned publicity campaign won over the peasants in droves. There was very little in the way of 'vengeance' attacks on the remaining (disarmed) Japanese troops. It's surprising really; according to Jonathon Fenby's very informative



18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China

book, 'The Penguin History of Modern China', in the so-called "Rape of Nanjing", Japanese troops competed to see who could behead the greatest number of Chinese prisoners. It's hard to understand how human beings could have done such awful things for fun, but they did. The photographs in Fenby's book show the Japanese troops laughing while they were doing it, in one instance attaching the severed head to a wall.

SORTING OUT THE MESS

After the war and Japan's surrender, there was a massive mess to clear up. With US assistance, more than two million Koreans who had been brought to Manchuria as slaves by the Japanese, were repatriated.

With Japan out of the picture, the KMT realised it was facing seemingly insurmountable problems: massive inflation, social issues, a loss of manpower, a weak administration and a lack of any kind of vision for the future. Out in the countryside, soldiers who had left whatever sort of military structure of which they had been part – army, marines, paratroopers or whatever – were looting the farms and houses. China took control of Taiwan from Japan, but in a condition of deep tension from the Nationalists, who seized the best assets while imposing a harsh and unpopular military rule. Two days after the surrender of Emperor Hirohito, Mao agreed to concede to the wishes of the Soviet Union and meet with Chiang Kai-Shek, something he very much did not want to do. When the aeroplane in which he was travelling landed in Yenan, Mao said that military and political problems should be resolved "in accordance with justice and reason, as well as on the basis of peace, democracy, and unity," adding: "We must build a unified, independent, prosperous, and strong new China." It's



The Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi and Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen in Taiwan, August 3, 2022

a great idea, but while Mao was under no illusions regarding the Americans, the nationalists, who had performed so poorly against the Japanese throughout the war, retained their illusions, imagining, perhaps, that the Americans would come along to do the heavy lifting and leave the subsequent running of the country to those who had proved conclusively that they couldn't handle the responsibility. If only they'd had Tsai Ing-wen to help them...

So, what happened to Taiwan when the war ended? It was, after all, the island to which Chiang Kai-Shek and his rather unpopular Nationalist forces fled following their defeat at the hands of Mao Zedong's Communist army. At the end of the Second World War, Japan surrendered and was occupied by allied forces, while Taiwan was put under the control of China's government, the ROC (Republic of China), which back in those days meant Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang, but in February 1947 the locals rose up against the Kuomintang in response to their cruelty and there was a massacre, which led to the governor of Taiwan, Chen Cheng to declare martial law. What followed was the Chinese civil war in 1949, at the end of which the KMT's Republic of China (ROC) was forced to retreat from mainland China, where Mao's Communists had declared the People's Republic of China. So, the Kuomintang retreated to Taiwan and then continued to claim that they were the sole legitimate government of China; all of it.

However, the United Nations eventually stepped in to stop the pointless squabbling by expelling the ROC as China's representative government there, replacing it with the PRC (People's Republic of China). Complicated, isn't it? It is also, of course, unfinished business. It would be possible, arguably, for China to try to win back Taiwan with

a charm offensive, but (because Xi has very little charm but lots of big weapons) a military confrontation seems more likely, especially now, following the Nancy Pelosi visit.

Apart from anything else, the People's Republic can outgun Taiwan many times over. It has 2,035,000 troops on active service, compared with Taiwan's 169,000. China can boast 965,000 ground troops; ten times the number Taiwan can field. China has 260,000 sailors to Taiwan's 4,000. As for ordnance, China has 5,400 tanks to Taiwan's 650. China also has 3,227 warplanes to Taiwan's 500 or so, and it has 59 submarines while Taiwan only has 4 and when it comes to artillery pieces, China can boast 9,834 to Taiwan's 2,000. Without outsiders joining in, it would look – on paper – like being quite a short war.

POKING THE HORNET'S NEST

Tensions between China and Taiwan are still strong since the visit of the Speaker of the House of Representatives to Taipei. Nancy Pelosi has been denounced far and wide as a fomenter of trouble, even though it was an unimportant private visit and could be seen as Pelosi's "last hurrah" before she steps down as speaker in November. Xi would have been far better advised, I think, to play down the significance of the trip, pointing out the relative unimportance and powerlessness of her position in US politics. As it is, she is now seen as a far more heavyweight figure than she really is. Some have suggested that Xi was in any case looking for an excuse to scare Taiwan and show off his military hardware.

Playing down the visit would have shown Xi as a balanced and sensible world-class leader instead of someone who is hysterically jittery. In fact, of



Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong in Chongqing, 1945



The first combat zone of the Armed Forces carrying out the "Cheng Jiang Exercise" during which various types of artillery were fired in sequence

© Chou Sheng-wen/Military News Agency.jpg

course, knowing of Xi's tendency to over-react it was undoubtedly unwise to go ahead with the visit, as China's military exercises in and around the Taiwan Strait have demonstrated. China's official media has branded the visit: "a political stunt", and it would seem they have a valid point, even if it was a stunt that played into Xi's hands. Both China and Taiwan fielded around 10 warships in the area after Pelosi left. More sabres to rattle, of course. Japan has announced that it fears five of China's long-range ballistic missiles may have landed in its own Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), possibly unintentionally. Japan has lodged an official protest anyway. Japanese foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi also called for an "immediate stop" to Beijing's military drills around Taiwan, which he fears may "have a serious impact on the peace and stability of the region and the international community." Beijing has now announced that they have ended.

Of course, Taiwan is the world's largest producer of semiconductors or chips, and China needs them, as does every other industrialized country. So why not just invade and seize them? It would be a disaster for the rest of the



Soldiers from the 66th Marine Brigade firing a Javelin missile during a Joint Combat Training Test

© Lin Tze-ting/Military News Agency

world, but semiconductors are fragile, delicate products whose manufacture demands the application of a wide range of hard-to-get (and expensive) chemicals at just the right moment and in the exact proportions required. The work must take place in "clean rooms" using ingredients of the very highest purity. China has tried to catch up with Taiwan but is said to be "nowhere near" matching what Taiwan can do. A single semiconductor may be thinner than a human hair and yet contain 40-billion components. China will not be catching up with that technology any time soon. So, China is unlikely to risk disrupting its own access to chips in return for doubtful military or strategic advantage and the risk of American retaliation. That would be one hornets' nest in which China would definitely get very badly stung.

Meanwhile, the US administration has issued a warning that China is planning further 'provocations' over Pelosi's visit, unintentionally (perhaps) increasing the risk of escalating the row with Beijing over the Pelosi visit. The US National Security Council spokesperson, John Kirby, told journalists that China would appear to be taking steps to raise the temperature by its actions.

"These potential steps from China could include military provocations, such as firing missiles in the Taiwan Strait or around Taiwan," adding that these could be: "operations that break historical norms such as large-scale air entry into Taiwan's air defence identification zone," and also: "air or naval activities that cross the median line and military exercises that could be highly publicised." He was speaking ahead of Pelosi's arrival in Taiwan, since when the temperature of Sino-American relations has dropped well below the surface temperature of Pluto. A spokesman for the Pentagon told the media that the US believes China "will not invade Taiwan for two years", but officials in Taiwan are understandably nervous. Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu warned that: "China has used the drills in its military play-book to prepare for the invasion of Taiwan." He seems not to be convinced by Washington's '2-year' assessment of China's intentions. "It is conducting large-scale military exercises and missile launches, as well as cyberattacks, disinformation, and

economic coercion, in an attempt to weaken public morale in Taiwan. After the drills conclude, China may try to 'routinise' its action in an attempt to wreck the long-term status quo across the Taiwan Strait". Tsai will not stand idly by; she is of Taiwanese aboriginal descent, and her name, simplified by her father to 英文, could be translated as "heroic literature". Tsai has already proved herself to be heroic, so her name is likely to be recorded in literature. She is unmarried.



© Chinamil.com

Warplanes of Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) conducting operations during joint combat training exercises around Taiwan, August 7, 2022

LESSONS FROM VLAD

As for China's intentions, all that remains puzzling is the timescale; there is no serious doubt that China will seize Taiwan by force, a source of great anxiety for Tsai and others. Diplomats have told journalists that when it does, it will do so in a lightning 48-hour strike, giving the rest of the world no time to react. However, many Western diplomats are working on the assumption that Xi and his team have learned from Russia's unexpected failure to seize Ukraine as quickly as they expected, following their earlier rapid taking of Crimea. It's clear that Putin had expected a push-over and found himself instead bogged down in a quagmire of fierce resistance. The sudden, all-encompassing 'blitz' seems to be what Beijing favours, rather than a gradual take-over, squeezing the opposition out by rolling tanks and troops across the land and blowing up as many buildings as it can. According to Ireland's Independent newspaper: "Chinese leaders have reportedly deduced that it took at least two days for western leaders to properly respond



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping

when Vladimir Putin launched his brutal assault on Ukraine on February 24, and that this is the crucial window of time when irreversible gains can be made.”

Xi apparently believes that Putin's biggest mistake was failing to seize Kyiv in the first 48 hours, and thus destroying Volodymyr Zelensky's government. By taking their time, the Russians left open the possibility that Western countries would rally to its aid, (which the Russians, strangely, were not expecting), at least by supplying weapons and other goods, which they did and continue to do. The Irish Independent goes on to quote Sidharth Kaushal of the think tank, Rusi, who has pointed out that any military action by China would risk the strong possibility of war with the United States, which Xi will probably prefer to avoid. And there's another concern, Kaushal notes: “Despite reportedly being the world's biggest army, the PLA is untested in combat, and failure could fatally undermine President Xi's

hold on power ahead of a key party congress at which he is expected to be granted an unprecedented third term”. Kaushal doesn't believe such a war would be easily winnable for China at the moment.

TRADING FUTURES?

Some observers have noted that Taiwan would be more likely to accept the idea of a Chinese takeover if there was clearly “something in it for them”. Being governed and overseen by Xi is not an alluring prospect. However, Beijing has long talked about linking China and Taiwan physically, with a bridge or a tunnel. China's State Council has already approved – almost a decade ago – two highway projects. As reported in the South China Morning Post: “One involves the long-proposed Beijing-Taipei Expressway, which would start in Beijing and pass through Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Anhui, Zhejiang and Fujian's Fuzhou before crossing the strait and reaching Taipei. Another inland route would start in Chengdu and pass through Guizhou, Hunan, Jiangxi and Fujian's Xiamen, and cross the Taipei-administered Kinmen archipelago before eventually ending at Kaohsiung in southern Taiwan.”

In either case, it would be a massive project, costing many billions of euros, whether China opts for a bridge or a tunnel under the sea. It would have to stretch 180 kilometres, but China has recently resurrected the idea of a bridge, predicting that it could be in place by 2035. There would inevitably be security concerns (it would be an

easy target) and also worries about the geology; just how stable would such a structure be? It could be to Taiwan's advantage: trade with mainland China and Hong Kong accounts for a third of Taiwan's economy.

Since the Presidency of Donald Trump, the United States has retreated from global leadership, apparently more interested in domestic issues. This leaves a gap at a global scale that China could fill to its obvious benefit, but under Xi it won't do that. As Elizabeth C. Economy explains in her fascinating book, ‘The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State’, “US and Chinese priorities, policies, and values are not aligned. Moreover, China cannot be a leader in a globalized world while at the same time closing its borders to ideas, capital, and influences from the outside world.” She recommends that the US and other Western powers, while seeking cooperation with China, must remain prepared and ready to tackle China if it becomes over-ambitious. Under Xi Jinping, that remains a very real possibility. It's a fact of which Tsai is painfully aware. She knows Taiwan could never win a shooting war against China, but she is continuing to make Taiwan an ever more capable and peaceful manufacturing hub for the most delicate and essential products on Earth. So, she waits, always striving to improve her country and improve life for its citizens, who are unlikely ever to welcome Xi as her replacement. His greatest interest seems to be to take what is of value while ignoring calls for justice. He should read Confucius, who wrote: “The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell.” Tsai understands what is right, it seems. And XI? Well, he has dropped his pledge not to station troops in Taiwan, so the idea of ‘one nation’ in peaceful co-existence with itself, free of strife, seems more remote than ever. And Xi should forget the idea of attacking Taiwan and remember another saying of Confucius: “Don't do unto others what you don't want others to do unto you.”

Anthony James



Anti-landing spikes on Lesser Kinmen (Lieu), near Shi Islet with the mainland Chinese city of Xiamen in the background

NEWS IN BRIEF

EU COURT UPHOLDS BAN ON RUSSIAN BROADCASTER



On 27 July, the Grand Chamber of the General Court of Justice of the EU rejected an appeal filed by the Russian state-controlled media Russia Today France (RT France) against the ban on its content, following the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

The Kremlin subsequently denounced the decision as "extremely negative" and threatened similar retaliatory measures against Western media.

This is the first ruling given by the Grand Chamber under the expedited procedure, by which a judgment or a preliminary ruling can be given more quickly than under the normal procedure for a judgment or a preliminary ruling.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February immediately gave rise to extensive media coverage, with the deployment of ad hoc formats, such as live broadcasts organised by a number of online media outlets to follow the invasion's developments and its many consequences.

Among these consequences is an unprecedented media event on a European scale: the European Union's ban on the Russian television channel Russia Today (RT) and the Sputnik agency from continuing to broadcast their programmes and information in the Community space.

This decision, announced on 27 February, took effect on 2 March with its entry in the EU Official Journal, and quickly gave rise to a multi-media soap opera which was itself prolonged with the announcement by RT on 8 March that it was challenging the decision.

The EU imposed the ban a week after the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, citing the systematic dissemination of false information about the operation.

The president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen said at the time, *"We will ban the Kremlin's media machine in the EU. The state-owned Russia Today and Sputnik, and their subsidiaries will no longer be able to spread their lies to justify Putin's war."*

And the Luxembourg-based Court of Justice declared that the Grand Chamber of the Court of First Instance rejects RT France's request to annul the Council's acts, adopted following the outbreak of war in Ukraine, temporarily banning it from broadcasting content.

The General Court found that, bearing in mind the extraordinary context of the case, the circumstances were sufficient to establish that the limitations on RT France's freedom of expression which the restrictive measures at issue are liable to have "are proportionate, inasmuch as they are appropriate and necessary to the aims pursued".

The Court also found that those measures "do not disproportionately infringe the essential content of RT France's freedom to conduct a business" since they are temporary and reversible.

Finally, in so far as the alleged infringement of the "principle of non-discrimination on grounds of nationality" are concerned, the General Court observed that the difference in treatment on which RT France relied did not fall within the scope of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and besides, RT France failed to identify any other category of persons who would have been treated more favourably when in a situation comparable to its own, namely being under the direct or indirect control of the leadership of the Russian Federation.

The EU sanctions apply to RT's English unit and its operations in Britain, Germany, France and Spain, and mean that RT's content cannot be broadcast by EU operators.

The ban includes the suspension of RT's broadcast licences and authorisation, transmission and distribution agreements with its European counterparts.

RT France can appeal on questions of law to the Court of Justice of the European Union, the EU's highest court.

James Lookwood

UKRAINE: THE EU HAS COORDINATED THE DELIVERY OF MORE THAN 60,000 TONNES OF LIFE-SAVING ASSISTANCE



As of mid August, the EU has coordinated the delivery of 66,224 tonnes of in-kind assistance to Ukraine from 30 countries via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. The assistance delivered includes 180 ambulances, 125 fire-fighting vehicles, 300 power generators, 35 heavy machinery

vehicles, and 4 pontoon bridges. This is by far the largest, longest lasting and most complex operation via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism since it was established in 2001, with an estimated value so far of over €425 million. To support this operation, logistics hubs have been set up in Poland, Romania and Slovakia where assistance is then channelled directly to Ukraine.

Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič said: *“We are all horrified by Russia’s atrocities in Ukraine. By providing emergency assistance, we can at least ease the immense pressure on Ukraine’s emergency response systems. Today we have reached an important milestone – over 60,000 tonnes of in-kind assistance coordinated via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism has arrived in Ukraine. I am extremely grateful to every single Member State, together with Norway, Turkey and North Macedonia for having offered help that we have then channelled most effectively through the Mechanism. This solidarity is the proof that the EU is with Ukraine not only in words but in actions.”*

On 15 February, Ukraine activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in preparation for a large-scale emergency. Ever since, the EU Emergency Response Coordination Centre has maintained close contact with the Ukrainian authorities to determine the specific needs, and to coordinate the EU's crisis response.

The EU continues receiving new offers to Ukraine from its Member States still today. The latest offers via the Mechanism include, hospital beds and hygiene kits from Austria, an ambulance and medical equipment from Norway, shelter equipment from Finland, Protective personal equipment from Germany, medicines from Czechia and Slovakia, power generators from Italy and energy supply equipment from France.

The EU's Emergency Response Coordination Centre is operating 24/7 to provide further assistance based on the specific needs indicated by Ukraine.

Background

Since the start of Russia's invasion on 24 February, the humanitarian needs in Ukraine have risen to unprecedented levels. The ongoing war endangers the lives of civilians and causes severe damage to housing, water and electricity supply, heating, but also public infrastructure such as schools and health facilities. Millions of people have no access to basic needs. The EU has mobilised all possible resources to enable emergency assistance into Ukraine.

In response to the Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the European Commission is coordinating its largest ever operation under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. All 27 EU countries, plus Norway, Turkey and North Macedonia, have offered in-kind assistance ranging from medical supplies and shelter items to vehicles and energy equipment. Given the immense need for medical supplies in Ukraine, the EU has also deployed its strategic rescEU reserves.

The European Commission has allocated €348 million for humanitarian aid programmes to help civilians affected by the war in Ukraine. This includes respectively €335 million

for Ukraine and €13 million for Moldova. EU humanitarian funding is helping people inside Ukraine by providing them with food, water, essential household items, health care, psychosocial support, emergency shelter, protection, and cash assistance to help to cover their basic needs.

USING GALILEO TO PROTECT BOATS FROM CRIMINALS



From theft to hacking and un-anchoring, boats of all shapes and sizes are becoming an increasingly popular target for attacks, including cyberattacks. Protecting these critical and often expensive assets requires new, outside-the-box solutions.

One of those solutions, powered by Galileo, is ARGOS.

Developed with the support of the EU Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA), through its Fundamental Elements funding initiative, ARGOS leverages the Galileo services and newest differentiations as a means of securing yachts and boats against criminal activity and making their mooring safer.

The solution is unique; it not only provides the accurate position of a vessel (or related assets), it also uses the Galileo Open Service Navigation Message Authentication (OSNMA) to assure the user that the navigation message received is in fact from Galileo and has not been modified.

By fusing this Galileo-provided positioning information with data from on-board sensors, ARGOS can:

- Protect a vessel against theft, tampering, un-anchoring and interruptions to the power supply
- Provide real-time monitoring of a docked or anchored boat's location
- Accurately track a vessel's location, monitoring that it remains in a pre-defined geo-fenced area
- Defend navigation systems against cyberattacks, spoofing and other forms of manipulation

In addition to Galileo and sensors, the ARGOS solution comes equipped with artificial intelligence, 4G connectivity, WiFi, Bluetooth, CAN-BUS, an anti-tampering system and a backup battery.

ARGOS ready for use

ARGOS is not just another technological concept. Following a successful demonstration, the ARGOS solution is now market-ready and it will well position in the market thanks to a strong and unique value proposition. To take advantage of its range of security services, all a user needs to do is install the device onboard the vessel and be ready to receive notifications in case an alert is triggered.

From there, ARGOS communicates information on the boat's location and monitor it within a pre-defined geo-fenced area through a proprietary ecosystem. This process starts with the control centre, which uses sophisticated algorithms to track and control the vessel's position. The information collected, along with any alarms and notifications, is relayed to the user via an easy-to-use mobile app and/or web portal.

ARGOS was developed by a consortium of companies, including Modis, Permare, GEA Space, ChipCraft and Aria United. The group is currently exploring the option of expanding the technology to other transport sectors, such as bikes, scooters and shared mobility services.

THE EU IS LOOKING FOR HEADS OF ADMINISTRATION TO WORK AT THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE (EEAS)



Are you a talented professional, interested in pursuing an international career as a **Head of administration in an EU Delegation**?

The EU is looking for **Heads of administration (grade AST 4)**. Recruited professionals will work at the European External Action Service (EEAS).

The **Heads of administration** assist the Heads of EU Delegations in fulfilling their mandate as regards the day-to-day running of the Delegation - management of an administrative budget and human resources, overseeing logistics, supplies and services, as well as safety and security of the staff and assets, among others. Together with the Head of Delegation, you will be responsible for the overall administrative and financial implementation of the Delegation's budget and will contribute to the smooth running of the Delegation.

All EEAS staff shall periodically serve in Union Delegations. During their career, EEAS officials will alternate between different geographic regions and headquarters and/or job functions. Some Delegations are located in countries where living and security conditions can be difficult.

As an employer, the institutions and agencies of the EU offer a community of expertise with a wide range of opportunities to broaden your learning, enhance your skills, and develop your career. The multicultural, international and diverse teams that make up the institutions work together to benefit the lives of approximately 450 million EU citizens and beyond.

Respect for cultural diversity and promotion of equal opportunities are founding principles of the EU. The European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) endeavours to apply equal opportunities treatment and access to all candidates. You can find out more about our equal opportunities policy and how to request special adjustments for selection tests on our dedicated page.

Do you have what it takes?

If you are an EU citizen and know **at least two official EU languages**: a thorough knowledge of **one of the 24 official EU languages** and a satisfactory knowledge of **English or French**, then you are the one we are looking for.

Additionally, you must have: **either** a level of **post-secondary education** of at least two years attested by a diploma in the following areas: law, business administration, human resources management, finance, accounting, logistics, building management, or engineering, **followed by at least six years of relevant professional experience**, or a level of **secondary education** attested by a diploma giving access to post-secondary education, followed by **at least nine years of relevant professional experience**.

For detailed information on requirements, please read the Notice of Competition on our apply page below.

<https://epso.europa.eu/en/job-opportunities/heads-administration-eu-delegations>

Source : European personnel selection office

COVID-19 VACCINES: COMMISSION AND MODERNA ADAPT DELIVERY SCHEDULES FOR LATE SUMMER AND WINTER

The European Commission and Moderna have reached an agreement to better address Member States needs for COVID-19 vaccines for the late summer and winter period. This will ensure national authorities have access to the vaccines, including



© Wikimedia

variant-adapted vaccines if authorised, at the time they need them for their own vaccination campaigns and to support their global partners.

This agreement will adapt the originally agreed contractual delivery schedules. Doses originally scheduled for delivery in the summer will now be delivered in September and during the autumn and winter period 2022, when Member States will more likely need additional stocks of vaccines for national campaigns and meeting their international solidarity commitments.

The agreement also ensures that, if one or more adapted vaccines receive marketing authorisation, Member States may choose to receive those adapted vaccines under the current contract.

In this context, at the request of some Member States, the agreement also secures additional 15 million doses of Omicron-containing vaccine booster candidates from Moderna, subject to marketing authorisation within timelines that would allow the use of these doses for their vaccination campaigns.

Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella Kyriakides, said: *“Increasing COVID-19 vaccination and booster rates will be crucial as we plan ahead for the autumn and winter months. To best ensure our common preparedness, Member States must have the necessary tools. This includes vaccines adapted to variants, as and when they are authorised by the European Medicines Agency. This agreement will ensure that Member States will have access to the vaccine doses they need at the right time to protect our citizens”.*

Background

In 2020, the European Union invested heavily in the global production of a number of COVID-19 vaccines. It was crucial to have vaccines as early as possible and at the scale needed, requiring important investments before knowing whether any of these vaccines would prove successful.

These actions taken at risk in 2020 have clearly paid off, as the development of vaccines has been highly successful: Member States had equal access to safe and effective vaccines at the earliest opportunity, and at the scale needed, allowing all EU citizens to be offered primary and booster vaccinations, saving lives and mitigating the impact of the pandemic upon social and economic life.

Moreover, a large number of these vaccines could also be used in the global efforts to tackle the pandemic. As of end July 2022, the EU exported more than 2.4 billion vaccine doses to 168 countries. Member States have shared over 478 million doses of which around 406 million have already been delivered to recipient countries (around 82% of these via COVAX). At the same time, Member States must continue to ensure they have the strategic stocks of vaccines they need to deal with the potential epidemiological evolution of the COVID-19 virus, given the uncertainties over its future evolution and impact. The EU's Vaccines Strategy provides Member States with certainty that they will have the supply they need, including of adapted vaccines.

MONKEYPOX: EXPERTS GIVE VIRUS VARIANTS NEW NAMES



A group of global experts convened by WHO has agreed on new names for monkeypox virus variants, as part of ongoing efforts to align the names of the monkeypox disease, virus and variants – or clades – with current best practices. The experts agreed to name the clades using Roman numerals.

The monkeypox virus was named upon first discovery in 1958, before current best practices in naming diseases and viruses were adopted. Similarly for the name of the disease it causes. Major variants were identified by the geographic regions where they were known to circulate.

Current best practice is that newly-identified viruses, related disease, and virus variants should be given names with the aim to avoid causing offense to any cultural, social, national, regional, professional, or ethnic groups, and minimize any negative impact on trade, travel, tourism or animal welfare.

Disease: Assigning new names to existing diseases is the responsibility of WHO under the International Classification of Diseases and the WHO Family of International Health Related Classifications (WHO-FIC). WHO is holding an open consultation for a new disease name for monkeypox. Anyone wishing to propose new names can do so here (see ICD-11, Add proposals).

Virus: The naming of virus species is the responsibility of the International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV), which has a process underway for the name of the monkeypox virus.

Variants/clades: The naming of variants for existing pathogens is normally the result of debate amongst scientists. In order to expedite agreement in the context of the current outbreak, WHO convened an ad hoc meeting on 8 August to enable virologists and public health experts to reach consensus on new terminology.

Experts in pox virology, evolutionary biology and representatives of research institutes from across the globe reviewed the phylogeny and nomenclature of known and new monkeypox virus variants or clades. They discussed the characteristics and evolution of monkeypox virus variants, their apparent phylogenetic and clinical differences, and potential consequences for public health and future virological and evolutionary research.

The group reached consensus on new nomenclature for the virus clades that is in line with best practices. They agreed on how the virus clades should be recorded and classified on genome sequence repository sites.

Consensus was reached to now refer to the former Congo Basin (Central African) clade as Clade one (I) and the former West African clade as Clade two (II). Additionally, it was agreed that the Clade II consists of two subclades.

The proper naming structure will be represented by a Roman numeral for the clade and a lower-case alphanumeric character for the subclades. Thus, the new naming convention comprises Clade I, Clade IIa and Clade IIb, with the latter referring primarily to the group of variants largely circulating in the 2022 global outbreak. The naming of lineages will be as proposed by scientists as the outbreak evolves. Experts will be reconvened as needed.

The new names for the clades should go into effect immediately while work continues on the disease and virus names.

STATE AID: COMMISSION APPROVES REVISED COMMITMENTS BY ITALY FOR BANCA MONTE DEI PASCHI DI SIENA



Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, Siena, Italy

The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a set of revised commitments submitted by Italy, replacing the original commitments on the basis of which the Commission had approved a precautionary recapitalisation of Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena ('MPS').

In July 2017, the Commission approved Italy's plan to support a precautionary recapitalisation of MPS, on the basis of commitments submitted by Italy. Under these commitments, the bank had to implement specific measures to restore its long-term viability, minimise distortions of competition and ensure an adequate own contribution to cover losses and restructuring costs. These commitments were first amended in September 2019. In addition, Italy had to sell its stake in the bank by a certain deadline.

Some of the original commitments had been timely implemented. In particular, MPS has reduced its bad loans and operating costs, it has improved its risk management policies and it has also respected a range of behavioral constraints.

However, in July 2022, Italy asked for more time to fulfil certain other commitments, notably to sell its stake in MPS and for MPS to implement certain divestments and to continue its restructuring through a further reduction of the staff and of the operational costs relative to the revenues. To minimise possible distortions of competition caused by the extended deadline, Italy proposed a series of additional commitments, such as certain additional disposals and divestments, additional branch closures and the continued obligation to respect certain limitations on the way it conducts business.

The Commission assessed Italy's request under EU State aid rules, in particular the 2013 Banking Communication. The Commission concluded that: (i) the extension of the deadline to complete the restructuring of the bank and to achieve the sale of the stake of the Italian State in the bank is acceptable; and (ii) the set of revised commitments adequately counterbalances the revision of the deadline.

On this basis, the Commission concluded that the aid which Italy granted to MPS in July 2017 remains compatible with EU State aid rules, as the overall balance of the original decision was maintained and has approved the revised commitments.

Background

MPS is Italy's fifth largest bank in terms of total assets, with a market share at national level of 6.4%. At the end of 2021, it had a total balance sheet of about €138 billion, 21,244 employees and 1,368 branches in Italy. The bank is mainly active in the retail and small and medium-sized enterprises segments, but it is also present in the wealth management and insurance businesses.

In July 2017, the Commission approved restructuring aid by Italy in favour of MPS in the amount of €5.4 billion, in the form of a precautionary recapitalisation, on the basis of an effective restructuring plan which aimed at restoring the bank's long-term viability, whilst limiting competition distortions. In order to approve the capital injection by the Italian State, among others, MPS's shareholders and junior creditors contributed €4.3 billion to limit the use of taxpayer money, as required by EU State aid rules. Also, the Italian State committed to dispose of its participation in the bank by a certain date. In December 2019, the Commission approved certain amendments to the original 2017 commitments submitted by Italy.

EU rules, in particular the Bank Recovery and Resolution Directive, make it possible for a State to provide capital support to a solvent bank without triggering resolution, provided that certain criteria are met. In this context, State aid can only be granted to cater for the possible capital needs of a bank that would materialise if economic conditions were to worsen (so-called "precautionary recapitalisation"). The State support also has to be temporary.

Since a precautionary recapitalisation involves the use of taxpayer money, EU State aid rules require that public funds can only be injected in a bank that is profitable in the long-term. This requires the bank to undergo in-depth restructuring with the purpose of ensuring its viability in the long term. At the same time, the bank must make efforts to mitigate competition distortions and bear part of its losses and restructuring costs itself (so-called "burden-sharing") to minimise the amount of taxpayer money.

THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK TO SUPPORT RYVU THERAPEUTICS' DISCOVERY, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW CANCER TREATMENTS WITH €22 MILLION



A Ryvu Therapeutics Laboratory

- **Ryvu Therapeutics, an innovative biotech company, receives EIB financing to accelerate the development of new therapies to treat severe blood cancers and solid tumours, including further clinical development of the flagship project RVU120.**
- **The funding is guaranteed by the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the financial pillar of the Investment Plan for Europe.**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) is providing €22 million (above 100 million Polish zlotys) in financing to Ryvu Therapeutics, a Polish clinical-stage drug discovery and development company focusing on novel small molecule therapies that address unmet medical needs in oncology. The funding is being provided under the EIB's venture debt instrument, which is tailored to the specific financing needs of high-growth innovative companies. The European Fund for Strategic Investments, part of the Investment Plan for Europe, is backing this funding with a guarantee.

The EIB's support will help Ryvu finance its development pipeline of new cancer treatments from discovery through to clinical trials. Ultimately, Ryvu aims to address the clinical limitations of current treatments in oncology and provide patients with access to innovative therapies for haematologic and solid tumours.

EIB Vice-President Teresa Czerwińska said: "Financing projects within the field of research, development and innovation is one of the EIB's top priorities and is especially relevant today, as the world suffers from the health crisis caused by the pandemic. Support for innovative companies like Ryvu specialising in advanced biotech research is clearly needed and we are delighted to assist this ambitious company, which has a notable drug discovery and development track record. The EIB's investment will strengthen Ryvu Therapeutics' research, development and innovation capacity and competitiveness for the wider social benefit."

Innovation, research, digital economy and the development of human capital are top priorities for the EIB Group. In 2021, the EIB Group's overall financing for innovation, digital transformation and human capital projects reached €20.7 billion worldwide, of which €1.5 billion went to Poland (up from €1.2 billion in 2020).

"We are very pleased to receive funding from the European Investment Bank, which plays such an instrumental role in providing financial support to innovation-driven companies like Ryvu that seek to develop new and potentially life-saving medicines," said Paweł Przewieźlikowski, Chief Executive Officer of Ryvu Therapeutics. "We would like to thank the EIB for their collaboration, as this funding will help Ryvu continue to advance our clinical-stage oncology pipeline, including RVU120 in clinical development for the treatment of hematologic and solid tumours, as well as earlier stage projects."

Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for an Economy that Works for People, said: "I welcome this investment by the EIB, backed by the Investment Plan for Europe, in Polish company Ryvu Therapeutics. It is great news for Europe's competitiveness and its location as a research hub for innovations that change and save people's lives. The additional funding will go towards the discovery, research and development of innovative therapeutics to treat cancer patients. This investment will also support the regional economy and create highly skilled jobs in the process."

Ryvu Therapeutics is already one of the main employers of highly qualified researchers in the biotech field in Poland. With research and development (R&D) activities based in Kraków, the additional investment in Ryvu will contribute to the creation of new highly skilled jobs and encourage economic growth in the region.

EX CHANCELLOR GERHARD SCHRÖDER ON A FIGHT WITH HIS POLITICAL FAMILY ABOUT HIS LOST PRIVILEGES



Gerhard Schröder and Vladimir Putin in 2005 in St Petersburg

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has urged former leader Gerhard Schröder to resign from his positions within large Russian business groups.

The ex-Chancellor has been severely criticised in Germany or close ties with Vladimir Putin.

"I don't think it's right for Gerhard Schröder to exercise these

functions and I also think it would be right for him to step down," said the German chancellor.

Asked whether this harms the Social Democratic Party (SPD) of which they are both members, the head of government assured: "everyone knows that we do not agree with" the positions of Gerhard Schröder concerning the Russia.

Schröder served as the chancellor of Germany from 1998 to 2005. From 1999 to 2004, he was also the Leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

He has long had close ties to Mr Putin and devoted considerable attention to improving relations and economic ties with Russia. He is in fact a key proponent of the original Nord Stream project and he joined the board of the Russian energy giant Gazprom after losing Germany's 2005 election as leader of the Social Democrats.

Controversy over Gerhard Schröder's relationship with Russia began in 2006, when he became chairman of the shareholder committee of Gazprom's first Nord Stream pipeline under the Baltic Sea.

Recently Gerhard Schröder has filed a lawsuit against Germany's Bundestag, the country's lower house of parliament, seeking to reinstate his privileges as former chancellor.

The German parliament took away some of Schröder's special rights and privileges for refusing to cut ties with Russia's Vladimir Putin, following the invasion of Ukraine. A German parliamentary committee ruled that he must give up his right to an office in the Bundestag, though he would continue to receive his pension and some security privileges.

In May, Schroeder announced that he would leave the supervisory board of the Russian energy giant Rosneft. He also promised to turn down a nomination for a supervisory board position at Gazprom, another Russian energy giant.

Germany's center-left Social Democratic Party has determined that there are no grounds to expel former Chancellor Schröder over his ties to Russian companies and Russian leader Vladimir Putin. The party's arbitration body says Schröder did not break party rules.

J.L

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT GIVES ITS GREEN LIGHT TO EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S TAXONOMY

EU Commissioner in charge of Financial Services, Financial Stability, and Capital Markets Union, Mairead McGuinness © Europa.eu

It was a close vote but, in the end, the European Parliament sided with the European Commission's proposal to widen the range of financial instruments combatting Europe's greenhouse gas emissions, and its dependency to third countries.

In essence, the proposal championed by Mairead McGuinness, EU Commissioner in charge of Financial Services, Financial Stability, and Capital Markets Union, aims to steer private investment to a mix of technologies that will contribute to climate neutrality. The approach is viewed by many as more



EU Commissioner in charge of Financial Services, Financial Stability, and Capital Markets Union, Mairead McGuinness

pragmatic, given the geopolitical tensions, and with sufficient flexibility, as each member state will be able to develop its own strategy in meeting these common objectives.

All possible solutions, based on scientific advice, are part of the menu, including incentives for private investment in gas and nuclear activities as part of our energy transition. Following, the European Parliament's green light, these provisions will apply as of 1 January 2023.

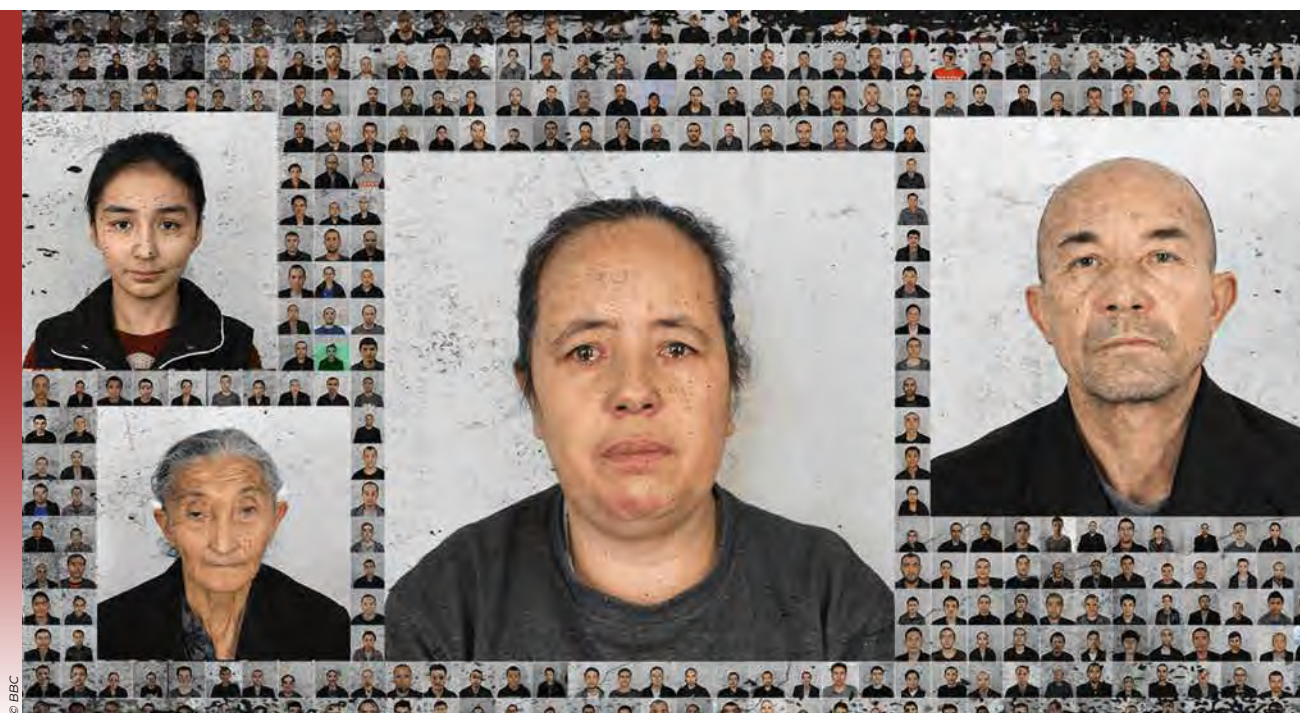
To understand the novelty of this landmark decision, we need to go back to the start. The EU Taxonomy Regulation was adopted in June 2020 as a tool to help investors, industry, and researchers to align economic prosperity with our Green Deal objectives. The need to foster growth without harming our environment relies on the following principles: i) climate change mitigation actions, ii) climate change adaptation, iii) sustainable use of water and protection of marine resources, iv) transition to circular economy, v) pollution prevention, vi) protection and restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity. To deliver on these ideas, increased access to green finance will be made available.

The revised decision, known as the Complementary Climate Delegated Act, acknowledges the potential of other technologies contributing towards decarbonisation, and introduces clear and strict conditions for nuclear and gas activities to be added. They would need to fulfil environmental safety requirements and offer a transition from coal to renewables. Disclosure requirements also apply for businesses in the gas and nuclear energy sectors. The European Commission has amended the legal framework, so that investors can identify which investment opportunities include gas or nuclear activities.

Although fusion is part of the long-term energy mix solution, it is clear that a friendlier economic environment providing incentives, can attract more interest and investment from private and public entities in harnessing the power of the Sun. Ultimately, the energy mix of the future must include all possible options that can help us combat greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change.



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



These images can be verified by being shown to contain real people, identified as the missing relatives of a number of overseas Uyghurs approached by the BBC

GLUCKSMAN AND UYGHURS J'ACCUSE! (LES DIRIGEANTS DE LA CHINE – ET DES AUTRES)

*French politician condemns inhumanity of China towards
its Uyghur population and others for staying silent*

In an article in France's *Le Figaro* newspaper French Socialist MEP Raphaël Glucksmann used the words of Emile Zola when he accused the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party of the most serious crimes against humanity the 21st century has seen in its approach to China's much-persecuted Uyghur people: genocide and human slavery. He also denounced

the international community for letting it happen, through its silence and passivity. He had harsh words for others, too, including the leaders of a number of Muslim countries. In a speech Glucksmann gave in Brussels, he told his audience: "I blame the leaders of many Muslim countries, from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia, who on the one hand brandish their faith as a standard and on the other support China's policy of destroying mosques." Some argue that the tide is starting to turn, but if so, it's doing so very slowly indeed. Too slowly, in fact.

It has led to high tension between China and Glucksmann himself. So who is Raphaël Glucksmann? He's an essayist, film-maker and Socialist politician, and he's had an interestingly diverse career, serving as an advisor to the President of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, for three years from 2009. He then became a journalist, writing

features for France Inter and later *Alternative Libérale* until his political convictions moved to the left, at which point he launched *Place Publique*, a left-leaning Liberal party. Glucksmann has become something of a thorn in Beijing's side, constantly reminding the world of China's forced labour camps and the severe mistreatment of the Uyghur people. China, of course, denies any wrongdoing, describing the camps as "re-education facilities" but Glucksmann isn't accepting that. Why does it matter to him so much? Because of his commitment to defending human rights, we must assume. There is plenty to defend against some dreadful threats.

He really entered the European political scene in 2018, when he founded his new political party, *Place Publique* (It means "Public Square", the place where politicians of an earlier age tried to sell their ideas to



French Socialist MEP Raphaël Glucksmann

the voters). The following year, Place Publique presented a joint list, together with the French Socialist Party, for the European Parliamentary elections with the slogan: "Envie d'Europe, écologique et sociale" ("The desire for Europe, ecological and social"). They gained 6.2% of the votes cast, earning them six seats in the new Parliament. Glucksmann was selected for the Committee on Foreign Affairs. It was an ideal place from which to launch his campaign on behalf of the Uyghur people. When a new committee was created called the "Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation", Glucksmann was selected to chair it. In addition, he has been chairing the Responsible Business Conduct Working Group, providing him with a good platform from which to urge better conduct from businesses using or importing goods from Xinjiang. He is also involved with the Spinelli Group, an in-house group seeking to convert the European Parliament to federalism. It was set up in 2010 by the former leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats, Guy Verhofstadt. Glucksmann has concentrated his fire on China's supposed "re-education camps" for the Uyghurs of Xinjiang. As a result, he has been sanctioned by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In case you may get the idea that he's a "one-subject politician", Glucksmann has also taken an interest in Green issues. In May 2021, Glucksmann joined a group of 39 mostly Green Party MEPs who sent a letter to the leaders of Germany, France and Italy, urging them not to support Arctic LNG 2, a \$21-billion (€20.45-billion) Russian Arctic liquefied natural gas (LNG)



Former leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats, Guy Verhofstadt



project, because of fears over climate change. In addition, in November 2021, Glucksmann led a group of seven Members of the European Parliament to Taiwan as a way of sending a strong signal in support of the island and its continuing independent status, despite threats of Chinese retaliation.

It was as leader of his new political party that he was elected to the European Parliament in 2019. Born in 1979, he's also a film maker, so potentially quite influential. He joined the European Parliament sub-committee on human rights, where he took a keen interest in the fate of the Uyghur people, who were being moved from their homeland and placed in internment camps, under the constant scrutiny of surveillance cameras and guards, and where they were forced to work on Chinese government projects. China denies it was forced labour but there's really no other way to describe it. Families were being broken up, it's been claimed, women were sterilized and children were simply disappearing. There was a lot of pro-Chinese propaganda emanating from Beijing, too, which they were compelled to view in their endless "classes". What was so wrong with the Uyghurs in China's eyes? They were insufficiently "Chinese", it seems. Glucksmann took up the batons on the Uyghurs' behalf because, it seemed, no-one else was doing so.

In China's case, it was all about one thing: pure and simple racism. It still is, it appears. When Émile Zola wrote his famous open letter to the then President of France, Félix Faure, it was to point out that Alfred Dreyfus had been accused of treason simply because he was Jewish.

It was published in L'Aurore in 1898 but Zola himself was arrested as a consequence, fleeing to England to avoid prison. Again, it was racism, the monster that refuses to die, just as it was racism that lay behind a Chinese decision to arrest almost 17,000 people, including university professors, writers, musicians and doctors on charges that, according to Nury Turkel in his terrifying book, No Escape, included "having a long beard", "reciting the Koran during a funeral" and even "using the front door more often than the back door". If that's a crime, I plead guilty, m'lord: I would have to climb over my garden fence to use the back one, and I'm not sure I could. It's hard to imagine how anyone could rate "wearing a beard" as a greater offence than imprisoning people and forcing them to do unpaid work, but anyone criticising China is accused of "interfering" in its internal affairs.

