

EUROPE DIPLOMATIC

MAGAZINE

BY WIG AND
GOWN TO
THE TOP

**Slovenia's Nataša Pirc Musar is
just the latest lawyer to rise to
political power and the top job**



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Nikola Hendrickx

BY WIG AND GOWN TO THE TOP

**Slovenia's Nataša Pirc
Musar is just the latest
lawyer to rise to political
power and the top job**



Nataša Pirc Musar leads the polls ahead of the Slovenian presidential election runoff

Abraham Lincoln was a lawyer before he became President of the United States. "Honest Abe" was his nickname in court circles back then. Further back in time, Cicero became famous as a friend of Julius Caesar and also a lawyer, but he was never chosen to be Caesar. More recently, of course, Barack Obama was a lawyer before he became President of the United States. When you think about it, the legal profession is good training for leadership of a country. You just have to look at a list of lawyers who went on to fame and fortune as leaders. Mahatma Ghandi, for instance. Or how about Hilary Clinton? Or Tony Blair. It's a very long list. Now we must add another one: Nataša Pirc Musar of Slovenia has been elected as Slovenia's first ever female head of state. In the UK, of course, lawyers appearing in a court of law must wear their black lawyer's gown and also a particular type of wig that may have been fashionable in the early 19th century or earlier but would certainly earn you some funny looks in any street today.

Lawyers, after all, know the exact legal parameters of leadership: how far your writ can run and exactly where it must come to an end. Ms. Pirc Musar, who is 54 years old at the time of writing, ran as an independent, as did other contenders, but her main opponent, Anže Logar, former Foreign Minister, is from the Centre-Right, which suggests that Ms. Pirc Musar leans to the left.



First Lady Melania Trump participating in a safari tour at the Nairobi National Park in Nairobi, Kenya in 2018

It's not her first brush with fame, having represented the former American First Lady, Melania Trump, who is herself Slovenian, in a number of copyright and other cases. How does she view her fairly convincing victory (53.86% to 46.14%)? She said to the reporters who inevitably clustered around her: "I believe in democracy, human rights, in tolerant dialogue," she said. "There is a lot of work to be done." Having declared her victory, she went on to say: "I will do my best to be a true president for all, to work for fundamental and constitutional human and



Nataša Pirc Musar in the summer of 1992 while hosting TV Dnevnik on national television

democratic rights and democracy." It all sounds very promising; it's never as simple as many voters may believe.

What do we know about this hitherto low-profile and modest woman? She was her country's Information Commissioner from 2004 to 2014, she worked as a journalist and she was President of Slovenia's Red Cross (2015-2016). She has also written several books about freedom of information and legal opinion, for which she is a strong advocate. Apart from Ms. Trump, she has also represented the Political party of the Social Democrats and various others. She has been involved in several high-profile cases. She officially takes over as President of Slovenia in December. It will, of course, be a challenging position and, as her country's first female President, she will be watched especially closely. Yes, I know that's unfair, but as the first woman in the top job I'm afraid it's bound to happen. I wish her a quiet and uncontroversial term of office, during which she can be as fierce and assertive as she likes!

As a journalist, however, she trained at CNN, which is seldom the quietest and most peaceful newsroom in the world. It always struck me as a hectic – but very well organised – office in which everyone knew what they had to do and got on with it. The journalists made friends with a lot of people, too, and spoke a lot of languages. In fact, I can't think of a better training ground. Ted



POP TV presenters Nataša Pirc Musar and Sandij Salkič in 1997

Turner can pat himself on the back. I must assume, therefore, that Nataša Pirc Musar knows her way around a television newsroom. Nataša Pirc Musar was born in 1968 in Ljubljana and after graduating from the Faculty of Law of the University of Ljubljana in 1992, she passed her national bar examination in 1997. After completing her studies, she was employed for six years at the Slovenian national television station as a journalist and news presenter for the main news programme TV Dnevnik. She then worked for five years as a news presenter on “24 ur”, the primary information programme of the largest commercial television broadcaster in Slovenia, POP TV.

It was after that that she gained additional experience in journalism at CNN and studied at the Media Department of Salford University in Manchester in the UK. During her studies she served professional internships at the BBC, Granada TV, Sky News, Reuters TV, and Border TV. She has also written newspaper articles and worked on radio. An all-round news-hound, in effect, with wide experience.

I Never stand still

However, she was someone who was forever looking to broaden her experience, so in 2001 she moved to the financial sector, joining the largest Slovenian private financial corporation, Aktiva Group, as Head of Corporate Communications. In April 2003 she became the Director of the Training and Communications Centre of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Slovenia. On July 15 2004, the National Assembly elected her the second Slovenian Commissioner for Access to Public Information. She was nominated for this position by the President of the Republic of Slovenia. From 31 December 2005, when the Office of the Commissioner for Access to Public Information was merged with the Inspectorate for Personal Data Protection, and for the following decade, Nataša Pirc Musar held the office of Information Commissioner.

Now she has the top job she must decide her priorities. “My first task will be to open a dialogue among all Slovenians,” she told the media. She stood as an independent, without party connections, but she had the backing of Slovenia’s centre-left

government. The Presidency in Slovenia is largely ceremonial, but Pirc Musar will still be in a position to nominate prime ministers and members of the constitutional court. Her past record shows that she is not the sort of person to sit still and simply let things happen around her. Hers will be an active – perhaps even energetic – presidency. She succeeds the centrist politician Borut Pahor in the post. Pirc Musar was supported by two small extra-parliamentary parties, the Pirate Party of Slovenia (PSS) and the Young People’s Party/ European Green Party (SMS-Zeleni).



Slovenian President Nataša Pirc Musar and husband Aleš Musar

Throughout her career, Pirc Musar has sought wider experience and greater knowledge. After she became Information Commissioner in December 2005, her term of office was extended for an additional five years in 2009 at the instigation of the country’s then president, Dr. Danilo Türk. Pirc Musar was then elected Vice-President of Europol Joint Supervisory Body, being elevated to President of Europol’s Joint Supervisory Body (JSB Europol) in March 2013, with the task of protecting personal data for all the member states of Europol and their citizens. In December 2014, she took an oath as Attorney at Law with the Slovenian Bar Association and from 1 January 2015 she became the director and owner of her own law firm, Pirc Musar. In November 2015, she successfully defended her Ph.D thesis at the law Faculty in Vienna, on striking the right balance between the availability of access to public information and the personal protection of data using a test based on the principle of “public interest”. It was also as the representative of her law firm that she acted as legal counsel for the family of Melania Trump.

Pirc Musar is married to the businessman Aleš Musar and they have a son. They have a property known as the Russian dacha in Zgornje Gameljne, and they also own a 1971 Rolls Royce Phantom VI limousine, once owned by first cousin of Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Alexandra. Clearly, it’s a bit of a step up from her motorbike.



Presentation on the theme: “Nataša Pirc Musar Information Commissioner, Republic of Slovenia Madrid, 28th of October 2008

Pirc Musar's election victory has certainly aroused interest around the world but especially in the Balkans. OSW, the Centre for Eastern Studies or Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im, points out the result is visible proof of just how polarised Slovenian society is, but with a slight predominance for the left-liberal side, which tends to be concentrated in the larger towns and cities, while the more right-wing conservative camp enjoys more success in the rural areas of northern and eastern Slovenia. Her rival for the presidency, Anže Logar, who is a former foreign minister in the government of Janez Janša, and who had the backing of the centre-right opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) which is rather more to the right than most "centre-right" parties, and New Slovenia (NSi), won just 46% of the vote, giving Pirc Musar a comfortable victory. In the first round of voting, it was her rival, Logar, who had the edge, but she won in the second round thanks to the support of the Freedom Movement (GS) and the Social Democrats (SD), the two parties which have led the left-green governing coalition since they won the parliamentary elections earlier this year. Pirc Musar has some very helpful friends.



