

EUROPE

Diplomatic

magazine



A MAN TO REMEMBER

The World (but not all Russians) mourns the Soviet Union's last leader



CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Old ways survive a change of leader and of figurehead

OLAF SCHOLZ

Tough lessons in German leadership



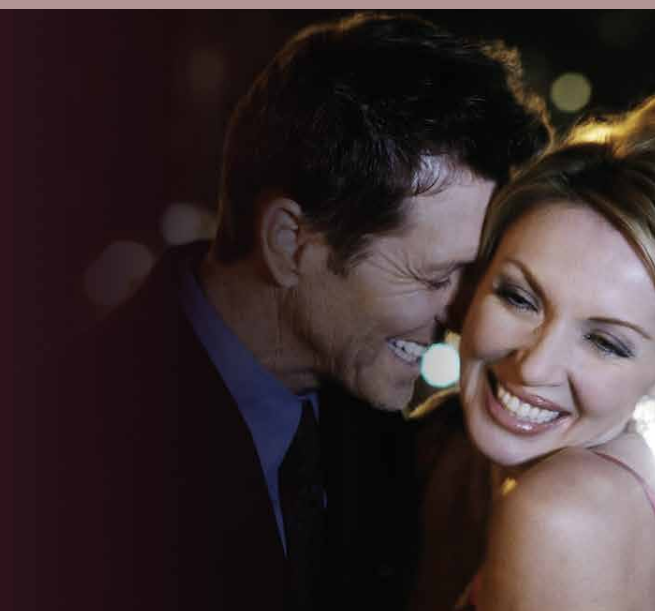


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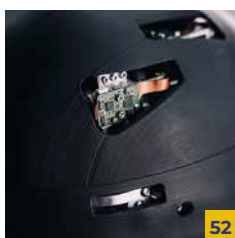


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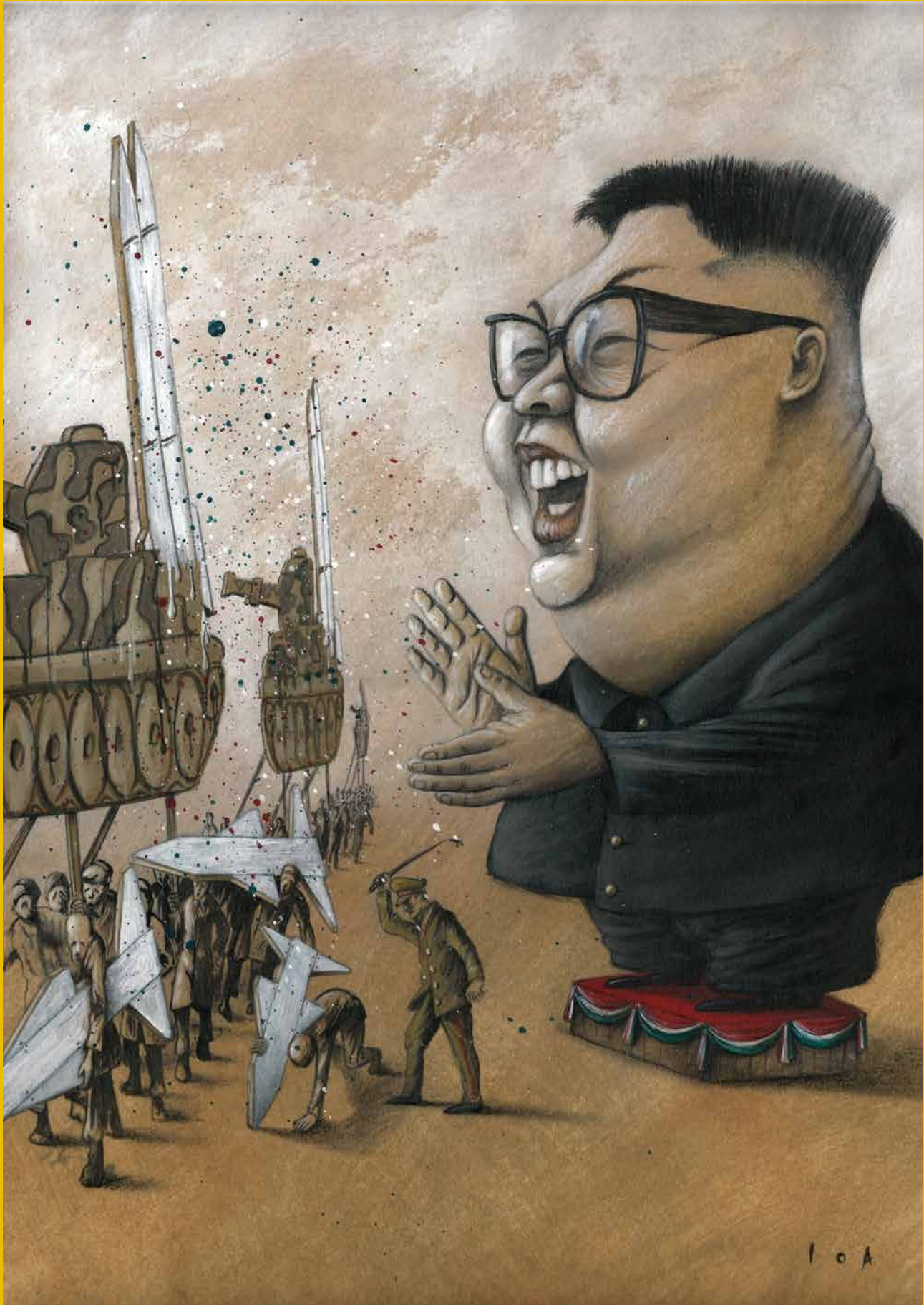
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Nikola Hendrickx

EDITORIAL

NUCLEAR ISSUE AND HUMAN RIGHTS:

Calling for a new approach in EU - Iran relations

While the war in Ukraine continues to dominate the headlines, another conflict has reached a critical point. After ten months of negotiations, the attempt to revive the Vienna agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue - also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - has stalled. It may well end in a resounding failure. Even President Biden's special envoy, Robert Malley, has described the latest attempt to negotiate in Qatar as a "waste of time".

In recent months, Iran has accelerated its controversial nuclear programme. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran has accumulated 43 kg of highly enriched uranium. This is more than enough to produce at least one nuclear bomb.

In June, the Iranian authorities switched off several cameras at various nuclear sites.

And at the beginning of August 2022, Iran began enriching uranium at the underground Fordo plant, despite having promised that this facility would only be used for civilian purposes.

Indeed, there is no doubt that under its new, ultraconservative president, Iran has become even more radical. Since Ebrahim Raissi came to power, the UN Human Rights Council's special rapporteur on Iran has been denied entry to the country.

Thousands have been imprisoned and tortured for opposition to the regime, while hundreds are on death row for vague crimes such as "insulting the Prophet" or "spreading corruption on Earth". According to Amnesty International, women continue to face "entrenched discrimination" in law and practice. Religious minorities, such as the Bahá'í, continue to be brutally repressed.

On September 16, the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman, three days after she was arrested by the vice police, has provoked outrage both in Iran and around the world.

Indeed, while visiting her family in the capital Tehran, she was stopped near a metro station because "her veil did not cover her hair enough", according to the police in charge of enforcing strict dress rules for women, before being taken to a police station.

The Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council found it "unbelievable" that almost 3 years after the deadly crackdown on the November 2019 protests, the Iranian government has still not properly investigated or held anyone accountable for the lethal force used against the protesters, which left at least 304 people dead.

The European Union has described the arrest and death in custody of the young Iranian woman as deeply shocking and called for a transparent investigation to shed full light on the circumstances of this tragedy and the head of EU diplomacy, Josep Borrell, has strongly condemned the "unacceptable" death of Mahsa Amini and called on the authorities to punish those responsible. Clearly, a new approach in EU-Iran relations is called for.

Regarding the nuclear issue, it has now become obvious to both the European Union and the United States that the only way to achieve a mutual return to the 2015 nuclear deal is for Iran to drop further unacceptable demands, and if it wants these sanctions lifted, it will need to alter its underlying conduct; the authorities will need to change the dangerous activities that gave rise to these sanctions in the first place and show a minimum amount of respect for human life if any meaningful international relation is to be maintained.

Trajan Dereville



© Federal Government/Kugler

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz

OLAF SCHOLZ

Tough lessons in German leadership

Olaf Scholz is not Cicero. Nor John Fitzgerald Kennedy or Martin Luther King.

Passionate speeches that move and carry you away are not his thing. The tone of his speech on Europe at Charles University in Prague was more reminiscent of a soporific television programme. One might have expected the German Chancellor to show a little more daring in terms of content. He could, for example, have made an uncompromising analysis of the state of the European Union.

But that is not how it turned out.

When Scholz defended concrete proposals in his speech on 29 August 2022, it was mainly a matter of tactics. The creation of a European air defence system or the admission of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia as full members of the Schengen area are important points. But they do not represent a vision for the future of the EU.

"When, if not now? Who, if not us?" By quoting this slogan of the Czech students who triggered the Velvet Revolution in 1989, Chancellor Olaf Scholz placed his first major "Europe speech" in a historical continuity. As an explicit response to French President Emmanuel Macron's Europe speech at the Sorbonne in 2017, he had chosen Charles University in Prague to present German proposals for reforming the European Union. This German position was eagerly awaited in the run-up to the European summits in October, where the "future of Europe" is to be shaped.



© Federal Government/Kugler

Olaf Scholz delivering his speech at Charles University in Prague

A TROUBLESOME LEGACY

Angela Merkel has undoubtedly left her mark on modern German history. Her rise to power in 2005 and her extraordinary longevity - comparable only to that of Konrad Adenauer (1949-1963) and Helmut Kohl (1982-1998) - make her a central figure in current German and European politics.

However, after the end of her last term in 2021, her party (CDU-CSU, Christian Democrats) and her designated successor Armin Laschet were voted out at the ballot box.

The new leadership, headed by 63-year-old Social Democrat Olaf Scholz, apparently wants to pursue a somewhat different course than in the past 16 years. But will this government, which includes the Social Democrats of the SPD, the Greens and the Liberals (FDP), be able to distance itself completely from the Merkel era?

There is a relative continuity between the new government and the era of Angela Merkel. The CDU/CSU has often governed with the SPD, the Greens and the FDP: Merkel was allied with the SPD from 2005 to 2009 and again from 2013 to 2021.

If Olaf Scholz is described as a "reassuring" chancellor, it is also because he wants to display the same sobriety as Merkel. Moreover, the two major parties of the left and the right have more or less advocated the same policies in terms of content: Reducing public spending, improving competitiveness, supporting demographics, openness to immigration, etc.



Olaf Scholz and Angela Merkel at the signing of the coalition agreement for the 19th election period of the Bundestag

Merkel had even taken up some of the SPD's themes to better weaken it and demobilise its voters, breaking with the taboos of the right on several issues: Announcement of the nuclear phase-out in 2011, admission of one million migrants in 2015, introduction of a statutory minimum wage in 2015.

In this way, the German Christian Democrats have adopted some of the historic demands of the SPD and the Greens. At the European level, Merkel also enjoyed the support of the SPD



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

and the Greens - then in opposition - at the height of the 2010 currency crisis. Without their support, it would not have been certain that she could have passed the aid plans for Greece or the creation of the European Stability Mechanism to save the euro.

But the former chancellor's record paradoxically opens up new possibilities for the new government. The many measures that the left advocated under Angela Merkel - phasing out nuclear energy, openness to immigration, but also same-sex marriage - allow the Scholz cabinet to go even further: decarbonisation planned for 2030, raising the minimum wage to 12 euros an hour, and investments in digital technology, education and ecological change that could total 100 billion euros.

This level of spending is made possible by the solid financial position of the German state, whose debt has fallen significantly under Angela Merkel. Nevertheless, Olaf Scholz wants to stick to the debt brake, which was written into the Basic Law in 2009 with the support of the SPD and which prevents the German state from spending more money than it collects in taxes.

The new government's ambitions are high, especially for the Greens, who seek a rapid decarbonisation of the economy and envisage much higher investment than their partners in their

programme, but the legal restrictions inherited from the Merkel era could cause problems in the long run.

In European policy, the new government is taking up the legacy left by Merkel on two levels. First, it wants to maintain the European Stability Pact and avoid a rise in inflation in the Eurozone. According to the coalition agreement between the three parties, it is even about strengthening the instruments to control public spending in Europe.

Furthermore, Olaf Scholz and his allies want to continue to use the budgetary leeway introduced during the Covid 19 crisis under Angela Merkel. On these two points, the new government is building on the policies of the former chancellor.

But Scholz and his allies are also breaking with Merkel's policy, which had severely strained relations between Germany and its partners during the euro crisis. They are recalling a federalist orientation not seen in Germany since the 1990s and the ambitious plans of Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand to strengthen Europe.

The coalition agreement between the SPD, FDP and Greens talks about a "European federal state". The text goes on to say: "We want to strengthen Europe's strategic sovereignty. This means above all expanding its own

capacity to act in the global context and being less dependent and vulnerable in strategically important areas such as energy supply, health, raw material imports and digital technology, without isolating Europe".

At the same time, Scholz and his partners emphasise their desire to maintain good relations with the United States, as the CDU/CSU had done under Merkel. They break with the line of relative independence from Washington initiated by Gerhard Schröder, who refused to participate in the Iraq war in 2003. The tone is changing, especially under the influence of the Green Party leader Annalena Baerbock, who is now German Foreign Minister and is already taking a tough stance on China.



Olaf Scholz and former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Despite being stripped of German parliamentary privileges, Scholz and the SPD decided to keep him despite his close ties with Putin

A graduate in international law, she is known for her commitment to human rights, even though she holds moderate views among the relatively pragmatic Greens. Although Beijing is the biggest international customer of German companies, the government wants to denounce the abuses against the Uyghurs and the pressure on Taiwan, for example. This is a turning point compared to the governments led by Angela Merkel.

A LEFT-LEANING YOUTH

Born on 14 June 1958 in Osnabrueck, the son of a travelling salesman and a housewife, he grew up in a north-eastern suburb of Hamburg. In 1975, at the age of 17, he joined the powerful SPD youth movement, the Jusos, and was elected its vice-chairman and vice-president of the International Union of Socialist Youth.



A young Olaf Scholz in the 1980s

In this capacity, he travelled to the GDR several times and, according to the Bild newspaper, the authorities in the former GDR had recognised him as an "old-school politician with influence". Consequently, he and his colleagues were given special treatment: "visas for Berlin, no fees" and "polite clearance, no customs checks". Nevertheless, he was pursued by the Stasi and kept under surveillance in Hamburg.

At the same time, Olaf Scholz studied law and eventually opened a law firm specialising in labour law in 1985. He represented trade unions and cooperative members. Since German reunification in 1990, he represented workers in numerous cases related to the privatisation and break-up of former East German companies.

LONG POLITICAL CAREER

His political career began in 1998, when he was elected to the Hamburg Parliament as MP. At that time he also married his wife Britta Ernst, who is also active in politics and is currently Minister of Education in the state government of Brandenburg.

In 2002, he became Secretary General of the Social Democrats (SPD) under the leadership of former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, his political mentor.

When Angela Merkel came to power in 2005 and formed her first grand coalition between the Social Democrats and the CDU, Olaf Scholz was appointed Minister of Labour. Between 2007 and 2009 he was part of the government that helped the country through the financial crisis.

In 2011 he was elected mayor of Hamburg and brought his home city back into social democratic hands. During his time in office, he set up a free crèche for families and launched a massive housing programme. The then 60-year-old returned to the ruling coalition in 2018 as Angela Merkel's finance minister and vice chancellor.

RIGHT WING OF THE SPD

Many in the SPD considered Olaf Scholz "too centrist - or even too right-wing". He played an important role in introducing Gerhard Schröder's liberal labour market reforms in the 2000s. Scholz's involvement in 'Agenda 2010', which led to substantial budget cuts in social benefits, earned him heavy criticism from the left wing of the SPD. As Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Olaf Scholz also raised the retirement age to 67.

His centrist, even right-wing stance contributed to his being marginalised within his party, so that activists and party loyalists removed him from the presidency in 2019. Olaf Scholz, however, managed to get back on his feet thanks to the Covid 19 pandemic, not hesitating to defy prevailing opinion and push public spending to the extreme.

Despite being disavowed in 2019, the SPD, one of the oldest political parties in Europe, elected him to defend its colours. His rise to power, however, came as a surprise. In the summer of



Former U.S. Treasury Secretary, Steven Mnuchin and former German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz at the 2018 G7 Finance Meeting



© Linsefraktion.de

Angela Merkel and Olaf Scholz with their hand gesture

2020, the Social Democratic Party was credited with only 15% of the vote, while the Conservatives (CDU-CSU) got almost 40% and the Greens almost 20%.

For many Germans, the enthusiastic jogger was still relatively unknown. But he managed to convince them with direct messages that appealed to voters: no tax cuts for the rich, stable pensions, more social housing and a carbon-neutral economy.

THE 'SCHOLZOMAT' IN ANGELA MERKEL'S FOOTSTEPS

He was regularly ridiculed in the press for his stern demeanour and monotonous, flat speeches, and the Germans gave him the nickname "Scholzomat", a pun between his surname and the word "Automat". But maybe that actually did him some good with voters who are still attached to Angela Merkel, who was not exactly known for her passionate speeches.

Although he came from a different party, he positioned himself in the election campaign as her natural successor.

In the media, he is also known as "Vati", which means "daddy" in German, an allusion to Angela Merkel's famous nickname "Mutti", which means "mummy". Alluding to his resemblance to the former Chancellor, Olaf Scholz even goes so far as to imitate her gestures by holding his hands in front of him in the shape of a rhombus in photos.

The 'Merkel-Raute' or the 'Merkel Diamond' in English is a hand position adopted by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in front of her stomach, where the fingertips meet and both thumbs and index fingers form a rough diamond shape. This gesture gradually became her trademark and was regularly used for political purposes.

ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN TAX FRAUD

Olaf Scholz's political career has been marred by a series of cases. Shortly before the Bundestag elections in September 2021, the Social Democrat had to justify himself before the Bundestag's Finance Committee for the fact that officials in his ministry had not passed on information about an alleged money laundering operation to the judiciary.

After years of investigation, the so-called "CumEx scandal" is now tarnishing the image of the German head of government, who was asked last August to provide explanations about this case of tax fraud on dividends. According to the German press, an email implicated Olaf Scholz in the irregularities that allowed almost 55 billion euros to be syphoned off from the tax revenues of several European countries, including France.

A parliamentary investigative committee is trying to understand the multiple ramifications of this financial scandal, which was uncovered in 2017. The CumEx affair is about an elaborate tax optimisation scheme set up by banks that allowed foreign investors to reduce their taxes on dividends.

Specifically, Olaf Scholz, who was mayor of Hamburg in 2016, is accused of not prosecuting the local branch of Warburg Bank, which would have had to pay tens of millions of euros in refunds, under pressure from Angela Merkel's government.

The parliamentary enquiry is to clarify whether the mayor put pressure on the tax office not to collect the taxes. Although Scholz has denied these allegations, new elements uncovered recently have invalidated the former mayor's denials.

In the flat of another member of the Social Democratic Party who may have played a role in the bank repayment, investigators discovered more than 200,000 euros in cash in a safe deposit box, strengthening suspicions of possible covert financial arrangements.



What does this man have to hide?" reads the cover of the August 2022 edition of Stern magazine, running a story about the "CumEx" tax scandal

"NOTHING WILL BE THE SAME AGAIN"

Olaf Scholz does not promise "blood, toil, sweat and tears", as Winston Churchill did in 1940, but not far from it. In a solemn opinion piece published by the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, the Chancellor justified the lifestyle change he will demand of Germans by next winter, in an environment approaching a war economy.

In his coalition agreement with the Greens and the Liberals, Olaf Scholz had already struck this tone regarding



A German-made Leopard tank

the epoch and paradigm shift, but in a far less serious form. Now that war has returned to Europe, the chancellor reminds Germans that politics begins with looking at reality.

"This is not an easy road, not even for a strong and prosperous country like ours. We will need staying power. Many citizens are already suffering the consequences of the war, especially the high prices for gas and food. Many are worried about their next electricity, oil or gas bill," admits the Chancellor, who has promised a 30-billion-euro package to cushion the effects of the crisis.

AMBIGUOUS ATTITUDES

And yet its behaviour towards the war in Ukraine seems somewhat contradictory. A month after announcing the delivery of German-made Leopard tanks and giving the green light for the export of armoured vehicles from post-Soviet stocks, the Scholz government is accused by the opposition, its Polish neighbour and Kiev of not keeping its promises.