The fact is that the manufacture of several Western clothing brands appears to involve the hard work of Uyghur people who have no choice about it. "Brands bring crime against humanity into our lives," Glucksmann said in his support of a complaint lodged in Paris against international clothing companies that have been accused of benefitting from China's policy of providing forced labour. Glucksmann was speaking at a press conference of the NGOs who launched the complaint, united in a kind of anti-corruption group, plus another anti-corruption organisation, Sherpa, and the Uyghur Institute of Europe. Sherpa, with its skeleton staff of two lawyers and a bunch of volunteers, and with extremely limited funding, mainly provided by the New York-based Open Society Justice Initiative,



Chinese garment factory workers

is currently pursuing the French bank BNP Paribas and the Lafarge Holcim concrete company (also French) for alleged corruption.

The issue with the Uyghurs is further complicated by the United States wanting to retain China as an ally on the Security Council because of its own problems with terrorists and its often-clumsy handling of international affairs. As for the Uyghur labour camps, these are denied by Beijing, which insists they're part of a programme of 'vocational training centres', set up to create distance between the Uyghurs themselves and those intent on supporting Islam and separatism, following various attacks that have been – rightly or wrongly – attributed to them.

The various associations with which Glucksmann is associated, together with a Uyghur survivor of the camps, lodged the complaint with the Paris prosecutor's office, accusing the Chinese authorities of "concealment of reduction in servitude" (whatever that means in other than legal terms), "concealment of trafficking in human beings" and, perhaps most ominously, of "concealment of genocide". The request for an official investigation of the various accusations was made against a French company (but with strong Japanese connections) because of links with manufacturers the campaigners think may (and may not, of course) have used forced labour, such as Zara, Bershka and including firms like Skechers. Britain is said to have been especially keen to import products from Xinjiang in recent months: Between 2019 and 2020, imports to Britain from Xinjiang rose by 192%, despite concerns that

had been raised over forced labour. Beijing sees criticisms of its labour policies as "interfering in China's internal affairs", seemingly without spotting the irony of describing trade relations with the rest of the world as "internal". Glucksmann sees this request for action by himself and his allies as "a crucial step" in support of the Uyghurs. Young people in France are responding by challenging the brands accused of being involved in modern slavery.

WHEN THEM COTTON FIELDS GET ROTTEN...

A lot of the cotton that goes into such popular garments as T-shirts comes from forced Uyghur labour. It's the first time, it has been pointed out, that American citizens have worn cotton products that are the product of slavery since the deep American south produced it in antebellum America.

It's been claimed that as much as 20% of all cotton products on the market during the American civil war (1861-18965) were produced by slave labour, almost all of it provided by African slaves. Union Army soldiers put an end to it back then, when the Civil War ended (some Trump supporters have bemoaned the Union victory on-line but have not yet tried to use the Trump trick of claiming the Confederacy were the real winners but that they had been cheated of victory in some mysterious way), but that's not what's happening in China.

There, Uyghurs are forced to work, their children are separated from them forcibly and many Uyghur women have been sterilised to prevent further reproduction. When the writer George Orwell wrote 1984 (back in 1948) he had no idea how awful the reality of total subjugation could become. The

existence of the Internet has made it much, much easier for tyrannical regimes to exercise total control.

Let's take a look at Xinjiang, the Uyghur homeland, although it's not what the Uyghurs themselves call it. For them it will always be East Turkistan, but the Han Chinese call it Xinjiang (which apparently means "old land now returned"), so, for the sake of argument, I shall do the same. Some 11-million people live there and their Chinese rulers say they're "not sufficiently Chinese". They may have an ancient culture with ancient traditions, their own religious faith, language, and literature, but Beijing portrays them all as Al Qaeda terrorists. Extra-judicial arrests are commonplace, based on race, ethnicity and religion, just like the arrests of Jews and Roma in Hitler's Germany. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 have served the Chinese government's purposes well, tarring all the Uyghurs with the same "anti-Chinese terrorist" brush. The system is likely to continue because it's good for China's economy, in which cotton is described as "white gold"; it's of enormous value, even if other natural resources are also in ample supply.

Paying its workers would presumably impact on the profits. In Britain and other parts of the world, pressure groups are active (arguably not active enough) in trying to get governments to impose a ban on imports in any way linked with forced labour. As for Xinjiang itself, it's a landlocked "autonomous" region in the North West of China that is able to exercise very little true autonomy. Its capital is Ürümqi but in reality it is wholly run from and for Beijing. It's a big place, covering almost 1.7-million square kilometres and with a history stretching back some 2,500 years,



Uyghur Muslims forced to pick cotton



© Google Earth

A Tier 3 detention centre in Dabancheng, Urumqi with watchtowers and interior fencing and an external wall

East Turkestan is a long-established entity. However, its rich resources of oil, minerals and especially natural gas make it extremely valuable to Beijing, which is why the Chinese government is so determined to come down hard on suspected separatists. That's why Glucksmann is taking such a strong interest in the injustices being meted out there.

Politicians in the West are increasingly speaking out against the treatment of the Uyghurs, with Raphaël Glucksmann at the forefront, earning him a mention in Nury Turkel's book, "No Escape". Glucksmann wrote on the Archyde website: "It is the largest mass internment in the world today. Uyghurs are deported, not for what they do, but for who they are. The Chinese regime is eradicating an identity and enslaving millions of human beings, transforming them into organ banks, in fact "human material", as Stalin said. So, yes, that falls within the international criteria to qualify as genocide, with, in particular, the systematic sterilization of women, instrument of disappearance of a people. It is the current crime against humanity that comes closest to the



© Wikipedia

Raphaël Glucksmann

genocides perpetrated in the mid-twentieth century. It takes place in deafening silence." So did Hitler's attempted eradication of Jews and Roma back in the 1930s. It wasn't for them that Britain went to war with Germany.

Why does the rest of the world stay mute in the face of such horrors? Glucksmann says it's because of fear of Chinese power and through indifference. People don't know enough or care enough about the Uyghurs to do anything (or even say anything) about it. "European leaders have not had a word to condemn this crime since 2016. Nor have the leaders of Muslim countries, while the Uyghurs are targeted as Muslims: wishing a 'good Eid' or reading the Koran is enough to get them deported. This silence kills." Ask the many thousands of victims of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau and Buchenwald. But you can't, of course, Hitler's brutal policies killed most of them.

Glucksmann and others try tirelessly to raise and maintain awareness of what China is doing to the Uyghurs. Whatever Xi Jinping may say (and hope), the issue is not about to go away. The European Parliament has adopted a resolution saying that what China is doing to the mostly Muslim, Turkic-speaking indigenous ethnic groups, like Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and others in the Xinjiang region, amounts to "crimes against humanity" and holds a "serious risk of genocide." One of those drafting this resolution was Glucksmann and it was approved in a vote at the European Parliament on June 9, 2022. The resolution condemned "in the strongest possible terms" China's treatment of the Uyghur peoples and other indigenous groups in the northwestern region. But it's only words, of course, as Shakespeare said in his little-performed play, Troilus and Cressida: "Words pay no debts. Give her deeds: but she'll bereave you o' the deeds, too, if she call your activity in question."

Where attitudes to trading in the very goods produced by China's Muslim slave-labour seem ambivalent at best, it would be true indeed to point out that: "Talk is cheap." China has even built crematoria to destroy the evidence of their crimes when one of their



© Wikipedia

A protest against the oppression of the Uyghur people in Australia

"students" (for which read 'prisoners') dies. The last time I saw the results of such things was as Auschwitz. The human race never learns, especially where profit is involved. It's hard to see how Xi Jinping can square his actions against the Uyghur people with the precepts of Marxism, in which all people are equal. The human race has known that inequality is not right for a very long time. It was the Greek philosopher Herodotus who said: "It is clear that not in one thing alone, but in many ways equality and freedom of speech are a good thing." Try convincing Xi Jinping of that.

THE BUCK STOPS HERE... OR MAYBE THERE?

The issue has certainly stirred up the policy-makers of the EU. It's a question of whether or not the EU will pass legislation imposing a complete trade ban, something the United States has already done. Ironically, it was when he was in the White House that Donald Trump imposed the first ban. The EU could choose to go for a weaker measure instead, imposing greater "due diligence" rules on companies, shifting the onus for compliance onto the companies engaged in the commerce. It would mean more bureaucracy and more work for companies trading with China but it would ease the burden on EU officials and customs officers. Raphaël Glucksmann has been running a social media campaign in favour of an import ban for goods from Xinjiang and claims that the ban cannot be squeezed into the new upcoming due diligence rules. He wants a separate far-reaching trade law that would be policed by the EU's Trade Commissioner, Valdis Dombrovskis.



EU's Trade Commissioner, Valdis Dombrovskis

"I know the existing discussion in the Commission," he told Politico magazine, "And I cannot say strongly enough how opposed I am to the idea of adding the ban to the due diligence directive. It would postpone the enforcement of the ban and make the due diligence directive more complicated than it is already." Glucksmann explained to the magazine why he is so strongly opposed to the idea: "Due diligence focuses on companies; the ban focuses on products and has to be enforced as a trade regulation. Commissioner Dombrovskis should take the lead and act quickly." Glucksmann has made it clear before that what is needed, in his view, is tough, unyielding and unambivalent legislation, policed by customs officers and police.

The Uyghur people have expressed their gratitude to Glucksmann for his work in bringing the issue to public attention. "Mr. Glucksmann's efforts as an MEP in the European Parliament have been crucial to advance the agenda to promote Uyghur human rights in the European Union, and amplify Uyghur voices," the World

Uyghur Congress told me. "His work has been particularly impactful with regards to Uyghur forced labour. Mr. Glucksmann has been a driving force behind mandatory EU human rights due diligence legislation, as well as the upcoming EU mechanism to ban the imports of forced labour products." The Congress credited Glucksmann with making a serious difference to public attitudes. "Due to his efforts, the EP has always taken a very strong stance on these issues. On a national level in France as well, Mr. Glucksmann has made a real impact by informing his large following on social media, and creating a grassroots movement to campaign for Uyghur rights. The Uyghur people are beyond grateful for Mr. Glucksmann's support." So say the World Uyghur Congress; Commissioner Dombrovskis seems less enthusiastic. His department has a reputation for being more "pro-Chinese" than others. Up to now, at least. His department is even said to have chosen to ignore reports of mass sterilizations in Xinjiang to secure an investment agreement with Beijing.

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen would like to ban goods made by forced labour but nobody seems clear as to who should impose such a ban. A total ban would mean that the EU was following in the footsteps of the United States. The "due diligence" measures would shift responsibility onto commercial companies. It also shifts the focus onto individual companies operating individual trade deals, as opposed an all-out ban. The system proposed would mean that some items produced by forced labour could still find their way into the supply chain unnoticed. In the old French expression, one needs to have "le

courage de son opinion" – the courage of one's convictions. It's not easy when other people's jobs and businesses may depend on the outcome.



A Nike made in China label

Glucksmann has said that the reason so few people are aware of China's actions in Xinjiang is that they (understandably, perhaps) fear China's power: don't pick on the bully in the school playground because he's bigger, tougher and more ruthless than you are, and you might get hurt. In China's case, that most probably means "hurt in the pocket". Vogue Business reported that: "For Raphaël Glucksmann, vice-chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament (or DROI Committee), the only solution is to hold companies legally responsible for any form of violation of human rights in their value chain, including violations perpetrated by their suppliers, subsidiaries and subsidiary contractors." The article went on to say: "Eighty-two well-known international brands, including Adidas, Lacoste, Nike and Zara, were linked, directly and indirectly, to Chinese factories that allegedly used forced labour earlier this year. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute report alleged 80,000 Uighurs had been deported to work in factories in the last two years "under conditions that strongly forced labour".

PROFIT, LOSS, AND INTERNMENT

Vogue Business, itself linked to the fashion industry but keen to 'clean it up', also contacted other big names. "Of the brands that responded to a request for comment, Gap, H&M, Ralph Lauren and Uniqlo denied sourcing garments from or working with manufacturers in Xinjiang," it reported. "A&F Co. says it believes



German Defence Minister, Ursula von der Leyen reviewing a guard of honour during a visit to Beijing, October 22, 2018



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MEP Raphaël Glucksmann and Taiwanese President Tsai during a visit in Taiwan in November 2021

it does not work with any factories listed in the report. Nike said it does not source products or components directly from Xinjiang and doesn't use textiles or spun yarn from the region. Cerruti 1881 said it has never used the Uyghur minority forced labour directly or indirectly. 'L Brands' said it cut ties with one supplier in Xinjiang earlier this year. PVH said that since January 2019 the company and its licensees are prohibited from producing finished goods in the region. Jack & Jones is increasing focus on due diligence procedures in tier 3 and 4 production in the province. Lacoste said specialist auditing firms found no non-compliance among its suppliers in China. Puma said that only one of the two manufacturers associated with the company by the report works, indirectly, for Puma and there is no evidence of any form of forced labour in its factory. Zara said it does not have commercial relations with any factory in Xinjiang. Zegna said none of the companies named in the report is a supplier to Zegna, but that one of the companies purchases fabrics from them. Adidas, Fila, Li-Ning and Skechers didn't reply to a request for comment at the time of publication." However, in Nury Turkel's book, "top brands such as Adidas, H&M and Nike have been identified as having used cotton from Xinjiang", according to a report called "Global supply chains, forced labour and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region", presented to the Congressional Executive Committee on China in a report from March, 2020.

Glucksmann is now working on a legislative initiative to make human rights and environmental due diligence mandatory for companies throughout their entire supply chain, based on a duty of care, "which is a

legal obligation," says the report, "to adhere to a standard of reasonable care. In effect, a European parent company will be legally liable for failure of due diligence not only in its owned operations, but on all levels of the supply chain beyond first-tier suppliers and no matter where they are in the world. While details are still sketchy, the legislation could also require the burden of proof in reverse (which means that the defendant will have to prove its innocence as opposed to the prosecutor having to prove their culpability) and address all human rights, not only severe violations. American companies that don't comply will be taxed."

All of this doesn't necessarily make Glucksmann popular everywhere. He has had his election poster from May of this year defaced with anti-Semitic slogans, writing the word "Jew" on his forehead and defacing his picture. Glucksmann said he wanted to go on fighting this kind of brainless hatred, although he admitted that he didn't expect it ever to disappear completely. "Regardless of the minority that the perpetrators intend to attack, we will never lower our heads and we will continue to persecute the hatred," he wrote, without specifying in which



Reinhard Butikofer, member of the German Greens, and currently Chair of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with China

city or even when the posters were discovered. We appear to be stuck with the kind of people who simply enjoy hating others. Glucksmann clearly isn't racist or stupid, which is partly why he found his name on a Chinese list of people they've sanctioned. With the Beijing regime, no arguing nor disagreement is permitted.

It's a somewhat bizarre and arcane list that probably only makes much sense to members of the Chinese government, who are notoriously inscrutable. The sanctions were in direct response to a similar action by the EU over the alleged human rights abuses in the Xinjiang region. It's the first time that the EU has sanctioned the People's Republic in more than thirty years. The measures Brussels has imposed are primarily aimed at four Chinese officials and one entity, who it accuses of human rights violations of the Uyghur minority, including arbitrary detentions, torture and forced political indoctrination, almost always in one of the concentration camps China has erected to hold its Uyghur prisoners (it still calls them "training camps"). Needless to say, China fervently denies the allegations. "This move, based on nothing but lies and disinformation," China's foreign ministry said after the EU sanctions were announced, "disregards and distorts facts, grossly interferes in China's internal affairs, flagrantly breaches international law and basic norms governing international relations, and severely undermines China-EU relations." That may well be true, but it appears to be unavoidable. Other countries must simply toe Beijing's line to keep in with China but Xi Jinping can hardly act surprised when that doesn't work. Oh, and I fail to see how it "breaches international law", too.

As for those named by Beijing for 'punishment', they were five members of the European Parliament. In addition to Raphaël Glucksmann, who chairs the parliament's special committee on foreign interference in democratic processes, there were also: Reinhard Butikofer (Germany, Greens), currently the chair of the parliament's delegation for relations with China; Michael Gahler (Germany, EPP), who acts as the spokesman of the European People Party (EPP) on foreign affairs; and Ilhan Kyuchuk (Bulgaria, Renew Europe) and Miriam



Pictures from the « The Xinjiang Police Files » a cache of data hacked from police computer servers in the region and passed to the BBC show what appear to be drills in a Uyghur re-education camp

Lexmann (Slovakia, EPP) who are both members of the foreign affairs committee.

Three members of national parliaments were also singled out: Sjoerd Wiemer Sjoerdsma of the Dutch Parliament, Samuel Cogolati of the Belgian Federal Parliament and Dovile Sakaliene of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. What they all have in common is that they have had a part in resolutions in which the situation in Xinjiang was described as "genocide"; not a word that finds favour in Beijing. Additionally, the students Adrian Zenz, from Germany, and Björn Jerdén, from Sweden, who are specialising in China studies, were also named.

The European entities targeted by China are: the Political and Security Committee of the Council of the European Union, the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament, the Mercator Institute for China Studies in Germany, and the Alliance of Democracies Foundation in Denmark. "The individuals concerned, and their families," the Chinese ministry announced, "are prohibited from entering the mainland, Hong Kong and Macao of China. They and companies and institutions associated with them are also restricted from doing business

with China," the ministry said. In terms of retaliation, the EU went further than just Chinese figures and groups. In total, ministers listed 11 people and four entities allegedly responsible for serious human rights violations in China, North Korea, Libya, Russia, South Sudan and Eritrea. They also targeted 11 Myanmar officials.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The last time the European Union imposed sanctions against China came after the vicious response to a harmless demonstration in Tiananmen Square, in which it's believed some 10,000 were killed. The new raft of measures is aimed at four Chinese officials and one entity believed to have been involved in alleged human rights violations of the Uyghur Muslim minority. The international community has for months alleged that serious abuses, such as mass arbitrary detention, torture and forced political indoctrination, are taking place in concentration camps located in the Xinjiang autonomous region. The sanctions the EU placed on China were part of a package agreed unanimously by EU foreign affairs ministers at a meeting in Brussels. The meeting included an informal exchange with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, and specific debates on EU-Turkey relations and the Western Balkans.

The measures became official shortly after they were published in the

Official Journal of the European Union. They include a visa ban and an asset freeze in the EU, while people and entities inside the Union are prohibited from providing funds, directly or indirectly, to the named individuals. The penalties come from a new mechanism called the EU Magnitsky Act, which was adopted in December 2021 and has already been used to punish four senior Russian officials involved in legal proceedings against Russian opponent Alexei Navalny. In the case of China, EU ministers selected four individuals who, in their view, are directly involved in the alleged human rights violations taking place in Xinjiang.

Beijing seems to like to recategorize its actions according to what suits it at that moment. Truth and honesty have no place in China's actions or opinions, of course. What was clearly an "international" affair one day can turn into an "internal" matter the next. Somebody must one day explain to Xi Jinping that the world doesn't work that way. Perhaps Xi Jinping should recall an old Chinese proverb (there are thousands of them to choose from) as he tightens his noose around the people of Xinjiang: "The only thing that was missing at the rich man's funeral was mourners." Apart from his tame sycophants, who do you think would mourn him? Probably not, on balance, Raphaël Glucksmann.

Jim Gibbons



The EU Magnitsky Act named after Russian whistleblower Sergei Magnitsky, who died in 2009 while in custody after being arrested and tortured by officers of the Russian Ministry of the Interior. The first US Magnitsky Act sanctioned those responsible for Magnitsky's death or those persecuting other Russian whistleblowers, but the subsequent legislation built a global sanctions campaign allowing the United States to target human rights abusers and corrupt actors globally

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© Janet and Allan Ahlberg

BURGLAR BILL, PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA

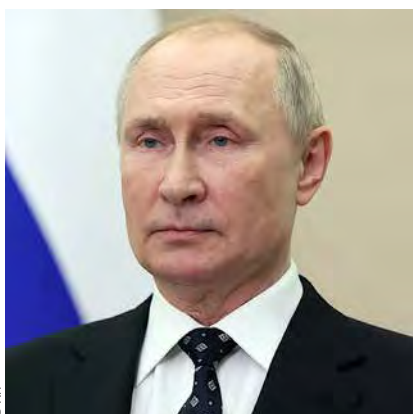
Russia's larcenous leader steals whatever he can

Back in 1977, the children's story book writers, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, wrote a lovely little story about Burglar Bill, a night time predator on his neighbours who had stolen everything he considers to be his, including his own bed. Being an Ahlberg book, of course, it all ends happily when somebody leaves him a baby and he then falls for its mother, Burglar Betty. They agree to give up stealing and raise the

baby together, which they do, having given back all the many things they'd stolen. Vladimir Putin has no good intentions at all and shows no signs of giving up blatant theft, certainly not returning his ill-gotten gains. He seems to believe that anything he wants he can simply take. It's a way of thinking more closely associated with real burglars or gangsters, who take what they can carry and damage whatever they can't, to ensure its real owners lose the use of it anyway, as a kind of punishment for having something that can't be carted off by the thieves. It's not an attitude most people associate with a world leader, but Putin is, to put it bluntly, a thief. The Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi, in the 4th century BCE, once said: "steal a hook and be executed. Steal a country and become a marquis." Almost three millennia later, Mao Zedong put it more simply: "Political power comes from the barrel of a gun." It's a philosophy Putin understands; he's a crook.

It's believed that Putin now employs a kind of specialist gang, to identify more accurately what's worth stealing, and to smuggle those items out of Ukraine and into Russia. Russia seems to see the group as a kind of human 'jeweller's loupe' magnifying glass.

Brian Daniels, an anthropologist who works with archaeologists, historians and specialists in digital imaging, is based in a laboratory in Virginia in the United States. He has been monitoring the thefts and deliberate destruction of cultural objects removed by Russians, and he says there is strong evidence that this is part of a deliberate Russian policy, with the thefts so far showing a preference for Scythian gold. Scythian gold is rare, heavy and extremely valuable. Several items made from it, including a great many animal figures and also a solid gold military helmet (at that weight it must have been hell to wear) were on display in Crimea but had been lent to a museum in Amsterdam before



© Nrf

Vladimir Putin



© Allard Pierson Museum

Helmet (Scythian, 900-100 BC). Gold.

the Russian invasion and takeover. There is now a legal dispute as to whether it should be returned, and, if so, to whom. The Russians want it, of course, but it can hardly be returned to its original owners because they no longer exist; Crimea is supposed to be Ukrainian but currently (the Ukrainians hope temporarily) it is not. Daniels told Britain's Observer newspaper: "These items are visually stunning, and there are now so many reports of thefts it is evident that it is a strategy." Daniels told the newspaper that the Ukrainians are keen to set up a list of stolen objects. He's not sure if the Russians are doing it because of the monetary value of what they've taken or if it's an attempt to undermine Ukraine's identity as a separate country by suggesting that everything of value there belongs to Russia. Burglar Bill strikes again!