US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Slovenian Foreign Minister Anže Logar in 2020

Saving the planet by bicycle

The victory of Pirc Musar is also a sign of success for Dr. Robert Golob, the businessman and politician who has been serving as Prime Minister of Slovenia and leader of the Freedom Movement since 2022. He is a highly talented and creative engineer who is determined to solve the problem of meeting the country's climate targets. If anyone can do it, it would seem, he can. He is not popular, needless to say, with climate change deniers, who exist even in Slovenia, but he is trying to encourage people to use renewable types of transportation. In her political views, Pirc Musar is pretty much in line with Golob, too, and during the election campaign she emphasized the ecological and social issues, promised to cooperate with NGOs and civic activists in the field of human rights, and also said that she would work towards maintaining the high standard of living in the country, which is what most voters want, of course. Both Golob and Pirc Musar are involved in the Climate Pact Movement, which is based upon the principle that if everyone were to work together, virtually any obstacle and problem could be overcome, including climate change.



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Dr Robert Golob

The movement tries to encourage more people to use bicycles to get about. As for Golob, he was among those who responded to the presentation of the European Commission Enlargement Report: "Today's decision by the European Commission to recommend granting candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina is also based on last June's initiative by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia to grant EU candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina," he reminded his audience. He became a Climate Pact Ambassador in 2021.

Pirc Musar herself is a firm believer not only in human rights but in the need to protect them from those with more nefarious views. She was a member of the EU delegation that negotiated with the US following Edward Snowden's revelations about the misuse of EU citizens' data and has put human rights and the rule of law at the centre of her campaign to be chosen as president. Her key priorities include health and pension reforms, climate neutrality and comprehensive security. She has chosen to have a wide brief and, it seems, she displays unfailing energy when pursuing it. Pirc Musar, who headed the country's data protection authority for a decade, won a healthy majority ahead over Logar, according to the election commission. "Slovenia has elected a president who believes in the European Union, in



© GOV.SI

Former Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša



The Slovak army during defense exercises in October 2022

the democratic values on which the EU was founded,” she told reporters, adding she would “give all my efforts so that politicians unify on strategic issues.” Pirc Musar looks like being a sensible choice.

As for her involvement with the Truss family? As a lawyer, Pirc Musar was hired to protect the interests of Slovenian-born Melania Trump during her husband’s presidency, stopping companies who were attempting to commercialize products by using her name without permission. During the campaign, Pirc Musar, who is a keen motorcyclist, came under attack because of her husband’s lucrative investments – especially in tax havens.

According to *Le Monde*, she told reporters at Agence France Presse (AFP): “The president cannot be neutral [...] and have no opinion [...] I have never been afraid to speak out.” Indeed, the record shows that to be true. And the result is a blow more for the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) of Janez Jansa than for the defeated candidate. Critics had accused Mr. Jansa of attacking media freedom and the judiciary and of undermining the rule of law during his latest term in office. “This election confirmed once again the vote against Janez Jansa,” the press was told. “Logar is not the biggest loser tonight, but it is Jansa,” Vlado Mihelj, a professor at Ljubljana University, told AFP. However the losing party (or parties) may choose to interpret the result, there is no doubt that Nataša Pirc Musar is the winner. Does it matter? After all, Slovenia is just a small Balkan country. Well yes, it does. With the world population having just reached eight-billion, who is running the show is a matter of great concern. As for Slovenia itself, it covers just 20,271 square kilometres with a population of 2.1-million. It is also mostly mountainous and heavily forested.

Side effects?

Certainly, Pirc Musar’s victory is a blow for Slovenia’s conservatives. Her opponent in the poll, Anže Logar, ran as an independent but is a long-term member of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) which is headed by Janez Jansa who tried and failed to be re-elected as prime minister in April. The French newspaper *Le Monde* quoted Vlado Mihelj, a professor at Ljubljana University who was interviewed by Agence France Presse (AFP): “This election confirmed once again the vote

against Janez Jansa. Logar is not the biggest loser tonight but it is Jansa.” Most commentators are saying that this result marks the end of Jansa’s career as a political force.

As for Pirc Musar, what are the options ahead for her? In Slovenia, the rôle of the president is as an arbiter or supra-party authority, in the words of Łukasz Kobeszko, a Research Fellow at the Central European Department at the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw. Clearly the President’s is an important rôle but in reality it carries relatively little power. According to Kobeszko, the President cannot dissolve parliament, nor veto laws, although she (or he) can nominate ambassadors, even if the government chooses to ignore the proposals. According to Kobeszko, the choice put forward in this way was often ignored during the period of 2020-2022, when Janez Janša was in power, or was at least in “cohabitation” (as it was euphemistically called) with the outgoing president, Borut Pahor, with his long-lasting links to the Social Democrat (SD) party. We should bear in mind that the SD is also the successor to the League of Communists of Slovenia. Presidents also nominate prime ministers and members of



Russian President Vladimir Putin and President of Slovenia Borut Pahor

the constitutional court, who are then elected in parliament, and furthermore appoints members of the anti-corruption commission.

You will gather from this the depth of the political divide within the small alpine (and very beautiful) country. Pirc Musar has pledged to bridge that divide and unite the people, setting aside the serious squabbles of the past, which won't be easy. "My first task will be to open a dialogue among all Slovenians," she said as her election team celebrated. "In the democratic election, Slovenians have shown what kind of a country they want." She went on to clarify her immediate intentions: "All my life I've advocated the same values: democracy, human rights, tolerance. It's time to stop dealing with the past. Many things have to be done in the future," she said, surrounded by her election team as her victory was announced.

First-hand knowledge



© N. MUSAR

Nataša Pirc Musar with her motorcycle

As to her decision to run for the Presidency, she claims to have noted what was going wrong in Slovenia when she was reporting on it for television news. She decided to seek public office because she "understands what the state's needs are and how to realize them", according to her website.

"I am also convinced that the time has come in Slovenia to get the first female president of the republic, who will confidently and courageously step forward with a new, different energy and strengthen her rôle as a statesman," says her website. "The President of the Republic is the one who must initiate and encourage this with a genuine, sincere desire and intention. That is why we need self-confidence, hope and trust. We need a seething energy, which must be skilfully clothed in a statesmanlike attitude. I know I have it." There speaks the voice of confidence.

Perhaps it comes from the fact that Pirc Musar rides a motorcycle. As the old 1950s motorcycle advertisement goes: "God didn't create metal so that man could make paper clips!" There are a number of sayings about women who ride motorcycles but I'm not going to quote them here. Some of them are quite suggestive, even rude. Pirc Musar can say if they're true, or if they're still true, now she's reached the age of 54. But motorcycling is said to keep you feeling young. Apart from being Slovenia's first female president and holding a number of other senior posts, the Presidency is a much higher-profile job. The head of state is elected for 5 years and plays a more formal rôle.