Robert Habeck

"I fear that the Chancellor does not want Ukraine to win the war, in the sense that Russian troops will be driven out of the country," criticised the CDU's foreign policy spokesman in the Bundestag. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba added: *"There is not a single rational argument why these weapons cannot be delivered, only abstract fears and excuses".*

The SPD has always taken a more conciliatory stance towards Russia than its coalition partners. The party's support for the now-stopped Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, which was condemned by the Greens and the Liberals, was the clearest expression of this disagreement.

This pro-Russian policy of the German left has several roots, going back to the policy of rapprochement with the East (Ostpolitik) under former SPD Chancellor Willy Brandt, but also to an ideological closeness to Russia cultivated by the most radical currents of the German left and driven by a certain anti-Americanism.

However, Olaf Scholz's reluctance to tighten sanctions should not be interpreted as an expression of a more conciliatory attitude on the part of his party. In an interview with the newspaper Die Zeit, Christian Lindner, the liberal Finance Minister, expressed the same concerns as Robert Habeck, the Green Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy, about the economic consequences of a possible embargo on Russian gas.

State cohesion is thus not fundamentally called into question by the war in Ukraine. Annalena Baerbock and Robert Habeck, the two Green foreign and economic ministers respectively, seem to be the

main actors in this crisis, shifting the lines and forcing the Chancellor to make changes. They are the ones who are benefiting from this crisis in terms of popularity, while the Chancellor is being heavily criticised for his inaction.

The criticism that is being levelled at Germany in this crisis is above all an expression of Germany's prominent position in Europe, which demands more responsibility from it than from its European partners.

But this critical attitude, which can be observed in a number of other European countries, does not seem to be the most courageous. In a way, these countries hide behind German restraint in order not to have to make decisions that would have destabilising consequences for their economies and European society as a whole - and could well contribute to strengthening extremist politics in Europe.



Annalena Baerbock

It is true, however, that on 27 February 2022, the Chancellor made a historic speech in the Bundestag about the turning point in security policy, including arms deliveries to conflict areas, which raised great expectations that Germany would finally assume the geopolitical role that its status as a leading European economy entitles it to.

For the time being, it must be noted that this speech has not been followed by action and that Olaf Scholz's Germany still seems to have difficulties establishing itself as a real central power in Europe.

Hossein Sadre

NEWS IN BRIEF

AMERICAN AIRLINES ANNOUNCES AGREEMENT TO PURCHASE BOOM SUPERSONIC OVERTURE AIRCRAFT, PLACES DEPOSIT ON 20 OVERTURES



© Wikimedia/Sandro Halank

The supersonic aircraft will fly passengers from New York to London in 3h30

American Airlines and Boom Supersonic have announced the airline's agreement to purchase up to 20 Overture aircraft, with an option for an additional 40. American has paid a non-refundable deposit

on the initial 20 aircraft. Overture is expected to carry passengers at twice the speed of today's fastest commercial aircraft.

Boom Supersonic's Overture would introduce an important new speed advantage to American's fleet, which is currently the simplest, youngest and most efficient among U.S. network carriers. Under the terms of the agreement, Boom must meet industry-standard operating, performance and safety requirements as well as American's other customary conditions before delivery of any Overtures.

"Looking to the future, supersonic travel will be an important part of our ability to deliver for our customers," said Derek Kerr, American's Chief Financial Officer. "We are excited about how Boom will shape the future of travel both for our company and our customers."

Overture is being designed to carry 65 to 80 passengers at Mach 1.7 over water — or twice the speed of today's fastest commercial aircraft — with a range of 4,250 nautical miles. Optimized for speed, safety and sustainability, Overture is also being designed to fly more than 600 routes around the world in as little as half the time. Flying from Miami to London in just under five hours and Los

Angeles to Honolulu in three hours are among the many possibilities.

"We are proud to share our vision of a more connected and sustainable world with American Airlines," said Blake Scholl, Founder and CEO of Boom. "We believe Overture can help American deepen its competitive advantage on

network, loyalty and overall airline preference through the paradigm-changing benefits of cutting travel times in half."

In July, Boom revealed the final production design of Overture, which is slated to roll out in 2025 and carry its first passengers by 2029.

"Aviation has not seen a giant leap in decades. Overture is revolutionary in its design, and it will fundamentally change how we think about distance," said Boom Founder and CEO Blake Scholl. "With more than 600 routes across the globe, Overture will make the world dramatically more accessible for tens of millions of passengers."

Boom combines a number of engineering innovations in aerodynamics, noise reduction, and overall performance.

Key Features:

Four-engine design: Overture will be powered by four powerful, wing-mounted engines that enable the airliner to cruise at Mach 1.7 over water and just under Mach 1 over land. Additionally, the four-engine design reduces noise while also decreasing costs for airline operators. Engine placement was selected to conform to the strictest passenger safety requirements.

Quieter operation: On take-off, Overture will use the world's first automated noise reduction system. The airliner will fly without afterburners, meeting the same strict regulatory noise levels as the latest subsonic airplanes. These noise reduction efforts will deliver a quieter experience both for passengers and airport communities.

Contoured fuselage: According to the principle of area-ruling, Overture's fuselage has a larger diameter toward the front of the aircraft and a smaller diameter toward the rear. Boom has applied this design technique to minimize drag and maximize fuel efficiency at supersonic speeds.

Gull wings: The aircraft's wings are sculpted to enhance supersonic performance as well as improve subsonic and transonic handling. Importantly, the wing shaping also helps ensure safety and stability at any speed.

Carbon composite construction: Overture will incorporate carbon composite materials into the majority of the build that are lighter, stronger, and more thermally stable than traditional metal construction. Carbon composites can also be manufactured with highly complex curvature, contributing to the aircraft's aerodynamic efficiency.

Net zero carbon: Overture has been developed from the beginning to be net zero carbon, flying on 100% SAF. Sustainability is woven into all aspects of Overture, from design and production to flight and end-of-life recycling.

Overture Specifications:

- Cruise speed: Mach 1.7 supersonic, Mach 0.94 subsonic

- Range: 4,250nm with full payload
- Passengers: 65–80
- Exterior Dimensions: Length: 201 feet, Wingspan: 106 feet, Height: 36 feet
- Interior Dimensions: 79 feet long, up to 6.5 feet height at aisle
- Airframe: composite fuselage, wing, vertical, and horizontal
- Wing: gull with digital leading and trailing edge flap control
- Flight controls: 4x redundant digital fly-by-wire on 2 LRUs
- Powerplant: 4x medium-bypass 100% SAF-compatible turbofan
- Airport Community noise: ICAO Chapter 14 / FAA Stage 5

Designed and built in the United States, the first Overture aircraft begins production in 2024, rolls out in 2025, begins flight test in 2026 and flies first passengers in 2029.

James Lookwood

THE US FEDERAL DRUG ADMINISTRATION APPROVES ANTI WRINKLE 'DAXXIFY', A SERIOUS COMPETITOR TO 'BOTOX'

Revance Therapeutics, Inc. (Nasdaq: RVNC), a biotechnology company focused on innovative aesthetic and therapeutic offerings, has announced that the United States (U.S.) Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved DAXXIFY™ (DaxibotulinumtoxinA-lanm) for

injection for the temporary improvement of moderate to severe frown lines (glabellar lines) in adults. DAXXIFY™ is the first and only neuromodulator stabilized with Peptide Exchange Technology™ (PXT) and is free of both human serum albumin and animal-based components. Most importantly, DAXXIFY™ has the ability to address duration of treatment effect, which Revance Therapeutics believes is the greatest unmet need with existing neuromodulators for both

consumers and injectors. The FDA approval, Revance's first, augments the company's innovative aesthetics portfolio and expands the company's access to the growing \$3.2 billion U.S. facial injectables market, further



© Revance

establishing Revance as an innovation leader in the industry and laying the groundwork for potential future therapeutic indications. "The FDA approval of DAXXIFY™ is a foundational achievement for the company as it marks the culmination of years of pioneering research and development made possible by the outstanding execution of our talented team, along with strong support from the medical and investor communities. It has been an incredible and rewarding journey to realize our vision and bring this disruptive innovation to an industry that has remained largely unchanged for over 30 years," said Mark J. Foley, Chief Executive Officer. "Importantly, we are very pleased DAXXIFY™'s label

includes data demonstrating the achievement of none or mild wrinkle severity based on investigator and subject assessments, as this provides the foundation for our marketing claims around duration of effect. We look forward to continuing to set new standards in aesthetics and to establishing a new category of long-lasting, peptide-enhanced neuromodulators."



Mark J. Foley, Chief Executive Officer

The approval was based on the data generated in the SAKURA phase 3 clinical trial program (SAKURA 1,2,3), which included more than 2,700 patients and about 4,200 treatments. In the pivotal trials, 74% of subjects achieved a > two-grade improvement in glabellar lines at week four per both investigator and patient assessment, and 98% of subjects achieved none or mild wrinkle severity at week 4 per investigator assessment. The median duration of effort was six months. Some patients maintained treatment results at nine months, with results seen as early as one day after treatment, typically seen within two days.

Daxxify is generally safe and well tolerated with no serious treatment-related adverse events reported in the clinical trials. The most common treatment-related adverse events with were headache followed by drooping of the upper eyelid ptosis and facial paresis (the inability to move facial muscles), including facial asymmetry.

EQUINOR COMPLETES EXIT PROCESS FROM RUSSIA

After 30 years in Russia, Equinor has now exited all joint ventures in the country. Equinor decided to start this process on 27 February following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Equinor can now confirm that the full exit from Kharyaga has also been completed.



© Svein Arne Ennes / Equinor ASA

The Kharyaga field in Russia

As part of the exit from Kharyaga, Equinor has in compliance with applicable sanctions covered decommissioning liabilities accrued and owed by Equinor over the years.

Following the exit from Kharyaga, Equinor has no remaining assets or projects in Russia.

Equinor ASA

Equinor, formerly **Statoil** and **StatoilHydro**) is a Norwegian state-owned multinational energy company headquartered in Stavanger. It is primarily a petroleum company, operating in 36 countries with additional investments in renewable energy. In the 2020 Forbes Global 2000, Equinor was ranked as the 169th-largest public company in the world.

EBRD PROVIDES US\$ 127 MILLION LOAN TO TURKEY'S ISBANK



© Wikimedia/Maurice Flesier

Isbank Towers, Levent Financial Center, Istanbul, Turkey

- US\$ 127 million financing to Isbank for on-lending to local businesses
- Facilitating green investments and supporting women-led SMEs
- Additional risk-sharing, mentorship and networking opportunities for women

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is providing US\$ 127 million in new funding to Isbank for on-lending to women-led businesses and to facilitate Turkey's transition to a green economy.

The financing is being made available through the Bank's Diversified Payment Rights (DPR) programme, an established market instrument used by Turkish banks to raise long-term funding.

The funds will be split between the Turkey Women in Business (TurWiB II) programme, which finances women-led SMEs, and the Turkey Sustainable Energy Finance Facility (TurSEFF III) programme, which supports resource efficiency and small-scale renewable energy investments. With this new investment the EUR 400 million financing made available under TurSEFF III programme is now fully subscribed.

Arvid Tuerkner, EBRD Managing Director for Turkey, emphasized the significance of the funding for a green and inclusive future: "The EBRD remains committed to securing the competitiveness of women-led businesses in Turkey and will continue to expand financial opportunities for women in the economy," he said. "We are also dedicated to accelerating the country's green agenda through our investments. We are happy to be working with a credible partner like Isbank in moving towards both of those ambitions."

In addition, women-led businesses will benefit from risk sharing through the Turkish Credit Guarantee Fund and the Turkish Ministry of Treasury and Finance. They will also have access to advisory, mentoring and networking opportunities, facilitating their access to know-how, non-financial development services and markets.

The new funding under the TurWiB II programme is part of the €600 million in financing dedicated to Turkish women entrepreneurs announced last year by EBRD President Odile Renaud-Basso.

The EBRD is a leading institutional investor in Turkey, with a strong commitment to the country's green agenda. It has invested more than €16.5 billion in 378 projects in the country since 2009, with the overwhelming majority of those projects in the private sector.

CRYPTOCURRENCIES KEY TO TACKLING ORGANISED CRIME

This was the conclusion of the 6th Global Conference on Criminal Finances and Cryptocurrencies – a two-day gathering of thousands of crypto specialists and financial investigators from law enforcement, regulators and the private sector at Europol's headquarters in The Hague, the Netherlands.

As cryptocurrency use expands into practically every country and sector, so does its abuse to commit new forms of crime and launder dirty money, said speakers.

Yet with the right tools, capacity and cooperation, the unique characteristics of blockchain-based technologies offer an unprecedented opportunity to investigate organised crime and money laundering networks and to recover stolen funds.

Keeping up as crypto enters the mainstream

The speeches and panels painted a picture of how "traditional" and virtual organised crime and money laundering typologies are merging. Cryptocurrencies are increasingly involved in trade-based money laundering cases, for example, and linked to a broad range of crimes

including drug smuggling, sports match fixing and proliferation financing.

Professional money launderers are taking advantage of the ever-growing options provided by crypto assets – from mining to decentralised services – to launder proceeds from both physical and cyber crimes.

But law enforcement, regulators and the private sector are working hard to stay ahead of those who abuse crypto assets to commit crimes and launder money.

- Legislation is tightening. New EU regulations, for example, will ensure that crypto assets are treated like any other assets for the purposes of anti-money laundering regulation and supervision.
- Multiple successful cases, some laid bare during the conference, illustrate how investigators are taking advantage of the unique characteristics of blockchain-based technologies to “follow the money”. This has allowed them to identify not only scammers and hackers but also more traditional organised crime groups and money laundering networks.
- Law enforcement and judicial authorities are increasingly treating virtual assets like any other asset from a legal perspective, easing their seizure, management and eventual transformation into fiat currency.
- Private companies are innovating fast to provide the tools and analytical capacity to trace funds laundered across multiple blockchains using different obfuscation techniques.

Increasing understanding and capacity in the crypto sphere among all players – regulators, law enforcement, the private sector – is vital to tackling organised crime and money laundering, both physical and virtual.



About the conference

The 6th edition of the annual Global Conference on Criminal Finances and Cryptocurrencies (#6CrC) took place in hybrid format on 1–2 September 2022. The conference was hosted by Europol with the support of the Basel Institute on Governance through the joint Working Group on Criminal Finances and Cryptocurrencies.

With over 1,700 registered participants from 119 countries, the first day was dedicated to public-private cooperation

and exchange. Speakers represented regulators (European Parliament), law enforcement (Europol), think tanks (Royal United Services Institute), virtual asset service providers (Binance), and specialised companies involved in crypto investigations, data analysis and asset recovery (Asset Reality, Chainalysis, CipherTrace, Sportradar and TRM Labs).

The second day of the conference was strictly limited to law enforcement and related public authorities, such as financial intelligence units. Specialised cryptocurrency investigators from France, Korea, Hungary, the Netherlands, Spain and the United States shared case studies and experiences with their international colleagues, which numbered more than 1,100 from 95 countries.

A conference summary and recommendations will be made available later this year on Europol's website.

FBI RETURNS 2,000-YEAR-OLD ITALIAN ART THAT LANGUISHED IN A LOS ANGELES STORAGE FACILITY FOR DECADES

Mosaic depicting Medusa returned to Italy via specialized shipping channels

FBI Art Crime Team agents recently returned several pieces of historical artwork back to their rightful owners—the Italian government. This is the first in a two-part series.

When Special Agent Allen Grove joined the FBI Art Crime Team, he never thought shipping and logistics would be part of the job.

But that's what it took for the team to return priceless artifacts—ones that may have been lost for as long as 100 years—back to their rightful home in Rome, Italy.

“I thought I'd be investigating art crime and repatriating antiquities. But so much of the work behind the scenes is communications, contracts, and getting the right items to the right people,” he said.

In late 2020, an art attorney reached out to FBI Art Crime Team Special Agent Elizabeth Rivas about an anonymous client who had a mosaic of the mythological figure Medusa. The enormous work had been cut into 16 pieces and stored in individual pallets in a Los Angeles storage facility since the 1980s. Each pallet weighed between 75 and 200 pounds.

Some of the pallets were termite-infested, but the pieces of the mosaic were largely intact thanks to the climate-controlled facility they'd been kept in.

The client had no documentation—known in the art world as provenance—so they could not sell the pieces. (Selling art without provenance is the equivalent of trying to sell a car when you don't have its title.)

The mission for Special Agents Rivas and Grove became discovering where the mosaic belonged so the FBI could return it.



Special Agents Elizabeth Rivas and Allen Grove traveled to Italy for the repatriation of the mosaic to its home in Rome

A local art expert said the mosaic was likely of North African or Italian heritage. So Rivas started with the FBI's liaison in Italy.

A few months later, the FBI's Italian counterpart, the Carabinieri, whose art squad frequently works with the FBI's art crime investigators, confirmed the mosaic was Italian. It had been entered into cultural property records in 1909.

The mosaic is believed to be about 2,000 years old and is a key part of Rome's history.

"The mosaic belongs to the people of Rome. It allows us to understand a bit about the history of humans 2,000 years ago," said Allen Grove, special agent, FBI Los Angeles

The only modern record of the mosaic's existence was a 1959 newspaper ad that appeared to show it for sale in the Los Angeles area.

The next challenge was logistical. The mosaic had to be carefully packed and shipped in such a way that it would arrive undamaged. Luckily, the anonymous individual who had possession of the work agreed to pay for specialized shipping crates.

"We worked with the owner and made sure we documented the condition and had everything we needed to ship it back to Italy," Grove said. "We then worked with the Italian consulate here in Los Angeles. This is something of great interest to Italy; they came and inspected the mosaic and helped us facilitate the logistics of actually getting it back to Italy."

The art arrived safely in April, and experts are now working to clean and restore it so the art can be enjoyed by generations to come.

"The mosaic was handcrafted from an age where people put an amazing amount of care and effort into it. It really speaks to the ingenuity and creativity of the time," Grove said. "It's not meant to be in Los Angeles. The mosaic belongs to the people of Rome. It allows us to understand a bit about the history of humans 2,000 years ago."

The ability to work closely and collaboratively with the Italian government was key to the success of the repatriation, as was the willingness of the art lawyer to reach out to Special Agent Rivas about the piece.

"We were very happy they contacted us," Rivas said. "If they hadn't, it could've been in storage for another hundred years. It's a successful example of how we can work together to get pieces back to where they belong."

THE LEAGUE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS SUES THE BELGIAN STATE FOR "CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY"

The League for Human Rights announced on 16 September that it would sue the Belgian state for "*crimes against humanity*". It criticises the Belgian state for not respecting the quotas imposed by the European Union since 2015 for the resettlement of asylum seekers from refugee camps in Greece. "*This failure has directly contributed to the overcrowding of the asylum seeker camps on the Greek islands, in particular the camp in Moria,*" the international association said in a statement.

For the League, Belgium has held itself responsible for actions that constitute crimes against humanity by violating European law and leaving asylum seekers who had reached Greece in inhumane and degrading living conditions.



Syrian and Iraqi refugees arriving at Skala Sykamias, Lesbos, Greece

Belgium has not respected its obligations

Faced with an influx of people seeking international protection, mainly in Italy and Greece, the EU set quotas in 2015 for the relocation of people to other EU countries. In March 2016, member states committed to resettle a total of 160,000 people who had applied for international protection.

However, according to the League for Human Rights, Belgium has not respected its commitments. Citing a European Commission report, it points out that in September 2017, only 677 people had been resettled from Greece to Belgium, although the country was supposed to receive 2,415 people.

According to the League, the Belgian state has contributed to the overpopulation of the camps on the Greek islands, although it could not ignore the "inhuman and degrading conditions" prevailing there.

"In view of the fact that tens of thousands of people were subjected to inhuman and degrading living conditions in the camps in full knowledge of the facts and systematically", the League considers that the Belgian state has held itself responsible for acts that constitute crimes against humanity.

WHO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE PUBLISHES CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CONTROL AND ELIMINATION OF MONKEYPOX IN THE WHO EUROPEAN REGION



© CDC

Monkeypox lesions often appear on the palms of hands

WHO/Europe has launched a series of new policy briefs on monkeypox for the WHO European Region. The first brief in the series, entitled Considerations for the control and elimination of monkeypox in the WHO European Region, was developed in collaboration with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

This guidance highlights the need for public health authorities and clinics at national and sub-national levels to identify and actively work with relevant civil society organisations, community-based organisations and stakeholders to ensure that at-risk groups are properly informed and empowered to protect themselves. Research on transmission patterns, disease surveillance and vaccination are additional areas that Member States should consider in their response.

ECDC Director Andrea Ammon Said:

"Through a number of complementary steps taken simultaneously, this brief from the WHO Regional Office for Europe outlines the ways in which we can begin to control the monkeypox infection in the European Region. These steps include among others, the isolation of cases, the appropriate use of therapeutics and vaccines, as well as engaging with affected communities which can ensure public health information is communicated quickly and effectively. We stress that multiple steps and approaches must be implemented simultaneously to ensure maximum impact. It also proposes indicators to monitor country-level progress towards this goal."