Daniels is also fearful for the welfare of museum staff who find themselves behind Russian lines. Russia has launched what is the biggest war in Europe since 1945, and it's a war of an imperialist nature. It's been done before: degrade your enemy, steal everything valuable and loot every museum and art gallery you can find. Museum staff are likely to be seized by Russian forces as 'prisoners of war'. Meanwhile, Russia has widened its range of targets for theft. For instance, it has been stealing hazardous materials from a site close to the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, their soldiers using postal services in neighbouring Belarus to get some of the stolen goods home. Voice of America (VOA) has shown photographs from a nuclear laboratory which are alleged to show Russian troops stealing radioactive materials that could be extremely

dangerous if mishandled. Among the stolen goods are radiation dosimeters, safety devices the size and shape of a large coin. If the Russian soldiers are carrying them around it could be dangerous for them: in direct contact with the skin they could cause radiation burns in just two minutes. Not everything the Russians have been stealing is dangerous, just expensive, such as computer servers and memory units, as well as other computer spare parts. They also took construction vehicles, trucks, excavators, crockery and even the mattresses from beds.

WE PLOUGH THE FIELDS AND PLUNDER

When I was very young there used to be an annual harvest festival, which involved singing an appropriate hymn at the daily morning school reception (a kind of semi-religious event with prayers and school announcements). The hymn most commonly used at harvest time was 'We Plough the Fields and Scatter'. In fact, the hymn itself is German in origin, written by the poet Mathias Claudius in 1782 to a tune by Johann A. Schulz, in celebration of gathering in the crops. It became a popular hymn for children in the UK, although living in an area of heavy industry, factory chimneys and smoke, as I did, I saw relatively little of the ploughing or scattering; I enjoyed the resultant baked goods, though. The first verse, in full, goes:

"We plough the fields, and scatter the good seed on the land;
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand:

He sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain,
The breezes and the sunshine, and soft refreshing rain."



© VOA/ Brooke

A John Deere combine harvester threshes and pumps wheat into a waiting truck on a field in Ukraine

It's quite a jolly little hymn, although it's not a literal translation from Claudius' original, and back in junior school we all sang along in a cheerful enough manner, expressing our gratitude for the hard work of the farmers who delve in the soil and plant the seeds, plus their efforts in gathering in the harvest. It's hard work for them, and even we town-bred types appreciated the effort involved in gaining us our daily bread. In America it's mainly sung to mark Thanksgiving, a state festivity held in November each year when many official offices are closed. It has rather less to do directly with the hard work of farmers in sowing and reaping. It certainly is hard work, however, and it's not at all what Russian troops are doing in Ukraine. They're not planting or trying to raise food crops. They're simply stealing the agricultural machinery owned by the Ukrainian farmers and anything else that's moveable and not nailed down upon which they can lay their hands. The words of Claudius' hymn would have to undergo change to reflect reality: "Wir pflügen die Felder und plündern" (we plough the fields and plunder).



Private apartments destroyed by Russian shelling

It's not the worst action of the Russian troops, of course. Shelling and firing missiles at civilian apartment blocks and schools, killing children and families, abusing and murdering any enemy prisoners they can seize comes higher up the list of outrages committed by Putin's killers. Perhaps they would prefer this version of the chorus:

"All God's gifts we've stolen
Will cause you lots of grief.
We don't mind if we shoot you
'Coz Putin is a thief."

The Russians' attempts to steal the latest tractors to take home to Russia,

where the technology is less advanced, have fallen foul of a device designed to encourage legitimate owners to take any that develop faults back to the manufacturer for repair. It's a money-making scheme, of course, because farmers tend to be quite good at making faulty equipment useable, so John Deere fitted theirs with a device linked to their "Connected Support" programme.

It was a very unpopular idea at the time because its aim was to discourage the repair of this costly equipment in favour of replacement.

However, in the Ukrainian city of Melitopol, some 780 kilometres from Kyiv in the south-west of the country, the Russians stole grain, tractors and harvesting machines worth some €5-million, which they loaded onto transporters to drive roughly 800 kilometres to their destination, only to find they couldn't start them when they got there. John Deere had implemented their remote deactivation technology, using the John Deere facility which also, incidentally, identifies the location of the stolen vehicle. In this case, they had been taken to Chechnya, where the military thieves found they had been remotely deactivated. Russian soldiers have been trying, so far unsuccessfully, to bypass John Deere's deactivation devices and get them working but may be reduced to stripping them down for spare parts that they can sell, possibly only on-line. The theft, then, would not be without gain for the thieves, but it's clearly not what they wanted.

LEPTON LARCENY

The Russians involved seem to have acted in the main like simple vandals, without regard for their own or anyone else's safety. The Director of the state agency that manages the exclusion zone around Chernobyl, Evgen Kramarenko, showed Voice of America (VOA) photographs he claimed had been taken on 5 April, shortly after the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chernobyl following an occupation lasting more than a month and beginning when Russia's invasion began. Among the items taken were dosimeters, safety devices normally provided in the form of a badge which has to be calibrated



State Enterprise "USIE IZOTOP" is being inspected by the IAEA | State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate of Ukraine

using radiation dosimeters. They, in turn, are calibrated using small metallic containers of radioactive material provided by the Ukrainian state enterprise USIE Izotop, which displays a photo of them on its website. Kramarenko told VOA that most of the calibration instruments were stolen, but they would be very dangerous to any Russian soldier carrying one around. Besarab said that they look rather like coins and are therefore harmless to anyone who doesn't know what they are. "If a person comes into direct contact with them" Besarab told VOA, "these kinds of instruments could cause radiation burns to the skin in as little as two minutes."

But Russian looting didn't end there. According to Karamenko, the Russians also stole construction vehicles, including trucks and excavators, without explaining what they wanted them for. VOA also discovered that the Russians stole tableware and even mattresses. Photographs showed Russian troops who'd been pulled back to Belarus, an ally of Russia, using a Belarusian domestic delivery company, CDEK, at various times to send some of the items they'd looted in Ukraine back to private homes in Russia. Initially the footage came from CDEK's own live-stream, but because of public outrage, the feed was taken down until after the deliveries set off. Then it was restored. The goods being sent were seen to be, in the main, mundane household goods but their transportation to addresses inside Russia seems to have been conducted with almost military precision. Among the items seen to be en route to Russia were a video card, an electric scooter, bottles of alcohol

and a car battery. After the video of the thefts became public, there were calls for the Russian troops involved to be labelled "marauders" and for them to face trial. Looting has long been practised in military engagements, so we can hardly be surprised, although this appears to have been unusually blatant. And that's not all: because of soaring electricity prices, Kosovo can no longer afford to import electricity and consumers there have been told that they will only be allowed six hours of power at a time, broken up with two-hour long breaks, according to its energy distribution company, KEDS. Again, it's all because of Russian aggression, which risks plunging the country into shortages and freezing temperatures this winter. However, there is hope of avoiding that. According to the energy ministry in Kosovo, planned power cuts are being cancelled because Kosovo has made a deal to obtain electricity from neighbouring Albania. The only worry is that Albania relies on hydro power and with a drought at present, it may not be a long-lasting replacement.



Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol destroyed by Russian bombing

STEALING STEEL AND EATING IT?

Russia's looting in Ukraine is seen by other trading countries as outrageous. For example, it's believed that Russia is stealing around €600-million of steel that – on paper, at least – is really the property of various customers around the world. The boss of Ukraine's largest steel plant at Mariupol, which was the last to fall to a sustained attack by Russian troops, Yuriy Ryzhenkov, told the BBC that the steel was being transferred to Russia and sold on to other customers. The plant, known as Metinvest, lost some 300 employees and 200 of their relatives in the fighting, while thousands of tonnes of steel that had already been paid for is now being sold on internal markets or to client countries in Africa or Asia. "What they are doing is basically looting," Ryzhenkov told the BBC, "They're stealing not only our products, but also some of those products that already belong to the European customers. So basically, they're not only stealing from us, they're stealing from the Europeans as well." Steel already sold to the United Kingdom was part of the shipment stolen by Russia. Ryzhenkov said that his company is documenting as much of the theft as possible with a view to taking legal action at a future date. "At some point in time, the Russians will be facing not only the international courts, but also the criminal courts. And we will be going after them with anything we have."

To be perfectly honest, the chances of success through the courts are very slim indeed. Professor Marko Milanovich, an international law expert at the University of Reading, was not hopeful of success. "Whichever legal options Metinvest chooses," he admitted, "it's a very difficult process and whilst looting is unfortunately quite common in conflicts, suing the looting state and obtaining compensation is very, very rare indeed." He is more hopeful that the symbolic value of labelling Russia a thief would be worth the bother of going through the difficult process. Of course, even if the Russians were forced to pay out compensation (they won't be), nothing can ever compensate for the 300 brave Ukrainians and their 200 relatives



Metinvest's CEO Yuriy Ryzhenkov

who died trying to defend the plant. Money, it seems, counts for more than human life in today's mercenary world, at least to Putin's Russia.

Stories of looting by the Russians date back to the very beginning of the invasion. Video footage posted on social media in February 2022 purport to show Russian soldiers stealing supplies from a supermarket, walking around filling the baskets without paying for anything, and another video appears to show Russian soldiers stealing a safe from a bank in the Kherson region of Ukraine. Russian soldiers are not well-supplied and neither are they well-paid nor well-fed, so looting of basic foodstuffs is, perhaps, inevitable, but it's rather hard to eat a safe. It's true, though, that the contents could buy food, I suppose, if there's any left in the shops that the Russians haven't already stolen.

There may be a day of reckoning, however unlikely that seems at present. One of Moscow's soldiers was even recorded calling his wife and promising her that he would bring her back 'two fur coats and a quantity of high-end kitchen appliances' that he had stolen. It's possible – perhaps remotely – that the thieves may one day find themselves in court because

Ukrainian intelligence services have hacked the mobile phones of more than 120,000 Russian soldiers, taking a note of all they've boasted of having stolen. Some of the pictures have shown scenes of which the conscripts are unlikely to boast, such as young soldiers (they only earn the equivalent of around €31 a month) stealing chickens and any other edible foodstuffs. It's not the sort of scene that would impress the girls back home. They also steal petrol and civilian vehicles.

But officers have also been known, not uncommonly, to steal their men's rations in order to sell them on or consume them themselves. The Russian troops had been assured that they'd be welcomed in Ukraine for 'saving the country from Nazis', but they could never find any, and they quickly discovered that they were not welcome at all, frequently being pelted with stones and with insults being shouted at them. Some of the Russian military convoys were seen to be made up of looted civilian vehicles, stolen locally. Russian military vehicles have also simply disappeared, stolen by Ukrainian civilians. This is no way to fight a war, although it's a style of warfare that some 18th and 19th century generals would have recognised (apart from the trucks and cars, of course).

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Some traditions of ancient warfare live on, unfortunately. Such as widespread looting of civilian homes, for instance. Following the Ukrainian victory in the Battle for Kyiv, and the subsequent Russian retreat, returning civilians have discovered their homes



Russian tank destroyed by Ukrainian forces in Mariupol



Gilgamesh, king of the city-state of Uruk, Sumer

stripped almost bare – with everything from computers and TVs to perfume, vacuum cleaners, curtains, and even underwear missing. As the Langley Advance Times reports: “Since at least the Bronze Age if not before, the typical soldier on the march has asked himself two key questions: Is it nailed down, and can it be pried loose?” In fact, in many cases in history, the war was mainly fought for loot. “Some of the earliest epics and legends are about war as a form of organized theft,” the Langley Advance Times explains, citing the case of one particular legend. “Ireland’s The Tain is also known as The Cattle Raid of Cooley, and in The Epic of Gilgamesh, the ancient king of Uruk fought a monster to gain access to valuable cedar wood.”

One assumes that the monster in this case was the enemy army whose valuable cedar wood it really was. According to the University of Alabama’s ‘Ancient Art’ website: “Today looting exists for



The Russian Wagner Group has recruited, trained and sent private military operatives to Ukraine to help the Russian Army. They are well known for their violence, torture, looting of natural resources and intimidation of civilians in violation of international law, including international human rights law.

many reasons, the primary reasons being a means to fund political campaigns and wars and the demand of artifacts for public and private collections. Both of these situations are fuelled completely by the high monetary value of the looted items.” In other words, an army fights a war primarily to steal enough goods to fund the next war. We’ve tended to forget this since the late 18th century, but it’s still true, especially, it seems, in cash-strapped and amoral Russia. These days, looting is banned under UN law and is regarded as a war crime, but it goes on and has hardly diminished. The goods that count as looting can be regarded as booty, plunder, the spoils of war, or pillage. In ancient times, they often included the defeated peoples, taken as slaves, or their wives, taken as concubines, and their children, the males of whom often became eunuchs. Nobody sensible ever said war was nice. Showing off your captured wealth was considered normal. Genghis Khan once stated that his greatest happiness was: “*to scatter your enemy and drive him before you; to see his cities reduced to ashes. To see those who love him shrouded and in tears. And to gather to your bosom his wives and daughters.*” I wouldn’t mind betting that of that list of benefits he foresees it’s the last one that appealed most strongly to him.

Shakespeare mentions looting, too, albeit in a roundabout way, thus proving it was common practice in the 16th century, when he was writing. In Henry V, for instance, one of the comic characters, Bardolph, is sentenced to death for stealing a religious necklace, called a ‘pax,’ designed for its wearer to kiss as a sign of devotion. Another of the comic characters, ‘Aunchient’ (Ancient) Pistol, pleads for his life, arguing that the item stolen was of too little worth to merit execution. Another character, Fluellen, disagrees, saying:

(if) “he were my brother, I would desire the duke to use his good pleasure, and put him to execution; for discipline ought to be used.”

What he would say about the theft of high-tech agricultural machinery we can only guess at, but clearly Putin and his officers see no sin in purloining the wealth of one’s enemies along with things belonging to their friends and allies; discipline against looting, urged by Shakespeare, doesn’t matter a jot to Putin, other than to tell his troops to



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu attending a meeting in Damascus, Syria,

steal more and of ever-greater value. From being president of a large and important country, Putin has turned himself into a Mafia don, counting the loot he’s amassed through outright theft like a common criminal.

Putin changes his point of view according to the audience he’s addressing. He makes few foreign visits these days because most countries wouldn’t welcome him and fear that showing friendship towards him might damage their own standing in the world. On his visit to Tehran, for instance, he talked up Russia’s importance in resolving the crisis in Syria. On a visit to Iraq, he said that: “The Syrian crisis can only be resolved by political and diplomatic means, by strictly adhering to the basic principles of the respect of sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.”

This hardly sounds like justification for his all-out assault on Ukraine. Syria, however, has a pro-Russian president, Bashar al-Assad, while in Iran, the country’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, is one of the few who has backed Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, arguing that without it NATO would have shown no restraint in seeking to spread its influence. Khamenei said that if NATO’s expansion hadn’t been halted there, the West would have used Crimea as an excuse to start a war somewhere else.

The support of Bashar al-Assad and Khamenei for Putin’s acts of theft, however, is a serious deviation from the teachings in the Qur’an. Islam mentions what is called *hudood* (the plural of *hadd*) as the limits set by Allah beyond which a true Muslim should not go. Those who overstep the limits can expect to be punished, although the actual punishments are not specified.

However, in some versions the *hadd* punishment for theft is the amputation of a hand. To be guilty of theft, “one must be a competent adult and have the mental intention to steal”, according to the True Islam website. Putin qualifies on both counts, of course. The site actually does a very good job of explaining what are strict rules and what are just a set of guidelines. As for explaining theft, “The act must consist of the removal by stealth of a certain kind of item of a minimum value that is owned by another person,” the site says.



© Wikimedia

Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran

How Khamenei squares his support for Russian looting with his conscience is his affair. According to the Qur'an, (5:38) “[As for] the thief, the male and the female, amputate their hands in recompense for what they earned [i.e. committed] as a deterrent [punishment] from Allah. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.” That might seem like an extreme punishment for Putin, but if he seeks closer relations with Islamic leaders, shouldn't he also observe Islamic laws? And his troops have done worse to Ukrainian civilians. But on the Islamweb.net website, a theft meriting amputation should have been done in a sneaky way and the owner must have asked for it back. In the smoke of war, perhaps the real owners forgot or were afraid to ask the Russians to return the stolen items. In any case, back in the days of the crusades, the “holy wars” between Christians and Muslims, looting was standard practice. In 1429, some 18,000 Islamic soldiers attacked Malta, looting any towns they came across, while 3,000 Maltese civilians were taken as prisoners into a life of slavery, even though the Saracen invasion was ultimately unsuccessful. Perhaps they didn't believe the rules of *hudood* applied to them.

RING OUT THE BIG GUNS

The scholar and military historian Lucian Staiano-Daniels has written that Russia did not want to fight the war in the way it has been compelled to do, albeit through its own ineptitude. Putin clearly believed, following his virtually unopposed seizure of Crimea, that his forces could make a simple dash to grab Kyiv and that would be the end. His soldiers were told that they'd be welcomed for “rescuing” the citizens from a brutal Nazi regime, even though such a government didn't exist. Instead of the knock-down walkover Putin had expected, he found citizens standing up to him, even throwing themselves under the wheels of the Russian armoured columns to slow their progress.

The Russian troops were forced to fall back on sieges of such cities as Mariupol in the east of the country. Alongside this tactic, Staiano-Daniels points out that Russia has resorted to a style of fighting Russia has used for centuries: pounding cities with massed heavy artillery. Such weapons have been popular among Russian generals since the 18th century, when Russian Field Marshal Peter Ivanovich Shuvalov developed various types of new cannon that allowed him to outgun rivals such as Prussia, while regulations adopted during the reign of Elizabeth Petrovna, Staiano-Daniels says, recommended concentrating them in combinations of 16 or even 24: a wall of explosive fire against the enemy.

Russia was accused of failing to modernise its artillery sufficiently after achieving what Staiano-Daniels calls “technological and theoretical” excellence during the first half of the 19th century, but it remained creative in its use of big guns. Staiano-Daniels writes on the Foreign Policy website that Russians seem to have a genuine affection for, even, perhaps, a devotion to their artillery, and there's a reason for that. After Russia lost a battle at Narva, in what is now Estonia, when a Swedish relief army under Charles XII of Sweden defeated a Russian siege force three to four times its size, such was the shame in Russian eyes that the late-17th century Czar, Peter the Great, ordered every church in the country to give up some of their bells to be melted down and cast into cannon, which are made using similar techniques and often in the same workshops. This was to replace



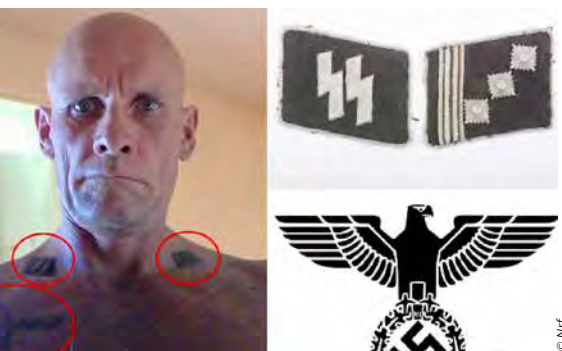
Destroyed Russian tanks in Ukraine

those the Swedes had successfully seized, and that is why, Staiano-Daniels suggests, Russian cannon crews accord a special status to their guns and defend them to the death, as if they were holy relics. Perhaps they were once.

In any case, the love for artillery lives on; the Red Army was built around the artillery it used during the Second World War. The historian Antony Beevor has argued that invasions over many centuries have convinced the Russians that they're surrounded by enemies and the victory over Hitler has changed the meaning of the word “Nazi” in Russian minds (they generally take all the credit for defeating Hitler). Now ‘Nazi’ simply means “opponent of Russia”. On that definition, perhaps Putin was justified (in a way) in describing Ukraine as being “full of Nazis”; most of its citizens have no time for Putin nor for his autocratic government. In more recent conflicts, Russia has again relied on heavy artillery. That's why it shelled Grozny in 1999 and Aleppo in 2016. Beevor points out that it proves that Russian military tactics haven't advanced: between 2000 and 2016, Russia used its artillery at the heart of its approach to the Chechen wars, the war in Syria and in earlier Ukrainian wars. Staiano-Daniels believes it's because of Moscow's unwillingness to



The Soviet-designed Grad multiple rocket launchers are designed to fire a salvo of powerful rockets. Their use against populated areas inevitably causes heavy casualties and major damage to civilian infrastructure because their accuracy is limited



Dmitry Utkin (seen here with Nazi tattoos) who chose "Wagner" as his nom-de-guerre in honour of Adolf Hitler's favourite composer is the purported founder and commander of The Wagner Group. His men have told reporters that they have seen him on the Ukrainian front and in Syria proudly wearing Wehrmacht military caps and helmets on a number of occasions.

invest in manpower; it was the same in the 18th and 19th centuries: if you don't have enough soldiers you'll need more big guns. They are also investing too little in replacing or refurbishing their much-loved artillery, so as the big guns wear out, Russian manufacturing facilities are not well-equipped to replace them. And with firing some 50,000 rounds a day they will wear out. NATO analysts estimate that every Russian gun that fails through over-use is one fewer for Russia to field in battle. It won't be replaced. The Russian forces are known to have used Soviet-era weapons in their current war but they seem not yet to have succeeded in acquiring large-scale Western weaponry.

What they have acquired is a reputation for subhuman barbarism and cruelty, in one recent incident castrating a Ukrainian prisoner of war with a box cutter, filming it and then posting the video on-line. The perpetrators are also believed to have telephoned the victim's wife to tell her what they had done, for no reason other than to cause despair and despondency by drawing her attention to the video. These are clearly not the actions of civilised

human beings. The video footage was taken down, and so was a still photograph posted to replace it. The perpetrator is thought to be a 39-year-old fighter with the pro-Putin Luhansk armed group known as Bryanka-SSSR, whose members have been pictured giving Nazi salutes, which is strange considering that Putin said they were going to Ukraine to fight against Nazis.

The fact is that it no longer has anything at all to do with normal politics and everything to do with Putin's determination to be the biggest fish in the pond, however many millions he has to kill to achieve that aim. The castration, carried out while the victim was held face down, with his attackers then holding his severed genitals up to the camera, is believed to have been the most brutal so far uncovered, although the vicious mistreatment of prisoners and other war crimes are something for which Russia, and especially the Bryanka-SSR group, is well known. Britain's Daily Mail reports that "the battalion commander, Dmitry Pindyurin nicknamed 'Lyuty' ('Ferocious'), was implicated in shootings, looting, extortion and other criminal acts that terrorised the separatist region in 2015. The bodies of 17 victims were discovered in the city of Bryanka, near Alchevsk in the Lugansk region, believed to have been killed by members of the Bryanka-USSR group." So, not only torture and murder but more lootings, too, although it's the group's sheer brutality that will be most remembered, and with loathing. No bravery medals for that bunch!

Russian forces seem keen on stealing and Putin tells them it's OK, apparently. He also tells them what to steal. Whatever wealth Ukraine may have should be Russia's, they're told. A country's heritage is its own

and nobody else's and, although I'm British, I firmly believe that the Elgin Marbles should be returned to Greece. British troops stole them and it's well past time to give them back. But back to the looting in Ukraine. As Russia's invasion began, the director of the Museum of Local History in Melitopol in the south-east of the country, Leila Ibrahimova, arranged for a hoard of gold artefacts from ancient Scythia to be hidden. Just a few weeks later, she was kidnapped and interrogated by Russian troops. They demanded to know where the Scythian gold was but she refused to tell them. The museum's curator, Galina Andriivna Kucher, was then taken at gunpoint to the museum and asked to show a Russian "expert" and various agents where the gold was. She also refused to provide the information. Shortly afterwards, on 30 April, Kucher was abducted from her home and her whereabouts remain unknown.