Nataša Pirc Musar upon handing over the signatures of voters to the National Election Commission

Although the rôle is mostly ceremonial, the president is commander in chief of the armed forces and nominates several top officials, including the central bank governor. Ceremonial it may be, but it clearly has some important functions. Pirc Musar is not a woman to shirk her duties. "Not a single day of my life have I said 'Oh God, I have to go to work'," she told Associated Press. "All the jobs that I have done in my life were a hobby of mine." Some hobby, you may well think, and certainly not one to everybody's taste.

Pirc Musar can be seen as a relative newcomer to the world of politics, but her face is doubtless familiar to most Slovenians as a former television news anchor. Familiarity is part of the charm of politics conducted in public. The issue of power and where it resides exactly has been under debate for centuries. In the excellent book about the history of jurisprudence and its relationship to power, "The Rule of Laws", Fernanda Pirie traces how jurists and lawyers came to hold control over others. "Did the ruler simply have power," she asks, "or did he only have the power to declare what was lawful? Or did the people have this power?" It's what makes being a lawyer a sensible qualification for rule, it seems. "The civil law had an authority, based on its ancient history and intellectual sophistication, that even emperors respected." In theory, anyway. Not all leaders have bothered to observe their own laws; there seems little doubt that Nataša Pirc Musar will do so. No-one pretends it will be easy but if anyone can do it, it would seem, she can. I wish her luck. It's not a job I would fancy. More of a poisoned chalice, really. But Pirc Musar is extremely well-qualified to do it; from the Rule of Law to the Rule of a Lawyer. I wish her luck!

Anthony James

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NEWS IN BRIEF

AIRBUS FINAL ASSEMBLY LINE ASIA ASSEMBLES ITS FIRST A321 AIRCRAFT



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Airbus has announced the commissioning of the first A321 aircraft to be assembled at its Final Assembly Line Asia (FAL Tianjin) in Tianjin, China. The breakthrough expands and deepens the collaboration with China's aviation industry, and demonstrates Airbus' commitment to enhance its long-term strategic partnership with China.

The FAL in Tianjin officially started the adaptation work to become A321 capable in August 2022. It is the first major upgrade of the assembly line since operations commenced in 2008. FAL Tianjin's first A321 aircraft is scheduled for delivery in early 2023.

"Since we announced our plans to expand the capability of FAL Tianjin to A321 production last November, I am proud that the Airbus Tianjin team has successfully completed the relevant adaptation work on schedule by working closely with European experts and our suppliers to overcome the impact of COVID-19" said George Xu, Airbus Executive Vice President and Airbus China CEO. "The commissioning of the first A321 aircraft underlines Airbus' commitment to China, marking a new milestone in the industrial cooperation with our Chinese partners."

Airbus has four A320 Family assembly facilities around the world: Toulouse, France; Hamburg, Germany; Tianjin, China; and Mobile, United States. By the end of 2022, all commercial aircraft assembly sites will be A321-capable, as part of the industrial strategy to de-risk the ramp up and to meet the rising share of A321 production.

Inaugurated in 2008, FAL Tianjin was the first Airbus commercial aircraft assembly line outside Europe. In the same year, the first aircraft sections arrived on site. Since its first A320 delivery in 2009, FAL Tianjin has delivered more than 600 aircraft over its 14 years in operation. It has become a role model of successful Sino-European cooperation.

The A321neo is the longest-fuselage member of Airbus' best-selling, single-aisle A320 Family, comfortably seating as many as 244 passengers in a higher-density arrangement, with a longest range reaching 4,700nm/8,700km. Featuring the widest single-aisle cabin in the sky, the A320neo Family offers a 20 % reduction in fuel consumption and CO₂ as well as a 50% noise reduction compared to previous generation aircraft, thanks to incorporating the very latest technologies including new generation engines and Sharklets. By the end of September 2022, the A320neo Family has received over 8,500 firm orders from more than 130 customers worldwide.

WARNING: ASPIRIN-CONTAINING ANTACID MEDICINES CAN CAUSE BLEEDING

The next time you reach for a nonprescription drug to treat your upset stomach or heartburn, consider whether you should use one of the many antacids that don't have aspirin.

Why? Aspirin-containing medicines to treat heartburn, sour stomach, acid indigestion or upset stomach can cause stomach or intestinal bleeding, especially in some people, warns the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Aspirin is commonly used to reduce pain and fever. It is a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) that can increase the risk of bleeding, including in the stomach and gastrointestinal tract (digestive tract).

"We're focusing on bleeding risk specifically with antacid-aspirin products used to treat upset stomach or heartburn."



© FDA

We're not telling people to stop taking aspirin altogether," says Karen Murry, M.D., Deputy Director of the Office of Nonprescription Drugs at the FDA.

Cases of bleeding are rare. When the FDA reviewed its Adverse Event Reporting System database, it found new cases of serious bleeding caused by aspirin-containing antacid products despite an agency warning in 2009 about such a risk. Some of those patients required a blood transfusion.

"Take a close look at the Drug Facts label. If the product has aspirin, consider choosing something else for your stomach symptoms," Murry says. "Unless people read the Drug Facts label when they're looking for stomach symptom relief, they might not even think about the possibility that a stomach medicine could contain aspirin."

How will you know what over-the-counter (OTC, or nonprescription) medicine to take to get relief from indigestion? The Drug Facts label will not only tell you if the medicine contains aspirin but also will list the risk factors for bleeding. If the medicine has aspirin, consider finding another product. There are plenty of stomach medicines that don't contain aspirin.

Who's at Higher Risk of Bleeding

Because aspirin thins the blood, the FDA believes the aspirin in these combination medicines is contributing to major bleeding events. People with one or more risk factors have a higher chance of serious bleeding with aspirin-containing antacid products.

You are at higher risk for bleeding with these products if you:

- Are 60 or older.
- Have a history of stomach ulcers or bleeding problems.
- Take drugs that reduce the ability of your blood to clot (also known as anticoagulants or blood-thinning drugs).
- Take steroid medicine, such as prednisone, to reduce inflammation.
- Take other medicines containing NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen or naproxen.
- Drink three or more alcoholic drinks every day.

Warning signs of stomach or intestinal bleeding include

feeling faint, vomiting blood, passing black or bloody stools, or having abdominal pain. Those are signs that you should consult a health care professional right away.

What if you've been taking these products for a long time?

"Some people may have been taking aspirin-containing antacid products frequently for a long time. Apart from the bleeding risk, it's not normal to have frequent or chronic upset stomach or heartburn. You should talk to a health care professional if that's happening," Murry says.

Take aspirin regularly? If your health care professional has advised you to take an aspirin a day to help prevent a heart attack or other condition, don't stop without talking with them first. "Make sure you discuss what kind of medicine you can take in case you get an upset stomach," Murry says.

How to settle an upset stomach

People have many alternatives for treating heartburn, sour stomach, acid indigestion and upset stomach. Read the Drug Facts label and look for products that contain an "antacid" or "acid reducer."

For example, there are numerous nonprescription medicines that contain only an antacid, such as calcium carbonate, magnesium hydroxide, or another antacid," Murry says. These products can be used to treat heartburn, sour stomach, acid indigestion and upset stomach.

For frequent heartburn, there are acid reducers, such as proton pump inhibitors (esomeprazole, lansoprazole, omeprazole), or H2 blockers (cimetidine, famotidine).