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) supports the need for multi-sector collaboration in order to reduce human-to-human transmission of monkeypox. ECDC has worked with the WHO Regional Office for Europe to develop several documents and resources that are available to Member States and civil society organisations for the current outbreak. ECDC is looking forward to the continued collaboration in the development of operational guidance to protect the health of European citizens.

RUSSIA'S WAGNER GROUP BOSS RECRUITING PRISONERS TO FIGHT IN UKRAINE

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the leading financier of the Wagner mercenary group, has launched a recruitment campaign in Russian prisons, promising inmates they would go free if they served in Ukraine for six months.

In a video posted on social media, he can be seen talking to prisoners and telling them: "Either private military companies and prisoners or your children - decide for yourself."

The BBC geolocated the footage to a penal colony in the central Russian republic of Mari El and is convinced it is genuine and that the recruiter is Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Prigozhin also said that if he were in prison, he would dream of joining the Wagner group to "pay my debt to the motherland".

"As long as you are with us for half a year, you are always in the combat zone," he told the group. "No one retreats. No one surrenders to captivity".

The Wagner Group is a Russian paramilitary organisation and is variously referred to as a private military company (PMC), a network of mercenaries or the de facto private army of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Officially, the group does not exist.

According to British military intelligence, 1,000 Wagner Group mercenaries are deployed in Ukraine, fighting alongside the Russian military.

Mercenaries have reportedly taken part in various conflicts around the world, including civil wars in Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic (CAR) and Mali, often fighting on the side of forces allied with the Russian government. The Wagner soldiers have been charged with war crimes. The charges include rape and robbery of civilians.



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Yevgeny Prigozhin, addressing inmates in a Russian prison



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



Memorial service conducted for Mikhail Gorbachev, the last General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and last President of the USSR, at the Pillar Hall of the House of Unions, Moscow

A MAN TO REMEMBER

The World (but not all Russians) mourns the Soviet Union's last leader

It was the great French novelist and fervent believer in literary realism, Gustav Flaubert, who wrote in a letter to his lover, Louise Colet in June 1853: *“On peut calculer la valeur d'un homme d'après le nombre de ses ennemis et l'importance d'une oeuvre du mal qu'on est dit”* (You can calculate the worth of a man by the number of his enemies, and the importance of a work of art by the harm that is spoken of it). I'm not sure what he'd have made of Mikhail Gorbachev, a man who brought peace and tranquillity to a world on the edge of a nuclear abyss. Those of us saved from a tragic war still admire him as the Soviet Union's most peace-loving (as well as being the last) leader before its dissolution. Gorbachev had achieved single-handedly something that the united forces of NATO had been unable to achieve: the fall of the Iron Curtain. That's the whole point, really: he succeeded in bringing an end to the nuclear threat that

had hung over us all for years, by ending Russia's terrifying counter-balance to the West and the threats they represented. Putin, on the other hand, is a man who likes to make threats. He denied Gorbachev a State Funeral and declined to attend the more normal funeral that saw Gorbachev interred next to his late wife, Raisa, although thousands of ordinary Russians were there. Apart from showing a lack of respect for the march of history, it also displays an alarming level of simple bad manners and rudeness.

“In the mid-80s,” Gorbachev told me back in 2008, during an unscheduled and off-the-cuff interview, “the leaders of the big states realised that there is an urgent need to do something.” He was not above bringing himself into his proclaimed description of our reality, “Then God made the ways of Gorbachev, Reagan, Bush, Thatcher, Mitterrand, and others – and they were wise

enough to overcome clichés and prejudices regarding each other and start talking about the nuclear threat.



Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s

Now the world and our times are different, there is globalisation, countries are more interdependent

and countries like Brazil, China and India have come onto the stage.” As we now know, of course, and he clearly could not have known back then, was that ambitious demagogic leaders can still overturn the appellation through ruthless ambition. I think he’d have been very disappointed to find that the culprit would be the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin. His words, though, had been remarkable, and spoke of peace.

I remember at my primary school, when I was 9 or 10 years old, the regular testing of the air raid siren mounted on the school roof. When that happened, the noise was too loud for lessons, so we kids quite enjoyed it. Since the school – and, indeed, the entire town – lacked any kind of nuclear bunker, I’m not sure what we were supposed to do if it sounded for real, which, of course, it never did. When I met Gorbachev, I was struck by how much shorter he was than I had anticipated. A great man, the leader of a great world power, should be gigantic and physically powerful, more like, say, the Hulk. Gorbachev, very clearly, was not like that.



© Wikimedia Commons / Blaues Sofa

Anna Politkovskaya

It was a fortuitous but accidental encounter, inside the European Parliament in Brussels, when I spotted him standing in the corridor, together with his interpreter, just outside the press bar and between it and the press conference room named, somewhat ironically, for Anna Politkovskaya, the Russian journalist whose courageous reporting of the Chechen war and trenchant criticism of Putin was presumably responsible for her being shot dead at point blank range inside her Moscow apartment. From 1999 until her death on 7 October 2006, she



Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991

served as a war correspondent (she was always described as a reporter, not a war correspondent, because she concentrated on the suffering of civilians) for the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, set up, ironically, by Gorbachev, using money from his 1990 Nobel peace prize. Politkovskaya often travelled to the front lines to document the frequent abuses by Russian troops and their Chechen allies against those fighting for independence and the long-suffering ordinary civilians. The Russians organised camps where Chechen prisoners often faced torture, rape, severe beatings, and mutilations. The dead were mainly dumped in mass graves by the Soviet troops. In today’s Russia, Putin would probably have called the war “a special military operation” or some other such silly and inaccurate euphemism. Politkovskaya also reported on Putin, who was Yeltsin’s prime minister at the time. In fairness, I must point out that it was Chechen militants who started the war by invading Dagestan. Politkovskaya never avoided telling the truth and repeatedly pointed out that fact.

But getting back to my meeting with Gorbachev, I was struck not only by his relatively modest size but by his modest demeanour, too. He agreed to be interviewed for radio (I’m afraid I do not recall the radio station concerned, whose name seemed not to interest him anyway) and we settled down to a stand-up interview. He was fulsome in his answers and extremely cooperative and friendly. His interpreter was only required so that I would understand his replies. He spoke nothing but Russian during the interview, but he always

started answering me before his interpreter had finished translating my questions, which showed he had a pretty good grasp of English, even if he chose not to speak it. I suspect that was because he wanted to be sure there could be no ambivalence about his views and not because it is the language of the United States, the Soviet Union’s former long-term rival for world supremacy. Putin’s decision not to attend Gorbachev’s funeral, let alone grant him a state funeral, is clear proof of the current Russian President’s lack of manners and appropriate respect for a great man, even if he disagreed with his views. It would not have surprised Gorbachev at any rate. Putin was, after all, the choice for leader of Boris Yeltsin, who was not always a good judge of character, even when sober. I met him, too, but he was much too busy to speak to a random and (to him) unknown journalist, although he did make a grunt that defied interpretation.

He did, however, come to Gorbachev’s rescue when coup plotters tried to remove him from office in 1991 for being too soft with the West. It seems that the hawks in the Kremlin always wanted a war, never heeding the words of the song first recorded for Tamla Motown by the Temptations and written by Norman Whitfield, a member of the group, but then made a massive hit by Edwin Starr:

“War, huh, yeah

What is it good for

Absolutely nothing

Uh-huh”



Mikhail Gorbachev and Vladimir Putin

It topped the US charts for three weeks and even earned Starr a letter of congratulations from Beatle John Lennon. I don't imagine that members of the Politburo are terribly keen on pop music, even if the public love it. There was never a song called "Special Military Operation, huh Yeah; What is it good for." I wonder why, since they mean the same thing.

LESSONS FROM WHICH PAST?

In Moscow and other Russian cities today, Gorbachev's legacy is a mixed one. Many ordinary Russians blame him for "losing" the Cold war and for the subsequent break-up of the Soviet Union, which Putin has described as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century", although that is not a view shared in, say, Ukraine, Moldova or Lithuania, and many other former satellite states. Even so, hundreds of ordinary Russian citizens lined up outside the Hall of Columns to pay their respects to Gorbachev in the same place that, for instance, Joseph Stalin and

Vladimir Lenin are commemorated. Today's world is – marginally – less embroiled in war. "The most important lesson we can take is that a dialogue has to be developed," Gorbachev told me. "Confidence has to be built. We have to renounce the politics of force, they bring nothing good. We have to understand that we are all in the same boat, we all have to paddle.

If not, some are paddling, some are pouring water in, others might even be making a hole in it. Nobody will win in this manner in this world." He's indisputably right, but is that Putin and one or two others I can see over there with big jugs of water and electric drills in their hands?

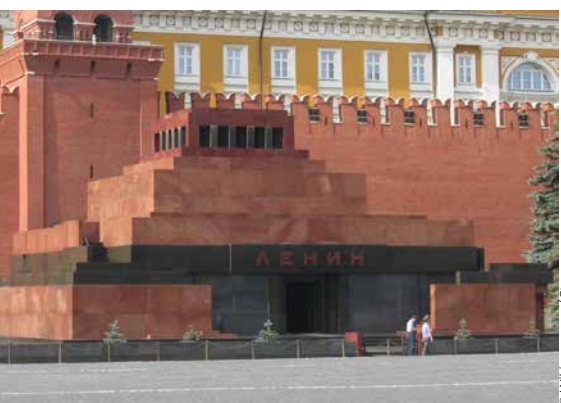
I suppose there are enough people in Russia and its former satellites who hate him to qualify him under Flaubert's reckoning as a "man of worth". His greatest legacy is, undoubtedly, the relative peace that the world enjoys, despite the conflicts that continue in various places. There are no longer two nuclear-armed superpowers threatening to obliterate us all. I can still remember the television warnings that were broadcast while I was still at primary school (on a tiny, black-and-white, 30 cm-screen) urging us to seek shelter underneath something solid if we hear the air raid sirens. Exactly how safe we'd have been underneath my mother's dining table if a nuclear weapon detonated nearby was never fully explained. Fortunately, Armageddon never arrived, and we have Gorbachev to thank for ensuring it never would, or not soon, anyway.

He visited the European Parliament several times and his message was always one of peace and the need to preserve it, although he also spoke on environmental matters, including the importance of ensuring a supply of clean drinking water everywhere. It was peace, however, that dominated his interview with me. He told me he believed that the key to peace was – and will always be – dialogue. The dismissive attitude of Putin and the old guard at the Kremlin towards Gorbachev's death probably provides enough enemies to justify him as a man of worth under Flaubert's criteria. Since his death in August 2022, following a long illness, top political figures from around the world have been quick to praise his unique legacy. When I spoke to him, he talked about how other world leaders should overcome their remaining prejudices and talk peace, or at least talk to each other, so that the nuclear threat – indeed, the threat of warfare in any form – could be diminished. Given the current circumstances, there seems little chance of that happening.



Mikhail Gorbachev at the European Parliament in 2009

He talked a lot about such things as trust, co-operation, dialogue, mutual help, and mutual exchange. He said he believed that the success of Europe is largely down to the existence of the European Union, which he admired. "We have to renounce the use of force," he told the European Parliament in his speech to MEPs. As recent history has shown, it's not a view shared with his successor, Putin, who was, at that time, a relatively lowly (but very ambitious) KGB operative, working mainly in St. Petersburg during Gorbachev's rule. Putin had worked as a chinovnik (the word is a carry-



Lenin's Mausoleum (from 1953 to 1961 Lenin's & Stalin's Mausoleum)

over from earlier times, meaning a minor official or office-holder under tsarist rule) in Dresden, East Germany, for 5 years. He'd worked as a liaison officer between the KGB and East Germany's feared secret police, the Stasi. He had told his mentor, the film-maker Igor Shadkhan, that he had quit the KGB because a changing Russia had left him with no rôle to play. He even talked of becoming a taxi driver. If only! Like many of Putin's claims, at that time and since, it was a lie. Even so, Putin had witnessed the dissolution of the Soviet Union (and the Soviet dream of world domination) from the security of the KGB's villa overlooking Dresden itself. The dissolution meant the arrival of nationalist movements in countries Moscow had considered its own, with which Gorbachev had been obliged to compromise. Soon after the failed hard right coup attempt, Yeltsin emerged as the man to watch. He promptly banned the Communist Party – something that is often forgotten, despite having been such a momentous decision – and suddenly the world was changed completely.

According to Catherine Belton in her highly informative book "Putin's People", Putin was still there and has given several different accounts of his departure from the KGB, none of which is true. Russia continued to recruit pro-Russian agents in the new independent East Germany. Ms. Belton claims that the STASI's political prisoners (and there were many) were held in tiny windowless cells and treated extremely badly, none of which is likely to come as a surprise to you.



© Mikko Stig / Lehtikuvu

Catherine Belton



Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, Muqtadā al-Şadr and Commander of the Quds Force Qasim Soleymani in 2019

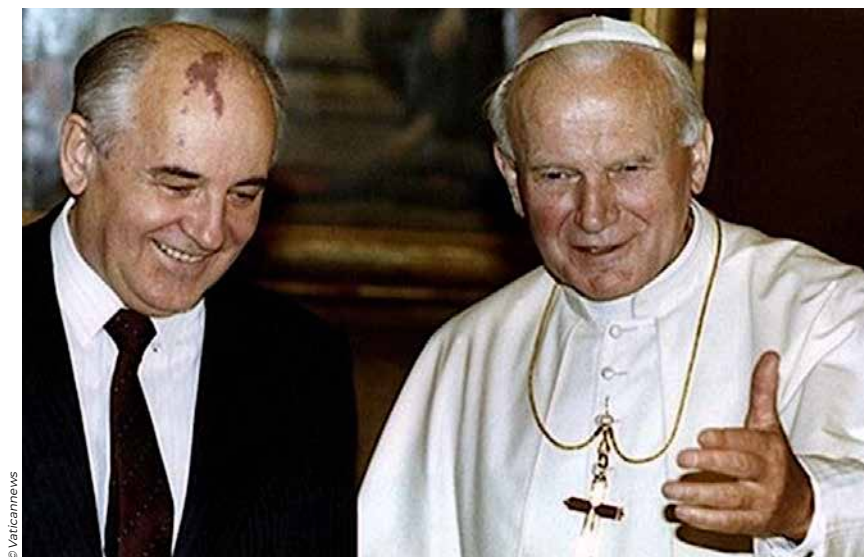
HOW DID WE GET FROM THERE TO HERE?

Gorbachev told me that meaningful conversation is the most important thing to achieve. World leaders may meet, may even talk to each other, but they talk with closed ears. The communication must be two-way, although that can be difficult to achieve. "Look at the US in Iraq," he reminded me, "Everybody was opposed, even their allies, but they did not listen and what happened? They do not know how to get out of it now." They didn't: even though the US and its allies (chiefly the United Kingdom) succeeded in overthrowing Saddam Hussein quite quickly, they then went on to occupy the country, sparking a violent insurgency, aiming to overthrow the Americans. Not all had been peaceful within Iraq for reasons of religious difference. Saddam had banned Iraqis from making pilgrimages to the Shi'ite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, leading some ayatollahs (local religious leaders) in southern Iraq keen to get away from areas controlled by Saddam's forces and to seek more peaceful lives out in the countryside. As they started to return and the pilgrimages resumed, Iraqis also began the hunt for their bodies of their loved ones. After the many pogroms of the Saddam regime, there were thousands of them to find.

Sectarian violence swept the entire country, with many killings between the Shi'ite and Sunni armed groups. One, formed by a tough-talking

cleric, Muqtadā al-Şadr, was called the Mahdi Army and was famously effective against both US and Iraqi forces on behalf of the Shi'ites, further destabilising an already very unstable country. The occupation and the continuing war divided American opinion, with the war becoming deeply unpopular with the emergence of American soldiers appearing to abuse and brutalize Shi'ites being held at Abu Ghraib prison, which became synonymous with cruelty and, basically, inhuman imperialism. By October 2009, the Pentagon had estimated that more than 4,300 American soldiers had been killed in the war. The controversy raged on and in 2011, new President Barack Obama ordered his troops home, ending this controversial and largely unpopular war. Something had to change to prevent further deadly and relatively pointless wars. "After the Cold War," Gorbachev told me, "Everybody was talking of the 'New World Order'. Even the Pope joined us and said a 'New World Order' is necessary: more stable, more fair, more human." A nice idea, but human beings have a poor record for adhering to such ideas and principles when they can advance their cause more quickly with a bullet in the brain of an opponent or a stiletto between their ribs.

Gorbachev said he had hoped that world powers had 'learned their lessons', but of course they hadn't. World leaders, it seems, cannot resist trying to seize the initiative in order to benefit from any global event and



Pope John Paul II and Mikhail Gorbachev in the Vatican in 1989

turn it to their advantage. The Pope and others may have been ready to welcome in the fabled 'New World Order'. "However, when the USSR fell apart – because of internal reasons first of all – the US could not resist the temptation to use the confusion," he told me, although it was a well-known fact at the time. "Political elites changed, those who brought the world out of the Cold War left the stage, the new ones wanted to write their history."

The only surprising thing about Gorbachev's opinion is that what happened seems to have come as a surprise to him. He had been around for long enough, had seen enough to know what human nature is like, up at the sharp end. Perhaps "surprised" is not the right word? Perhaps he was just "disappointed". That, I could well understand. It disappointed him, but it also seems to have worried him. "Those errors of vision, poor decisions and missteps made the world ungovernable," he told me. "We live in a world of chaos. New ways of life and new political mechanisms can emerge from the chaos, but the chaos can also lead to disruption, resistance, and armed conflict." Yes indeed, it certainly can.

BREATHE DEEPLY (WHILE YOU STILL CAN)

Apart from world geopolitical events, Gorbachev was also deeply concerned by what has been going wrong with the environment, especially the availability of clean, drinkable water and the safe disposal

of health-threatening waste. There are several charitable organisations devoted to this issue, including 'Water.Org', who set out their intentions on their website: "We believe water is the best investment the world can make to improve health, empower women, enable access to education, increase family income and change lives. Yet, 771 million people lack access to safe water." That's a damning indictment and it seems the organisation had the support of Gorbachev, although his environmental interests were wider than that. Access to clean drinking water and the safe disposal of waste matter would be a huge step in the right direction, he told the European Parliament. "The major problems are poverty, air and water quality, unsanitary conditions, low agricultural productivity, but all of them are about ecology," he said in reply to my question about environmental degradation. "It

is nonsense to say that ecology is a luxury – it is a major priority of our times." After all, it's been reported that this year's drought in Europe has been the worst in 500 years. In Germany's Elbe River, a carving made in 1616 is meant to be underwater and therefore hidden from sight.

Known as "the Hunger Stone", it provides a warning that the worst droughts will lead to very poor harvests and starvation as well as being a visible indicator of just how serious a drought is becoming; in severe droughts it appears above the surface of the water, rather than being hidden beneath the surface, as usual. Carved on it are the words: "*Wenn du mich siehst, dann weine*", which means "If you see me, weep." Now, farmers who have harvested olive trees on their land for generations are seriously worried because of the toll being taken by the lack of adequate rain. Spain's olive farmers are anticipating a reduction in the harvestable crop of up to 38%. Other edible oils are likely to remain available at inflated prices and with diminished quality, but it may take a while for the olive crop to get back to normal, if it ever does. Normally, olive trees are long-lived plants, with the oldest known one being the olive tree of Vouves, believed to be at least 2000 years old. That's unusual, but it's fairly common for olive trees to last for 500 years or more, during which time the occasional drought can hardly have been unknown. Obviously, keeping them in sunny spots and also well-watered and well drained is essential.



A hunger stone at the Elbe river in Děčín, Czech Republic

There's no doubt that Gorbachev had a point when he expressed concern about mankind's cavalier attitude towards maintaining a safe, clean and well-watered environment. But it's not the only issue that worried him. "The second priority is the fight against poverty because two billion people are living on \$1 to \$2 a day," he said. "The third one is global security, including the nuclear threat and weapons of mass destruction." That's a fairly formidable list of things that are wrong with the world and not visibly getting better. "These are three urgent priorities," Gorbachev said, "but I put ecology in the first place, because it directly touches all of us." Anyone who has been affected by this year's drought would doubtless agree that it touches us all. Unlike the olive tree we can't maintain healthy humans simply by putting them in a sunny spot that's also well-watered and well drained. There's rather more to it than that. Finding somewhere peaceful would be helpful, too, although in Ukraine, for example, that's not easy right now.