The Russian forces don't just steal; they insist on their right to take whatever they and their larcenous boss, Putin, say they want. As for the gold artifacts, they surfaced again after being found crated in a cellar and were taken to Donetsk in the Russian-controlled Donbas region. The new director, a Moscow 'plant' called Evgeny Gorlachev, said it was for their "safety" and that the artifacts themselves were not just for the Ukrainians but, as he put it, "of great cultural value for the entire former Soviet Union". I'm not sure Lenin would have liked seeing robbery disguised as respect for Soviet values. It's strange for today's Kremlin to express much interest in the history of the Soviet Union. Putin is certainly no Vladimir Lenin but perhaps bears a passing resemblance at times to Joseph Stalin. He certainly shares the brutality and sheer cruel barbarism, and, like Stalin, seems to lack any sort of morals. Perhaps he, like Peter the Great, loves cannon; he certainly shares a fascination with artillery. If that is the case, Russia deserves a leader of much better calibre.



Security camera footage posted on social media showing Russian soldiers trying to steal a safe in an Ukrainian occupied city

Kingsley Brooks

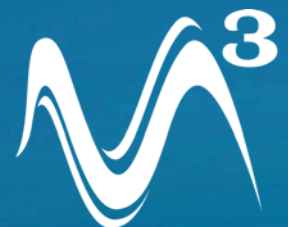


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The President of the Republic of Kosovo Vjosa Osmani, during her official visit to Slovenia, bestowed the Presidential Military Medal to the Slovenian troops, as part of the NATO/KFOR peacekeeping mission in Kosovo

THE (BROKEN) HEART OF SERBIA

Should Kosovans remain excluded from Europe's thriving commercial and political club?

“Kosovo is not a part of Serbia,” said Slobodan Milošević, a former president of Serbia when it was a province of Yugoslavia, “It is the very heart of Serbia.” It may not be wise to follow the opinions of Milošević himself, because he would hardly count as an unbiased witness. And in any case, times have changed, although Milošević was right in saying that it's NOT a part of Serbia. In fact it's now even less a “part of Serbia” that when Milošević said it. For Kosovo is Europe's youngest state, but it's not a part of the European Union, although many observers say it could become one in the foreseeable future. It would have to disentangle itself entirely from the clutches of Serbia and its Russian masters first. Certainly, its current president, Vjosa Osmani thinks it should be in the EU and has argued that point firmly with European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen. With regard to the current dispute over the imposition of Kosovan vehicle registrations, Osmani stressed that what Kosovo is doing is aimed at “fulfilling a

legal requirement”, while Serbia, urged on by Russia, is deliberately stirring up trouble. Osmani wants the entire international community to condemn Serbia's blatant attempts at destabilisation. Osmani is a firm believer in the law, having gained a bachelor's degree in law from Kosovo's University of Pristina, followed by a Master's Degree from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law and later

a doctorate in juridical science. She believes firmly in the law.

Osmani told Von der Leyen in no uncertain terms that the EU should have a clear strategy for integrating the Western Balkans, including Kosovo, of course. Osmani pointed out that Kosovo has already met all the criteria required for liberalising the visa regime and she asked the EU to honour the promises it made to



Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, Croatian President Franjo Tuđman and Bosnian, President Alija Izetbegović at the signing of the Dayton peace accords in 1995. Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González, U.S. President Bill Clinton, French President Jacques Chirac, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and U.K. Prime Minister John Major look on



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Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti

Kosovo. She also asked for the existing EU member states to respect the recommendation about Kosovo made by the Commission. Von der Leyen talked to her about how Kosovo fits into EU's Economic and Investment Plan (EIP), especially with regard to sustainable development, economic growth and the empowerment of women and young people.

They also discussed the vehicle licence plate issue that has caused serious friction in the north of the country, with Serb citizens refusing to use the new plates. Osmani warned Von der Leyen that neighbouring Serbia, backed and encouraged by Russia, is encouraging the problems there with a view to destabilising the entire area, which would be to nobody's benefit, except, perhaps, Serbia and Russia. Osmani has good reason to fear those who would overrun her country; she once admitted that she "can still feel" the barrel of an AK-47 rifle that a soldier thrust into her mouth when her home in Mitrovica was raided by Serb forces. She was a teenager at the time but it's the sort of experience one tends to remember. Serbs still conduct such raids today; one local claimed they were held "to create some kind of fear and tension".

Closer links with the EU for Kosovo are hampered, of course, by the fact that not all EU member states recognise its independence, although Vasilis Maragos of the European Commission has expressed his gratitude for Kosovo's stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, even though it's not obliged to adopt EU positions on foreign policy. He also pledged to help Kosovo over any economic consequences that result. The general feeling in this debate in the European Parliament was that relations between Kosovo and Serbia should be "normalised", but the most recent discussion organised by the EU

to achieve that has ended in failure and there seems little prospect of it being sorted out anytime soon. After the meeting, Josep Borrell, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs, said: "Today, there is no agreement." Borrell told journalists that Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti and Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić would not agree to holding regular talks in a bid to hasten eventual agreement. Basically, it seems as if Serbia is still hopeful of taking back Kosovo altogether.

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

If Kosovo is really the heart of Serbia (as the Serbians have claimed), it's a heart that's in dire need of cardiac surgery. Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia almost a decade after a small war that eventually ended when NATO intervened against the Belgrade-based regime of Milosević. That led to the Kumanovo Agreement, under which all of Milosević's forces had to withdraw from a province that was, in any case, primarily ethnically Albanian, not Serbian. The ethnicity issue there is hugely complicated. Kosovo became the only UN protectorate in Europe. The EU and others poured money into the region to help shore up its independence and to help turn it into a proper democracy. Serbia, meanwhile, viewed and still views Kosovo as part of its own territory, much as Russia sees Ukraine as part of its territory, and strives to keep Kosovo out of such organisations as the United Nations, the EU and Interpol. Kosovo does, however, use the euro as its currency, whatever Vučić may think.

As for Milosević himself, I remember him as a man who liked to laugh, albeit not a man I'd trust, the sort that would be good company in a bar somewhere, probably telling off-colour jokes and enjoying a drink or three.



Officers and men of the German-Croatian Police. c. 1944

He was certainly joking to the small group of journalists from various EU countries of which I was part. Most of the jokes he told were at the expense of Croatian president Franjo Tuđman, who was always eager to stand up for the Croats, even getting himself expelled from the Communist Party for claiming that the Yugoslav authorities had played up the crimes of Croatian Nazis during the Second World War just to discredit them further (even though mere membership of the Nazi party was not something most people would have wanted to boast about by then, even if they had joined because they liked the idea of discipline, rather than mass slaughter). Milosević sought to amuse us journalists and laugh at his jokes, albeit in a somewhat embarrassed way.



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Parliament of Republic of Kosovo

Both men were, of course, Communists, at least in theory. Both men are no longer with us, but Serbia continues in its bid to ensure, at least for the time being, that Kosovo can never join a number of European and international organisations. To obtain a long-stay visa for Belgium (known as a "D" visa), for someone in Kosovo, for instance, it's necessary to apply in Sofia, applicants are told, even though they will need a different visa even to enter Bulgaria in order to apply for one. It makes no sense, although perhaps Franz Kafka, author of *The Trial*, might have understood, or at least sympathised. Serbia has been heading an international campaign to get recognition of Kosovo's status as an independent country reversed by as many countries as possible. Serbia wants Kosovo back under its wing, even though the two countries plainly don't get on and are racially divided. It's all about territories and control,

but the EU hasn't given up, trying to achieve peace and harmony while Russia attempts the opposite. It's a difficult road to peace that Osmani is walking, with many tripwires provided by a war-mongering Moscow.

Kosovo has a parliamentary Assembly comprising 120 members, each elected for a 4-year term. It also has twenty reserved seats, ten for Kosovar Serbs and ten for non-Serb minorities, such as the Roma. Winning a seat is always quite a battle because there are quite a few parties who must cooperate to form coalition governments. All Kosovo's laws have to be passed in the Assembly, which must also ratify treaties, appoint the President and Prime Minister, as well as the justices, and adopt a budget. Currently, it's the left-of-centre anti-establishment Vetevendosje party that's in charge. Osmani began her political career in the centre-right Democratic League of Kosovo party (LDK) and she was instrumental in her country's independence by defending the legality of independence at the International Court of Justice. Osmani clashed with the LDK in protest at it forming a coalition with the rival Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), which it had promised it would never do. She became acting President after the incumbent of the time stepped down and she was chosen to take his place. She formed her own party, called Guxo, in 2021 and aligned it with Vetevendosje. Osmani won a vote to act as President.

So, let's look at why the current row is happening. Throughout the late Middle Ages, a great deal of the Balkans lay within the territory of the Byzantine Empire, described in an old (1939) French history book about Byzance (Byzantium) that I bought on a flea market in Brussels long ago, as: "une

civilisation barbare et merveilleuse, superstitieuse et cruelle: drames politiques, drames amoureux, drames religieux, vengeance, intrigues, coups de force, interminables discussions théologiques, complots d'eunuques, vêtements semés de pierres, palais de marbre incrustés de mosaïques." (a Barbarous and wonderful civilization, superstitious and cruel: political dramas, love dramas, religious dramas, revenge, intrigues, coups de force, endless theological discussions, eunuch plots, clothes strewn with stones, marble palaces inlaid with mosaics).

With such a background we should not, perhaps, be surprised at the more recent history of Kosovo. Byzantium sounds like the thrilling, exciting sort of place in which you would not want to live. It would be like living under that ancient Chinese curse: "may you live in interesting times" And if you did, it probably would not have been for very long.

EMPIRES OF THE PAST

From the 6th century on, the area was home to the South Slav people, which included the Serbs, while in the South-West of the country, an Albanian settlement was developing. As the Byzantine power waned, the region around Kosovo became the centre of a Serbian empire, under the Nemanjić dynasty. Records suggest the territory was overwhelmingly Serb, but with a small Albanian minority. The Britannica website informs us that from the mid-12th to the mid-14th century the region was lavishly endowed with sites sacred to the Serbian Orthodox church, one monastery alone boasting more than a thousand frescoes. Things were not destined to go their way for very long, however, and at the Battle of Kosovo (we'll come back to that), fought



The Sinan Pasha Mosque is an Ottoman mosque in the city of Prizren, Kosovo

near Pristina, an army of Turkey's Ottoman Empire defeated a force of Serbs and their allies. Afterwards, the Turks penetrated well to the west of Constantinople, deep into Balkan Europe, while the Christian world was riven with schism, faction, and corruption which in combination were causing loyal churchgoers to quit their faith or emigrate in droves.

By the middle of the 15th century, the Turks had imposed direct rule over the whole of Serbia, including Kosovo. Many Christian Orthodox Serbs migrated northward or westward to reunite with their co-religionists, although a few converted to Islam. In popular memory, Kosovo came to represent Serbia's "golden age" of greatness. Today, most Kosovans are Muslim, although many are non-practising, while most Kosovan Serbs are Christian Orthodox.

Serbia finally won its independence from the Ottoman Empire in the early 19th century and regained control of Kosovo in 1912, although it lost it three years later, during the First World War. It suffered more than most countries through the war which, of course, had begun with the assassination of Austria-Hungary's Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo, the capital and cultural centre of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was war right on the doorstep, but it was a war Austria-Hungary wanted anyway, as an excuse to get tough with the Serbs, who Vienna thought were getting too ambitious. Many of the Habsburg empire's supposed allies sympathised with the Serbs. The Serb soldiers weren't even issued with boots, despite a savage winter, and some 240,000 soldiers and civilians died of cold, starvation, disease and enemy action as they sought a way out of their troubled country.



In 1918, various military occupations were sorted out and Kosovo was left to become incorporated into the new Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which was later renamed Yugoslavia but was in any case a part of Serbia. Throughout this time, however, the ethnic balance was changing in favour of Albanians, with Prizren emerging as an important centre of Albanian culture and ethnic identity. In the 1980s and the haggling and toing and froing thereafter, Slobodan Milosević wanted to dominate the messy rule, and having gained control of four of Yugoslavia's eight constituent Communist parties, he stripped Kosovo of its autonomy. Kosovo's ethnic Albanians were furious and staged violent protests, so Milosević brought in troops to control them. Milosević wasn't finished, however: he dissolved Kosovo's assembly and closed any schools teaching in the Albanian language. The Kosovars held a referendum (not recognised by the Serbs) and voted overwhelmingly to secede from Serbia and from Yugoslavia.

That is partly why the federal Yugoslav state disintegrated, so that in 1992, a new Yugoslav state was founded comprising only Serbia and Montenegro. The Kosovars adopted a pacifist response under Ibrahim Rugova, organising a network of Albanian language schools and other institutions. They also adopted a policy of non-cooperation. Despite most Kosovar-Albanians being committed to non-violence, a Kosovar Liberation Army (KLA) developed, frequently attacking Serbian police and officials. The Serbs responded with a very violent crackdown that drove hundreds into the arms of the KLA as new recruits. NATO stepped in as international alarm grew, bombing Serb targets. As Albanian refugees started returning, some of the Serbs



Members of the Kosovo Liberation Army turn over their weapons to U.S. Marines in the village of Zegra, Kosovo, on June 30, 1999

began to flee. A UN plan to deliver self-rule (not full independence) was stymied by the Serbian government's opposition. Talks were clearly not getting anywhere and in 2008, Kosovo simply declared its independence. The Serb minority were not happy about it and Kosovo remains a disturbed and not entirely happy province, but with at least some hope of peace one day and a reasonable level of employment. There is, it's claimed, a better level of understanding over religious faith now and Osmani addressed a message of peace to Kosovo's many Muslims to mark their celebration of Eid. "Sacrifices accompany humanity throughout its life journey and that holidays such as Eid bring to the surface interpersonal solidarity," she said. "Our people understand very well what sacrifice means. This holiday finds us in a better position than on the last Eid. Share with others today not only the goods from your tables, spread love, kindness, care, and harmony with everyone today!"

Going back a little further, we should take a look at the Balkan Wars, which were fought from 1912 to 1913 and were really two separate conflicts, rather than one on-going one. They resulted in the Ottoman Empire losing all of its remaining territory in Europe with a couple of very small exceptions: Thrace and the city of Adrianople. Thrace, or in modern Greek Thráki, is explained in the online version of Britannica like this: "To the ancient Greeks it was that part of the Balkans between the River Danube to the north and the Aegean Sea to the south. It is bounded on the east by the Black Sea and by the Sea of Marmara and to the west by mountains east of the Vardar" (in Modern Greek, it's the Axiós or Vardárais River). It's very complicated and it's actually easier to look at where it is on a map, although the map I have in front of me doesn't

really make it clear enough. So, one war down, another to go. This one, the Second Balkan War, began when there was a bitter argument among the Balkan allies – Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria – over how to divide up and share out the spoils. That led to hostilities restarting in 1913 between Bulgaria and the combined forces of Serbia and Greece, who were joined by Romania.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

According to Britannica, the Balkan Wars were caused by the discontent in Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece that resulted from what it refers to as 'disorder' in Macedonia. The Young Turks, in coming to power, imposed not only much-needed reform but also centralised power in Constantinople (Istanbul, as it is now, of course). As Britannica explains, "There were, therefore, no concessions to the Christian nationalities of Macedonia, which consisted not only of Macedonians but also of Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, and Vlachs". Who were the Vlachs?



Postcard issued during 1920s of the Ilinden (Organization) in Sofia, presenting an imagined independent Macedonia

Britannica again: "there was a military class of Vlachs in Serbia and Ottoman Macedonia, made up of Christians who served as auxiliary forces and had the same rights as Muslims, but their origin is not entirely clear". The Vlachs, also called the Vlah, with the alternative names of the Armân and Rămân, are also known as the Aromanioan, Macedoromanian and Macedo-Vlach. That's as hard to pronounce as to understand, it seems. It's amazing that they didn't all develop identity crises with so many different and (to western ears) unpronounceable names by which to identify themselves. They must have needed exceptionally good memories.



Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, Historical President of Kosovo



Postcard issued during the First Balkan War, showing Petar I Karadjordjevic, King of Serbia (born July 11, 1844 – died August 16, 1921)

Meanwhile, the Albanians were developing a growing sense of nationalism, which led to the formation of the Albanian League, which was a breeding ground for opposition to the centralist policies of the Young Turks. Opposition to the Turkish administration came, at least in part, from the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO), founded in 1893. Inevitably, there were clashes which served to exacerbate anti-Turkish feelings as well as a public urge to resist the Turkish rulers who were in charge. The IMRO grew in power and influence, partly by organising armed groups to offer resistance to the Turkish administration.

Meanwhile, the public opinion in Bulgaria was turning towards a tougher stance, thus making the IMRO a big issue in Bulgarian politics. Not to be left out of this toughening anti-Turk feeling, a similar organisation began to operate in Serbia, the Narodna Odbrana, or “national defence”, founded in 1911. The organisation was better known as the Black Hand, although it was officially called “Union or Death”, and it organised Serbian resistance in Macedonia. Britannica reports that the activities of the Black Hand, which had craftily infiltrated Narodna Odbrana, led in 1903 to the formation of an armed group to defend Greek interests, but Greece was just as



Members of the organization - Narodna Odbrana

interested in extending its territory in the Aegean Islands (holidaymakers sunning themselves on those beaches ought, perhaps, to bear in mind that a lot of blood was shed there in the past).

Initially, the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians were often in conflict until in 1911 they realised that their main enemies were the Turks, and they could only achieve the goal of defeating them by working together.

Kosovo seems to have been unusually unlucky in its neighbours and their interactions with one another. For example, in 1908, Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, although they were legally part of the Ottoman Empire, were under the control of the Austro-Hungarians and had been since 1878, when the Congress of Berlin had been held over the course of one summer month, largely to reorganise the states of the Balkan Peninsula. It was necessary following Russia's victory over the Ottoman Empire. The Congress had granted the Austro-Hungarian government the right to occupy the district of Novi Pazar, which separates Montenegro from Serbia. Many of the places caught up in this bizarre game of armed ‘musical chairs’ may seem of little relevance to our modern world, but they provide vivid evidence of just how intolerant they all were of one another. In any case, the occupation meant that those who saw Bosnia and Herzegovina as home could never obtain a longed-for union with Serbia. Serbia, however, was in no position to oppose one of the “great powers” of the time, so it turned its attention to Macedonia. It believed that if it could strike up a successful alliance with Bulgaria, it would make Turkey vulnerable to a combined attack. What hope has Osmani got, given such a history, of cementing a lasting peace there?

Next comes the so-called Agadir Crisis (known in German as *Panthersprung*), which was one of the incidents that would lead towards the First World War. It began when France deployed a large force of troops in the interior of Morocco in April 1911, while Germany sent its gunboat, SMS Panther, to the Moroccan Atlantic port of Agadir.

Germany was not opposed to French expansion but wanted compensation



Light Cruiser SMS Panther (Austria-Hungary)

for itself. With talk of war in the air, the issue was settled the following November: France took over Morocco as a protectorate in exchange for territorial concessions to German Cameroon from the French Congo. It's amazing how the imperialist powers thought they had the right to transfer control of a region, or even a whole country, without reference to the people living there. It was beginning to look increasingly like the prelude to a large-scale war, with Britain and France growing closer to each other and Germany appearing to be a little short of friends. After four years, it began to look short of soldiers, too, with the First World War having claimed some 22-million dead. Semantics can become a deadly business. At the start, we had the Triple Entente, made up of France, Russia and Great Britain. Ranged against them were the members of the Triple Alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. In each case, the member countries promised military assistance to each other in the event of attack, although Italy left the Alliance in 1915, when the legal document linking the partners expired. The Triple Entente didn't end in quite such a bureaucratic way, but then it had never been much of an alliance in the first place, and both French and British politicians expressed relief when Tsar Nicholas II, chose to abdicate. In fact, he had little choice.

Kosovo had been part of the Roman and Byzantine Empires long before the first Serbs migrated there in the 7th century. In mediaeval times, Kosovo became the heart of the Serbian Empire and the site of some architecturally impressive Serbian Orthodox monasteries and churches. In 1389, however, after the Serbs had been defeated in the Battle of Kosovo, the Ottoman Turks took control and during the five centuries of their rule, large numbers of Turks and



Turkish President Erdogan and Kosovo's President Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu

Albanians had settled there. By the end of the 19th century, Albanians had replaced the Serbs as the dominant ethnic group. After the Second World War, the modern boundaries of Kosovo were established and it became an autonomous province of Serbia within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The Albanians were never very happy with this arrangement and in the 1980s, they staged riots and other forms of unrest in a bid to secure Kosovan independence. In response, Serbia revoked Kosovo's autonomy status in 1989 and instituted a new constitution. Kosovo could not accept that, of course, and organised a referendum in 1991, declaring Kosovo independent based on the outcome. The Serbs, who still viewed Kosovo as their heartland, responded with repressive measures against the Kosovar Albanians, starting an insurgency against Serb rule.

KOSOVO TODAY

I really should explain more about Kosovo; where it is and even what it is. It's a self-proclaimed independent country – independent from Serbia, that is – with that independence recognised by the United States and most (but not all) the members of the European Union. This gives Kosovo an unusually ambivalent place in the world for its president, Vjosa Osmani to negotiate. You will not be surprised to note that Serbia doesn't recognise it and nor does Serbia's pal, Russia (nor does China, for some inexplicable reason). Its name, Kosovo, is a corruption of an old Serbian word meaning 'field of blackbirds'. Early in the 20th century, Kosovo was swallowed up by Serbia, which later became part of Yugoslavia. By later in the century, ethnic Albanians, who were predominantly Muslim, overtook in numbers the Eastern Orthodox

Serbs living there, and this gave rise to inter-ethnic tensions and occasional violence.

1998 saw a bid for freedom on the part, mainly, of the country's ethnic Albanians, but it became a major cause célèbre, strongly opposed by Serbia and Montenegro, by now the mere rump of what was once a federal state. NATO conducted a bombing campaign on what had been Yugoslavia and its two member states returned to using their individual names, before splitting into those two separate independent countries. Most (but far from 'all') countries in the world now recognise Kosovo as an independent country, but Serbia still regards it as part of its territory, although with United Nations help and guidance, Kosovo gradually developed the structures it needed to be considered an independent country, including a government in its capital city, Pristina, which is written as Prishtinë in Albania or Priština in Serbian. However, all is not sweetness and light. How could it be? Years of tension over exactly what Kosovo is have left a fragile, uneasy peace and deep concern about Serbia.

Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić has been rumoured to be seeking to establish Russian military bases on Serbian soil. "Serbia does not need



Serbia's President, Aleksandar Vučić

anyone's military base," Vučić said in a television interview about the allegation. "Serbia will maintain its military neutrality. Serbia will build its own alliances. It won't be ashamed of good relations with Russia, China, the US and European Union but it will take care of itself." Vučić has also said he would like to bring back military conscription, which suggests that he's not expecting a wholly peaceful future.

Serbia has also reacted angrily to the news that Kosovo plans to apply for membership of the Council of Europe, an organisation largely based on a belief in human rights and the rule of law, as well as the ability to ensure that member states behave themselves. There's a cultural side to it, too. Kosovo's government says it has already ratified the various conventions to do with "human rights and elementary freedom", so the process could be quite fast, in theory. Serbia, however, is keen to prevent that from happening. Serbia's ally, Russia, was obliged to leave the Council following its invasion of Ukraine.



Warrior armoured personnel carriers of the Irish guards are cheered on as they pass refugees from Brazda camp on the Macedonian-Kosovar border on their way to Pristina in 1999

Unrest has started yet again in Kosovo, this time over car registration plates, with Serbian protestors blocking roads and firing guns in the air because they had been ordered to put Kosovo-issued plates on their vehicles. The objections come from the ethnic Serbs who make up just 6% of the population.

The war that brought Kosovo its independence was bitter and bloody and more than 13,000 people died during it. After it, in 2008, Kosovo declared its independence, although, as I've pointed out, it's not recognised by quite a lot of countries. Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić has pledged



The Serbian Armed Forces

that Kosovo will never be independent, or at least that its independence will never be recognised. Needless to say, Russia and China don't recognise it either, but then neither do 97 other members of the United Nations (at the time of writing), while only 22 out of 27 EU members recognise it, 26 out of 39 NATO members and 31 out of 57 of the member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

For many Serbs and Albanians, the war never ended: it's simply unfinished business. Only Russia and China have gone so far as to block Kosovo from joining the UN. In Kosovo itself, some 50,000 people living in mainly Serb-dominated areas will not use Kosovan-issued licence plates because they still refuse to recognise Kosovan independence. Strangely, Kosovans living in Serbia do have to apply Serb-originated registration plates. The government of Kosovo has accused Serbia of deliberately fomenting trouble, with the support of Russia. Russia blames the unrest (of course) on the Kosovan authorities, but there's little doubt that Russia has a hand in it, too. One MP from Vučić's party has said that Serbia will soon be forced to start the "denazification of the Balkans", borrowing a word from Putin when he sought to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine (the politician apologised for using it later, especially

as it's clearly a lie). Putin has been accused of trying to destabilize Europe by encouraging conflicts. Kosovo's prime minister, Albin Kurti, has said that when Belgrade talks about murder and violence it is talking about itself. Serbia is a much more violent place than Kosovo.

The Serbs, meanwhile, seem to be stirring up fears over an alleged threat of attack by Albanian Kosovans, which President Vjosa Osmani, says is untrue. Vučić even claimed that the authorities in Pristina are preparing to "liquidate Serbs in northern Kosovo" under the guise of a fight against crime. It's demonstrably untrue. The biggest encouragement for involvement in crime is Kosovo's desperate poverty. 33% of its people are unemployed, with youth unemployment standing at almost 60%. As a result, around 45% of the population live below the poverty line, most of them in deprived rural areas, trying to eke out a living (or at least to stay alive) through a kind of subsistence farming on very small plots of land. With few washing facilities, personal hygiene is a problem, too, while ethnic minorities face legal obstacles to make their lives even more difficult. The Roma, for instance, and others like the Ashkali (an Albanian-speaking minority who claim to have originated in Persia – now Iran – in the 4th century BCE, but nobody knows for sure) and Balkan Egyptians have trouble obtaining the documents they need to access such benefits as education, health care and social assistance. Domestic violence is rife, partly because of insufficient police and a fractured court system. Even so, Kosovo has a lower crime rate than most of its neighbours, but there is a desperate housing shortage, with more than one in five households reporting two or more people having to share a room. In a very poor country, the Ashkali are among the poorest. But nobody there is exactly well-off: Kosovo's minimum wage is just €170 per month for those aged 35 to 65. It's only €130 for workers under 35 years of age.

Kosovo, of course, wants to join the EU but that won't happen overnight, despite Osmani's determined diplomatic efforts in Brussels. There are other countries ahead of Kosovo in the queue anyway, and that's far from being the only obstacle. While the

plan to standardise vehicle registration plates in the Albanian style, rather than permitting Serbian versions, has been postponed because of the violence the idea provoked, the issue hasn't really gone away, according to the Politico website. "There's been chatter all over the world about the next war breaking out in Kosovo," said Donika Emini, an expert on the Kosovo-Serbia dynamic who heads a network of civil society groups. "This never happened before – we had crises much worse than the one [last week] and the global audience barely paid attention to them." But, she added, "because of the war in Ukraine, everyone is on high alert." The media may have made more of the tensions than they really merited. Politico reports that only an hour from the barricades, Pristina played host to a huge open-air concert, which suggests the fear is not overwhelming. The EU has been trying – seemingly without much success – to resolve ongoing issues like the vehicle licensing plates and widening the recognition of Kosovo university diplomas. The tensions continue, then, although Russia has not yet, at any rate, decided to settle the issue in its and its friends' interests through a Ukraine-style military invasion. Perhaps it feels overstretched after the unexpectedly fierce opposition to its Ukraine ambitions.

SOME THINGS DON'T CHANGE: LIKE HATRED



The NATO-led KFOR peacekeeping force first entered Kosovo in 1999

Serbia began in 1998 to expel ethnic Albanians and so some 800,000 Albanians were forced from their homes. There were a number of attempts by other countries to mediate what was happening which led, in 1999, to intervention by NATO forces that lasted for three months.



Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Belgrade in September 2021

The Serbs found themselves forced to withdraw their military and police forces from Kosovo and a resolution by the UN Security Council placed Kosovo under a temporary administration. The UN began in late 2005 to try and find a more permanent solution but negotiations held in 2006-2007 drew a blank, although the UN's final report endorsed independence for Kosovo as a solution, albeit one that certainly wouldn't satisfy the Serbs. Indeed, they refused to accept the judgement and took the issue to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). It didn't work the way they had hoped, and the ICJ gave the opinion that Kosovan independence did not break any international law. To Serbia's evident disgust and disapproval, the international community ended Kosovo's period of supervised independence, so that elections could be held. In 2012, Kosovo held its most recent municipal and national elections, choosing a ruling party committed to self-determination and led by Albin Kurti, a former political prisoner, although he had never been a combatant. Serbia still rejects Kosovo's independence and refuses to acknowledge it, trying for all its worth to prevent Kosovo from joining international organisations. However, in the middle of August, Vučić travelled to Brussels to visit the NATO headquarters for talks with Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. In his greeting, Stoltenberg reminded him that: "The EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue is the platform to find a solution that respects the rights of all communities. I welcome the next round of the dialogue taking place tomorrow. I encourage all sides to engage in good faith. To show flexibility. And to be constructive," he



Kosovar Prime Minister Albin Kurti (left) and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles, August 2022

said. They also discussed the invasion of Ukraine which even Vučić seems to have acknowledged as "unprovoked", although neither man suggested a way to end it.

Don't expect a peaceful handshake and mutual agreement, any time soon, or even ever. Prime Minister Albin Kurti's attitude to Serbia has been more confrontational than that of his predecessors (and certainly more than Osmani's), despite Osmani's peace-keeping moves, while Serbia's leader, President Vučić has accused Kosovo of provoking the expulsion of Kosovo Serbs and warning: "If they dare to begin persecuting Serbs then there will be no surrender and Serbia will win." If war should erupt again, whatever Vučić may think, NATO is most likely to have the final word. Unless Russia does. Keeping the lid on this frothing tension would appear to be a near-impossible task. It seems that Serbia and its Russian backer will never consider any sort of peace that leaves Kosovo independent. European Union-led talks between Kosovo and Serbia began in 2011 but have so far failed to achieve any sort of normalisation

in relations. Kosovo is recognised by about 100 states, including the US and most EU countries, but Serbia and its allies – which include Russia – refuse to do so. The EU has put a great deal of effort into restarting dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, and the simple fact that Kurti and Vučić met at all, however unproductively, has been spun as a positive. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said afterwards that "we did not get to an agreement today but that is not the end of the story".

Kosovo signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU in 2015, and the EU named Kosovo as one of six Western Balkan countries that will be able to join the organization "once it meets the criteria to accede" (Osmani claims it already has). That day may still be a long way off and the last thing the EU needs is a member whose closest neighbour doesn't recognise its legitimate existence, and which also poses the constant threat of military action, possibly backed by Russia, to seize it back. Perhaps Vučić should take note of a speech written by William Shakespeare in his play, 'Henry VIII': "Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace, to silence envious tongues." I fear there's not much chance of that. Such a deal of hatred tends to speak more loudly and inevitably drowns out any number of clarion calls for moderation and peace. Vučić would seem more likely to call for war than peace, whatever Osmani may say; we have to hope that not too many people will hear him, even if he borrows Putin's megaphone to say it with.



President Aleksandar Vučić of the Republic of Serbia and Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at NATO Headquarters in May 2022

Robin Crow



THE KREMLIN'S DARK MASTER

Are Putin's oligarchs facing a reckoning?

During the 1990s, the term 'oligarch' referred to a symbol of high social status, and was claimed by the extremely wealthy and men of power in Russia.

However, the Russian oligarchy has evolved considerably over the past 25 years, and today it is mostly associated with the worst period of the presidency of Boris Yeltsin. Many oligarchs have fallen into oblivion, some are in prison, others are living in exile outside Russia, and the most resistant among them have adapted to the new rules, renouncing all political ambition.

The appearance of the capitalist oligarchy of Russia during the Yeltsin era is due to many factors: privatisation methods, disorganisation of industrial

relations, opening up of foreign trade, and relations between economic and financial powers.

However, by arriving on conquered ground in the East, after the demise of the Soviet Union, the West gave rise to all sorts of resentments in Russia, and brought about the conditions that allowed Vladimir Putin to establish his personal power.

And the Russian president is the first culprit of the drama that is unfolding today in Ukraine. But the Russian oligarchs, who helped him come to power - and stay in power - are also responsible.

A distinction should be made between oligarchs and 'ordinary billionaires'; if one can describe them as such. According to Forbes, there are some 123 billionaires in Russia, the vast majority of whom are unknown to the general public; they are only occasionally of interest to the specialised economic press.

The 'oligarchs' on the other hand are all concentrated in the group of the top 20 billionaires who are known to have a certain political influence.



Boris Rotenberg

They are those who are regularly heard by, and sometimes even listened to by the Kremlin... Alisher Usmanov, Viktor Vekselberg, Vagit Alikperov, to name but a few.

There are President Putin's personal friends... Vladimir Potanin, owner of the Norilsk Nickel Corporation and, as of March 2022, the wealthiest man in Russia.

Gennady Timchenko, founder and owner of the private investment firm, Volga Group.

Arkady and Boris Rotenberg, co-owners of the Stroygazmontazh (SGM Group), the largest construction company for gas pipelines and electrical power supply lines in Russia.



Boris Yeltsin



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Oligarch Alisher Usmanov. Usmanov had an estimated net worth of \$19.5 billion and was among the world's 100 wealthiest people

Russian oligarchs, billionaires and wealthy individuals - more than 6000 Russians possess a fortune of more than 150 million dollars - form a group that shares certain values and lifestyles.

Most of them have assets and, above all, holdings in European countries either directly or through front companies, especially in England, where there is the largest concentration of huge Russian fortunes outside Russia.

It can be observed that while the owners of these fabulous fortunes continue to live and work mainly in Russia, their family members, and especially their children, no longer live there at all and are very often acculturated and educated in foreign universities.

To continue the distinction between oligarchs and billionaires, it should be noted that the oligarchs will continue to rally around President Putin, while the billionaires will probably refrain from making political statements and judgments.

If the military operation in Ukraine does not proceed quickly and efficiently enough, and if the war gets bogged down or turns into guerrilla warfare, the billionaires will dissociate themselves from the source of power and gradually move away from a Russian ruling class which they know is totally discredited in the eyes of the West.

The resulting waves of discontent would then begin to spread across the community, together with the temptation, including by certain oligarchs, to ditch Putin.

As a consequence, these people have found themselves in a very delicate position, and even in conflict with the authorities, including the Kremlin, which by extension means with Vladimir Putin himself.

RUSSIAN GAS: A POLITICAL WEAPON

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine or 'special military operation' as President Putin would have it, Western sanctions have hit the Russian economy very hard. The Russian stock market is now trading about 50% below its October peak last year, and investors have already lost large amounts of money this year. Despite Gazprom's record profits - due to soaring gas prices - hundreds of thousands of shareholders were left empty-handed for the first time since 1998. As a result of the war in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin and his team of close advisors apparently decided to withhold the money to compensate for the drop in revenues. Investors were outraged as Gazprom's shares fell by 30%, leading to a trading halt.

Gazprom is the most popular stock among Russian retail investors and according to June figures, Gazprom accounted for 36.5% of shares held by retail investors on the Moscow Stock Exchange. A total of 19.8 million people are affected. So, what could have prompted Putin and his associates to pass such an unpopular measure? In all likelihood, they came to the conclusion that there would be nothing to seize in the second half of the year, so it was now or never.



The Gazprom oil and gas terminal in Novoportovskoye, Russia

The Kremlin probably assumes that the volume of gas exports to Europe will remain low or will be reduced to almost nothing. Putin may have decided to use Gazprom as a political weapon, which would also cause a collapse of exports. Exports to Europe are the most vulnerable part of Gazprom's business, and their loss in the short term would be a major blow. The large number of foreign investors among Gazprom's shareholders (up to 25%) may also have played a role in the government's decision.

Be that as it may, there seems to be a curse around Gazprom. In the past few months, at least eight oligarchs and business executives have died in highly suspicious circumstances. The fact that in one way or another, most of them were linked to Russian energy giants Gazprom and Novatek which are centre stage in the Kremlin's economic and military confrontation with the West over Ukraine, only adds to the suspicion of a conspiracy.

ANOTHER SHADOW OVER PUTIN'S REGIME



Ex Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia

It is no secret that Russia does not go easy on its critics. There is the Novichok nerve agent attack on Sergey Skripal, a former Russian military intelligence officer in 2018, and the 2020 toxic attacks on opposition politician Alexey Navalny, a vocal critic of the Kremlin. These are, among many other cases, just two instances of attempted murder of high-profile opposition figures.

It has been clear for some time now that anyone critical of the Kremlin and Vladimir Putin should, as a safety measure, seek personal protection. This applies to people living in Russia or abroad.

Since Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine on or just before 24 February, nine top Russian business executives have officially died. In some cases, they were killed with their families sometimes suffering the same fate; things are far from clear. However, what is troubling is that most of them were involved in the Russian energy sector.

The choice of words is decisive here: most reports mention the deaths of several Russian 'oligarchs'. Yet almost all the deceased are former top-level managers or entrepreneurs of the Russian economy and one must not suppose that Putin himself has anything to do with each and every one of these cases. According to specialists, many of these people were politically too insignificant.

Rather, these mysterious deaths could be the result of a "small, low-level war". It should be pointed out that the structures in Russia and the Kremlin are strictly hierarchical, and communication takes place exclusively at the same hierarchical level. It is therefore possible that a conflict broke out at a lower level without Putin being personally involved.

According to Dr Fabian Burkhardt, research fellow at the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies in Germany, "At present, there is no indication that these deaths constitute a series of centrally coordinated assassinations." While it is true that some Russian entrepreneurs have died in dubious circumstances, the accumulation of such instances since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine is striking. But all the deaths are not necessarily related to the war.

What's more, other than speculation, it is not possible to establish a direct link between the deaths. However, six of the eight people who died in murky circumstances happened to work in the Russian energy sector. In fact, half of them were directly employed by Gazprom.



Dr Fabian Burkhardt

In principle, several scenarios are possible, according to a number of experts. Top Russian managers generally have a stressful and 'unhealthy' lifestyle. Dangerous hobbies and sports can lead to accidents, and too much stress at work can lead to heart attacks or suicide. However, the frequency of cases, both in Russia and abroad indicates that other factors may be at play.

For example, the Russian secret service could eliminate certain people because they have important information that must not fall into the wrong hands.

There is also the issue of redistribution of property and property rights in Russia due to the war. This is already causing friction and a certain amount of infighting which can also lead to competitors in the economic sector eliminating each other with the help of the secret services.

But so far, there are no proven sources on why this might actually be happening.

POSSIBLE LINK BETWEEN CASES IN THE ENERGY SECTOR



Anders Åslund

Swedish economist Anders Åslund sees a possible link, at least as far as the Gazprom deaths are concerned. He says he has learned from Russian sources that the Russian secret service has compiled two lists of names of energy executives in Russia. One at the end of 2021, the other in early March this year. This is what Åslund told the New York Post: *"Putin finances much of his business through Gazprom and Gazprom Bank. And the executives who work there know all about this secret financing. Gas is the most corrupt sector in Russia."*

It is likely that the Kremlin suspects people at the top in the energy sector may be leaking information about funding for secret operations by the Russian secret services and financing of the invasion of Ukraine by the Gazprom Bank.

Anders Åslund understands that lists of names were presented to Vladimir Putin by the domestic security agency, the FSB. He is said to have authorised, if not their liquidation, at least some sort of punitive action against the people on the list, without taking a closer look at them.



Vladimir Putin awarding a medal to an FSB officer

In addition to information leaks, this is also about money...a lot of money. The Warsaw Institute think tank notes this in a report: *"It is possible that some high-ranking people linked to the Kremlin are now covering up traces of fraud in state-owned companies. If Gazprom and its affiliate companies were to undergo major management reshuffles, this hypothesis could prove to be correct."*

Indeed, in many of the 'accidents' involving Russian top-level executives, Gazprom security officers also appeared as soon as the local police arrived at the scene of the crime. These mysterious deaths could well be murders, and there are many clues pointing to Russia. But as to the likelihood of them being directly ordered by the Kremlin or even by Putin himself, it all remains to be proven.

A LITANY OF DISTURBING HEADLINES

Because of these circumstances, experts speculate that the official explanation of the deaths as cases of suicide is just a cover-up by the Kremlin, to conceal a 'clean-up' operation.

Be that as it may, there seems to be a curse around Gazprom. In the past few months, at least eight oligarchs and business executives have died in highly suspicious circumstances. The fact that in one way or another, most of them were linked to Russian energy giants Gazprom and Novatek which are centre stage in the Kremlin's economic and military confrontation with the West over Ukraine, can only add to the suspicion of a conspiracy.

29 JANUARY: LEONID SHULMAN

The first so-called 'suicide' took place in January, when the expression 'special military operation' was not yet ringing all over Europe. In a villa in Leninskoye, a Russian village not far from St Petersburg, the lifeless body of Leonid Shulman was found with stab wounds to the wrists. At the time, Shulman was a transport manager at Gazprominvest, an investment company and subsidiary of energy giant Gazprom.



© Twitter/Nrf

Leonid Shulman

Shulman was at home under medical certificate at the time of his death. He had a broken leg strapped in an 'Ilizarov' apparatus, which is an external fixation used in orthopedic surgery to reshape broken bones. In his suicide note, which was found near his body by the police, he had written that the pain caused by the device was unbearable. However, investigators were not entirely convinced of the authenticity of the note. Moreover, with a fortune valued in the millions, Shulman could certainly afford expensive drugs or other forms of treatment.

Within Gazprom, however, Shulman was not a blameless figure. He was investigated by Gazprom's security service in late 2021, which found irregularities in the transport department. For example, Shulman or other senior people in the division had allegedly manipulated lists of spare parts for the fleet. The price of the parts was much higher than the average cost, and Shulman was apparently aware of such irregularities.

25 FEBRUARY: ALEXANDER TYULAKOV

Nearly a month later, on 25 February, another high-profile 'suicide' took place in the picturesque town of Leninskoye,



Alexander Tyulakov

nicknamed 'Gazprom's nest' because of the presence of several senior Russian officials and Gazprom executives.

The 61-year-old official was found dead in the garage. At the time of his death, Tyulakov was vice-president and head of security and human resources at the Unified Clearing Centre (UCC), which manages Gazprom's finances.

Little further information is known about Tyulakov's death. However, the police were reportedly informed of his death by an anonymous phone call. Almost at the same time as the police, Gazprom's security service arrived at the scene. At the end of 2021, an internal audit was carried out within Gazprom, which reportedly revealed some irregularities.

It is important to note that Alexander Tyulakov should not be confused with Alexander Tyuliakov, who, as head of the UCC, manages Gazprom's treasury. He is currently still alive.

28 FEBRUARY: MIKHAIL WATFORD

On 28 February, four days after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the lifeless body of Mikhail Watford was discovered by his gardener. Watford was born in the former Soviet Union, in what is now Ukraine, under the name Mikhail Tolstosheya. He had a career in the energy sector, particularly in oil and gas.

Watford's body was found at his estate in Surrey, UK. The villa is in the grounds



Mikhail Watford

of the Wentworth Club, a golf club and resort which had served as the prison of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in the late 1990s, pending his extradition to Chile.

Although Watford made his fortune in the oil and gas industry, there is no direct link between him and Gazprom. However, there are media reports that he was on Vladimir Putin's hit list.

However, the oligarch himself had previously denied this claim. Other sources claim that his suicide was linked to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which had an impact on Watford's mental state.

23 MARCH: VASILY MELNIKOV

On the morning of 24 March, the Russian newspaper Kommersant announced the death of Vasily Melnikov, owner of the pharmaceutical company MedStom. According to initial police findings, the businessman first killed his wife and two children and then committed suicide. Neighbours and relatives, however, refuse to believe it.



© nexta.ru/Twitter

Vasily Melnikov

The Ukrainian media outlet Glavred theorised that Melnikov's business suffered heavy losses due to Western sanctions, and that he therefore committed this desperate act. Another theory circulating claims that Melnikov was arguing with a former business partner. There is no evidence of a link between Melnikov or MedStom and Gazprom.

18 APRIL: VLADISLAV AVAYEV

The next 'suicide' again took place in Russia, more precisely in a luxury flat in Moscow.

26-year-old Anastasia discovered the bodies of her father Vladislav Avayev, her mother and her 13-year-old sister Maria. Preliminary findings suggest that it was murder followed by suicide,



Vladislav Avayev

with Avayev first killing his family and then himself. A total of 14 firearms were found in the flat.

Avayev enjoyed some status in Russia, and was, like many others on this list, linked to Gazprom. Avayev amassed his fortune in a Russian construction company before taking up the position of deputy director of a major Kremlin department. Avayev later became a banker and was for a long time deputy chairman of Gazprombank, which is owned by the energy company itself and its pension fund, Gazfond.

Igor Volobuev, who held the same position at Gazprombank and who recently left Russia to fight for Ukraine, questions the whole situation. What's more, he describes Avayev's death as "staged", and says it was murder. Avayev is said to have been responsible, among other duties within Gazprombank, for the VIPs who had accounts there: the Russian president's inner circle, and perhaps Putin himself.