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA SHOULD TAKE FURTHER MEASURES TO COMPLY WITH THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

In its first baseline evaluation report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) highlights positive legal and policy measures introduced by the authorities, but also outlines measures to meet requirements of the Convention on



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Trebinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

In its report GREVIO welcomes policies to secure gender equality, including gender-sensitive budgeting in ministries at the state and entity levels and the establishment of contact persons for gender equality. The report highlights positive steps, including the passing of new criminal legislation introducing the offences of forced genital mutilation (FGM), forced sterilisation, stalking, sexual harassment and forced marriage. GREVIO praises the provision of specialist victim support in domestic violence proceedings, via a “person of trust”, assisting victims and attending all their meetings and hearings before public institutions, including police and courts.

However, basing its findings on information obtained from the authorities, civil society and other sources, including an on-site visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, GREVIO identifies challenges that require “urgent action” by the authorities to comply with the treaty.

GREVIO urges the authorities to amend the sexual offences provided under the national, entity-level and Brčko District criminal codes to fully incorporate the notion of lack of freely given consent as required by the Istanbul Convention and to specify the type of non-consensual sexual acts that are criminalised, in line with the convention. They furthermore should adopt measures to ensure that any offence of sexual violence applies between former or current spouses or partners and ensure proportionate and dissuasive sanctions for all sexual acts without the victim’s consent, irrespective of personal characteristics.

GREVIO also urges the authorities to set up rape crisis and/or sexual violence referral centres that provide immediate medical care, trauma support, forensic examinations and psychological assistance by qualified professionals, in line with treaty standards. Regarding custody and visitation rights, GREVIO urges the authorities to take “priority actions” to ensure the safety of victims and their children and to “break the cycle of power and abuse” exercised by perpetrators.

Finally, as required by the treaty, Bosnia and Herzegovina must ensure that one or more telephone helplines providing support to victims of all forms of violence against women are reachable in the whole territory, around the clock, completely free of charge and with due respect for the confidentiality and anonymity. Based on this report, the Committee of the Parties, which is composed of the representatives of the State Parties to the Convention, will publish its recommendations to Bosnia and Herzegovina in December this year.

STATE AID: COMMISSION APPROVES €1.1 BILLION AUSTRIAN SCHEME TO SUPPORT COMPANIES FACING INCREASED ENERGY COSTS IN CONTEXT OF RUSSIA’S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

The European Commission has approved a €1.1 billion Austrian scheme to support companies facing increased energy costs in the context of Russia’s war against Ukraine. The scheme was approved under the State aid Temporary Crisis Framework, adopted by the Commission, recognising that the EU economy is experiencing a serious disturbance.



Seat of the European Commission

The Austrian measure

Austria notified to the Commission, under the Temporary Crisis Framework, a €1.1 billion scheme to support companies facing increased energy costs in the context of Russia’s war against Ukraine.

The measure will be open to companies with an annual turnover below €700,000; and to energy-intensive businesses.

The measure aims at covering part of the additional energy costs linked to exceptionally severe increases in natural gas and electricity prices.

Under this measure, which will be administered by the Austrian Promotional Bank, the aid will take the form of direct grants up to €400,000 per company and up to €2 million for energy intensive businesses. Furthermore, the latter are eligible for increased support under the measure if they have incurred operating losses, up to €25 million (and up to €50 million if they are active in particularly affected sectors). The scheme will run until 30 June 2023 and will cover energy costs incurred by the beneficiaries between 1 February and 30 September 2022.

The Commission found that the Austrian scheme is in line with the conditions set out in the Temporary Crisis Framework. In particular, the individual aid amount will not exceed 50% of the eligible costs for the maximum aid ceiling of €4 million. For beneficiaries qualifying as energy-intensive businesses, the overall aid per beneficiary will not exceed 65% of the eligible costs, or 80% for particularly affected sectors in Annex 1 or the maximum aid ceiling of €50 or €150 million respectively. In addition, the aid will be granted before 31 December 2023.

Furthermore, the public support will come subject to conditions to limit undue distortions of competition, including safeguards to ensure that companies benefiting from higher aid amounts and intensities implement the recommendations of mandatory energy audit reports.

The Commission concluded that the Austrian scheme

is necessary, appropriate and proportionate to remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of a Member State, in line with Article 107(3)(b) TFEU and the conditions set out in the Temporary Crisis Framework.

On this basis, the Commission approved the aid measure under EU State aid rules.

EUROJUST COORDINATES ACTION AGAINST MASSIVE INVESTMENT FRAUD WITH HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF VICTIMS WORLDWIDE



At the request of the Spanish, German and Finnish authorities, Eurojust and Europol have supported an action against a massive investment fraud involving the use of cryptocurrencies. The victims of this major online fraud are estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands. During operations on 8 and 9 November in Albania, Bulgaria, Georgia, North Macedonia and Ukraine, 15 call centres were searched and 5 suspects arrested.

The suspects allegedly belong to an organised crime group (OCG) believed to be involved in an investment fraud using cryptocurrencies. The criminal network used dozens of call centres in several countries and hundreds of online platforms to commit the fraud.

The suspects presented themselves as brokers who would help the investors earn large amounts of money through small investments. In reality, the OCG deceived the victims by gaining their trust online as well as through professionally set-up call centres or other modes of so-called social engineering. This encouraged victims to invest via web platforms controlled by the criminal organisation, which resulted in them losing large sums of money.

The scale of the investigations in such cases is so far unprecedented. As revealed by the investigations, hundreds of thousands of investors all over the world have fallen victim to the fraud, dating back at least to 2016. The damage caused is estimated at EUR 50 million per quarter. Investigations into the cyber scam began in 2018, with seven countries having opened judicial cases against the OCG to date.

Eurojust facilitated judicial cooperation in this case by setting up and funding a joint investigation team (JIT), set up at the request of the Swedish authorities and also involving Albania, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, Spain and Ukraine. A total of 13 coordination meetings were organised to coordinate the national investigations and prepare for the action day. The Agency also facilitated the execution of International Arrest Warrants, European Investigation Orders and Letters of Request to third countries.

Europol provided analytical support to the investigations and organised seven operational meetings. To support the action day on 8 and 9 November 2022, Eurojust set up a coordination centre to enable rapid cooperation between the involved judicial authorities.

As a result, 15 call centres were searched (6 in Albania, 5 in Georgia, 3 in Ukraine and 1 in North Macedonia), as well as 27 other locations and 5 vehicles. 5 suspects have been arrested, 4 in Albania and 1 in Georgia. Approximately 50 hearings (suspects and witnesses) have been conducted. Seizures include over 500 electronic devices (computers, laptops, USBs, hard disks), more than EUR 340 000 in cash, several mobile phones, several bank accounts, cryptocurrency wallets, properties, ID documents and bank cards, and hundreds of other documents. Potential investors are advised to be extra vigilant when investing online and to check whether websites belong to legitimately operating enterprises.

EDA PROJECT HELPS IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH UNDERWATER ROBOTS

Underwater robots, such as autonomous underwater vehicles (AUV), have the potential to take over lengthy and labour-intensive missions in dangerous areas from navy ship crews and special forces. As a result, the role of mobile unmanned platforms in military scenarios is becoming more and more important. But their integration into the network



of surface ships, submarines, sensor nodes and surface gateway buoys is crucial.

This requires underwater acoustic networks, as well as the capability to adapt autonomously to communication conditions, for example by switching between frequency bands and data rates, so that network assets stay connected for extensive operation times without recovery and redeployment.