The Gorbachev Foundation) was founded by Mikhail S. Gorbachev, former President of the USSR, in December 1991

The problem, as Gorbachev admitted to me, is that his Gorbachev Foundation's motto, "Towards a New Civilization", cannot be easily realized without resources. Everything good costs money. "It's not always about money," Gorbachev replied when I mentioned that good things don't come cheap. "If international issues are handled in a disorderly way, you need more money. It is about trust, co-operation, dialogue, mutual help, and mutual exchange." Interestingly, Gorbachev then gave his advice about the EU which, sadly, the British voters failed to hear. Or at

least, failed to observe. "Why is Europe growing economically?" he asked, before going on to give his own answer, that it's: "because of the existence of the EU. This is the path of new opportunities, and the EU is a good example." It almost sounded as if Gorbachev was suggesting that Russia should apply to join the EU itself. It never will, of course, and probably would be turned away as too large a country to come on board; a shark among so many relative minnows. Indeed, Putin has branded the EU "stupid" for trying to impose price caps and other restrictions on the flow of Russia's gas. It all seems rather strange: I can remember being stopped in the street one day, not far from the European Parliament's Brussels building, by a former German Socialist MEP who was trying to persuade me to invest in Russia's Nordstream gas pipeline.

She'd taken on a consultancy position with the company. I didn't take her up on the suggestion. Putin, of course, is now threatening to withhold any form of energy from Europe as punishment for Europe's refusal to countenance Russia's takeover of Ukraine, whether it's a war, an invasion or a "special military operation", which is an invasion dressed up in fancy words. Whether or not the entire EU, with its variety of sometimes opposing opinions, can unite on a common energy policy or not is as yet uncertain. Experts suggest that Putin's aim is not to freeze EU citizens this winter, nor to ramp up energy prices: he wants to cause tensions that will break up the EU.

He doesn't like successful organisations that oppose Russia's actions, however meekly, it seems. It's been suggested that it's even part of a plan to take NATO apart by causing friction within it.

FUELLING POTENTIAL CONFLICT

The fact is that Europe is dependent on fossil fuels from Russia: 38% of the gas EU countries consume comes from Russia, that's up from 27% just nine years ago. Russia recorded its highest ever current account surplus this summer, partly because Putin keeps putting the price up but also because Russian imports are so low. That, however, may not be sustainable for Russia, because if it is to expand as an economic power, or even maintain its manufacturing levels, it will need to get hold of the goods it is no longer buying. Nobody is gaining from Putin's stupid and pointless war, not even Putin and his lapdog Kremlin. However, it's hard to see how any country could hope to replace the vast quantity of fossil gas Russia supplies to Europe, and emissions from gas consumption now exceed those from burning coal. According to the European Commission, the EU must eliminate the use of fossil gas by 2050 if the rise in global warming is to be restricted to just 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Currently, the burning of fossil gas is responsible for more carbon emissions than coal. The Paris agreement set the target of restricting the global temperature rise to below 2° Celsius, with 1.5° as the ideal goal. Writing on the Science Analytics website, Dr. Carl-



Alexey Miller, CEO of Gazprom (principal funder and major shareholder of Nordstream), and Russian president, Vladimir Putin

Friedrich Schleussner, Head of Climate Science and Impacts, said that: “Science from the IPCC (the International Panel on Climate Change) is clear: limiting warming to 1.5°C can avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Many changes become larger in direct relation to more warming, and every fraction of a degree makes a difference. Every avoided increment of warming would reduce extremes such as heatwaves, heavy rainfall, and droughts, as well as long-term impacts and the risk of crossing tipping points of the Earth System.” Having witnessed this year’s unusually high temperatures and the ensuing drought, we must conclude that he has a point.



Bernard Looney, CEO of BP

How, then, even with Gorbachev’s ideas, can we reduce Europe’s dependence on Russia’s fossil gas? Tara Connelly, senior gas campaigner with the international NGO Global Witness, suggests that Putin could simply turn off the gas taps. “More gas isn’t a long-term solution,” she told CNN, “The flag on the pipeline or ship is irrelevant – it’s Europe’s dependency on the fuel, regardless of where it’s from, that makes it so vulnerable to the vagaries of the global gas market.” And, of course, to the aggressive territorial ambitions of the Russian president. The European Commission wants to see the gas market reformed, but the energy companies, revelling in the record profits they’ve been enjoying, are opposed. Naturally. Connelly points out that the CEO of BP, for instance, Bernard Looney, has called for more investment in gas, while nothing is being done to find ways of reducing demand. As prices continue to rise,



President Ronald Reagan, Vice-President Bush and General Secretary of the CPSU, Mikhail Gorbachev on Governor's Island, New York, 1988

more and more EU citizens are going to struggle to pay soaring bills, while facing the increasing risk of a cold winter. How can governments and the EU address such a massive problem while it’s being deliberately made worse by a war-mongering megalomaniac like Putin?

“It is not always about money,” Gorbachev told me, when I asked him what his “New Civilisation,” would look like. Reading his answer, you must bear in mind that the interview was conducted several years ago, when the EU’s future looked brighter, more united and in which Russia had not yet invaded Ukraine. “If international issues are handled in a disorderly way, you need more money. It is about trust, co-operation, dialogue, mutual help, and mutual exchange.” Yet again, Gorbachev was calling for dialogue and co-operation. “Why is Europe growing economically? Because of the existence of the EU,” he told me. “This is the path of new opportunities, and the EU is a good example.” It is too good an example, it seems, for Putin to leave it alone. It is also a group of nations working together (most of the time, at least) that is not headed by Putin himself, which is a situation he seems to find offensive. Even then, Gorbachev could see where the seeds of discord either had been or would be sown. “Of course, not everything is perfect,” he conceded, “In my view the EU is already over-charged as a system. It

has to have wisdom and know when to stop, absorb, move forward, not just hurry and make hasty headlong jumps.”

I cannot remember the EU making many “headlong jumps”, hasty or not, although I remember attending and reporting on a few enlargement ceremonies. It may get larger again, too. Current candidates include Albania, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are seen as potential members at some future date. Turkey’s membership is a long way off and, like all of those wanting to join, it would offend the Kremlin by doing so. Gorbachev, though, would have approved. Sadly, men of peace seldom get to run countries whose politicians are hungry for conquest and whose arms industries sniff a profit in warfare. In 1987, in a speech to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, Gorbachev said: “At some point, the country began to lose momentum, difficulties and unresolved problems started to pile up, and there appeared elements of stagnation and other phenomena alien to socialism. All this badly affected the economy and social, cultural and intellectual life.” Thanks to him, it did not lead to conflict because, unlike Putin, he preferred peace and mutual tolerance to war. He will be greatly missed.

Jim Gibbons



Central, Hong Kong as seen from Victoria Peak

THE DUMB ADDRESSING THE DEAF

Why Hong Kong's future stays as unsettled as ever

There is an old Chinese saying: “A closed mind is like a closed book; just a block of wood.” There can be few minds more closed, at least on some issues, than that of Xi Jinping, it seems. You will recall what Xi's predecessor, Deng Ziaoping, proposed as a solution for Hong Kong's future? It was “One country, two systems”. Deng was a visionary figure in many ways. Often referred to by his nick-name of Xixian, he was a revolutionary, a military commander and also supreme leader of the People's Republic of China from December 1978 to 1992. His career showed an impressively upward rise to prominence. During the 1950s, he became Vice-Premier of the People's Republic and General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), although he was then considered a pariah during the infamous Cultural Revolution. He was brought back into the party fold by Zhou Enlai, but then booted out again by the so-called “Gang of Four”. When Mao himself

died later that same year, there was a big power struggle and the members of the Gang of Four were arrested and Deng was reinstated. It was Deng who led his country out of the terrible, bloody mess left behind by the horribly misguided Cultural Revolution. He was, however, kicked out of the government following what happened in Tiananmen Square, although he continued to be an important influence until his death. His market reforms transformed China into the economic powerhouse it is today and earned him the title “architect of modern China”.

A confirmed Maoist, he will long be remembered as the man whose ideas had made China the world's largest economy by 2010. Deng undoubtedly really meant “one country, two systems”, with Hong Kong in mind, but there is certainly no sign that the current leader, Xi Jinping, shares that view, or, perhaps, that he interprets it in the same way.

Deng proposed his solution back in the early 1980s, when he was Paramount Leader of China, engaged in negotiations with the United Kingdom about Hong Kong's future.



Thousands of soldiers sweep away the “Gang of Four”

The bigger question now is not so much “does Hong Kong even have a future” (it obviously has) as “who will be in charge to guide it?” and probably “in which direction will it go?”. And will any of its current residents stay on if Beijing takes over completely? Remember, when Deng set out his plan for the future governance of Hong Kong and Macau, it was before they became redesignated as “regions” of China, Hong Kong in 1997 and Macau two years later. Xi seems to believe in one country, but apparently not ‘two systems’, unless it’s a simple choice: ‘my way’ or ‘not at all’. In fact, in respect of Hong Kong, Xi begins to look like that block of wood I spoke about. With him there can be no ‘halfway house’, no compromise. Under his rule, another well-known Chinese saying was proved wrong: “Clear conscience never fears midnight knocking.” Under Xi, no-one can relax when they hear a knock on the door at midnight. Xi likes to keep the Chinese people on their toes, it seems, as if fear of him and his soldiers equates to love of the leader. It doesn’t, and another old Chinese saying comes to mind: “Respect out of fear is never genuine; reverence out of respect is never false.” Xi seems not to subscribe to that doctrine, either. Deng’s approach was pragmatic and practical, but not what Mao’s most ardent supporters wanted to hear. Deng had stressed the idea of opening China up to the outside world. He believed in the ‘one country, two systems’ plan but

wanted to see it implemented fully, not used as a blackout curtain to hide what was really happening. His was a pragmatic approach, not buried under the political dogma.

One of the problems is that Xi Jinping’s definition of democracy doesn’t match the predominant western version, although it probably finds favour among the world’s more ruthless despots. In the 1871 children’s book, “Through the Looking Glass” by Lewis Carroll, which brings back the Alice character of “Alice in Wonderland” fame, Humpty Dumpty tells Alice, “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.” Alice asks how one word can have a lot of different meanings for different people and Humpty Dumpty replies: “The question is, which is to be master – that’s all.” Xi Jinping clearly has no problem with that. In China, he is the unquestioned master, and his meanings are his own, whatever he chooses them to be. Disagree with them at your peril! He still claims that “democracy is the key tenet unswervingly upheld by the Chinese Communist Party.” If you believe that, just trying telling the Chinese Communist Party that it has got something wrong. So when he told a conference audience that “true democracy” only began in Hong Kong when China took control, he really meant it, or at least believes it to be true. “After its return to the motherland,” he said, “Hong Kong

compatriots became masters of their own affairs.” Many probably thought they already were.



Hong Kong protester throwing eggs at the portrait of General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping, 1 October 2019

This, of course, fell far short of what many in his audience (at home and around the world) may have wanted to hear, but Xi knows exactly what he means, even if few others are sure. “Hong Kong people administered Hong Kong with a high degree of autonomy, and that was the beginning of true democracy in Hong Kong,” he said.

That is clearly very different from the definition given by Abraham Lincoln in 1858, not long after the American Civil War. He told his audience: “As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy.” I can imagine some interesting but probably ill-tempered conversations in the next life (if



Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying (Fourth from left), Chinese President Xi Jinping (Center), Chief Executive-elect Carrie Lam (Fourth from right) sing during celebrations for the 20th anniversary of the city's handover from British to Chinese rule, in Hong Kong, China June 30, 2017

there is one) between Xi and Abe. As for whether or not Hong Kong's version of democracy would suit Abe Lincoln, I can only quote CNN World's comment on the sweeping national security law imposed after 2020's anti-government protests: "Two years later, no opposition lawmakers remain in the Hong Kong legislature, while nearly all of its leading pro-democracy figures, including activists and politicians, have either been forced into exile or imprisoned – with dozens of them behind bars." No, I don't think Xi and Abe would find much common ground when debating what democracy actually means, do you?

HOW DID WE GET HERE FROM THERE?

There is ample archaeological evidence that people lived in Hong Kong and the surrounding small islands during what was, in the West, the neolithic age, with burial sites containing skeletons from at least 3,000 BCE or earlier. Whoever they were, those inhabitants were followed by the Yue people, who were fully independent of outside control until the island was invaded by Qin dynasty forces from the rest of China. Various others took control for short periods, then in 111 BCE, the Han dynasty took over. Later, under the Tang dynasty, Hong Kong became famous for salt production and pearls. Then came the Song dynasty which was driven out in its turn by the Mongols, and who then established the Yuan empire. The last dynasty to rule there were the Qing dynasty, when the island was home to just a handful of fishermen and farmers. Then along came the imperialist British who found a good, sheltered bay for their merchants' ships to anchor with the aim of exploiting locally-produced goods and natural resources while selling British-produced goods to the Chinese. They raised the British flag there in 1841 and the Chinese government of the time ceded Hong Kong to the British in 1842. People from further north in China fled to Hong Kong during the Taiping Rebellion and other troubles in the 1850s. Everyone has heard of what is said to be an old Chinese curse: "may you live in interesting times".



Victoria Harbour and Hong Kong Island in the 1860s

Hong Kong has had more than its share of those. It was only returned to Chinese rule officially in 1997.

The tangled history doesn't explain how Hong Kong acquired its strange status as a country-that-isn't-quite-a-country. It's a story that shows Britain in a most unfavourable light, as a country so extremely determined to gain financial advantage from China and its people, regardless of how unhappy and ill it made them, that it would stoop to any depths by selling opium there. It wasn't just that Britain was fuelling deadly addiction while finding a market for a product originating in another of its imperial holdings, India. There was far more criminal (or at least thoroughly immoral) activity than that: the "trade" was tied to blackmailing, corruption, money laundering, war, colonial exploitation and other criminal activities. Britain was not a 'nice' country. Imperial Britain made the Mafia look like a bunch of choirboys by comparison.

According to 'The Saker' website, "Part of the huge growth of British banking and of the financial power of the City of London in the 19th century resulted notably from the profits from the opium sold in China. This trade grew from around 5000 crates of opium sold in 1820, to 96,000 crates in 1873. This took place against the fierce resistance of the Chinese imperial government, which for this reason had to suffer the three so called Opium Wars waged by Great Britain against China. Expressed in tons, the British opium exports reached very nearly ten thousand tons during the year 1873. An incredible quantity for a substance sold in grams!

Immorality on that scale is hard to quantify and impossible to excuse. Britain was determined to continue making vast profits from selling addictive and dangerous drugs to Chinese citizens. The triad gangs did much of the selling and were later used by the Kuomintang to help keep the people in line, but when Mao's Communists tackled them, they were finally defeated, along with their nasty trade. Those triad members who escaped prosecution, jail or execution fled to Taiwan or, of course, Hong Kong. Even by 1848, Hong Kong had been seen as the nerve centre of triad criminality



Chinese opium smokers in Hong Kong in 1858

The British tried to clamp down on the triads, but it wasn't easy; it was a very lucrative type of criminality. One Kuomintang general, Li Wen-huan, lived in Thailand's so-called "Golden Triangle" in order to attack the Communists until he surrendered to the People's Liberation Army in 1949, and he sold lots of heroin to pay his troops. He escaped to Taiwan in 1950. Drug addiction was endemic. The triads were also supplying the Americans with illicit narcotics during the Vietnam War. In order to avoid prosecution, as the authorities

started to get tough on the triads, many members of the gangs moved to Hong Kong. Too many of them are still there. But what of the overall governance? Under the agreement between China and Britain in 1997, the Chief Executive and principle officers are appointed by the State Council of the People's Republic of China. The Chief Secretary of Hong Kong is the most senior official, heading the Government Secretariat. It's a complicated system.

PANDA PROPAGANDA

If you listen to Xi, of course, you'd think democracy is alive and well in China and possibly ONLY in China. Vanity, conceit and hubris would seem to be a problem for Xi, although he'd never admit it, although he is, at least, trying to combat the drug-fuelled gangsterism of the Triads and their successors. However, he must believe that his thoughts are more important and cleverer than other people's. A speech he gave to mark the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's handover from Britain to the People's Republic is now compulsory reading for teachers in Hong Kong. A circular sent out to teachers by the Hong Kong Education Bureau contains the speech and urges all teachers to, as it says, "study and learn" because of "its great significance". Copies have been distributed to all educational establishments, including kindergartens, primary, and secondary schools. How much impact it will have is somewhat open to debate. Most believers in Communism will no doubt admire



Giant panda Ying Ying (R) and Le Le eating bamboos at the Ocean Park in Hong Kong, South China, March 1, 2012

Karl Marx and his two great works, "The Communist Manifesto" and the massive 4-volume "Das Kapital". Both are extremely impressive and important works, but how much impression either of them would make on a 4-year-old seems doubtful to me.

The distribution does seem to suggest a certain level of egotism on Xi's part, however. I rather think that the kindergarten kids in particular would probably prefer a children's story. There are many to choose from in Chinese. There's "Yeh-Shen", for instance, a kind of Chinese version of Cinderella, or "Fa-Mulan", a story about a farm girl who is obliged to become a soldier. There are lots of animal stories, too, of course, several of them including cute pandas. The participants in these tales neither read nor write political polemics for

the young. Xi must really consider his thoughts to be both brilliant, and accessible.

I can't imagine a jolly cartoon panda writing merry propaganda, but perhaps I'm wrong. And I cannot imagine Xi as a jolly cartoon panda, either. There may be more suitable comparisons and more appropriate animals. One of the books of children's stories from China and Tibet, for instance, involves a mythical world where the animals speak but also play tricks on each other, especially enjoying a trick being played on the great striped tiger, who is portrayed as powerful, strong and scary but who can be fooled. I somehow don't think Xi would fit the bill there?

The fact is that children, especially very young children, have a natural liking for animal stories, as well as stories of magic, fairies, demons, dragons, unicorns and other such mythical beasts. China is exceptionally rich in such tales, but as far as I can tell, Xi is not a cuddly figure who is universally loveable. Children are likely to be less interested in Xi's innermost thoughts than in the death of the world's oldest known giant panda, An An. He was a gift to Hong Kong from the Chinese government in 1999 and lived at an animal theme park. At 35 years, he was the oldest male giant panda in captivity and he was put down not long ago for humanitarian reasons, when he stopped eating. His age – 35 in real years – is the equivalent of 105 years for a human. His female



Xi Jinping in Hong Kong

'partner' (they were never seen to mate and never produced young), Jia Jia, who was given to the safari park at the same time as An An, died in 2016 when she was even older: 38. Both animals were fond favourites for the park's many visitors. It still has two giant pandas, Ying Ying and Le Le, but Xi has not given orders for anyone to read his speeches to them, as far as I know. It would make a change from munching on bamboo stalks, but it may not grab their attention much. It would be quite a coup, though, if both pandas simply sat down to listen, before volunteering to join the CCP.

Xi would like us to see China as a 'workers' Paradise', with fair deals for all, but that is not strictly true, although education is free and senior secondary graduates have access to a wide range of vocational and tertiary courses. It seems unlikely that China's current Politburo has much knowledge of the wider world upon which to base judgements, nor to set standards. Its twenty-five members all dress alike in dark suits and all but one are men of a similar age. There is one woman, however: Sun Chunlan, the 67-year-old head of the party's United Front Work Department, whose job it is to spread the party's influence at home and abroad by, for example, seeking to undermine Taiwan's interests in other countries and trying to ensure that Chinese students studying abroad in such countries as Australia or New Zealand stick rigidly to the party line. The only other woman to have been in the Politburo, Liu Yandong, recently retired. Xi seems more obsessed with ensuring China's pre-eminence in world affairs than with the welfare of the Chinese people. According to the East Asia Forum, only 21 per cent of all party members in China are female and only 23 per cent of all national-level civil servants are women. Further down the system, little more than 1 per cent of village committee chairs are women. All of this is surprising and disappointing, given that the party has some 92-million members and almost 5-million party 'units', nationwide. What is a 'party unit' or 'party cell'? Well, they are the grass-roots party organisations, and are the most ubiquitous units of the party.



Chinese Vice Premier Sun Chunlan

According to the party constitution, all business, social and army units on the ground with three Communist Party members or more must set up a party cell. It doesn't say if any of the members should be female.

The cells play an important role within the Party, with a wide range of duties, including promoting the party's ideology, informing the public of the party's policies, implementing decisions from higher levels and organising cadres and non-party members – or the so-called masses – to take part in social work.

At the height of the coronavirus pandemic, over 4.6-million party cells went into emergency mode and helped set up quarantine areas in neighbourhoods, taking people's temperature and allocating daily necessities for people during a lockdown. Very good, of course, and a fine example to the world, but where are all the women? For a party that espoused gender equality

long ago, it's an unimpressive record. Uniquely for China, there is also a Standing Committee of the Politburo, made up of seven individuals elected (selected?) from among the 25. The Standing Committee meets on a weekly basis, with the full Politburo meeting once a month. There is also the National Party Congress, which is convened once five years and features 2,200 delegates elected from among the members of the party cells. They represent the 92-million party members nationwide. It's a complicated structure in which one might think a single member might simply disappear.