19 APRIL: SERGEY PROTOSENYA

Less than 24 hours after Avayev's death, the Spanish coastal town of Lloret de Mar, a favourite haunt of wealthy Russians, was rocked by a new crime. Spanish media reported that Sergey Protosenya's body was found hanging



Sergei Protosenya and his family

in his villa. His wife and 18 year-old daughter were also found dead. It was the son who had raised the alarm when he could not reach his family.

Protosenya is said to have first killed his wife and daughter, and then committed suicide; exactly the same story as with Avayev. And here again, Gazprom is part of the story.

Protosenya had held various positions in Novatek, Russia's largest independent gas company, between 1997 and 2015. Independence is of course quite relative as Gazprom is said to hold 10-20% of Novatek. Within Novatek, Protosenya was already vice-president and, until his retirement, head of the accounting department. His assets are estimated at 418 million euros.

In Protosenya's circles, nobody believes that the man was capable of killing his family and himself. His son told the Daily Mail that his father is not a murderer. I am sure he did not do anything to my mother and sister". The same rhetoric was heard from Anatoly Timoshenko and Roman Yuriovich, two close friends of Protosenya. Igor Volobuev also claims that Protosenya, like Avayev, was murdered by the Kremlin.

1 MAY: ANDREY KRUKOVSKY

On 1 May, the Russian news agencies TASS and Interfax reported the death of Andrey Krukovsky. The 37-year-old Russian was reported to have fallen from a cliff while hiking in the Caucasus mountains near Sochi, a fall from which he did not survive.

Until his death, Krukovski was the managing director of Krasnaya Polyana, a company that built all the facilities in the city of the same name for the 2014 Winter Olympics. Before that, he had been a member of the company's board of directors. In Russia itself, he has been praised for his talent and expertise. Russian Natural Resources Minister Alexander Kozlov wrote on Telegram that Krukovsky "has done more than anyone else to develop tourism in the region. He has turned Krasnaya Polyana into a top resort."

It is not surprising however, that Gazprom's name comes up here. The energy giant, with the help of President Putin, is said to have bought and expanded the resort. Moreover, when



Andrey Krukovsky

Sochi was chosen as the host city for the Winter Olympics in 2014, Gazprom had the opportunity to develop the resort further.

The circumstances around Krukovsky's death were highly questionable, as the man had years of climbing experience, and had even conquered Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania and Mount Elbrus, the highest and most prominent peak in Russia and Europe.

10 MAY: ALEXANDER SUBBOTIN



Alexander Subbotin

Alexander Subbotin wanted to cure his alcoholism with toad poison and rooster blood. But for the former boss of the Lukoil energy corporation, a visit to a shaman proved fatal.

The former top executive at Russia's second-largest oil producer and owner of a lucrative shipping company reportedly died while visiting a couple of healers in Mytishchi, north-east of Moscow. According to TASS news agency, Subbotin died of a heart attack.

Magua Flores (real name Alexey Pindyurin) and Tina Cordoba (real name Kristina Teikhrub) are said to have given Subbotin the venom of a toad through an incision in his skin and then given him a bath in rooster blood. His body reacted quickly; he first vomited, according to the statements of the shaman and his wife to the police. The couple then gave him drops of herb

extracts as a tranquiliser. He then fell asleep, and did not wake up again.

The Russian oligarch had approached the couple of healers to treat his alcoholism. As reported by the independent newspaper Moscow Times, Subbotin is said to have regularly had recourse to shamans and other such practitioners. In passing, it is interesting to note that President Putin himself is also said to have some unusual preferences as far as medical treatments are concerned.

JUNE 28: YEVGENY PALANT



Yevgeny Palant

Ukrainian-born telephone and IT mogul Yevgeny Palant and his wife Olga, also Ukrainian-born, were found with multiple stab wounds at their dacha near Moscow, by their 20 year-old daughter Polina.

At first, it was assumed that the businessman murdered his wife and then committed suicide. However, some family members later suggested that in fact, the opposite was true. Apparently Olga had flown into a rage after discovering that her husband, who had close ties with the Kremlin, was about to leave her for one of his young mistresses. She allegedly stabbed him 14 times before inflicting fatal knife wounds on herself.

Family friends however disputed this scenario, saying that the couple's relationship was very harmonious and that one of them killing the other because of jealousy was absolutely out of the question.

4 JULY: YURI VORONOV

Yuri Voronov's corpse was found floating in his swimming pool, at his home in Saint Petersburg, with a bullet in his head. The pistol was found at the bottom of the pool but forensic experts could not determine whether it was a murder or a suicide.



Yuri Voronov

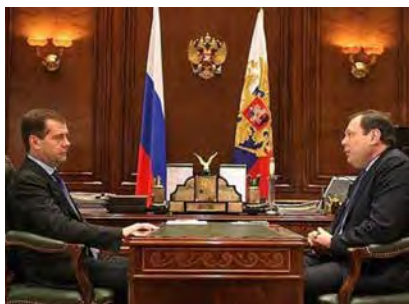
The 61 year-old oligarch ran a company that was a partner of Russian gas giant Gazprom, and as such was close to the Kremlin. According to Vanity Fair, the investigation favours the thesis of a "dispute" with business associates. His widow confirmed that her husband was "a victim of fraud" from some of his associates.

The circumstances remain very troubling however, especially since this mysterious death is in line with eight other strangely similar deaths among the Russian business elite since the beginning of the year.

PUTIN AND HIS OLIGARCHS

The Putin system is constructed in such a way that it cannot survive without the loyalty of oligarchs who control the strategic sectors of the economy. The energy sectors, the raw material markets and exports as well as the arms sector are in the hands of oligarchs whose loyalty is the most assured.

The same cannot be said for the banking and financial sectors, and especially for the emerging high-tech sector. At the beginning of March, Mikhail Fridman, the Ukrainian-born, Russian-Israeli businessman,



In 2019 President Medvedev instructed Mikhail Fridman one of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE) executives, to analyze different scenarios for Russia's transition from crisis to development, taking into account the proposals made by big business representatives

billionaire, and oligarch openly dissociated himself from the Kremlin - without opposing it - by calling for an end to the war in Ukraine.

He was supported by other oligarchs, known for their lesser alignment with the Kremlin, such as Oleg Deripaska, president of the holding company Basic Element (energy, financial services, agriculture, construction, aviation). They were joined the next day by Oleg Tinkov, founder and owner of the Tinkoff Bank which was promptly threatened with nationalisation by the Putin administration. Tinkov went into hiding after selling his 35% stake, under pressure.

It should be noted that the nature of the power structure in Russia is not pyramidal, but circular.

In other words, Putin is not placed at the top of a pyramid, but at the centre of various circles of power, which are constantly shifting. Therefore, he must make sure that he is always at the very centre in order to control the balance. This means that he must constantly consult and have at his disposal efficient, reliable and loyal sources of information within the institutions of the State, but also within the large industrial, financial and energy corporations.

For what Putin probably fears most is the formation of alliances between certain spheres of the state technocracy within the government, or even the presidential administration which he may no longer be able to control.

Some oligarchs could, in case of a stalemate in Ukraine, be tempted to organise, or at least participate in the overthrow of the head of the Kremlin, who would be accused of having led Russia to be banished from the concert of civilised nations.

And this is a discourse that could easily win over those Russian billionaires and oligarchs whose patriotism does not go so far as to cause the loss of too large a part of their fabulous fortunes.

Hossein Sadre



© Wikimedia Commons

A power-generating unit control panel at Kursk Nuclear Power Plant in Kurchatov, Russia, in 2008

NUCLEAR POWER

Future blessing or catastrophe

From the time Benjamin Franklin discovered electricity in the 1700s with his kite experiment, in which he flew a kite with a metal key attached to it during a thunderstorm, to 1951, when a reactor at an experimental station near Arco, Idaho, in the USA produced the first 100 kW of electricity through atomic fission, nuclear power has become increasingly important on our planet.



President Harry S. Truman signs the Atomic Energy Act into law on August 1, 1946. Behind the President, left to right, are Senators Tom Connally, Eugene D. Millikin, Edwin C. Johnson, Thomas C. Hart, Brien McMahon, Warren R. Austin and Richard B. Russell Jr.

The science of atomic radiation, atomic change and nuclear fission was developed as early as the end of the 19th century. At that time, great scientists such as Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr and Ernest Rutherford explored the possibilities of its use. Unfortunately, until 1945, most developments concentrated on the atomic bomb. It was not until 1945, after World War II, that attention shifted to the controlled use of this energy for more peaceful purposes and to generate electricity. Since 1956, the main focus has been on the technological development of reliable nuclear power plants.

In 1953, American President Dwight Eisenhower gave a speech to the United Nations (Atoms for Peace) in which he emphasised the need to develop a more "peaceful" use of nuclear energy. This was followed in 1954 by the Atomic Energy Act, which allowed the official release of the newly discovered American reactor technology and encouraged development by the private sector. The IAEA was then

established to address the great fears and expectations that had arisen from the discoveries and diverse applications of nuclear technology. The official Statute of the IAEA was signed and unanimously adopted by 81 states in October 1956.

From its headquarters in Vienna, Austria, this UN agency was mandated to "work with its Member States and numerous partners worldwide to promote safe and peaceful nuclear technologies". The objectives of the IAEA's dual mandate - promotion and control of the atom - are set out in Article II of the IAEA Statute. "The IAEA supports its Member States in the use of nuclear science and technology for peaceful purposes and facilitates the transfer of such technology and knowledge in a sustainable manner to Member States". (Source : www.iaea.org)

In 1954, the Obninsk nuclear power plant in the USSR was the first nuclear power plant in the world to generate



© D. Calma/IAEA

IAEA safeguards inspectors are trained to check all nuclear materials at a research reactor facility

electricity for a power grid with an initial capacity of five megawatts. However, the first commercial nuclear power plant in the world to be connected to the national grid was in England (at Windscale, on 27 August 1956).

The US followed suit, but in the early 1970s increasing public hostility to nuclear power on American soil led to the creation of the US Atomic Energy Commission, and later, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to lengthen the licensing process, tighten technical regulations and increase requirements for safety equipment.

Nuclear energy today supplies about 10% of the world's electricity. To prevent further climate damage, the IAEA is promoting the development of greater amounts of clean and reliable energy. Thirty countries in the world currently operate nuclear power plants, and about the same number of other countries are currently examining nuclear energy as a viable source of power for the near future.

The oil crisis of 1963 had a strong impact on countries such as France and Japan, which had relied more heavily on oil for power generation. This led to a rapid and large investment in the development of nuclear power plants.

Today, Japan and France are among the world's ten largest producers of nuclear power.

The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Japan is currently the largest nuclear power plant in the world with a production capacity of 7,965 MW. Canada, South Korea, China and Ukraine are also among the largest producers of nuclear power.

Although it is a carbon-free and therefore environmentally friendly source of electricity, some countries have raised strong objections to any nuclear power project due to a number of catastrophic accidents. Austria (1978), Sweden (1980) and Italy (1987) have held referendums against nuclear power or in favour of phasing it out.

Chernobyl is considered the biggest nuclear accident in the history of mankind. It occurred on Saturday, 26 April 1986, in reactor number 4 of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant near the town of Pripyat (now in Ukraine, then in the former USSR). The slow initial emergency response and some questionable political reactions by Soviet leaders only made the situation worse. The emergency measures and later plans to decontaminate the site ultimately affected more than 500,000 people and cost about 18 billion Soviet roubles (about 68 billion USD).

Chernobyl used an RBMK design that lacked some safety features such as a more robust containment building. Over 10 RBMK reactors are still in operation today, but some important changes have been made (e.g. a safer method of enriching uranium or a more efficient control system) to reduce the possibility of a similar accident. As a direct result of the 1986 nuclear accident, the World Association of Nuclear Operators (WANO) was

founded to promote safety awareness and professional development among nuclear power plant operators.

However, after an extremely strong earthquake and subsequent tsunami off the coast of Japan on 11 March 2011, three core meltdowns occurred at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant because the emergency cooling system failed due to a lack of power supply. This led to the worst nuclear accident since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.



© Greg Webb/IAEA

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

After the reactor accident in Fukushima Daiichi, a process of reviewing all nuclear safety regulations and measures was initiated. Germany has approved plans to shut down all its reactors in the near future. The use of nuclear energy as a "green" and better alternative to fossil fuels is controversial in Germany. The Greens have argued for decades that the environmental dangers of nuclear waste disposal far outweigh the benefits.

China, Switzerland, Israel, Malaysia, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the Philippines also reviewed their nuclear power programmes.

With Germany decommissioning eight of its nuclear reactors and Japan's reactors remaining offline for inspection, nuclear power production saw its sharpest decline ever in 2012. Worldwide, nuclear power plants produced 7 % less than in 2011. This led to a new, less optimistic estimate of new nuclear power plant capacity to be built by 2035. In August 2015, Japan began reactivating its nuclear reactors after four years of



© Nrf

The Chernobyl nuclear power plant in May 1986, a few weeks after the disaster



Anti-nuclear protest near nuclear waste disposal centre at Gorleben in northern Germany, on 8 November 2008. The sign says, "Only the risk is certain. Atomic power? No, thanks!"

almost no electricity generation from nuclear fission, following the completion of safety improvements.

In 2015, the IAEA stated that "nuclear energy is a critical element in limiting greenhouse gas emissions and the outlook for nuclear energy remains positive in the medium to long term, despite negative impacts in some countries ... it remains the second largest source of low-carbon electricity in the world. And the 72 reactors under construction at the start of last year were the most in the last 25 years".

As of January 2019, China had 45 reactors in operation, 13 under construction and plans to build

another 43, making it the world's largest generator of nuclear power. The US now has 93 operational nuclear reactors in 30 states.

Recently, other alternatives to conventional nuclear power plants have been explored. The US government announced a \$14 million grant this year for an engineering and design study that will form the basis for the use of small modular reactors (SMRs) for a new nuclear power plant in Romania.

The study will be completed in the next few months, following an investment of \$28 million, including contributions from Romanian nuclear power company Nuclearelectrica and NuScale, the US company supplying the SMR technology. This first SMR power plant will also provide important data on construction costs and other important details for the future development of SMR reactors.

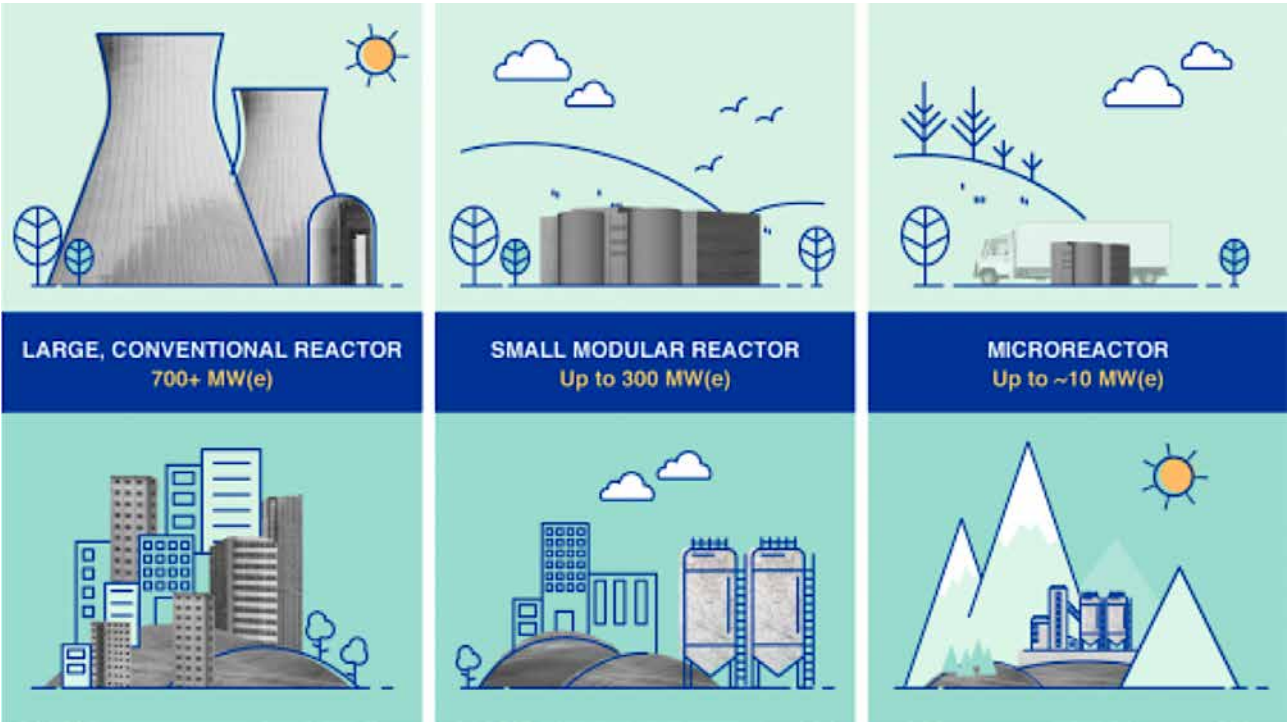
Nuclear energy, including small modular reactors, is an important tool in the fight against climate change and can also improve energy security and increase economic prosperity. This is an important step in supporting Romania's desire to deploy innovative, safe and emission-free nuclear energy in partnership

with the United States," said US Climate Change Envoy John Kerry.

When finally fully implemented, this multi-billion dollar project will prove that advanced nuclear reactor technology is capable of replacing old and polluting power plants while creating new jobs in the region. The project aims to prove that climate change initiatives and sustainable economic growth can go hand in hand to create a cleaner and safer future.

By 2020, 13 EU countries will have conventional nuclear reactors in operation (103 plants in Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden), but electricity generation from nuclear power has declined by 25.2% between 2006 and 2020 (mainly due to Germany's policy of shutting down many nuclear power plants).

Of the 172 nuclear reactors in operation in Europe, France has the most in operation (56 units), followed by Russia with 37. In 2021, France led the field with a 69% share of nuclear electricity production, followed by Ukraine (55%), Slovakia (52.3%) and Belgium (50.8%). Meanwhile, Italy is the only country to have permanently



Small modular reactors (SMRs) have a power capacity of up to 300 MW(e) per unit. Many SMRs, which can be factory-assembled and transported to a location for installation, are envisioned for markets such as industrial applications or remote areas with limited grid capacity



Zaporizhzhia is Europe's largest nuclear power plant

decommissioned all functioning nuclear power plants as of 2022, while Germany will phase out the remaining three power plants by the end of the year.

Ukraine has 15 Russian-designed nuclear power plants at four sites, which generate half of the country's total electricity and of which seven units are currently in operation.

The European Network of Transmission System Operators announced in June that electricity trading between Ukraine and the EU will officially begin on 30 June, allowing Ukraine to generate revenue in the current difficult situation and provide the EU with additional affordable electricity, at a time when prices are rising daily. This is part of another step in the integration of Ukraine's, but also Moldova's, energy systems with Europe, and has a special significance now that they have been granted EU candidate status.

The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in south-eastern Ukraine (built

by the former Soviet Union) is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe and among the ten largest in the world. After Russian military attacks began in February, concerns were raised about the safety of Ukraine's power plants, and in particular its largest power plant.

The nuclear facility was attacked by the Russians and eventually fell into the hands of the invaders. Since then, the Russian forces occupying the power plant have been accused of using it as a shield to shell Ukrainian army positions.

Recently, there have been repeated reports of heavy shelling near the plant. Russian soldiers control the plant, but Ukrainian personnel continue to operate it. Due to the shelling, a reactor unit at Zaporizhzhia was cut off from the power grid, triggering the emergency system and bringing generators online to ensure power supply. A senior official from UN said a nitrogen-oxygen station was also shelled. While firefighters have extinguished the fire, repairs are yet to be investigated and assessed.

It is clear to everyone that a fatal accident with major consequences for the whole of Europe is possible. In the worst case, if the nuclear power plant were bombed, parts of the contaminated walls, the terrain, the cooling water, the stored dangerous fuel elements and the spent fuel would evaporate into the air as dust, which would then be carried by air currents to other parts of the European continent.

After the Chernobyl nuclear accident, for example, the Scandinavian countries and other parts of Europe

were affected by radioactive releases from Chernobyl. Caesium and other radioactive isotopes were blown by the wind as far as Sweden and Finland and over other parts of the Northern Hemisphere.

More than 200,000 square kilometres of Europe were contaminated beyond the safe level of caesium. Many countries around Ukraine then distributed iodine tablets to their populations to counteract the possible effects of radioactive contamination on people.

These days, Europe is once again under nuclear terror and many remember with great concern the time of 1986. "The situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine has deteriorated rapidly and has become very worrying", the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Mariano Grossi, told the UN Security Council on 11 August.

For this reason, the IAEA was in constant contact with both the Ukrainian and Russian authorities to get as accurate a picture as possible of the developing circumstances and to prevent a disaster. The Director General continued: "The preliminary assessment of IAEA experts indicates that there is no immediate threat to nuclear safety as a result of the shelling or other military actions. However, this could change at any time".

Finally, Mr. Grossi added that "seven indispensable pillars are crucial for nuclear safety, such as the physical integrity of the plant, external power supply, cooling systems and emergency preparedness measures. All of these pillars have been compromised or even completely violated at one point or another during this crisis".

Even though nuclear energy still seems to be an alternative for a cleaner future, any nuclear disaster would affect the quality of life on our planet for many years to come and irrevocably affect people and places, which is why it should be our common goal to prevent it.

Nuclear energy is a blessing or the road to disaster... we shall see.

Alexandra Paucescu



Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi

EUROPE'S SUPPLIERS GATHER TO CELEBRATE THE COMPLETION OF THE LATEST ITER MAGNET



© Europa.eu

Alessandro Bonito-Oliva, F4E's Project Manager for Magnets

The production of Europe's powerful superconductive magnets has reached its peak with 80% of the components fully completed. The eighth of the ten Toroidal Field coils, under F4E's responsibility, is ready to get loaded on the vessel that will deliver it to France. Once there, it will wait for its turn to enter the Assembly Hall to join the coils from Europe and Japan. A total of 18 magnets will create the powerful cage to confine the hot plasma. The human endeavour behind this achievement is massive just like the size of the magnets.

To grasp the meaning of this milestone we need to go back nearly 14 years in

time when the procurement strategy was masterminded to reach this point. This the outcome of solid collaboration between F4E's Magnets team, 40 companies and more than 700 people involved from all over Europe.

It all started with the definition of the procurement and technology strategy, continued with the production of prototypes to validate the technology, rigorous planning and thorough project management of the different contracts and interfaces, just as Europe was getting ready to transport its first TF coil from Italy to the ITER site, the world came to a standstill because of the global pandemic. But not even that could bend the iron will of F4E, SIMIC and DAHER to deliver the first Toroidal Field coil in ITER's history in April 2020.