A four-year European Defense Agency (EDA) project known as SALSA, funded by five EDA Member States, developed a smart adaptive protocol stack for the development of flexible and self-configurable underwater acoustic networks. Launched on 30 October 2018, the final meeting took place on 25-27 October 2022. This meeting was used to reflect upon the technical achievements gained within the project, regarding the requirements set in an early stage.

Also, strategic decisions were taken on what technical results were fit to be published in a standard.

The Netherlands was the lead nation in the project, working with Germany, Norway, Sweden and Finland. The project involved a consortium of industries and research establishments from these five Member States. In this regard, the main objectives defined for this project were linked to the development and standardisation of a protocol stack for self-configurable underwater acoustic networks that autonomously adapt to changing environmental conditions and operational needs.

Next steps on standardisation

Under the SALSA project, work has been carried out at the two levels of the physical and the network layer.

At the physical layer, where bits are converted into sound and vice versa, the JANUS underwater communications standard (STANAG 4748/ANEP-87) was applied for first contact, after which the more robust and flexible frequency repetition spread spectrum (FRSS) modulation was employed to enable the required heavy-duty communication in the military scenario at hand. In addition, at the network layer, the versatile gossiping in underwater mobile ad-hoc networks (GUWMANET) routing protocol was employed with the accompanying application-layer protocol generic underwater application language (GUWAL). The decisions for adaptations, and their synchronization within the network to maintain interoperability, were controlled by an adaptivity module inside the network layer.

During the implementation of the project, a successful demonstration was performed of self-configurable underwater acoustic networks in military scenarios using up to 20 network nodes.

Based on the results provided, the navies of the five EDA Member States, supported by their national research establishments, have the intention to submit a proposal for a NATO Standardisation Agreement. The consortium is still seeking for the best approach to initiate the NATO standardisation process; whether it should be extension of a current standard or a new standard, and how to keep all partners involved given that the EDA-SALSA project has now been closed.

The SALSA consortium hopes to engage in discussions on new use cases or the needs of potential clients for their adaptive underwater communication protocols. These aspects underline the high level of ambition to continue

international collaboration on underwater communications as over the years a full workbench has been developed within this consortium.

Source : European Defense Agency

THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONDEMNS FRANCE



Eloïse Bouton

By invoking the right to freedom of expression, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has ordered France to pay 9,800 euros in damages and legal costs to a feminist activist who had been condemned by a French court to a five year suspended prison term in 2017.

On December 20, 2013, Eloïse Bouton, a 30-year-old French woman, entered the Madeleine Church in Paris, where a dozen people and a choir were rehearsing Christmas carols. She then stood before the altar, bare-chested and covered in slogans, and proceeded to mime an abortion with a piece of beef liver.

She had been a member of the 'Femen' movement, an international women's rights organisation created in Ukraine in 2008 and known for the provocative actions of its members who protest topless to combat the image of women as sexual objects.

She was acting as part of an international action organised by her movement to denounce the Church's position on voluntary termination of pregnancy.

Her action was covered by the media. Photographs of the activist before the altar, veiled and wearing a crown of thorns were published with her chest bare, and holding two pieces of beef liver in her hands, a symbol of the aborted baby Jesus. Painted on her chest and back, were the slogan : '344th slut' (...) in reference to an open letter of 343 French women who admitted to having an abortion in 1971.

The priest decided to lodge a complaint and to bring a civil action. The activist was sentenced by the criminal court to one month's suspended prison sentence for indecent exposure. She appealed the decision, but the Paris Court of Appeal upheld her conviction. And the Court of Cassation rejected her appeal.



The decision of the ECHR

On June 3, 2019 Eloïse Bouton decided to refer the case to the European Court of Human Rights. In her application to the Court, she challenged her conviction and argued that there had been a violation of her right to freedom of expression.

The question put to the Court was whether the activist knew, or on the contrary should have known, whether the conduct she engaged in and for which she was effectively convicted was in the nature of an act that could give rise to criminal liability under Article 222-32 of the French Criminal Code relating to indecent exposure.

The Court found that the activist “could reasonably have expected that her conduct would entail criminal consequences for her”. They also noted that the domestic courts could “legitimately have envisaged punishing this conduct [in a public place]”, as the applicant had exhibited a part of her body, described as a “sexual part”, in accordance with French criminal law.

However, the judges noted that the applicant’s action had the character of a militant action and sought to convey the ideas of the Femen movement, on whose behalf she was acting, concerning a public and societal debate, in particular the position taken by the Catholic Church, which was considered to be “a sensitive and controversial issue” with regard to women’s right to have recourse to abortion and, more generally, to the right of women to be able to dispose freely of their bodies.

In its assessment, the ECHR stated that it considered that “the impugned conviction, which took place in the context of the applicant’s activist performance, constituted an interference with the exercise of the right to freedom of expression protected by Article 10 § 1 of the Convention”.

The ECHR also recalled that “the sole purpose of the

applicant’s action, for which no insulting or hateful conduct was alleged, however shocking it may have been to others in view of the nudity she imposed in a public place, which is punishable under domestic criminal law, was to contribute, by means of a deliberately provocative performance, to the public debate on women’s rights, and more specifically on the right to abortion”.

As a result, and in view of the elements noted by the judges, the national courts did not balance the interests at stake in accordance with the case law established by the European Court of Human Rights. The judges added that all the reasons given by the domestic courts for sentencing the Femen activist were not proportionate to the legitimate aims pursued.

This led to the condemnation of France by the European Court of Human Rights and the payment for legal costs and moral damage to the applicant.

RHAETIAN RAILWAY’S WORLD RECORD ATTEMPT HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL

It has been officially confirmed and accomplished: on October 29 2022, Rhaetian Railway (RhB) took the longest narrow gauge passenger train in the world on the UNESCO World Heritage route from the Albula Tunnel in Preda to the world-famous Landwasser Viaduct just outside Filisur. Several thousand guests and railway fans attended the public event in Bergün or positioned themselves along the route mentioned above to experience this unique journey.

RhB travelled along the Albula Line with 25 fourpart Capricorn railcars from leading Swiss manufacturer Stadler. The 1,906-metre-long record train was lined up like a string of pearls in the Albula Tunnel during the night from Friday

to Saturday and on Saturday morning. It then set off in Preda at 2.20 pm. Shortly after 3.30 pm, the record-breaking train reached its destination: the spectacular crossing of the Landwasser Viaduct. “After intensive preparation, we are overjoyed to have achieved this world record. Not only did we have a wonderful railway festival here in Bergün, but we were able to present ourselves around the world as a fascinating and innovative mountain railway thanks to our dedicated partners, sponsors and an incredibly dedicated team,” says Renato Fasciati, Director of RhB shortly after the world record was set. The success of the world record was officially confirmed on site by GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™.

An impressive railway festival

A festival site was built outside Bergün where around 3,000 visitors attended the world record attempt. On the festival site, Märklin also presented the world record train in mini format – with 25 Capricorn LGB model trains and a length of 80 metres on a scale of 1:22.5. The world record attempt itself was broadcast on Blick TV with an approximately two-hour programme and was included in coverage by numerous TV stations around the world. More than 120 media representatives from 15 countries followed the world record live.