THE CAT FEARS A MOUSE?

There are signs, despite the recent row over House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, that Xi is wary of Hong Kong, though the reason is hard to pin down. On a visit back in June, he chose not to spend the night in Hong Kong, preferring to slip across the border into Shenzhen, right on the border but on Chinese territory, for the night. Certainly, Hong Kong has been changed by Xi, with a ban on any kind of dissent (such as expressing mild disagreement with the government) and with compulsory "patriotic education", which sounds like an attempt at mind control. Newspapers that are critical of Beijing find their staff being harassed or arrested. According to the rightwards-leaning New York Post, "Xi Jinping's long-term goal is to integrate Hong Kong into the Guangdong-Hong



China's Politburo Standing Committee



Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area region." In other words, it will become just another city in China. When Hong Kong University shut down its Public Opinion Research programme, asking what people thought about relations with China, many thought it was to save Beijing from embarrassment. Xi claimed in a speech that "Hong Kong has risen from the ashes"; The New York Post writes that it has simply been subjugated to Xi's will. Even so, that doesn't explain Xi's wariness unless he expected organised violence against his person, which seems highly unlikely.

According to the New York Post, Xi is fast taking control of the city. Authorities do not permit protests and they have closed down independent media, such as the Apple Daily newspaper. Its offices have been raided several times over allegations that it had breached the hated "national security law". Police detained the editor-in-chief and five other executives, while company-linked assets were frozen. Officials have been repeatedly harassed, apart

from the raid, and police have now arrested owner Jimmy Lai, along with senior staff. The paper has been forced to close permanently. Hundreds of Hong Kong citizens have been imprisoned, many of them under the national-security law, which has been described as 'the end of law in Hong Kong'.



Jimmy Lai, founder of Apple Daily and media group Next Digital

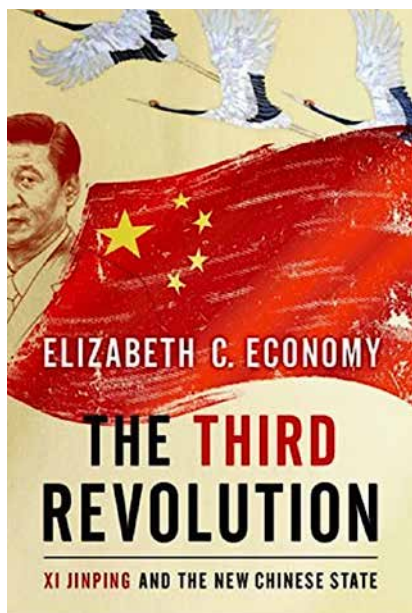
China seems not to like people having the freedom to think for themselves. As a point of interest, at the time of writing, media tycoon Jimmy Lai, the owner of Apple Daily,

was set to plead 'not guilty' to four charges, including two counts of conspiracy to commit collusion with foreign countries and one count of conspiracy to print and/or reproduce seditious publications. Six of his colleagues are similarly accused of collusion with foreign forces and conspiracy to print seditious publications. The arrests came under those strict national security laws and one of the charges could lead to a life sentence. Xi, it seems, is not only against letting people disagree with him but he also seems keen to stifle any sort of debate altogether. Politics apart, what is life in Hong Kong like? It may be ruled by a Communist regime, but is one of the world's richest cities with more Rolls Royces per head of population than any other and also the highest number of skyscrapers in the world. For four years it has won the title of "Best Business City in the World". And, in case you're interested in longevity, Hong Kong people believe that eating noodles on your birthday will help you achieve that.

Xi's approach to the West is feeding anti-Chinese feelings in western government circles, while media stories about life in Xi's China keep the public determined to resist him. For instance, the UK has blocked the take-over by Hong Kong-based Super Orange of the small electronic-design company Pulsic, in Bristol, England, which mainly designs software to use in electronic circuits. The UK cited its reason as the risk that the technology could be used to detect and protect against electronic surveillance. The UK's Foreign Secretary at the time, Liz Truss (now Prime Minister) urged "a tougher approach to China", warning Beijing that it could face sanctions if it doesn't abide by internationally acknowledged rules. It seems she included Hong Kong in her decision and "get-tough" approach. Britain hasn't always been as quick to block Beijing's ambitions: when Huawei wanted to get involved in the roll-out of the UK's 5G network, it took political pressure from Washington to get the British government to take action.

China, meanwhile, makes a lot of effort to keep western countries from its own Internet services. The

method has been defined by the journalist Jing Zhao, who works under the pen name Michael Anti, as “Block and Clone”, a self-explanatory phrase: China blocks one or another Internet service from Chinese access, then sets up an exact clone to which western users don’t have access. Elizabeth C. Economy, in her book “The Third Revolution” explains it like this: “China blocks Facebook, Twitter, and You Tube, and hinders Google’s search operations, which run through Hong Kong, while supporting homegrown Internet companies such as Baidu, Tencent, Benren (a Facebook copy), Youku and Tudou (Youtube twins owned by one parent company) and Sina.” All of these are copies of Western Internet services. If that sounds scary, read on.



Elizabeth C. Economy again: “The government’s ability to ensure that its political restrictions – controlling content that comes in, is transmitted, and goes out – are followed is far greater with Chinese companies than multinationals.” It seems that Xi takes a very personal hand in it all. To quote Economy again: “In addition, Xi Jinping has increased the challenge for foreign media and Internet companies to gain access to the Chinese public.” Those challenging Beijing’s control can find themselves in trouble, like 47 prominent legislators and activists who have been charged under the National Security Law for engaging

in peaceful, non-violent political activities. Five of them have now been named as ‘major organisers’ which could suggest they face very harsh sentences for not agreeing with Xi.

It makes it look as if Xi and his acolytes are afraid that if the people of China get even the merest glimpse of what life in the West is really like they’ll choose to overthrow Xi and launch a more liberal and tolerant China, however impossible that may seem. All they want is democracy, which Xi says they already have. Xi has claimed that democracy is only awake at election time in the West, while in China it’s a permanent feature. He says that westerners have no voice once the voting is over with. And strangely, he sees himself as the only solution. “Democracy is not for decoration,” he said, as if we didn’t know, “but for solving problems that people need to solve.” That’s not its normal definition, of course; according to my Chambers dictionary, it means “a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people collectively and is administered by them or by officers appointed by them”. In other words, ‘the people’ are supposed to be in charge. But how, one might ask, does ‘the people’ speak; how are they represented when they have a point to raise? Xi replied: “this happens through the leadership of the Party.” But can the people ever believe that Xi is listening to them, let alone taking any notice, because he never shows any sign of it? “Evidence that the Party represents the people is offered by the ‘economic miracles’, and the building of a powerful and stable nation.” That almost certainly doesn’t mean he’d appreciate a letter pointing out how and where something is going wrong, unless the writer fancies a brief holiday behind bars, or worse. As the CNN News website pointed out, the same criteria could have been applied before the Second World War to prove that Nazi Germany was a powerful, prosperous, and stable country where human rights flourished. Once again, it comes down to a definition of what the word ‘democracy’ means, just as Humpty Dumpty said. In China, it means whatever Xi wants it to mean.



Kishore Mahbubani

We live in a world where appearances are very important, in some ways more important than simple facts. For instance, in America an administration must talk tough about China whatever policies it’s following. Kishore Mahbubani, a former diplomat and an academic, in his book, “Has China Won?”, writes that: “On purely ideological grounds, any American administration must appear sympathetic to demonstrators in Hong Kong clamouring for more rights. American public opinion demands that the United States support the demonstrations. However, any shrewd American administration should also balance public opinion with a sound understanding of the core interests of Chinese leaders.” It’s also worth bearing in mind the imbalance in terms of the size of the population. The United States has a population of 330-million people. China’s population is 4.242 times as great, and that’s a lot. Of course, in the event of a war, the sheer size of a population is not a good guide to predicting the outcome. Winning or losing depends on training, tactics, the skills of the officers planning the battles, the determination of the combatants, how good their weapons are and how well the soldiers can use them, among many, many other things.



Joshua Wong with a book by Hong Kong pro-independence activist, Honcques Laus

Mahbubani points out that, whatever its image, China has shown restraint in dealing with all the protests in Hong Kong. Many of the protests were against the proposed legislation of Hong Kong's then chief executive Carrie Lam, who tried to get an extradition agreement with Taiwan and China. Opposition was so strong that she withdrew it. Both the United States and India have, at various times and in response to a variety of provocations, ignored international advice – and international law – to invade and take over countries with whose policies they disagreed. China hasn't done that, to its credit. Hong Kong has certainly given it provocation. Hong Kong Demonstration leader Joshua Wong told Agence France-Presse that he is not a separatist, he just wants the people of Hong Kong to be able to elect their own chief executive, a concession which Beijing actually agreed to before 1997. Despite that promise, the Chief Executive is selected by an Election Committee dominated by pro-Beijing politicians and (this is the strange part in a Communist regime) by tycoons. But as is the case with most demonstrations, the bottom line is poverty. Hong Kong's property tycoons have persuaded the government not to allow more



Hong Kong Chief Executive, John Lee Ka-chiu

building as a way of boosting the value of their investments in real estate.

As Mahbubani explains, things are very different (and much better) in Singapore. In Singapore, US\$1-million would buy four apartments of around 932 metres each. In Hong Kong, the same sum would buy just one, with only 232 metres of living space. According to Mahbubani, the demonstrations in Hong Kong are not so much against a tyrannical regime in Beijing, they're really against rapacious and greedy property barons who have managed to boost the value of their assets by lying and trickery. The real estate tycoons are the real enemies of the people. In Hong Kong, unlike mainland China, Mahbubani says that the bottom

50% of Hong Kong's population have seen their living standards worsen so much that finding accommodation of any sort is difficult. There is a lot of homelessness. The question is whether or not Beijing has the inclination to stand up to the gluttonous business tycoons who don't want their wealth diluted by developers building enough homes to bring the prices down. It has happened in Singapore; why not in Hong Kong? Mahbubani says it nearly happened when Hong Kong's first Chief Executive, C.H. Tung proposed ways of increasing home ownership (and reducing homelessness) in a bid to emulate Singapore. Hong Kong's wealthy real estate barons persuaded Beijing to overrule Tung. His plan was shelved, and homelessness mushroomed while the property barons became immorally and quite unscrupulously rich.

Beijing is against uprisings of any sort, as is the current Chief Executive, John Lee Ka-chiu: the rule of law must always win, even in fiction. The latest "Minions" film, in the "Despicable Me" series, for instance, would have showed arch-villain Gru escaping from justice again, (as it does in the version being shown in the West) but China has re-edited the ending and added a text that explains how Gru's mentor, Wild Knuckles, was sent to prison but reformed himself while inside, so that a Chinese audience will see wickedness defeated and good triumph. I'm not really convinced that a cartoon kung-fu comedy can influence people's views or stop children from choosing a life of crime, but Beijing clearly thinks it can. Does this mean that a film of, say, Lord of the Rings would end with the Hobbits persuading the evil Sauron to mend his ways, marry and raise a family, while Gollum would join the Boy Scouts? It would lose some of the dramatic tension of J.R.R. Tolkien's original, I fear. Where are Aragorn, Elrond, Galadriel and Gandalf when you need them? Only if you need them, of course.



Hong Kong protesters in 2020

Martin Gardiner

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Andrius Kubilius

RAINING ON PUTIN'S PARADE

A Lithuanian MEP calls for tougher measures to aid Ukraine and hurt Putin

Andrius Kubilius is a mild-looking Lithuanian politician who feels deep antagonism towards Vladimir Putin and his followers. Kubilius helped to campaign for the independence of his native land during the break-up of the old Soviet Union and now wants tougher measures to be taken against the Russian Federation that Putin leads to protect others from attempts to put them back under Russian control. "As Ukraine is fighting alone in Europe's existential war, a simple question has

been on the minds of both Ukrainians and many Lithuanians," Kubilius wrote in a newspaper article earlier this year, "Why does the West not impose a 'no-fly zone' over Ukraine's territory, thus protecting Ukrainian towns and cities from Russian bombers, fighter jets and missiles?" Kubilius is in a good position to pose that question and demand an answer, as chairman of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, a body intended to bring the former Soviet satellites closer to their western equivalents and facilitate easier

dialogue amongst them. He posed it in his opening speech for 9th plenary session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly (EPA), stressing that "the Eastern Partnership region requires immediate attention and clearer EU leadership in this neighbouring region." He has a point, but it's hard for a body created as a peaceful union of non-aggressive partner nations hoping for an easier exchange system for agricultural or manufactured goods to start talking tough and throwing its collective weight around.



© European Union

Welcome address by the president of the European Parliament, Prof. Jerzy Buzek, at the Euronest Constituent Meeting, Brussels, 3 May 2021

Within the EPA, members of the European Parliament exchange views and endeavour to forge closer political and economic ties with members of the national parliaments of Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia so that they can develop at least a commercial friendship with their opposite numbers. The idea is based on the principle that we could all get on in friendship (and fair commercial competition) if only we knew each other better. It's a laudable idea but not one that appeals to Vladimir Putin and his pals. Good intentions are simply not enough, especially when dealing with a militaristic and ambitious person like Putin, who has a great many weapons and troops at his disposal, if not quite as many as he wishes or would like us to believe.



Ukrainian troops in the settlement of Hoptivka. September 2022. Ukraine

"Instability is becoming a new trait of the Eastern Partnership region," wrote Kubilius. "We see numerous important changes here, and they aren't always easy to deal with positively." It would, of course, have been too much to expect the Soviet Union's member states to switch smoothly to our western version of representative democracy without some hiccups and misunderstandings along the way. And there have been quite a few. "For example, changes related to democracy in Belarus, security challenges in Ukraine with the Kremlin massing its forces on its borders (*this was written by Kubilius in the Lithuania Tribune newspaper at the end of April 2021, before the invasion of Ukraine began in earnest*), challenges to the maturity of democracy in Georgia and the presidential elections in Moldova, which Maia Sandu (a pro-EU economist) won. And the tragic armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well." Kubilius also noted that changes within Russia itself could

impact on Eastern Europe, although presumably not quite as dramatically as an armed invasion and a bombing campaign.

Now it begins to look as if Russia's boast of near invincibility was the lie that most people in the West always hoped it would be, with Ukrainian troops retaking some 2,600 kilometres of territory in the Karkiv region in a single weekend. It's not just the myth of Russia's military superiority that has taken a severe knock, of course, but the reputation of Putin himself.

Rumours are starting to circulate that his days are almost certainly numbered. In an interview for Charter 97, Kubilius was asked why Putin had chosen to go to war. He replied that: "A major reason is that he started to feel that his regime is becoming weaker and weaker. Putin saw the whole panorama how authoritarian regimes in the entire post-Soviet area are starting to lose the loyalty of the people." Kubilius has proved a skilled observer of Russian politics, which appear as convoluted and complex as the Renaissance court of Florence at the time of the Medicis. "And, of course," he continued, "the Belarusian developments in 2020 were a major breakthrough showing that people do not want any more to live with the same dictator for 27 years." We should recall that Cosimo di Medici was a successful banker, not a politician, but he was hugely powerful. "Political questions are settled in Cosimo's house," it was said in the early 15th century. "The man he chooses holds office... He it is who decides peace and war... He is king in all but name." That may be the sort of position Putin would like to hold himself, but Kubilius is determined to ensure that never happens.



Chechen forces alongside Russian Army forces and separatist militias in Donbas

WHO'S WINNING? WHO'S PAYING?

"In my view," Kubilius said, "Putin made a major mistake. He will lose the war. He is losing in the military fields of Ukraine, and he is losing in his economy against Western Sanctions. Sanctions are really hitting very heavily, and they will be even broader." There have even been calls in Russia to charge Putin with treason for his reckless and ultimately humiliating actions in Ukraine, such as this: "The Smolninskoye Council decided to appeal to the State Duma deputies with a proposal to bring charges of treason against President Putin to remove him from office. The decision was supported by the majority of deputies present," the politician emphasized. The authors of the letter said they had asked to bring charges of high treason against the head of state "to remove him from office."

It may not be as easy as that; we've had similar events before and yet Putin survives. Even so, it begins to look as if some of his allies are having a change of heart, people like the Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, who has criticised the Russian Army's performance in Ukraine after its humiliating defeat in



Russian President Vladimir Putin with Acting Head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov

Izyum, which has been seen as a critical supply hub in Ukraine's eastern region around Kharkiv. Kadyrov was quoted in *Novaya Gazeta Europe* as saying: "I'm not a strategist like those in the defence ministry. But it's clear that mistakes were made. I think they will draw a few conclusions". Smolninskoye is a district of St. Petersburg, thought to be faithful to Putin as a 'local lad made good'. But the Russians love a winner, and Putin is beginning to look more like a loser.

This is the cue for Andrius Kubilius to weigh in with a warning to those dithering on the periphery. He has told Serbia's top politicians that it's becoming clearer that Putin is losing the war and that it's time for Serbia to pick the winning side. He told them that Serbia should clearly define its position, because the whole country's future may depend upon it. "I think it is better to be on the side of those who will win and not with those who make them lose the war," Kubilius warned them. He has also been calling for a total embargo on Russian exports, especially oil and gas, for a very long time. Only that way can the countries that rely on it, such as Germany, avoid action by Russia to restrict it, which has now happened, of course. Putin believes, not unreasonably, that the coming winter will be on his side. Gas and oil make up some 60% of Russia's exports to the EU and the money they generate is what pays for new tanks, aircraft, and missiles to launch against Ukraine. Of course, Putin has made it clear in the past that he does not view the EU as important. Even so, as Kubilius has pointed out before, Putin is keen to associate himself with anti-EU figures and minority leaders within the EU, people like Hungary's Viktor

Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary (now branded an "electoral autocracy" by MEPs), and France's far-right Marine Le Pen, or Geert Wilders from the Netherlands. Anyone threatening consensus inside the EU is a potential friend for Putin, or at least a figure Putin can use to whip up more unrest. Even so, Orbán was obliged to condemn Putin's invasion and to allow NATO forces and weapons to pass through Hungary on their way to the front.

Putin continues to trot out his favourite lie that Ukraine is really a part of Russia and is only separated from it because of the "nazis" in power there. One of Putin's allies predicted that in a year or two from now Ukraine would no longer appear on any map. Another, commenting on the discovery of the body of a British man among the dead, argued that it proved the UK is at war with Russia and that Putin should "aim hypersonic missiles" at Britain.

According to Charter 97, Kubilius also has harsh words for Putin's ally, Alexander Lukashenko, president of Belarus but seen by many (including Kubilius) as Putin's puppet. Indeed, he is dismissive of Lukashenko's right to govern at all. "Lukashenko for many years since the beginning of his authoritarian regime has been the Kremlin's slave and a powerless servant of President Putin," Kubilius argued. "He had a chance to side with the Belarusians themselves in 2020, but ultimately he decided to stand against his own people and continue serving the Kremlin." Faced with the possibility of standing stoutly against Moscow many minor leaders have decided that the risk is just too great.



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko

KUBILIUS IN CLOSE-UP

So just who is this mild-looking and quiet politician who, nevertheless, feels tough enough to take on Russia's KGB-linked President, Vladimir Putin, whose ambition it would seem is to take over all the former Soviet lands and lead them against the western nations. Kubilius was born in December 1956 in Vilnius, Lithuania's capital, and studied physics at Lithuania University. He became a member of the Sąjūdis movement, favouring independence from the Soviet Union, although it was not easy back then to do so. He did, however, going on to become Executive Secretary of the Sąjūdis Council. Involving himself more in politics, he chose to represent the Homeland Union, the Lithuanian Christian Democrat party, which made him a key figure in the independence movement.

He led his party into the 2008 general election, in which his Conservatives defeated the Social Democrats, being appointed Prime Minister shortly afterwards. He received 89 votes, against just 27 and with 16 abstentions. In 2008 he became the first Prime Minister of Lithuania to serve out a full term in what was a famously precarious post. It was also the year of a huge financial crisis, causing the greatest global recession since 1929, mainly due to massive deregulation and inequalities in the United States, plus the failure of Lehman brothers. "On both sides of the Atlantic," wrote economist Thomas Piketty, Director of Studies at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales at the Paris School of Economics, in an article for *Le Monde* entitled 'Such a Long Recession', "Economic activity fell by about 5% between the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2009; this made it the most serious world recession since the crisis in the 1930s." Recovery did begin – slowly – but it was mainly in the US.



© Alexei Druzhinin, Presidential Press Service of Russia

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán

“In Europe growth finally began again modestly at the beginning of 2013,” wrote Piketty, “but the damage had been done: by the end of 2015, GDP in the Euro zone had still not exceeded its level at the end of 2007, whereas the United States had experienced cumulative growth of over 10% between 2007 and 2015.”