Two years later, stepping into new reality making it possible to meet, SIMIC took the initiative to open the doors of its facility to celebrate this achievement, and to present the tooling used during the final manufacturing steps. Representatives from F4E, the fusion community, industry, laboratories and the companies directly involved in the manufacturing of the TF coils gathered to send off the latest one. Around 100 people witnessed the remaining magnets in production and were able to collectively celebrate their contribution. This was not only an event that marked a significant technical milestone. It also marked an important human milestone by bringing all protagonists together.

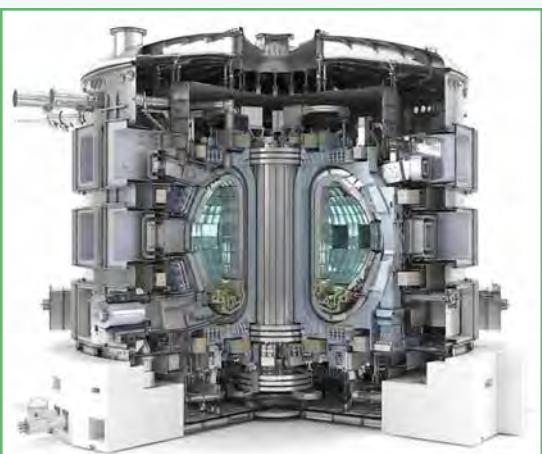
Marianna Ginola, SIMIC Commercial Manager, opened the event by welcoming guests and took a few moments to look back on the evolution of the project. Then, looking to the future, she put it into context with the latest political developments. "It is a great honour for SIMIC to manufacture some of the most challenging components for ITER. We are contributing to an extraordinary mission to deliver a new energy source for self-sufficient, cleaner and more sustainable future."

Under the gaze of the 14 m TF coil, Alessandro Bonito-Oliva, F4E Magnets Programme Manager, took the floor to explain Europe's involvement in ITER, the potential commercial benefits, and more specifically the procurement and manufacturing strategy adopted to produce these complex magnets. "Leadership, trust, collaboration, and decision-making are key in managing such complex projects. As experts, our professionalism to deliver is our main driving force. But when I think of us as people, it's the passion and enthusiasm of colleagues from F4E, ITER Organization, and our suppliers, which made this long journey meaningful and successful."

THE ITER DEVICE

Boris Bellesia, F4E Magnets Deputy Programme Manager, underlined the fruitful collaboration between F4E and SIMIC: "Together we have accomplished some major achievements throughout the manufacturing process: the delivery of the first coil to the ITER project, the optimisation of time in production, and the extremely high level of homogeneity amongst all TF coils".

Paolo Barbero, SIMIC Project Manager, concluded the presentations session by running through the technical steps unfolding in the SIMIC facility and presented some of the challenges they faced. "The project has made important progress with the eighth TF coil completed, and the remaining two expected early in 2023. We are very proud to have reached this important milestone both in terms of quality and time. We managed to overcome a combination of technical and managerial challenges thanks to our great collaboration with the F4E Magnets team, and all subcontractors. Most importantly, many thanks to the SIMIC teams that worked with such great commitment, competence and effort during the entire project."



© Europa.eu

Millions of components will be integrated in the biggest fusion device. The assembly of the device will be one of the most complex engineering operations. Each ITER Party is responsible for the manufacturing of distinct pieces of equipment. Europe is responsible for almost half of the components of the machine, while the remaining six Parties will have to deliver equally the rest. In Europe, their fabrication is the result of the collaboration between F4E, industry and research laboratories



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TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

Hello September !

How to say goodbye to the summer holidays without too much nostalgia? By discovering four of autumn's most cheerful and stylish trends. Here they are:

Mini skirts dream big

Mini, macro, nano... as long as they're short! According to the Fall 2022 shows at New York Fashion Week, the revival of the micro-mini skirt trend will still be going strong from now and during the cold-weather months. Here are two of the best ways to wear a miniskirt in 2022 without any "fashion faux pas".

The 'schoolgirl' style

It comes at just the right time... the schoolgirl wardrobe is making a comeback, including ties, socks, cardigans and (mini) skirts as fashion essentials of the season.

1



Inspiration Negin Mirsaheli

© INSTAGRAM @NEGIN_MIRSALEHI

Go modest on top for contrast

If you're feeling a bit uncomfortable wearing such a small piece of fabric, going modest on top can be a good way to balance out the look. A turtle-neck sweater, a matching jacket for a 'skirt-suit' effect or a button-up shirt, layered with a vest is a great way to contrast a miniskirt.

2



Inspiration Maje
([maje.com](https://www.maje.com))

© INSTAGRAM @NEGIN_MIRSALEHI

To buy right away



Buttoned, black miniskirt with a flared silhouette

(Miu Miu, spotted on [mytheresa.com](https://www.mytheresa.com))

© MIU MIU - MYTHERESA.COM



Ethnic trim tweed miniskirt
([maje.com](https://www.maje.com))

© MAJE



Pleated miniskirt, featuring a leather strap
([prada.com](https://www.prada.com))

© PRADA

TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

From « ugly » to « trendy »

They may not be "glamorous", but Birkenstock's Boston clogs are officially having a moment. Is it because we've seen them recently on many a celebrity's feet, including Kendall Jenner, Kristen Stewart or even Katie Holmes ?

Possibly, but beyond all the hype, it must be acknowledged that this footwear which is often classed in the "ugly shoes" category, is in fact incredibly comfortable and practical.

As a reminder, Birkenstock is available on luxury websites like netaporter.com and matchesfashion.com and collaborates with luxury brands such as Manolo Blahnik.



(birkenstock.com)



(viktors-rolf.com)

A magic potion

For their new fragrance, "Good Fortune", the creative duo of Viktor & Rolf have devised the epitome of a new positive lifestyle. This visionary women's perfume is an olfactive manifesto for spirituality and self-potentialisation, bringing you the power to create your own destiny.

We love the purple bottle. Refillable and captivating to perfection, topped with a faceted stone cap evoking – for those who believe in the symbolism of gems - the powerful amethyst, connecting you to your spiritual self.

And what about fragrance in all of this? It opens with the secret alchemy of the fennel & gentian flower, co-distilled as top. A jasmine super infusion then takes centre stage at the heart of the fragrance, while an enchanting Bourbon vanilla, ethically sourced in Madagascar, sits at the base.

Sporty and trendy go together

A glance at the Saucony running shoes collection is enough to convince the laziest among us to start running. The brand which is becoming cool (again) favours speed, optimal arch comfort and foot support over everything else, when you lace up a pair from the Endorphin Collection.

The hardest part isn't moving, but choosing among the tens of dazzling colours



(saucony.com)

PLACES TO VISIT

*Now is the time to visit this wonder of nature
called "the valley of the moon"*



A journey to Wadi Rum is a journey to another world.

A vast, silent place, timeless and starkly beautiful. Wadi Rum is one of Jordan's main tourist attractions and one of the most stunning desert landscapes in the world.

It lies some 320 km southwest of Jordan's capital Amman, 120 km south of Petra, and just 68 km north of the port city of Aqaba on the Red Sea.

Uniquely shaped massive mountains rise vertically out of the pink desert sand, which separate one dark mass from another in a magnificent desert scenery of strange, breathtaking beauty with towering cliffs of weathered stone.

The faces of the sheer rock cliffs have been eroded by the wind into faces of men, animals and monsters.

Everywhere in this extraordinary landscape are indications of man's presence since the earliest known times. Scattered around are flint hand axes, while on the rocks at the feet of the mountains are scratched the names of ancient travelers. The inscriptions of Anfaishiyya reveal a series of etchings depicting camels, warriors, and animals that cover a stretch of the huge rock face.

The ancient Nabatean peoples, who first

emerged in the 4th century BC and who inhabited these regions until 106 AD have also left their mark in the form of rock paintings, carvings, water systems in key areas, and of course temples and other architectural marvels, especially around Petra.

But today, all around, there is emptiness and silence...in this immense space, man is dwarfed into insignificance.

The valley floors are some 900-1000 meters above sea level, and the great sandstone crags rise sheer, a further 500-550 meters. Jabal Rum is the highest peak in the area and the second highest in Jordan.

The highest elevation in Jordan is, in fact, Jamal Umm al Dami, culminating at 1,840 metres and located 30 kilometres south of Wadi Rum village. On a clear day, it is possible to see the Red Sea and the Saudi border from its peak.

Others are some 27 km north of Wadi Rum village, such as Jabal Kharaz and Jabal Burdah with its Rock Bridge, a spectacular 260-foot-high natural bridge that is truly breathtaking. It is one of Wadi Rum's most popular attractions.

There are many ways to explore this fragile, unspoiled desert retreat. Serious trekkers will be drawn to Wadi Rum,

with challenging climbs some 1750m high, while casual hikers can enjoy an easy course through the colourful hills and canyons.

Naturalists will be drawn to the desert in springtime, when rains bring the greening of the hills and an explosion of 2000 species of wildflowers. Red anemones, poppies and the striking black iris, Jordan's national flower, all grow by the roadside and in more quiet reaches. Visitors to Wadi Rum usually see very few animals because most desert creatures are nocturnal, to avoid the daytime sun, and many of the larger ones are now reduced to very low numbers. However, if you take the time to look carefully, you are likely to encounter a number of interesting birds, insects and reptiles – and some desert plants.

Trees are rare in Wadi Rum and restricted to three types: Acacias, False Figs and Tamarisks. The Acacias, with their flat tops and spiny, sparse branches, are the most typically desert-looking tree. The plants you will see most often are the short, woody shrubs scattered across the desert, which consist of three main species: White Saxaul, Jointed Anabasis and Hammada salicornica. These provide an important food source for Bedouin goats and camels, especially in the summer months, when the smaller succulent desert plants have all dried up. The sparse desert scrub harbors a surprising variety of small birds, of which the most common is the buff colored Desert Lark. Other common but more distinctive birds are the black and white Mourning Wheatear and the White Crowned Black Wheatear, whose name gives away its striking color pattern.

You are also likely to see African Rock Martins wheeling across the scrub and along the cliffs during the summer

months, as well as passing flocks of Tristram's Grackle, showing their orange wing flashes. In early spring and autumn, Wadi Rum becomes an important flyway for birds migrating between Africa and Eastern Europe, especially for birds of prey, like Steppe Buzzards, Honey Buzzards and Steppe Eagles. It is possible to see hundreds of these birds on a single day. Reptiles are widespread in Wadi Rum, but do not exist in high numbers. This may be considered fortunate by some visitors, since there are ten species of snake, of which two are very poisonous vipers: *Cerastes gasperettii* and *Echis coloratus*.

The *Cerastes* has the classic 'side-winder' movement and leaves indented 'S' shaped tracks in the sand. It should be stressed, however, that bites from these snakes are extremely rare; the vast majority of visitors never see them. Down on the sand, one common small creature is a black beetle with very long legs called a Blaps beetle. It is frequently seen crossing areas of open sand during the daytime, where it tiptoes to keep its body off the hot ground. Other kinds of invertebrates (insects, spiders and their allies) have different strategies for keeping cool, such as making burrows and hiding under stones.

One group of renowned animals that can be found frequently under stones in Wadi Rum are scorpions. A total of eight kinds have been recorded so far, from large brown ones to small yellow ones. It is the small, yellow ones that give the most painful sting, although like snakes, few visitors see them and very few ever get stung. Stunning in its natural beauty, Wadi Rum epitomizes the romance of the desert. Now the home of several Bedouin tribes, Wadi Rum has been inhabited for generations. These hospitable and friendly desert people are settled in Wadi Rum in scattered nomadic camps throughout the area.

Visitors who are invited to share mint tea or cardamon coffee in their black tents, perhaps sitting by the fire under a starry desert sky, will have an experience not to be forgotten. Wadi Rum is home

to the Zalabia Bedouin who have made a success of developing eco-adventure tourism as their main source of income. The area is one of Jordan's important tourist destinations, and attracts an increasing number of foreign tourists, particularly trekkers and climbers, but also for camel and horse safaris or simply day-trippers from Aqaba or Petra.

Its luxury camping retreats have also spurred more tourism to the area. Popular activities in this desert environment include camping under the stars, riding Arabian horses, hiking and rock-climbing among the massive rock formations. All terrain vehicles (ATVs) and Jeeps, as well as excursions in hot air balloons are also available.

But for the ultimate adventure, there are the Microlight Flights, offered by The Royal Aero Sports Club of Jordan. Experienced ultralight aviation pilots take one passenger at a time for a cruise at speeds of 90 to 100 km/hour at altitudes of 1000 to 1200 metres, which are ideal for photography and filming of the rock formations and sand dunes. Wadi Rum is probably best known because of its connection with the enigmatic British officer T.E. Lawrence, who was based here during the Great Arab Revolt of 1917-18, and as the setting for the film about his exploits in the region, "Lawrence of Arabia", shot in 1962.

One of the area's main attractions is the ruins of a house, erected on the Nabatean ruins of a water cistern where, according to legend, "Lawrence of Arabia" lived during the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans.

There is also the Lawrence Spring: Marked by a water tank near the entrance of Wadi Shallalah, this spring is named after T.E. Lawrence who famously made the area his military base and home. The official name of the small spring is Ain Abu Aineh, and views are spectacular from the top. This spring, on the edge of the open sands, is a regular stop on the 4WD circuit. Another important historical aspect of Wadi Rum is on display at the Hejaz Railway desert stop.

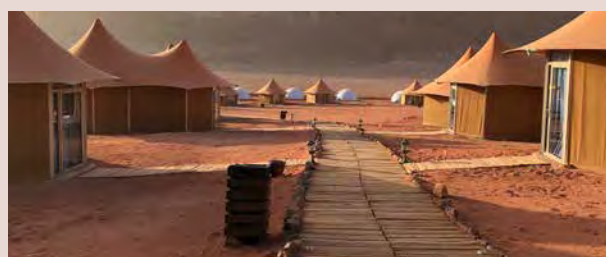
The refurbished locomotive sitting at this desert station invokes the memory of the century-old conflict that helped shape the modern Middle East.

In 1916, when the world was at war, and much of the Arabic-speaking world was controlled by the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the Allied leadership - Britain, France and Russia - sought to force the Turks out of the region; they urged Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca, to join them and take up arms against the Ottomans in return for Arab independence. Under the leadership of Hussein's son, Prince Faisal—and with assistance from the illustrious T.E. Lawrence "of Arabia"—the Arabs fought a guerilla-style war by interrupting train passages on the Hejaz Railway.

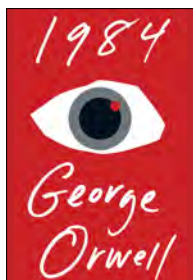
In the first three weeks of May 1918 alone, the Arabs destroyed railway tracks on 25 separate occasions. These attacks on transportation systems wreaked havoc on Turkish lines of communication and were instrumental in defeating the Turks and ending the Great War. The origins of the modern Middle East thus trace their way back to the attacks on the trains of the Hejaz Railway. The refurbished steam locomotive at the Hejaz Wadi Rum stop puts that history on display for today's audiences. Visitors can walk the perimeter of the train and take pictures, or step inside to observe the compartments. On certain occasions, visitors can even pay to board the train and partake in a mock battle during a show put on by the Jordan Heritage Revival Company.

Wadi Rum may be on your travel list for its visual parallels to the arid, crimson landscapes of Mars and the mysterious, barren spaces on the Moon, but a stop at historical attractions such as the desert's Hejaz Railway station is well worth the time.

Because finding unique, historical gems within famous destinations is often one of the most rewarding parts of travel.



BOOKS



1984

By George Orwell

AFTERWORD BY ERICH FROMM

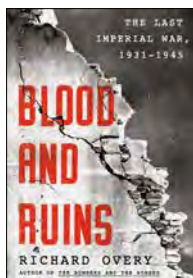
Written more than 70 years ago, 1984 was George Orwell's chilling prophecy about the future. And while 1984 has come and gone, his dystopian vision of a government that will do anything to control the narrative is timelier than ever...

• Nominated as one of America's best-loved novels by PBS's *The Great American Read* •

"The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command."

Winston Smith toes the Party line, rewriting history to satisfy the demands of the Ministry of Truth. With each lie he writes, Winston grows to hate the Party that seeks power for its own sake and persecutes those who dare to commit thoughtcrimes. But as he starts to think for himself, Winston can't escape the fact that Big Brother is always watching...

A startling and haunting novel, 1984 creates an imaginary world that is completely convincing from start to finish. No one can deny the novel's hold on the imaginations of whole generations, or the power of its admonitions—a power that seems to grow, not lessen, with the passage of time.



BLOOD AND RUINS

By Richard Overy

THE LAST IMPERIAL WAR, 1931-1945

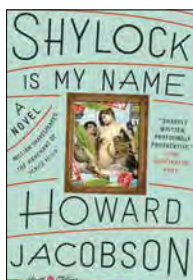
"Monumental... [A] vast and detailed study that is surely the finest single-volume history of World War II. Richard Overy has given us a powerful reminder of the horror of war and the threat posed by dictators with dreams of empire." — *The Wall Street Journal*.

A thought-provoking and original reassessment of World War II, from Britain's leading military historian — *A New York Times* bestseller

Richard Overy sets out in *Blood and Ruins* to recast the way in which we view the Second World War and its origins and aftermath. As one of Britain's most decorated and respected World War II historians, he argues that this was the "last imperial war," with almost a century-long lead-up of global imperial expansion, which reached its peak in the territorial ambitions of Italy, Germany and Japan in the 1930s and early 1940s, before descending into the largest and costliest war in human history and the end, after 1945, of all territorial empires.

Overy also argues for a more global perspective on the war, one that looks broader than the typical focus on military conflict between the Allied and Axis states. Above all, Overy explains the bitter cost for those involved in fighting, and the exceptional level of crime and atrocity that marked the war and its protracted aftermath—which extended far beyond 1945.

Blood and Ruins is a masterpiece, a new and definitive look at the ultimate struggle over the future of the global order, which will compel us to view the war in novel and unfamiliar ways. Thought-provoking, original and challenging, *Blood and Ruins* sets out to understand the war anew.



SHYLOCK IS MY NAME

By Howard Jacobson

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S THE MERCHANT OF VENICE RETOLD: A NOVEL

Man Booker Prize-winner Howard Jacobson brings his singular brilliance to this modern re-imagining of one of Shakespeare's most unforgettable characters: Shylock

Winter, a cemetery, Shylock. In this provocative and profound interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is juxtaposed against his present-day counterpart in the character of art dealer and

conflicted father Simon Strulovitch. With characteristic irony, Jacobson presents Shylock as a man of incisive wit and passion, concerned still with questions of identity, parenthood, anti-Semitism and revenge.

While Strulovitch struggles to reconcile himself to his daughter Beatrice's "betrayal" of her family and heritage—as she is carried away by the excitement of Manchester high society, and into the arms of a footballer notorious for giving a Nazi salute on the field—Shylock alternates grief for his beloved wife with rage against his own daughter's rejection of her Jewish upbringing. Culminating in a shocking twist on Shylock's demand for the infamous pound of flesh, Jacobson's insightful retelling examines contemporary, acutely relevant questions of Jewish identity while maintaining a poignant sympathy for its characters and a genuine spiritual kinship with its antecedent—a drama which Jacobson himself considers to be "the most troubling of Shakespeare's plays for anyone, but, for an English novelist who happens to be Jewish, also the most challenging."



THE PALACE PAPERS

By Tina Brown

INSIDE THE HOUSE OF WINDSOR—THE TRUTH AND THE TURMOIL

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • The "addictively readable" (*The Washington Post*) inside story of the British royal family's battle to overcome the dramas of the Diana years—only to confront new, twenty-first-century crises

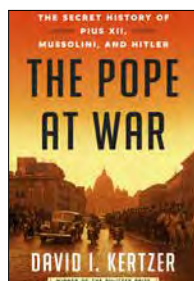
"The beach read of the summer... juicy, satisfying entertainment." — *Town & Country*

"Never again" became Queen Elizabeth II's mantra shortly after Princess Diana's tragic death. More specifically, there could never be "another Diana"—a member of the family whose global popularity upstaged, outshone, and posed an existential threat to the British monarchy.

Picking up where Tina Brown's masterful *The Diana Chronicles* left off, *The Palace Papers* reveals how the royal family reinvented itself after the traumatic years when Diana's blazing celebrity ripped through the House of Windsor like a comet.

Brown takes readers on a tour de force journey through the scandals, love affairs, power plays, and betrayals that have buffeted the monarchy over the last twenty-five years. We see the Queen's stoic resolve after the passing of Princess Margaret, the Queen Mother, and Prince Philip, her partner for seven decades, and how she triumphs in her Jubilee years even as family troubles rage around her. Brown explores Prince Charles's determination to make Camilla Parker Bowles his wife, the tension between William and Harry on "different paths," the ascendance of Kate Middleton, the downfall of Prince Andrew, and Harry and Meghan's stunning decision to step back as senior royals. Despite the fragile monarchy's best efforts, "never again" seems fast approaching.

Tina Brown has been observing and chronicling the British monarchy for three decades, and her sweeping account is full of powerful revelations, newly reported details, and searing insight gleaned from remarkable access to royal insiders. Stylish, witty, and erudite, *The Palace Papers* will irrevocably change how the world perceives and understands the royal family.



THE POPE AT WAR

By David I. Kertzer

THE SECRET HISTORY OF PIUS XII, MUSSOLINI, AND HITLER

INSTANT NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • "The most important book ever written about the Catholic Church and its conduct during World War II... The best nonfiction book of the summer." — Daniel Silva on the Today show.

Based on newly opened Vatican archives, a groundbreaking, explosive, and riveting book about Pope Pius XII and his actions during World War II, including how he responded to the Holocaust, by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Pope and Mussolini*.

When Pope Pius XII died in 1958, his papers were sealed in the Vatican Secret Archives, leaving unanswered questions about what he knew and did during World War II. Those questions have only grown and festered, making Pius XII one of the most controversial popes in Church history, especially now as the Vatican prepares to canonize him.

In 2020, Pius XII's archives were finally opened, and David I. Kertzer—widely recognized as one of the world's leading Vatican scholars—has been mining this new material ever since, revealing how the pope came to set aside moral leadership in order to preserve his church's power.

Based on thousands of never-before-seen documents not only from the Vatican, but from archives in Italy, Germany, France, Britain, and the United States, *The Pope at War* paints a new, dramatic portrait of what the pope did and did not do as war enveloped the continent and as the Nazis began their systematic mass murder of Europe's Jews. The book clears away the myths and sheer falsehoods surrounding the pope's actions from 1939 to 1945, showing why the pope repeatedly bent to the wills of Hitler and Mussolini.

Just as Kertzer's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Pope and Mussolini* became the definitive book on Pope Pius XI and the Fascist regime, *The Pope at War* is destined to become the most influential account of his successor, Pius XII, and his relations with Mussolini and Hitler. Kertzer shows why no full understanding of the course of World War II is complete without knowledge of the dramatic, behind-the-scenes role played by the pope. "This remarkably researched book is replete with revelations that deserve the adjective 'explosive,'" says Kevin Madigan, Winn Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Harvard University. "*The Pope at War* is a masterpiece."

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