The RhB partners showed their skills at the station itself. For example, the track construction company SERSA was present with a track construction machine and a locomotive simulator. Expertise partners ABB and Repower provided information about electromobility. Siemens enabled a fantastic rail experience with augmented reality. The Albula Railway Museum was open, while Märklin and BEMO also showed various model railways. The entire railway village of Bergün was on the move.

Facts and figures about the world record attempt

- The train consisted of 25 compositions, each with four carriages of the new Capricorn railcars, and had a total length of 1,906 metres.
- “Capricorn” is the Rhaeto-Romanic term for ibex.
- The world-record route from Preda to Alvaneu is 24,930 metres long.
- The train covered a difference in altitude of 789.4 metres (Preda = 1,788.7 m a.s.l.; Alvaneu = 999.3 m a.s.l.).
- The world record-breaking journey crossed 48 bridges and went through 22 tunnels.
- The largest viaduct on the world record route is the world-famous Landwasser Viaduct just after Filisur with a length of 142 metres and a height of 65 metres.
- The longest tunnel on the world record route is the Greifenstein Tunnel just before Filisur which is 698 metres long.
- The attempt to break the world record generated 4,000 kWh of braking energy (recuperation).
- The world-record train travelled at a speed of 30 to 35 km/h.
- The record-breaking journey took around an hour.
- The weight of the record-breaking train was around 2,990 tonnes.

- Communication within the train was ensured by means of a field telephone almost two kilometres long from the Civil Defence.
- In addition, 7 train drivers and 21 technicians were at work on the train to ensure its operability.

35 000 ANNUAL DEATHS FROM ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE IN THE EU/EEA

More than 35 000 people die from antimicrobial-resistant infections in the EU/EEA each year, according to estimates presented in a new report released today. The estimated number of deaths in the report examines the years 2016-2020 and shows an increase from previous estimates. The health impact of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is comparable to that of influenza, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS combined.

“We see concerning increases in the number of deaths attributable to infections with antimicrobial-resistant bacteria, especially those that are resistant to last-line antimicrobial treatment” said Andrea Ammon, ECDC Director. “Each day, nearly 100 people die from these infections in the EU/EEA. Further efforts are needed to continue to reduce unnecessary antimicrobial use, improve infection prevention and control practices, design and implement antimicrobial stewardship programmes and ensure adequate microbiological capacity at national level.”

Overall, the latest data show significantly increasing trends in the number of infections and attributable deaths for almost all bacterium–antibiotic resistance combinations, especially in healthcare settings. In 2021, the number of reported cases of *Acinetobacter* species resistant to different antimicrobial groups was more than double (+121%) than the average for 2018–2019. Another example is the percentage of *Klebsiella pneumoniae* cases that are resistant to carbapenems – an antibiotic often used as a last resort - of which there was a 31% increase in 2020 and a further 20%



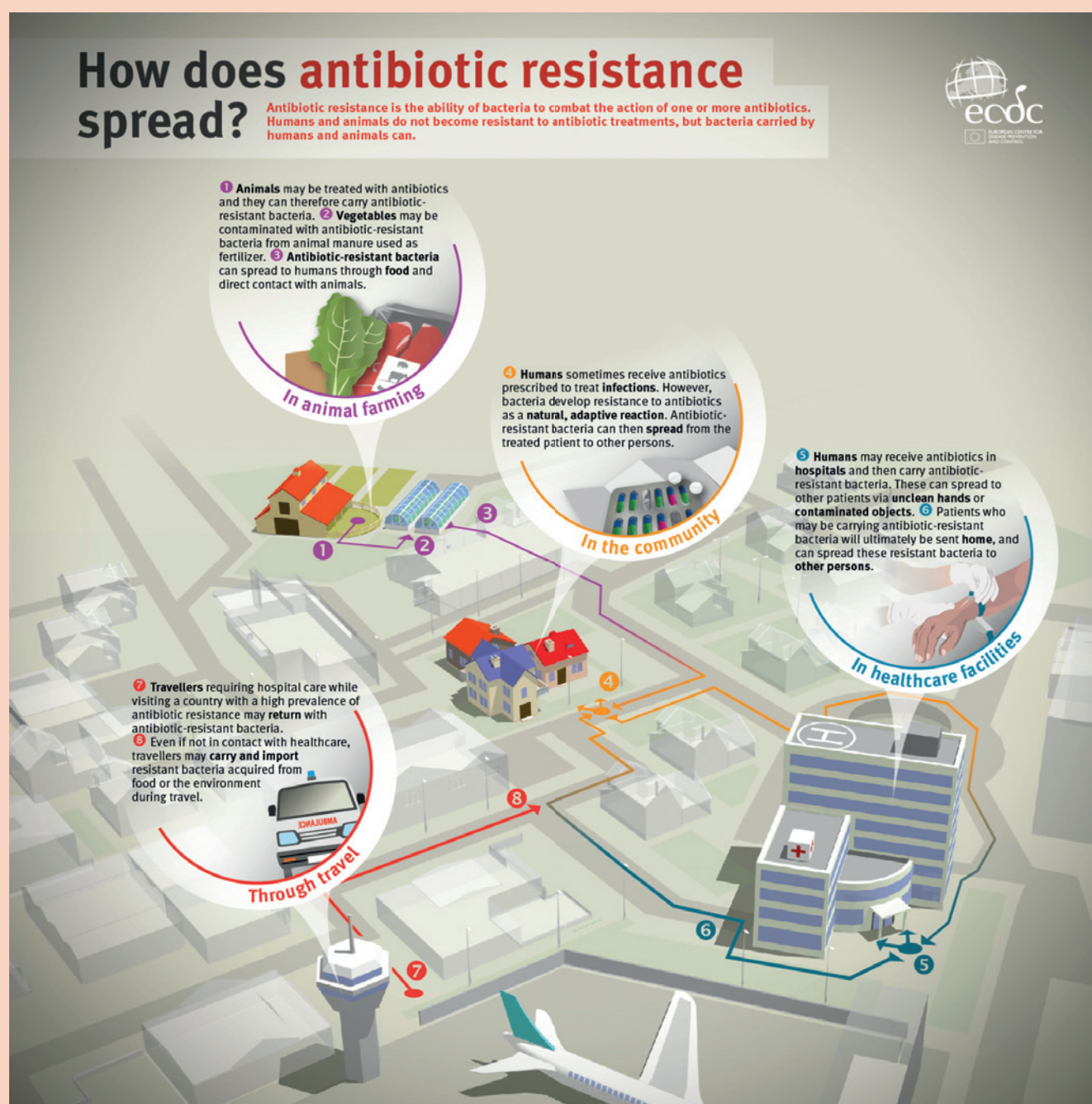
Dr Andrea Ammon, ECDC Director

increase in 2021. These are pathogens that are difficult to eradicate once established in healthcare settings. Moreover, the number of *Candida auris* reported cases nearly doubled between 2020 and 2021 and were considerably higher than in previous years. *Candida auris* is a fungal pathogen that causes outbreaks of invasive healthcare-associated infections and can be resistant to multiple antifungal agents.

A decrease of 23% in total antimicrobial consumption in humans, in the primary care and hospital sectors combined, was observed in the EU/EEA during the period 2012–2021. Although this represents an achievement, there has been an increase in the proportion of ‘broad-spectrum’ antibiotics

that were used, in particular in hospitals. Between 2012 and 2021 in hospitals, consumption of ‘broad-spectrum’ antibiotics increased by 15%, consumption of carbapenems by 34% and the proportion of ‘Reserve’ antibiotics – that is antibiotics that should be reserved for treatment of confirmed or suspected multidrug-resistant infections – more than doubled in the same timeframe.