Kubilius supported a controversial austerity programme that saw Lithuania recover from its economic woes. Some constituents, according to one website, consider him to be the best Prime Minister Lithuania ever had, emerging from economic austerity in record time, which led to him being elected to the European Parliament in 2019. As Executive Secretary of the Sąjūdis Council, he has remained an active and highly influential figure in Lithuanian politics, helping to forge the Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats group in 1993.



Andrius Kubilius, Prime Minister of Lithuania, at the Opening session of Baltic Development Forum Summit 2009 in Stockholm

Apart from serving on the committees for Foreign Affairs and Industry, Research and Energy, he became rapporteur on his country's relations with Russia. He later said that it is “impossible” to have good relations with Russia and called on the EU to phase out its imports of Russian oil and natural gas. He also praised Turkey for standing up to Russia and for “proving thrice (in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh) that the Kremlin,” as he put it, “fears the fist”. With Russia's recent reversal at the hands of Ukrainian forces, there are growing calls in Russia – especially, oddly, in Putin's old stomping ground, Saint Petersburg, to oust the Russian leader from the Kremlin and even to prosecute him for treason. Kubilius has pointed out before that Russia can change and become a fully democratic country, hard as that may be to imagine. An assessment earlier this year drew the conclusion that it's necessary to distinguish between the



Andrius Kubilius and other political personalities posted an invitation on Facebook for a live discussion, 21 days before the start of the Russian invasion

Russian people and Putin's regime which is described as a “stagnating authoritarian kleptocracy led by a president-for-life surrounded by a circle of oligarchs”. Kubilius has reminded MEPs that they must continue to push back against Russia's aggressive policies while “laying the groundwork for cooperation with a future democratic country”. We mustn't forget, of course, that even if this scenario is played out for real, it will also remain an extremely LARGE country, by far and away the largest in the EU, were it ever to join, which currently seems most unlikely.



Garry Kasparov at the press conference of the 2018 Oslo Freedom Forum

CASTLING THE KREMLIN

The great Russian chess master, Gary Kasparov told the Kyiv Post that the attitude towards the war among ordinary Russians is changing. As the wounded return from the front, Russian citizens are coming to realise that their country's armed forces are not invincible and the death toll among its troops is thought to have reached 50,000 or perhaps more. “There's a factor that's underestimated by the West: it's the psychological factor,” Kasparov told the newspaper. “Morale

is always a problem, just as is military equipment. And today, the morale of the Russian soldiers is deteriorating. Alternatively, it seems that the Ukrainians are at the point where they're willing to bear any cost to liberate their country and defeat the enemy.” We can assume, I imagine, that Putin's calculation was based on the total lack of resistance when his forces seized Crimea. He must have felt very confident that armed opposition would simply melt away. But the world today is a different place and those countries that have acquired democracy are very reluctant to let it slip through their fingers. Putin's staunchest allies now, apart from Belarus and its lapdog leader, are the oligarchs still profiting from doing dubious deals. Turning a profit, though, will become more difficult for them as their country is increasingly isolated in response to Putin's aggression.

As for Kasparov, he may see castling as a valuable move in chess, bringing the rooks more into the game and thereby making them more useful while placing your king in a safer position, but it depends on just how cleverly used your rooks are in play. Putin appears to be increasingly dependent on flexibility and movement, even though those options are getting more and more difficult to apply. There are questions, too, regarding nuclear weapons; will Putin dare to use them? There is an old saying in English: “never dare a fool”. We have to hope that Putin isn't as big a fool as that. But there again, like many others, I never thought he would order the invasion of Ukraine. It was a foolhardy and dangerous move that was not necessary, but it has dramatically changed the political landscape for Europe. Writing in the Lithuania Tribune, Kubilius said: “The most important question for Europe in the next decade will be the question of

Ukraine. Because therein lies the answer to the other two important questions: What will be the Europe of the future (in what environment will it exist?), and what will Russia be like, even after Putin? Without an answer to these questions, Europe will return to business as usual, not only in its relations with Putin but in all the other geopolitical failures of the EU in these decades, which led to war." It's a sobering thought. Kasparov believes that Putin wants to avoid measures that will bring NATO directly into the war he started. "Basically, the war is lost," Kasparov told the Kyiv Post. "If you look at all of the objectives that Putin set for the war, all of them have failed. All of them. So, continuing the war is the only way for Putin to stay in power. He wants to create extra chaos in the free world hoping that a new window will open for him. It's really just a protracted agony. It is cynical and stupid, but Putin is willing to put thousands of civilians into graves in the months to come before the whole of Ukraine is liberated, if that will allow him to maintain power."

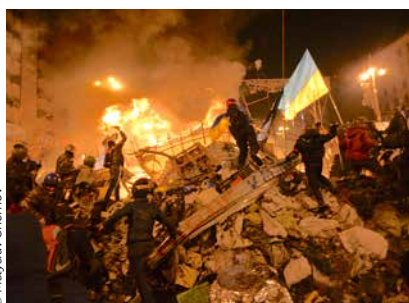
With conspirators increasing in number wanting to regain trading advantages by removing him, it would seem that the future for Putin begins to look rather bleak. We must be wary, however: if he sees that he has nothing to lose, that could be the trigger to resort to the use of nuclear weapons, which would be a real global catastrophe.



On June 25, Russian President Vladimir Putin indicated Russia's intention to transfer Iskander-M missiles — which can carry both conventional and nuclear warheads — to Belarus and begin upgrading Belarusian Su-25 fighters to carry nuclear weapons

Kubilius has described Russia's war in Ukraine as 'brutal', which few would dispute, describing the conflict as: "A war started by a madman who is scared that Ukraine, having chosen and defended its European integration course back on the Maidan in 2014, can become a successful, European state. And that would be the greatest danger for the Kremlin because

the example of Ukrainian democracy might infect ordinary Russians." Is Putin worried? Presumably he is, but he has backed the West into a corner from which it has been forced to act. "We believe that the free world must do everything to help Ukraine win," said Kasparov, "There's no other solution: Unconditional victory of Ukraine — and the unconditional defeat of Putin." In Kasparov's view, the status of Crimea, seized by Putin, must play a part, too. "The only chance to defeat Putin's fascism is to raise the Ukrainian flag in Sevastopol, Crimea. That's the top priority for anyone who wants to see our planet safe from Putin's existential threat of destruction." Of course, we must not forget that even with Putin out of the picture (if that happens) it doesn't mean peace and democracy for all. The world is not short of ambitious would-be dictators, nor of ordinary people who are willing to vote for them, presumably in the hope of advancement.



State flag of Ukraine behind a wall of anonymous protesters in Kyiv, Ukraine. Events of February 18, 2014

HOW TO FIND THE ENERGY

Meanwhile, Putin's most powerful weapon remains his iron-hard grip on energy supplies. In Kubilius' home country, Lithuania, the reliance on Moscow is a massive problem. Former Energy Minister Arvydas Sekmokas has called for urgent attempts to find a solution. His greatest concern is Lithuania's dependence "on the control room in Moscow", as he has put it. He says it's urgent for Lithuania to disconnect from the BRELL electricity supply ring while Russia is bogged down in Ukraine. He added that: "we need to look for new ways to get more electricity quickly because electricity will not go up, demand will not go down, and there is no plan on what we will do." Lithuania has an unfortunate history where nuclear power is concerned. It started construction on two power stations, using RBMK reactors, in 1978, but they used the same



Arvydas Sekmokas

technology as Chernobyl of evil memory. To join the EU, Lithuania was obliged to shut them down, accepting US\$36.8-million (€36.35-million) to improve safety at the Ignalina site. The shut-down came as a blow because Lithuania was a net exporter of energy. Public support for EU membership was greatly reduced and plans for a replacement nuclear plant were shelved permanently. There are other hints of a power plant to come, however, and Kubilius and Sekmokas have said that they hope an agreement with Hitachi-GE Nuclear Energy on the main provisions can be signed later this year.

Did Putin realise how widely the effects of his unwarranted invasion of Ukraine would spread? Possibly not, although if he had it would not have put him off. He likes causing chaos and sees it as one of his principal weapons in the war. Any war. I visited Lithuania's Ignalina nuclear power plant with a cameraman many years ago and work was proceeding to shut it down and clean up. Andrius Kubilius and Arvydas Sekmokas hope that the agreement with Hitachi-GE Nuclear Energy on the main provisions for a new power plant will be signed this year. Arvydas Sekmokas says that the agreement is important for regional partners, moreover, he did not rule out that Lithuania's share in the future project may change. "The concession commission approved the main provisions of the concession contract. I believe that if the Government approves it at the meeting and meeting next week, it will be possible to sign those basic provisions with the strategic investor in the near future." Let's hope so. Otherwise, Lithuania could be facing a very cold winter while Ukraine tidies up a rather hot conflict. Kubilius will continue, no doubt, to strive for a better future for his country and to defy the Kremlin. Putin cannot hold on forever.

Anthony James

How to avoid MOBILE SIM SWAPPING?



WHAT IS A SIM SWAPPING ATTACK?

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



1 Collect victim's personal data

Via phishing, data breaches, social media searches, malware



2



2 Carry out the fraudulent SIM swap

In-store, contacting company's representative over the phone or online through the provider's app or portal



3



3 Exploit the swapped SIM

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

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS?

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

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE A VICTIM?

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

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

HOW TO PREVENT THE ATTACK?

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





RUSSIAN WAR ADDS UNCERTAINTY AND VOLATILITY TO EU FINANCIAL MARKETS

The European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), the EU's securities markets regulator, has published the second Trends, Risks and Vulnerabilities (TRV) Report of 2022. The Russian war on Ukraine against a backdrop of already-increasing inflation has profoundly impacted the risk environment of EU financial markets, with overall risks to ESMA's remit remaining at its highest level.

In the first half of 2022 financial markets saw faltering recoveries, increasing volatility and likelihood of market corrections. Separately, crypto-markets saw large falls in value and the collapse of an algorithmic stablecoin, highlighting again the very high-risk nature of the sector.

Verena Ross, Chair of the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), said: "The current high inflation environment is having impacts across the financial markets. Consumers are faced with fast rising cost of living and negative real returns on many of their investments. Consumers also need to watch out as they might be targeted by aggressive marketing promoting high-risk products that may not be suitable for them."



Verena Ross, Chair of the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA)

The Russian invasion of Ukraine continues to significantly affect commodity markets, leading to rapid price increases and elevated volatility. These present liquidity risks for exposed counterparties and show the continued importance of close monitoring to ensure orderly markets, a core objective for ESMA."

RISK SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

The overall risk to ESMA's remit remains at its highest level. Contagion and operational risks are now considered very high, like liquidity and market risks. Credit risk stays high but is expected to rise. Risks remain very high in securities markets and for asset

*https://www.esma.europa.eu/sites/default/files/library/esma50-165-2229_trv_2-22.pdf

management. Risks to infrastructures and to consumers both remain high, though now with a worsening outlook, while environmental risks remain elevated. Looking ahead, the confluence of risk sources continues to provide a highly fragile market environment, and investors should be prepared for further market corrections.

MAIN FINDINGS

Market environment: The Russian aggression drove a commodities-supply shock which added to pre-existing pandemic-related inflation pressures. Monetary policy tightening also gathered pace globally, with markets adjusting to the end of the low interest rates period.

Securities markets: Market volatility, bond yields and spreads jumped as inflation drove expectations of higher rates, equity price falls halted the

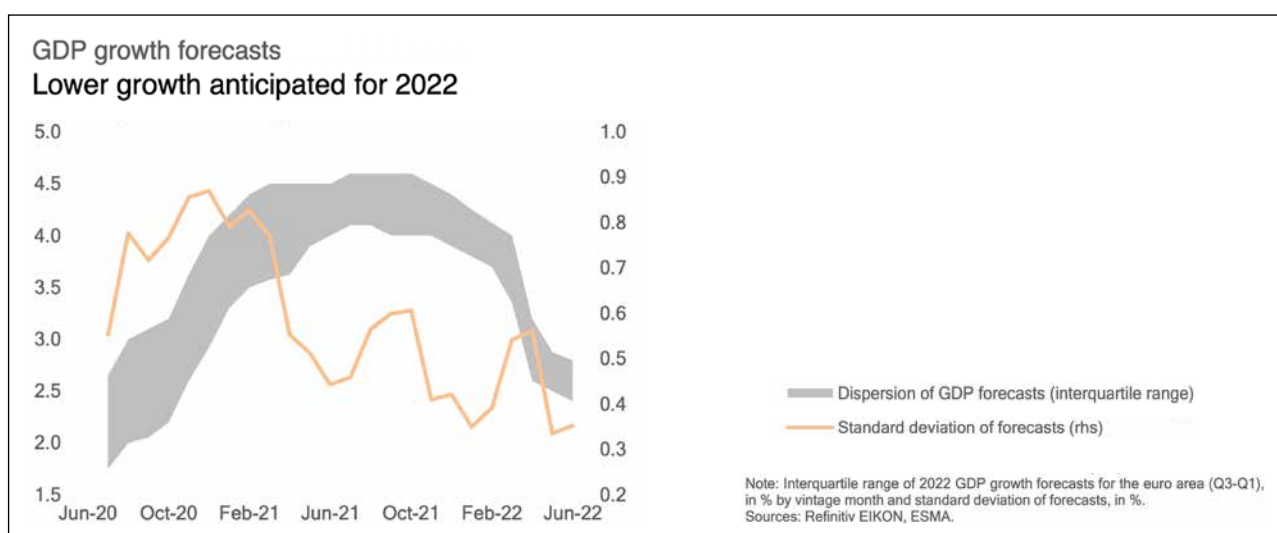
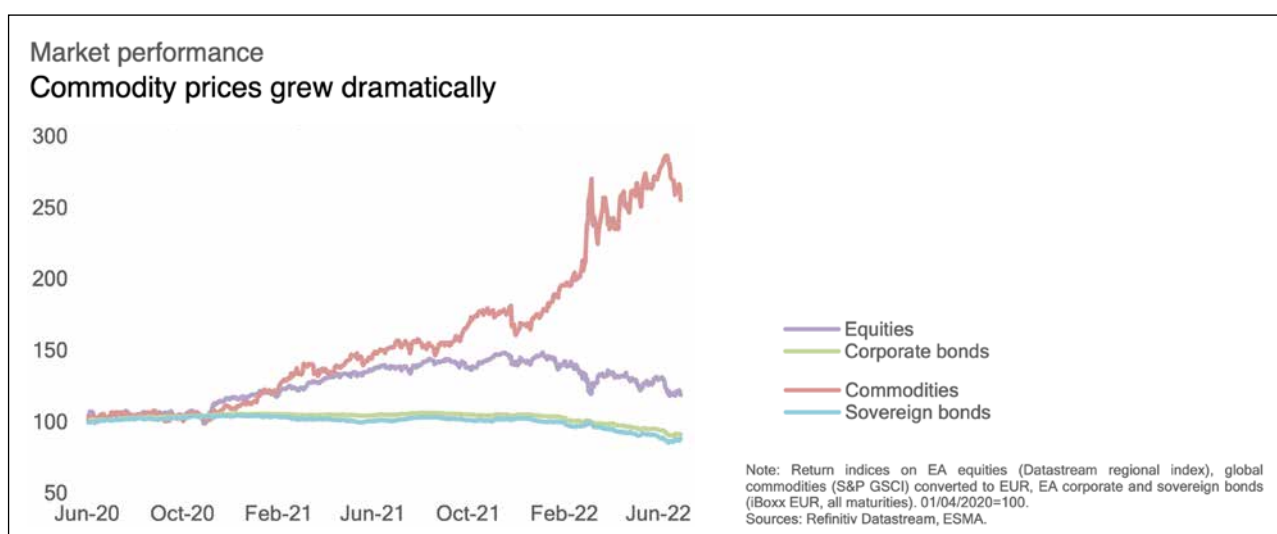
recovery that had started in 2020, and invasion-sensitive commodity values surged, particularly energy, impacting natural gas derivatives and highlighting liquidity risks for exposed counterparties.

Asset management: Direct impacts of the invasion were limited but the deteriorating macroeconomic conditions amplified vulnerabilities and interest rate risk has grown with expectations of higher inflation. Exiting the low-rate environment presents a medium-term challenge for the sector.

Consumers: Sentiment worsened in response to growing uncertainty and geopolitical risks. The growing volatility and inflation could negatively impact many consumers, with effects potentially exacerbated by behavioural biases. Household savings fell from the record highs of the pandemic lockdowns.

Sustainable finance: The invasion presented a new major challenge to EU climate objectives as several member states turned to coal to compensate for lower Russian fossil fuel imports. Although EU ESG bond issuance fell and EU ESG equity funds experiencing net outflows for the first time in two years, funds with an ESG impact objective were largely spared and the pricing of long-term green bonds proved resilient.

Financial innovation: Crypto-asset markets fell over 60% in value in 1H22 from an all-time-high, amid rising inflation and a deteriorating outlook. The sharp sell-off, the Terra stablecoin collapse in May, and the pause in consumer withdrawals by crypto lender Celsius, added to investor mistrust and confirmed the speculative nature of many business models in this sector.





© Pool photo by Andrew Milligan

Queen Elizabeth II at Balmoral Castle, inviting Britain's Prime Minister Liz Truss to form a Government, September 6, 2022

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Old ways survive a change of leader and of figurehead

The new Prime Minister of the United Kingdom must rate as one of the luckiest political leaders of any democracy in the world. Liz Truss had only been chosen (by a very select group of people, not by the voting public) for two days when the country she was to run was plunged into national mourning by the death of the reigning monarch. Now, I'm not saying she would have been pleased by the news, of course; like most people in the United Kingdom, she will have been deeply saddened by the death of Queen Elizabeth II after she had been on the throne for 70 years and 214 days. She was 96 years old, making hers the longest reign in British history, and she died at Balmoral Castle in Scotland, thought to have been her favourite residence. She became Queen while out of the country on a safari holiday in Kenya. The diplomat and politician Harold Nicholson wrote in his diary: "She became Queen while in a perch in a tree

in Africa, watching the rhinoceros come down to the pool to drink." He father, King George VI, had died in his sleep almost 6,500 kilometres away on the Sandringham estate in Norfolk. He was just 56 at the time.

Ever since the Queen's death was announced, Britain has been plunged into mourning and seemed to lose interest in everything else, with people queuing for hours just to glimpse the coffin as the body of the Queen lay in state in London's

Westminster Hall. What a gift for a new Prime Minister: the power to do or say whatever she wanted without anyone taking an interest. I'm sure she would not have chosen to begin her premiership in a period of such sorrow but she's a sufficiently professional politician not to turn down the opportunities it provided. She could plan her time in office without interference from other politicians; she had the time to plan, and she will have used it. One of the first things she did was to



© Liberal Democrat Youth Society

Liz Truss during a demonstration in protest at the Criminal Justice Bill on 2 July 1994

rid herself of senior ministers who had backed her rival, Rishi Sunak, for the top job. Out they all went, to be replaced by hard-line supporters of Britain's exit from the European Union. She also appointed several new advisors with backgrounds in right wing think tanks and lobby companies sympathetic to her personal political leanings.

Her father, a lifelong Socialist and keen supporter of the Labour Party, has said he hopes it's just a phase she's going through, as in the past she had supported the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, as well as campaigning against Margaret Thatcher when she was prime minister. Truss's mother will still – somehow reluctantly – campaign on her behalf and hand out leaflets but her father refuses.

Truss may find that the new monarch, the late queen's eldest son, now King Charles III, doesn't share all of her political beliefs. He has already expressed his concern over the rising cost of living. Truss has stated that she plans to tackle the cost of living crisis, but at the time of writing her exact plans are unknown. She has drawn criticism for refusing to reveal exactly how she intends to start an economic recovery and for avoiding interviews with journalists who are well versed in economic theory. She has said she will cancel the rise in National Insurance contributions announced by her former leadership rival, Rishi Sunak, so as to leave more in the wallets and pockets of the people. She has also promised to help people living in fear of high and rising energy costs, although she is on record as saying there will be no "hand-outs". This comes at a time of wage stagnation and fast-rising prices for essentials. Perhaps the essential hand-outs will be disguised as something else.

LIFE GETS DEARER

Another cost that Truss has sworn to do away with is the rise in Corporation Tax announced by Rishi Sunak in his role as Chancellor of the Exchequer. It had been set to rise from 19% to 23% in 2023. She also pledged to introduce some £30-billion (€34.2-billion) in

tax cuts to help rebuild the British economy. The plan was condemned by Sunak when he was Chancellor, calling it "reckless", a "short-term sugar-rush" and "fairytale politics".