The reported AMR percentages varied widely among countries for several bacterial species–antimicrobial group combinations. In general, the lowest AMR percentages were reported by countries in the north of Europe, and the highest by countries in the south and east of Europe.





A SPECTRUM OF POSSIBILITIES

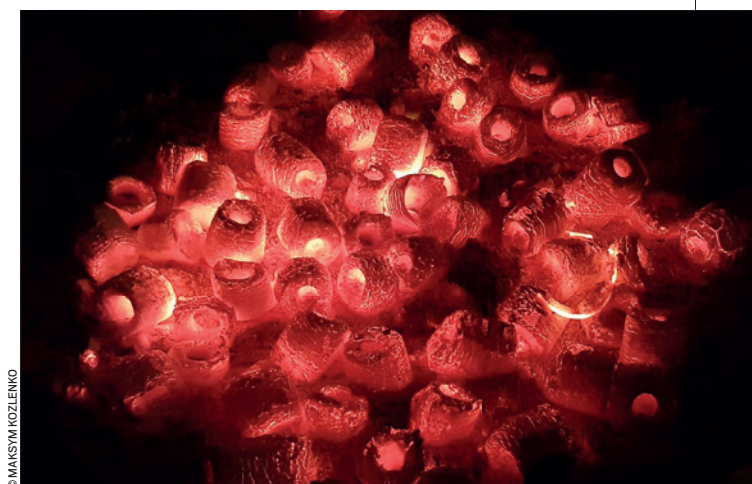
**Does yesterday's
favourite fuel have a part
to play in our futures?**



Hartley Bank colliery, Balk
Lane, Netherton 1966

Coal was the driving force behind the industrial revolution all around the world. It certainly happened that way in the United Kingdom. It made several fortunate landowners very rich indeed, while the men and women (yes, there were women mining coal, too) lived in cheaply built homes without indoor sanitation or running water. If they had upstairs rooms, (the lucky ones may even have had two) they could only be reached by means of crudely-made ladders from the rooms below. Rich landowners didn't think the miners needed much more than the breath in their lungs, as long as that breath helped them to dig out the black gold that enriched their employers so generously whilst very often making the actual workers ill. The miners might spend an hour underground, crawling on their hands and knees in the pitch darkness just to reach the coalface, but they weren't paid for that. Payment only began when their picks reached the coal seam itself. "The past, like the future, is indefinite and exists only as a spectrum of possibilities," wrote the brilliant physicist Stephen Hawking. The past, of course, was built on the fuel of the day, coal, which made a small number of people extremely rich whilst causing irreparable lung disease and other various serious ailments and physical damage to limbs and muscles and even eyesight for those working in the industry. Eventually, it would be coal that brought them electricity, too, through a vast network of power stations, most famously through Battersea Power Station in central London, whose four massive chimneys, although long disused, remain a London landmark. At its peak, Battersea burned a million tons of coal a year.

Now it looks as if the future may also involve some risk to life and limb, despite campaigners urging governments to ensure that the coal stays in the ground. Coal was very important in North-East England, where I was raised. The coking plant behind my parents' house dictated which day would be my mother's washday. If you weren't taking cognisance of smoke output and wind direction, the clothes came in from the washing line covered in "smuts": black specks released from the chimneys of the plant in the coke-making process that would stick firmly to any washing that was hanging on a line. Perhaps I should explain that the coking process involves heating the coal in the total absence of oxygen to a temperature of more than 600°C, to drive off the volatile components of the raw coal, leaving a hard, strong, porous material that is high in carbon content. Coke consists almost entirely of hydrocarbon. It's just one of the disadvantages of



© MAX SYM KOZLEW

Hot coals glowing



© TYNE & WEAR ARCHIVES & MUSEUMS

Arthur Scargill in a demonstration rally against pit closures outside University of Sunderland's Edinburgh Building

having a coking plant as a near neighbour, but that is what you get if you live in a coalfield. The resulting coke was essential for the production of steel, another vital local industry. It also fuelled my parents' water heating facilities. But coal (and its derivatives) is the fuel of yesterday, isn't it? Apparently not. Some countries – Germany among them – are extending the planned run times of their remaining coal-fired power stations. It's mainly (but not exclusively) because Vladimir Putin, Russia's megalomaniac president is using his country's gas and oil supplies as a weapon, restricting the options of those who wish he'd stop.

Meanwhile, there would seem to be plans afoot to bridge any gaps in the fuel supply by carrying on with coal, or its derivative, coke. Yes, it makes the air dirty (as my mother could have confirmed) but it's available and it inarguably provides heat. Certainly, when I was first married, my wife and I heated our house with coal. Back in the 1960s, when I was new to journalism, I reported on various miners' strikes and demonstrations (coal being essential to life at that time and the North East coalfield being an important source) and on several occasions I met the UK miners' leader Arthur Scargill, frequently demonised by Britain's right-wing press in articles written by those more interested in the politics of the affair than in accuracy. I rather liked Scargill and found him unfailingly friendly and helpful, although I know that's a view that few parts of the country's media shared at the time. But there is a rather different moral issue involved in Europe's current fuel problem. For instance, Germany has been importing some €1.8-billion of Russian gas, oil and coal every month, which must be helping to fill Putin's war chest. German chancellor Olaf Schulz has made the point that cutting off the flow would hurt Germany more than Russia, even though some other European governments have called for an out-and-out total embargo.



A coal mine in Russia

According to The Economist magazine, Schulz has found unlikely allies among the trade unions, who agree that stopping Russian energy imports could lead to a recession.

They have predicted that Germany's GDP could shrink by more than 6%, even if an alternative source of supply could quickly be found. The plain fact is, of course, that economists very seldom agree with one another about anything, but neither are they keen on taking risks. Nor are industrialists, of course.

As The Economist magazine points out, the IMK think tank, which tends to favour trade unions, has published a study backing the government's predictions. According to The Economist: "It says halting energy imports from Russia would cause a deep recession with GDP shrinking by more than 6% even if alternative suppliers could make up for half of the gas supplied by Russia." In Germany's case, of course, it's not just gas but coal, too. Thus, says The Economist, "The INK finds itself in rare agreement with industrial lobbies such as the BDI (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie), the association of German industry." The magazine goes on to quote Siegfried Russwurm, who heads the BDI and who warned that "talk about an EU embargo on Russian energy is 'playing with fire' and would harm the EU more than the aggressor."

I Don't go "bang"!

Certainly, Russia is extremely rich in terms of natural energy, including coal. Moscow says very little about the size of its supply, but the oil giant BP plc has estimated that it has as much as 33-trillion cubic metres of natural gas at its disposal. OPEC gives an even higher estimate: almost 49-trillion cubic metres, while it's reckoned that there are vast reserves, yet to be

discovered. We'll come to that shortly. In its gaseous state, it takes up a lot of room, which is why it's chilled down to -2600 Fahrenheit (-162.220 Celsius) for storage or transportation, thus taking up 600 times less volume than when it has in its gaseous form. Of course, it has to be transported in specialised containers before it can be 're-gasified', as it's called and made ready for use. As for its composition, Wikipedia provides an excellent explanation.