Former Chancellor of the Exchequer (finance minister) Rishi Sunak

Others in his party (and importantly those with voting rights) clearly disagreed with him. It's a well-known fact of politics that given a choice between price rises and no price rises, most people will choose the latter. The intricacies of budgetary matters may be lost on most British people, especially those who have been out buying bigger televisions on which to watch the Queen's funeral. I remember watching her coronation (yes, I'm that old) when my father went out and bought a very early television: a tiny screen in a massive and rather attractive cabinet, so that he could invite a few neighbours round to see the spectacle. When he bought it, there was no television service in the north-east of England, where we lived. The transmitter was turned on especially for the big outside broadcast, then switched off again until some 5 or 6 months later, when the service really started. I recall one of our neighbours' children (like me, around 4 years old or maybe a little older) who kept standing up to block the screen and goad us into responding with such cries as "now you can't see it" and "look at me instead". He was a most irritating child! The TV, although a large piece of furniture, had a 405-

line screen in black-and white with a corner-to-corner measurement of just 30 centimetres.

During the leadership campaign, Truss was quite cagey about her likely policies. However, she enters office at a time of crisis. According to Britain's Office of National Statistics, the Consumer Price Index rose by 8.2% in the 12 months to June 2022, up from 7.9% in May. The biggest contribution to that rise came from housing and household services, mainly electricity, gas and owner-occupier housing costs, as well as motor fuels. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 9.4% in the 12 months to June.

Truss has stated that her main economic priority is to reboot the sluggish economy and help those facing soaring energy bills, promising to reverse the recent increase in National Insurance contributions and cancel a planned rise in corporation tax, which together come to some £30-billion (34.2-billion). She has also talked about cutting VAT by 5% or else cutting income tax to help household budgets. Both solutions would mean more borrowing and the added costs associated with it.



10 Downing Street, official residence and office of the British Prime Minister

Truss risks upsetting environmentalists, despite her supposed pledge to stick to the UK's net-zero carbon target. Her team have said she will focus on renewable energy, but it's hard to see how. She has said she will suspend the green levies on energy bills, and she is also known to be keenly opposed to onshore wind farms and has described solar farms on farmland as "a depressing site". As someone brought up on the North



© Simon Dawson

Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Foreign Secretary Liz Truss arrive in Washington DC ahead of a bilateral meeting with US President Joe Biden in 2021

East Coalfield, I can recall all too clearly how my mother used to dash outside to bring her washing in if the wind changed and directed the smoke from the nearby coke works our way. Truss is also in favour of restarting fracking for shale gas, despite scientists warning that it could lead to earthquakes. A ban on fracking in the UK in England was announced in 2019 after a report by the Oil and Gas Authority found it was not possible to accurately predict the probability or intensity of earthquakes linked to fracking operations. Truss also wants to see more drilling in the North Sea and a big expansion in nuclear power. She has made no mention of such things as help with home insulation to reduce energy bills, which could help cut costs for householders. It almost looks as if she wants to clean up the environment by expanding the dirty measures that were popular in the past.

CHANGING HORSES IN MIDSTREAM

Not all of her announced plans or known intentions are environmental in nature. She has said little about her plans for the National Health Service, although she has promised to continue supporting it. However, she has said she will reverse the rise in National Insurance payments, even though it was aimed at providing money to help clear the backlog of HNS procedures and also pay for better social care.

She wants to improve ambulance response times, but very often delays in ambulance arrival times are the result of hospital beds being too full. Truss has not yet talked about how she would address that issue. Nor has she explained how she plans to address Boris Johnson's pledge to "level up" society. The problem is that it will cost money which she has few ways of raising. She has said she's committed to the idea in principle, but that she would have to tackle the issue in "a Conservative way", presumably through tax cuts and deregulation, which seems not to have been Johnson's favoured route.

Johnson became (and remained) popular in the so-called "red wall" constituencies that had traditionally elected Labour Party candidates by securing financing for popular infrastructure projects there and constantly reminding voters that it was a Conservative government that is picking up the bill for them. That won't work for Truss if she stresses how she's saving money through cutting expenditure, and also through deregulation and by reducing public spending. She can't have it both ways: saving money AND spending at the same time? She has not made herself popular with those who disagree with the outgoing Home Secretary, Priti Patel's, policy of deporting asylum seekers and illegal immigrants caught crossing the Channel or arriving on south coast beaches to

Rwanda or some to other country where their human rights are unlikely to be respected. Truss has said the policy will continue, even be stepped up, although it remains to be seen if the threat of imposing such measures will dissuade migrants from trying to reach the UK. Many – probably most – of them have faced dangers and almost certainly paid large sums of money to the traffickers. Many of these migrants end up in difficult and dangerous situations, as they do not have the proper documents to get a job, access healthcare, and housing. The flow of illegal migrants is almost always from poorer countries to wealthier ones.

The idea of sending those caught by the authorities to some African country far from Britain has made many British people angry, but Truss has often spoken against what she describes as "woke culture", such as "trans rights" and free speech (and allowing illegal migrants to settle). She has also talked about quitting the European Court of Human Rights and its relevant Convention, saying she might replace membership with a British "bill of rights", which would offer a far lower level of protection, if any. She has also talked up her toughness over the Northern Ireland protocol, suggesting she would be willing to trigger Article 16, the emergency procedure in the UK's post-Brexit deal with the EU.



© Freddie Everett

Liz Truss

The Article is supposed to be invoked only in an emergency. Safeguard measures can be taken

if the protocol is leading to serious "economic, societal or environmental difficulties" that are liable to persist. So, while it is not intended to be used for temporary or minor problems there is no specific guidance on what qualifies as a "serious" difficulty. That presents a problem that is hard to quantify, let alone resolve. The measure contains no instructions for how and when it should be applied; it is supposed to be a 'safeguard' measure, to be invoked only if either the EU or the UK claims that the agreed deal "is leading to serious practical problems or causing diversion of trade."

Additionally, it says that priority shall be given to measures that will 'least disturb' the functioning of the protocol. Once the article is invoked, "negotiations should continue, with the measures being jointly reviewed every three months



Former UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

with a view to their abolition or limitation." This leaves the UK government with a range of possible options, and if it thinks the rules for access of goods into Northern Ireland from the UK are too complicated, it could suspend articles 5, 7, 8 and 10, which deal with customs, product standards, VAT and state aid. That would be

unacceptable to Brussels because it would end the Irish Sea border and, from the EU's perspective, open up a back door to the Single Market, which could never be allowed. Truss seems quite willing to upset the EU, however, and it's a view shared by most of her new cabinet. The only hope for those who believe in a more united Europe and the UK's place within it may well be that Truss's list of things to do – a nightmarishly long list, too – may leave her with insufficient time to tackle issues connected with the EU.



Frontier separating the United Kingdom and the European Union in Ireland after 31st January 2020 with the Union Jack in Northern Ireland and the European and the Irish flags in the Republic. The international border is now also the frontier of the European Union and the European Economic Area

TURNING UP THE HEAT

The list of problems facing Liz Truss on taking up office is formidable. She has said that she wants energy bills to be frozen until the next election in 2024. That won't be easy because Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia will continue to block gas supplies to Europe until the West lifts its sanctions over his invasion of Ukraine. The UK gets relatively little gas from Russia but the whole affair has dramatically pushed up wholesale gas prices. Germany, more reliant on Russian gas, has been installing temporary terminals for liquified gas allowing it to import gas from further afield, while providing €62-billion in financial help to consumers.

During her campaign for leadership of the Conservative party, Truss declined to describe how her rescue package would work. She needs to explain it in the very near future; the energy price cap is expected to jump from £1,971 (€2,247) to £3,549 (€4,047) overnight. That's very serious money and not the sort you

find down the back of the sofa. Any sort of political action to cope with such a jump would have the support of the other political parties, so Truss needn't fear opposition in the House.

Truss is said to be styling herself on Margaret Thatcher, although in her youth she used to take part in anti-Thatcher demonstrations, chanting slogans against the so-called "Iron Lady" and giving out leaflets. The biggest differences between them is that Thatcher – like her or not – had very clear ideas about her principles and didn't change them. If Truss says she believes in something as a principle, you must bear in mind that it may change, according to what thoughts most closely reflect her thinking at that precise moment. Truth and accuracy have seldom played much part in her political activities. She sold herself to the electorate as someone who had succeeded despite having been brought up in a poor part of the industrial northern city of Leeds.



Margaret Thatcher

But Leeds has pleasant, leafy parts, and it was in one of those that she was raised by middle-class (Labour voting) parents. She went to the local school, Roundhay, formerly a grammar school with large grounds and very well thought of. It gave her special tutoring to get her into Oxford, but she told voters the school had let down its pupils by giving them "low expectations". She even said it was the reason she was a Conservative, despite having progressed through Oxford as a Liberal Democrat and a pro-European. As *The Spectator* newspaper put it: "Truss even headed up a pro-EU group that backed the Maastricht Treaty while a student at Oxford University



Liz Truss (bottom, third from right) in a 1989 class photo at the the Roundhay State secondary school

doing PPE. (Politics, Philosophy and Economics)." In her speeches she slandered her excellent school as "a failing comprehensive". It wasn't. And Truss's supposed devotion to Conservatism and "levelling up" is at the very best a misnomer. During her time at Oxford, she upset the then leader of the Liberal party, Paddy Ashdown, by publicly calling for the abolition of the monarchy. The mass hysteria that followed the recent death of the Queen amply demonstrated that it is not a widely-held policy, nor a wise course to follow. Even in 2022, the monarchy remains popular.

She met her husband, Hugh O'Leary, at the 1997 Conservative Party conference and they have two teenage daughters. However, in 2010, while standing as a Conservative Parliamentary candidate for South West Norfolk, it was revealed that she'd been having an affair for 18 months with her mentor at the time, the Conservative MP Mark Field. She won the seat and her marriage survived, although his marriage came to an end. She made some fairly poor political decisions which her career has also survived, such as co-authoring a book called 'Britannia Unchained', in which the British people are described as being "among the worst idlers" in the world. She also incorrectly claimed in a speech to the Conservative Party conference that two thirds of the cheese sold in Britain was imported, a situation she described as "a disgrace". It was also a lie. The journalist Brian Reade, writing in the left-leaning *Daily Mirror*, wrote: "Her slogan, 'In Liz We Truss' and

pledge to make Britain "an aspiration nation" sum up the vacuum in her thinking. What we know is she is a free trade fundamentalist who wants to cut taxes, shrink the state and slash workers' rights. And she will say anything to get power." Just to clear up her background, I should mention that after Oxford she worked for Shell as a graduate trainee, acquiring an accountancy qualification along the way, going on to become Economic Director at Cable and Wireless.

According to the local newspaper, "This is Oxfordshire", all was not plain sailing at Merton College. A satirical Liberal Democrat newspaper at the time listed her alleged problems in an article written by a future Oxford professor, Paul Martin: "1.) Liz is mad. 2.) Liz is going out with Malcolm Hutty and he too is mad. 3.) Liz has mad ideas. 4.) Liz shirks work." After leaving Oxford she joined the Conservative Party. According to the newspaper, a Merton contemporary told the *Sunday Times*: "We came out of Oxford and it was the summer of Euro 96 and Britpop then Tony Blair got in. It was a breath of fresh air. The country was full of optimism. To then go and join the Conservative party, I was like: 'How does that happen?' It was really perplexing."

POETIC JUSTICE

Truss certainly doesn't seem to be a follower of the poem, "The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám" by Edward Fitzgerald, which contains the famous lines:

*“The Moving Finger writes; and,
having writ,*

Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit

*Shall lure it back to cancel half a
Line,*

*Nor all your Tears wash out a Word
of it.”*



Liz Truss visiting South Wraxall

In Truss's cases, a stated belief or conviction she expresses can change or even reverse on the turn of a coin. There would seem to be no firm belief that cannot be overturned by expedience. The Rubáiyát itself (the word means “quatrains” or sets of 4-line stanzas) was written in Persian in the 11th century and translated in Victorian times at the instigation of FitzGerald by Edward Cowell, one of the few Victorian scholars to speak Persian. It is not

– nor was it ever intended to be – mystical. As for Omar Khayyám himself, he was a philosopher and follower of Avicenna, which is western mis-spelling of Ibn Sina, an 11th century Muslim polymath. He was also a mathematician who used geometry to solve cubic equations. A clever chap, in other words.

Truss may find it harder than she imagines to cut taxes at a time of almost record inflation. Deutsche Bank's foreign exchange analyst Shreyas Gopal has warned that large, unfunded and also untargeted tax cuts and spending pledges “could alarm global markets”, which, given the fairly parlous state of the British economy, would not be surprising. Quoted in The Guardian newspaper, Gopal warned that “it could lead to foreign investors refusing to fund the UK external deficit by buying government debt as investor confidence cannot be taken for granted. Gopal was quoted as pointing out that the UK's current account deficit was already at record levels, meaning sterling “needed large capital inflows, supported by improving investor confidence and falling inflation expectations, to support the currency.” Whatever route Truss selects to get Britain out of trouble is packed full of traps, tricks and tripwires.

The Guardian writes that the UK could borrow £87-billion (£99-billion) more than anticipated in this financial year, including £17-billion (£19.4-billion) of the tax cuts Truss promised when campaigning to become Prime



Liz Truss with her husband Hugh O'Leary on Valentines Day 2019

Minister. That would rise to £29-billion (£33-billion) in 2023 and £35-billion (£40-billion) in additional support for households and businesses. The problem with numbers that big is that they pass over the heads of most people for being simply too massive for us to grasp. Truss has even used the words “tax cuts” to define Conservatism. It would appear that she has a choice in dealing with the rocketing cost of energy between subsidising the bills of the poorest people or freezing prices. Either will cost her government between £70-billion (£80-billion) and £100-billion (£114-billion). If she also comes good on her promise of tax cuts, she could end up with such a massive rise in government debt that the financial markets will simply turn their backs on the UK. These are dangerous times for Truss and for the Conservative Party itself. She can celebrate her move to No. 10, Downing Street, with a glass of something fizzy, but she'll have to take great care; it could yet turn out to be a poisoned chalice. Truss's defeated rival for the premiership, former Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak, has called on the party to unite behind Truss, but given the party's reputation for knives in the back, she may prefer to keep them all where she can see them.

T. Kingsley Brooks



Merton College, Oxford, England

EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY ON ONE VOICE



All over the world, the EU is working to prevent and resolve conflicts, support resilient democracies, promote human rights and sustainable development, combat climate change and contribute to a rules-based global order.

As a key player on the world stage, the European Union has consolidated its image and political weight on the international stage by actively engaging in multilateral global aspects and issues. All these coordinated actions have been managed and supported by the European External Action Service (EEAS) over the past 11 years.

The European External Action Service, which was officially launched on 1 January 2011, was formally created by the Lisbon Treaty in 2007 and entered into force at the end of 2009. Although the importance of such an institution was clear to all parties, its creation was the result of long negotiations and discussions about its day-to-day function, the composition of its staff and the involvement of other European institutions. But despite some disagreements, it was clear to all that the

EU must speak loud and clear with one voice to the rest of the world.

"In an increasingly interconnected world, Europe's security begins abroad," says the EEAS website.

The European External Action Service is basically the EU's diplomatic service, responsible for the EU's external action, including foreign policy, defence and security, trade, development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Its aim is to make the EU's foreign policy more influential, coherent and effective.

The security of the European Union, human rights, the fight against climate change, migration and humanitarian aid, gender equality or EU enlargements are just some of the issues that are also on the agenda of the EEAS. In the meantime, the EEAS has developed and improved effective tools to prevent, deter and respond to the "manipulation and interference of foreign information" that has increased in recent years.

As an autonomous body within the EU, the EEAS is in part the successor to the European Commission's Directorate-

General for External Relations. The EEAS's main partners are the European Council (where the heads of state and government of all EU member states meet regularly), the European Commission and the European Parliament.



Seat of the European External Action Service in Brussels, Belgium

The European External Action Service follows the EU's stated foreign and security policy, which aims to promote peace, prosperity, security and the interests of European member states abroad. From its headquarters in Brussels, the EEAS cooperates with the European Commission on many issues.

The EU maintains diplomatic relations with almost every country in the world and cooperates with strategic partners and key international actors.

The work of the EEAS is currently supported by more than 5,000 staff, plus some interns, junior and external staff.

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy is the main coordinator and representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy within the European Union. The unofficial title 'EU Minister for Foreign Affairs' is sometimes used by the media to make him or her more recognisable to the general public. The High Representative is elected by qualified majority in the European Council for a five-year term. The President of the EU Commission must also agree with this decision.



Josep Borrell Fontelles is a Spanish politician serving as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy since 1 December 2019

The first person to hold the full title of Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy after the Lisbon Treaty was the Briton Catherine Ashton. Five years later, she was followed by the Italian Federica Mogherini. Currently, the post is held by Josep Borrell Fontelles, a Spanish politician, aeronautical engineer, economist and mathematics professor. He entered politics in the 1970s, held several high-level government posts, including Minister of Foreign Affairs, and was elected High Representative in December 2019.

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the High Representative (HR/VP) is also Vice-President of the European Commission. His or her role is to shape EU action on the global stage while building consensus among EU member states and their respective priorities. The HR participates in the regular meetings of the EU Heads of State and Government



The last Module IV of the 22nd edition of the EDP took place in France, under its current EU Council Presidency. The conference entitled "The EU as a global actor: Strategic autonomy, resilience and multilateralism", jointly organised by the EEAS and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, brought together over sixty junior diplomats from the EU Member States and EU institutions, experts in foreign policy and the MS Training Directors

in the European Council, informs the European Parliament on foreign and security policy issues, represents the EU in international meetings and is also the head of the European Defence Agency and the EU Institute for Security Studies. The HR /VP regularly reports to MEPs on foreign policy and its activities and answers their questions. In addition, the HR /VP chairs the monthly meetings with all EU Commissioners whose portfolios deal with international issues.

Within the EEAS, the High Representative is responsible for the institution's annual budget (which must also be approved by the EU Parliament and the Council).

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The High Representative also controls EEAS staff and the recruitment policy needed to support the EU's extensive diplomatic network abroad and operations in the field. In recent years, there has been criticism of the gender imbalance in the European External Action Service. One report found that 87 per cent of senior and 75 per cent of middle management positions in the EEAS are held by men, which is far more than in other EU institutions.

However, the EEAS Human Resources Report 2020 affirmed that "gender equality remains a priority objective of the EEAS and gender balance is being

actively pursued with concrete measures". EEAS staff are recruited on the basis of merit. The EEAS strives to ensure a significant presence of nationals from all Member States in the service and a gender balance. One of the main priorities is to encourage Member States to nominate female candidates for all posts in the EEAS, including senior management positions. As a result of our efforts, the number of staff from these Member States increased by 6% at the end of 2020 compared to the previous year. Moreover, their share of EEAS staff was almost equal to their share of the total EU population. To make it easier for women to fill posts in delegations, the EEAS is also working with Member States on an action plan to improve employment opportunities for spouses in the post.



Federica Mogherini

In an attempt to create a stronger and more competitive common European diplomatic body, the European External Action Service is now launching a pilot project aimed at establishing a European Diplomacy Academy.

42 junior European diplomats from different EU member states, Ukraine (with two diplomats), Georgia, Moldova,

Turkey and the Western Balkans (selected by the sending states/institutions) have been selected to participate in a 9-month training programme.

The programme is residential so that participants can live, learn and work together throughout the academic year, which contributes to networking and team building.

In a more difficult world with complex crises, the EU must have a stronger diplomatic voice. We need more well-trained diplomats ready to contribute to world politics. We are establishing the European Diplomatic Academy with the aim of creating a truly European diplomatic corps that will further strengthen our European global action," said Josep Borrell, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, when officially announcing the initiative.

The ambitious project is run by the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium, and Natolin in Poland, and aims to strengthen the EU's future external action. It is led by Federica Mogherini, the current Rector of the College of Europe in Bruges. This institution was awarded the project after a careful and open evaluation of a total of six educational proposals.

The programme, which will span two academic semesters (September - December 2022 / January - May 2023), already started on 29 August 2022 at the College of Europe campus in Poland with an initial two-week team-building session and visits to the Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Belarusian borders. Further training on EU foreign and security policy will take place at the College of Europe in Bruges, in the heart of Europe. The programme includes regular study visits to the European institutions in Brussels as well as to other relevant institutions such as NATO.

The stated aim of the programme is to provide participants with skills and competences to effectively promote and defend the principles and interests of the EU in the world. The programme focuses on 10 learning areas and includes group work, simulations and case studies, written and oral presentations, classroom discussions and debates. Around 80% of the lecturers will be EU practitioners, including senior EEAS officials.

The pilot project, funded by the European Parliament with a budget of €990,000, consists of two steps: an academic pilot programme (currently being developed) and a feasibility study, prepared by the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), the European University Institute (EUI) and the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), to be presented in November.

The feasibility study will analyse the different diplomatic trainings that currently exist at national level in the EU and then present different options and also budget estimates for the establishment of a future European Diplomatic Academy. The results and conclusions of the feasibility study and the academic pilot programme will help the EEAS to define the most effective model for this European Diplomatic Academy, in terms of curricula, legal and administrative structure and budgetary needs.

For the pilot year, the EEAS will cover the tuition fees for the entire program, as well as a scholarship for each participant to support transport, boarding and house expenses.

"A European Diplomatic Academy will help train European diplomats and equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to shape common policies, implement common decisions and use the EU institutions to promote and defend the EU's values and interests in the world". (EEAS)



CEPS Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium

The programme, launched only last month, is designed to complement, not replace or duplicate, the curricula of diplomatic academies in EU Member States, which is done at national level, as it will focus mainly on providing the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct European diplomacy at a high level and to represent and promote the European agenda and European diplomatic culture in the world.

Furthermore, learning together in an established environment will create a sense of belonging and cooperation between future European diplomats. However, it is important to note that completing the European Diplomatic Academy pilot programme does not automatically guarantee a job in the EEAS, although it will most likely increase the chances of success when applying for vacancies in the EEAS, EU delegations or EU institutions.

The idea of a European Diplomatic Academy is certainly a good one and takes into account the fact that Europe needs a coordinated strong voice not only in internal affairs but above all on the international stage. Dealing with increasingly delicate and demanding international affairs requires people who are professionally trained at the highest level and who know the problems and the European position on various issues when dealing with international partners. A well-prepared and operational European diplomatic body can only be an advantage in this regard.

There remains however, one important question : could this, in time, be only the beginning of what could later lead to a dramatic decline in the importance and influence of the national diplomacy of the European Member States on the international stage?

Alexandra Paucescu

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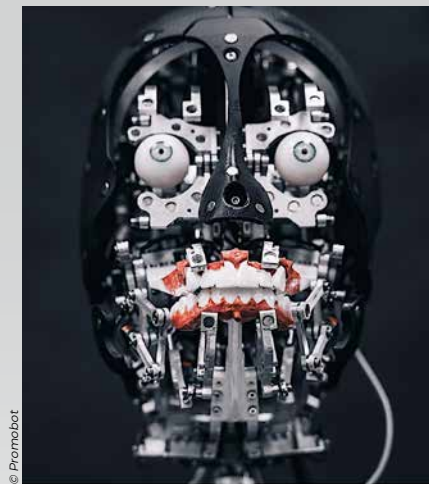


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ROBO-C PROJECT CREATES

The first-ever robot dialogue system



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Robo-C Project developed a new dialogue system for its human-like service robot. Before that, robots utilized a question-answer system called the language base. With a dialogue system, Robo-C recognizes questions, clusters them according to the topic, and generates responses with neural networks.

The new dialogue system utilizes finite automation. It is a linguistical system that involves natural language processing under three levels: analysis of named entities, user intents, and a wide array of topics.

« This is the first time a dialogue system has a theme depth based on four dimensions. These dimensions include time, place, topic, and negative or positive context. Unlike assistants, the robot's

responses depend on the time and place of the discussion. It is crucial for service robots because their operation greatly depends on their area of work, i.e., airport or office or kids center. They must be aware of their surroundings to provide the best service possible, » says Andrew N., Ph.D., head of the dialogue system at Robo-C Project.

The developers used ten primary intents for the system's modules, including 'transport' (how to get somewhere, buy tickets, where, etc.), 'locations' (the addresses, how to get there, etc.). One intent requires two thousand request samples. Data engineers need 6.5 million lines of requests, eight thousand work hours, or a thousand workdays to set up ten intents.

Each dialogue is split into five modules or branches. The first branch is simple chatting to make communication comfortable. This dialogue does not have a specific target. The second branch is a business-specific module to fulfill the requests of users. This module is targeted and excludes random responses. The third branch is a search module for constant updates of the robot's database.

The fourth module operates together with the third. When the robot has to evaluate data ('what's the most/least expensive,' 'where can I go,' 'who's better'), it compares info from the search engine. The robot doesn't require an Internet connection for it —

it is a constant process that it performs whenever it is online. The last module directly connects with Robo-C Project's language database, a depository of phrases and syntheses in 11 different languages that the company has been developing for the last five years.

« Most voice assistants operate as just one of our modules, the first one responsible for chatting, » says Robo-C Project representative. 'whenever you cut off the Internet, your assistant shuts down. Our voice assistant works offline and is here to fulfill specific requests of people. A dialogue system that doesn't require the Internet is unprecedented. »

The dialogue system is already in use on most Robo-C models. Solutions by Robo-C Project operate in more than 40 countries worldwide and include service robots with human-like appearance. Robo-C is an anthropomorphic robot that imitates human emotions. It moves eyes and eyebrows, lips, and other artificial muscles. Mechanical muscles created with Robo-C's patented technologies allow the robot to mimic more than 600 human facial expressions.

Promobot is the largest service robotics manufacturer in Northern and Eastern Europe.

The company carries out developments in the fields of mechatronics, electronics, artificial intelligence and neural networks, autonomous navigation, speech recognition, development of artificial skin and muscles, and human-machine interaction

In January 2022, Promobot, a Russian-owned company promised to pay US\$200,000 to own the perpetual rights to a person's face and voice in order to create its next service-focused humanoid robot.

Once the right person is chosen, a 3D model of their face and body will be created and over 100 hours of speech will be dictated for the robot to be able to respond to their owners. The robot is set to start appearing in 2023.



© Promobot

The "face" of Robo-C can display more than 600 variants of human facial expressions: the robot can move its eyes, eyebrows, lips, neck and "face muscles"



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EUROPEAN INNOVATIONS IN TECHNOLOGY

RACER, an aerodynamic configuration at the service of high speed



The RACER is a high-speed helicopter Research demonstrator currently being developed by Airbus Helicopters as part of the Clean Sky 2 European research programme. Airbus Helicopters relies on a wide network of companies, Research Centers, and SMEs spread across all European Union. Airbus Helicopters works with about 25 consortia, made of about 40 partners in 13 EU countries. They have been selected via an open selection process managed by Clean Sky 2 framework.

A FOCUS ON AERODYNAMIC EFFICIENCY

Building upon the achievements of the company's X3 technology demonstrator, RACER helps refine the aircraft's

aerodynamic configuration and brings it closer to an operational design with the objective of meeting future requirements for increased speed. While the aim of the X3 was to validate the chosen architecture for getting high speed at the right cost, RACER goes further and aims to demonstrate compliance with potential future operational requirements. As such, RACER is also a Mission demonstrator.

The simplicity of the concept is one of the main assets of the aircraft's new configuration, which combines fixed wings for energy efficient lift, propellers (so called lateral rotors) for energy-efficient propulsion and a main rotor that provides energy-efficient VTOL (vertical takeoff and landing) flight capabilities. A key feature to demonstrate is box-wing with pusher propellers concept, which is key for achieving safety, and

environmental performance of RACER demonstration in Clean Sky 2.

Optimised for a cruise speed of 400 km/h, the Racer features a variety of innovative technologies, including:

- A characteristic box-wing designed for aerodynamic efficiency
- A hybrid metallic-composite airframe designed for low weight
- A new high-voltage, direct-current electric generator
- A rear fuselage with an asymmetric cross-section profile, designed to optimise hover performances without penalising the forward and cruise flight phases

IMPROVED ENVIRONMENTAL AND ACOUSTIC FOOTPRINT

Improving the environmental and acoustic performance of helicopters is a key focus area of the Racer demonstrator programme. The dynamic configuration enables 15% less fuel burn per nautical mile at 180 kts compared to a conventional helicopter at 130 kts. The innovative Safran Eco-Mode hybrid-electric system – which allows one of the two Aneto-1X engines to be switched to stand-by while in cruise flight – generates further fuel savings of up to 30%. The distinct architecture of the Racer formula also contributes to lowering its operational acoustic footprint.

LEVERAGING HIGH SPEED FOR MULTIPLE MISSIONS

The Racer intends to demonstrate the advantages of high speed for a wide range of missions. These missions include the following:

- Emergency medical services (where the greatest chance of saving lives depends on help arriving within the first “golden hour”)
- Search and rescue operations
- Public service
- Commercial transportation

ABOUT CLEAN SKY

The European aeronautical sector is a global leader, comprising the talent and initiative of Europe's centres of industry. With a steady rate of growth and need for aircraft in the thousands over the next decades, concerns have been raised about the sector's environmental impact. Clean Sky is the European Union's response.

Clean Sky is a joint undertaking of the European Commission and the European aeronautics industry (Airbus, Airbus Helicopters, Fraunhofer, Saab, Liebherr, Rolls Royce, and others), and is part of the EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. Its mission is to develop innovative, cutting-edge technology with the goal of making a substantial positive impact on noise reduction, CO₂ emissions, and fuel economy.

With a budget consisting of contributions on a 50/50 basis, made by the Commission and the aeronautical industry, Clean Sky delivers technology demonstrators in all segments of civil air transport, grouped into areas called integrated technology demonstrators (ITD).

Under the management of the Clean Sky Joint Undertaking (CSJU) the programme's first phase, Clean Sky 1, put each ITD under the leadership of two industry leaders. Examples of

successful demonstrators include Airbus Helicopters' Bluecopter which, by optimising the design of certain shapes on the fuselage of an H135 helicopter, successfully showed improvements in drag reduction; and the Tech 800 demonstration engine, which showed advances for small- and medium-size helicopter engines with savings of 15 percent fuel burn.

“Such demonstrators incorporate mature technology – developed through the talent of industry, universities, research centres and small and medium-size enterprises – into full-scale demonstrators. The result is a rapid evaluation and testing that helps bring advanced levels of maturity to projects' designs and techniques,” said Éric Dautriat, Executive Director of Clean Sky. “With this, the hoped-for end result is implementing innovative technology in future products and markets.” The technology of the Tech 800 demonstration engine, for example, was integrated into the product development of the new Turbomeca ARRANO engine, recently selected as the engine of Airbus Helicopters' H160.

Following on the progress of CS1, Clean Sky 2 – which represents a budget of €4 billion over seven years (2017 to 2024) – will deliver break-through technology which will be incorporated, from 2025 onwards, into future generations of aircraft.

PARAPUBLIC

- Improved cost efficiency by need for fewer bases
- Increased productivity



PASSENGER TRANSPORT

- Less time on-board for a given mission
- Avoids need for several transportation means for a medium distance
- Increased comfort



EMS/SAR

More lives saved:

- Time to target reduced
- Much greater area covered in the “golden hour” timeframe





TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends



These boots are made for walking

While ankle boots still remain a style staple, 2022-2023 boot trends seem to be all about higher styles. From slouchy boots, to boots that fit like a glove, going all the way through super trendy knee-high boots, there is something to suit all tastes.

The German fashion influencer Leonie Hanne (more than 4 million followers on her @leoniehanne Instagram account) has a knack for wearing boots with style... and to give us inspiration !



Will the influencer, Caro Daur (@carodaur) inspire us to wear black, high boots in an elegant version of “Less is more” ?
The answer is : YES !



Thigh-high boots

They cling to us like a second skin, are ultra sexy, and super trendy. From street style looks to runway shows, the thigh-high boot has definitely made its entrance as **THE boot silhouette of the season.**

Leather over-the-knee boots
(isabelmarant.com)

Slouchy boots

They are one of the **must-have footwear for this autumn** and an alternative for those who can't get behind the “second skin” fit.

Suede slouchy boots, Paris Texas
(spottedonmytheresa.com)



TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends



Vinyl or shiny boots

This season, boots are **not just getting higher, they're also getting shinier**. Boots with a glossy, vinyl finish are getting more attention, with clicks increasing by over 1000% compared to last year on the Stylight fashion search platform (*). Patent leather is also a very elegant option.

Black patent leather knee-high boots, Saint Laurent
([spotted on mytheresa.com](#))

Furry boots

Shearling is the perfect accessory for winter wardrobes, especially our coats. But this autumn, **we will also be wearing fur and shearling on our feet!** Whether as a small detail or completely covered with fur...anything goes !

Knee-length shearling boots, Miu Miu
([spotted on farfetch.com](#))



Rain boots (again)

Last year, Bottega Veneta's short puddle boots were the all-stars, but this year **the real must-haves will be rain boots that reach almost up to the knee**.

Biodegradable rubber knee-high rain boots
([row.jimmychoo.com](#))

Tall cowboy boots

The cowboy boot has been trending for some time now (who doesn't own at least one pair of cowboy boots at this point?). However, this year, the cowboy boot is "elevated" and reaches up to your knee. It's **the perfect transitional footwear**, easily paired with sundresses at the end of summer and then with long maxi dresses as we move into autumn.

Suede boots with paisley embroidery
([etro.com](#))



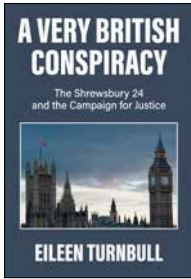
What about chunky boots ?

Do you only swear by this kind of boots? Well, you can rejoice : they continue to be popular for autumn/winter 2022-2023. With jeans, a skirt or a dress...just like fashion-conscious chameleons, they can adapt to anything in your wardrobe!

Leather chunky boots, Bottega Veneta
([spotted on mytheresa.com](#))

(*) Data collected by Stylight, the world's leading online search platform for Fashion, Beauty and Design ([stylight.com/insights](#))

BOOKS

**A VERY BRITISH CONSPIRACY****By Eileen Turnbull****THE SHREWSBURY 24 AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR JUSTICE**

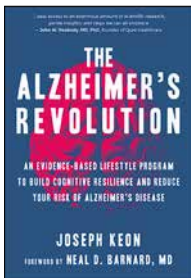
The story of the campaign for justice for the 24 building workers wrongly prosecuted by the state in the 1970s

When a group of North Wales building workers were put on trial for picketing-related offences during the first and only national building workers strike in Britain, it not only had a profound and lifelong impact upon them and their families.

It also was a turning point for halting the growth of trade unionism in the building industry, from which it has never recovered.

Using newly available material that Eileen Turnbull discovered in various archives whilst searching for the fresh evidence that would get the pickets convictions referred to the Court of Appeal, *A British Conspiracy* uncovers government and police documents that show the careful planning of the prosecution of the North Wales building workers. It brings into focus the secrecy surrounding the actions of the police and the government in the five months between the end of the strike in September 1972 and the arrest of the pickets on the 14 February 1973. It shows how the state used the criminal justice system to halt effective picketing by workers during industrial disputes. It reveals that common law offences were carefully selected to overcome the prosecutions' problems of a lack of hard evidence.

The premature death of one of the convicted pickets was a catalyst for a group of trade unionists in the North West to come together in 2006 to organise a campaign. In February 2021, their appeal against the convictions was finally successful. The book describes, through their own words, how the pickets and their families felt after forty-seven years being ostracised and considered as criminals in their communities, as well as the response of the six core Campaign Committee members who had brought this historic victory about.

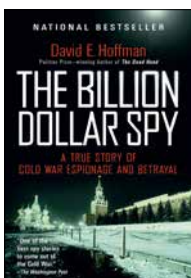
**THE ALZHEIMER'S REVOLUTION****By Joseph Keon****Foreword by Neal Barnard****AN EVIDENCE-BASED LIFESTYLE PROGRAM TO BUILD COGNITIVE RESILIENCE AND REDUCE YOUR RISK OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE**

The Alzheimer's Revolution is the all-in-one guidebook for taking control of your risk factors and reclaiming your overall health.

Based on cutting-edge research and the most up-to-date studies, Joseph Keon identifies the risk factors that anyone can control and shatters the myth that Alzheimer's is caused just by genes. *The Alzheimer's Revolution* also provides proven strategies to improve cognition and slow progression in those who have already been diagnosed.

Everyone is at risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, and everyone can take steps to prevent it. *The Alzheimer's Revolution* is a complete overhaul of how we understand the risk factors of Alzheimer's disease, challenging every aspect of current thinking on prevention and treatment. It challenges the misguided and disempowering belief that Alzheimer's disease cannot be prevented or slowed. The book reveals that over half the Alzheimer's cases today could be prevented by addressing 7 key lifestyle factors that are within everyone's ability to control.

The Alzheimer's Revolution offers a scientific and evidence-based lifestyle program designed to build cognitive resilience that can dramatically reduce the risk of this devastating condition. Alzheimer's disease is the number-one public health crisis of our time. It's time to turn our attention and resources toward prevention.

**THE BILLION DOLLAR SPY****By David E. Hoffman****A TRUE STORY OF COLD WAR ESPIONAGE AND BETRAYAL**

NATIONAL BESTSELLER • A Washington Post Notable Book of the Year • Drawing on previously classified CIA documents and on interviews with firsthand participants, *The Billion Dollar Spy* is a brilliant feat of reporting and a riveting true story of intrigue in the final years of the Cold War.

It was the height of the Cold War, and a dangerous time to be stationed in the Soviet Union. One evening, while the chief of the CIA's Moscow station was filling his gas tank, a stranger approached and dropped a note into the car. The chief, suspicious

of a KGB trap, ignored the overture. But the man had made up his mind. His attempts to establish contact with the CIA would be rebuffed four times before he thrust upon them an envelope whose contents would stun U.S. intelligence. In the years that followed, that man, Adolf Tolkachev, became one of the most valuable spies ever for the U.S. But these activities posed an enormous personal threat to Tolkachev and his American handlers. They had clandestine meetings in parks and on street corners, and used spy cameras, props, and private codes, eluding the ever-present KGB in its own backyard—until a shocking betrayal put them all at risk.

THE GODMOTHER**By Barbie Latza Nadeau****MURDER, VENGEANCE, AND THE BLOODY STRUGGLE OF MAFIA WOMEN**

The chilling story of one woman's rise to prominence in the Italian Mafia, and the as-yet untold stories of the women who followed in her footsteps.

For as long as it has gripped our imaginations, the Mafia has been tied to an ingrained image of masculinity. We read about "made men," "wiseguys," and "goodfellas" leading criminal organizations

whose culture prizes machismo, with women as ancillary and often-powerless characters: trivialized mistresses and long-suffering mob wives. The reality is far more complex.

In *The Godmother*, investigative journalist Barbie Latza Nadeau tells the stories of the women who have risen to prominence, and fallen out of favor, in the Italian mob, beginning with the most infamous of these women: Pupetta Maresca. A Mafia woman born and raised, Pupetta avenged her husband's murder, firing 29 shots at the man who killed him.

Woven throughout Pupetta's story is Nadeau's diligent research, and her personal interviews with the Mafia women themselves. Nadeau takes readers inside the Mafia families to paint a complete and complex portrait of the real culture that has shaped the Mafia, and the women who are part of it.

Leaving behind the stereotypes we know from Mafia movies, *The Godmother* shows the Mafia in an entirely new light: full-fledged, ruthless, twenty-first-century criminal enterprises led by whoever is strong enough and smart enough to take control.

**TAKING BERLIN****By Martin Dugard****THE BLOODY RACE TO DEFEAT THE THIRD REICH**

From Martin Dugard, author of *Taking Paris* and the #1 *New York Times* bestselling coauthor of Bill O'Reilly's *Killing* series, comes a nonfiction thriller about the race between the Allies and Soviets to conquer the heart of Nazi Germany.

"Spectacular... *Taking Berlin* is certain to be a massive hit with fans of both history and thrillers alike."—Mark Greaney, bestselling author of the *Gray Man* series • "With the precision of a smart bomb, Martin Dugard puts the reader directly into the campaign to destroy Hitler."—Bill O'Reilly • "Gripping, popular history at its page-turning best."—Alex Kershaw

Fall, 1944. Paris has been liberated, saved from destruction, but this diversion on the road to Berlin has given the Germans time to regroup. The American and British armies press on from the west, facing the enemy time and again in the Hurtgen Forest, during the Market-Garden invasion, and at the Battle of the Bulge, all while American general George Patton and British field marshal Bernard Montgomery vie for supremacy as the Allies' top battlefield commander.

Meanwhile, the Soviets begin to squeeze Hitler's crumbling Reich from the east. Led by Generals Zhukov and Konev, the Red Army launches millions of soldiers, backed by tanks, artillery, and warplanes, against the Germans, leaving death and scorched earth in their wake, pushing the Wehrmacht back toward their fatherland. As both the Anglo-American alliance and the Soviets set their sights on claiming the capital city of Nazi Germany, Churchill seeks to ensure Britain's place in a new world divided by Roosevelt's America and Stalin's Soviet Union.

With a sweeping cast of historical figures, *Taking Berlin* is a pulse-pounding race into the final, desperate months of the Second World War and toward the fiery destruction of the Thousand-Year-Reich, chronicling a moment in history when allies become adversaries.

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