"Natural gas (also called fossil gas or simply gas) is a naturally occurring mixture of gaseous hydrocarbons consisting primarily of methane in addition to various smaller amounts of other higher alkanes." The site goes on to explain that low levels of trace gases such as carbon dioxide, nitrogen, hydrogen sulphide and helium are also generally present. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, it is more ubiquitous than oil, being derived from land plants and creatures and also from other aquatic organic matter. In most cases, it is also linked with the production of coal, putting its origins back to the Carboniferous and Early Permian times, which means between 359-million and 273-million years before the present. It's been maturing down there for a very long time.

For its existence, of course, we have the trees to thank. As Peter Wohlleben points out in his excellent book "The Hidden Life of Trees", trees photosynthesize, producing hydrocarbons



A natural gas field processing plant in Solohiv , Ukraine

© WIKICOMMONS



© PETER WOHLLEBEN/DE

Peter Wohlleben

to fuel their own growth. Over the course of their lives, they can store up to 22 tonnes of carbon dioxide in their trunks, branches, and root systems. The process would seem to be positive in every way. “When they die,” writes Wohlleben, “the same exact quantity of greenhouse gases is released as fungi and bacteria break down the wood, process the carbon dioxide, and breathe it out again.” He goes on to add that: “The assertion that burning wood is climate neutral is based on this concept.” But he also makes the point that this is an over-simplification; the way a forest works is far more complicated than that. “It’s true that some of this carbon dioxide does indeed return to the atmosphere after a tree’s death, but most of it remains locked in the ecosystem forever.” Wohlleben points out that the CO₂ ends up as humus, which continues to get more and more concentrated until eventually it turns, after inconceivably many centuries, into – possibly – bituminous or anthracite coal. The period of its evolution was marked by glaciations and a low sea level, with amphibians developing as the first backboned creatures to walk the land, where ginkgo trees, early conifers and cycads provided food and cover, before they started the long journey to providing us with fuel.

The atmosphere at that time had lost most of its carbon dioxide, which, coupled with a sharp fall in temperatures, led to the extinction of 50% of contemporary animal life. There were only two continents back then, plus the odd island or two, though both were huge: Laurasia and Gondwana. The lack of oxygen in the water meant that dead matter didn’t decay, instead being compressed by the vast weight of the water above it. Eventually, the dead vegetation was turned to coal, whose usefulness has been proven over and over again, creating wealth from utility. Gas is even more ubiquitous than oil, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica,

being derived from both land-based and aquatic vegetation. In its early stages, decomposition creates what’s known as ‘marsh gas’, driven by anaerobic microbes that are unable to tolerate oxygen, even in the minutest amounts. As a result, biogenic gas is only found in poorly drained swamps, bays, and occasional lake bottoms. During the mature stage of the generation of petroleum, normally at depths of between 750 and 5,000 metres, a lot of thermal methane is created, together with the oil, while at greater depths – 2,900 metres or more – it is primarily gas containing liquid hydrocarbons (known in the industry as ‘wet gas’) that is formed. Later, at depths greater than 5,000 metres, oil in its natural form is not stable and the main product obtained from such a deposit is methane gas. Such gas, with all its potential for providing heat and energy, is in great demand, of course.

Turn up the gas

In 2022 gas began to prove less easy to get hold of. Lower volumes of gas have been reaching Europe through pipelines because of the tense political situation following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, so record volumes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) have been getting to the EU and the UK from a variety of sources, especially the United States. Russia is strongly placed to use its ready access to natural gas (and firm grip on its supply and distribution) as a weapon, possessing between 30% and 40% of the total volume of the stuff on planet Earth. It is also most certainly the cleanest fuel known, because when it burns, all that is produced is carbon dioxide and water.

It’s not very easy to transport, however, because being under pressure (as it has to be) it can explode if not handled carefully. It requires very expensive specialised tankers to keep it stable. It’s an overlooked fact that not all fossilised fuels are equal. Letters to successive editions of the satirical British magazine ‘Private Eye’ (nos. 1584 and 1585) from Doug McRoberts and Thomas Sweeney, for instance, mention how “heritage” railways in the UK, still popular with those who remain nostalgic for steam-powered railway engines, are now dependent on foreign (very often Russian) coal. McRoberts



© VISITBRITAIN/GRAMHAM STAPLES

A steam train on North Yorkshire Moors Railway billowing clouds of smoke

and his wife were stranded in the Scottish mountains a little way short of their destination (but a bit too far to walk) because of clinker in the firebox. It is often found in poor quality Russian coal, and in this case it had put out the fire. The scenery, of course, around Strathspey was (and always is) magnificent, but reaching one's destination may rank higher among one's priorities than gazing entranced at mountains and roaring streams, however beautiful. Sweeney points out that the small volume of coal we now import for such uses is often won at disproportionately high environmental costs in countries with very poor safety standards. In his letter to Private Eye, McRoberts quotes the train crew's explanation for the unscheduled halt: "Bloody Russian coal. It's rubbish. Full of clinker. Have to clear the firebox and get the fire going again..." Putin appears to get everywhere, even onto historic steam trains run by volunteers, it seems. The late John McCain, a former US naval officer and later senator, once described Russia as "a gas station masquerading as a country." Obviously not one that gave out green stamps...



According to the Worldometer website, Russia has coal reserves totalling a very impressive 176,770,840,800 tons, making it the world's second largest coalfield. In fact, it can boast some 16% of the world's total volume, or 767.3 times its annual consumption. To put it another way, at its present rate of consumption, its coal reserves should last it another 763 years. Russia also has the largest proven gas reserves in the world (48-trillion cubic metres), according to OPEC, which says that Russia has some 24% of global supplies although the oil giant BP has said that Iran probably has more. It's an unfortunate fact, perhaps, that the world's greatest supplies of fuel are in two of the world's most awkward countries. As mentioned earlier, Russia also has vast but so-far undiscovered gas reserves estimated at 6.7 trillion cubic metres – probably. Russia is a big consumer, too, getting through some 457 billion cubic metres a year, just behind the United States.

Obviously, we cannot just sit down and manufacture natural gas; it takes many millions of years and is a process over which we will never have any control. We don't even fully understand it. It is an undisputable irony that as the world gets hotter through global warming, our powers for keeping it warm and for providing sufficient energy are somewhat



lacking. What a shame that we can't use one to control or overcome the other.

In 2021, production of hard coal in the EU was 57 million tonnes, 79 % less than the 277 million tonnes of 1990. From 2018 to 2021, the EU reduced its consumption of both hard coal and brown coal (which we tend to overlook) by 25%. Brown coal, also known as lignite or subbituminous coal, is are low-rank coals with a high (more than 50%) moisture content. Brown coal is not always brown, by the way, either; they can vary from yellow to black and can even show stratification, with layers of concentrated plant material visible. With the falling demand for coal (which may be changing), coal mining jobs have been in steady decline for years. In the US in January 2022, it was estimated that the coal industry employed around 36,500 Americans, down from nearly 90,000 ten years earlier. It's a similar picture in Europe, but in the United States, coal mining jobs now make up only around 0.02% of the 160 million-strong civilian labour force.

There are more people employed in the travel industry, as aircraft mechanics and technicians or even as fitness trainers. The European Commission is not sitting on its hands over the crisis, although its room for manoeuvre is limited. Its solution, so far, is the REPowerEU plan (why does the EU insist on silly and almost incomprehensible names for its proposed solutions to difficulties?). The Bruegel think tank says that EU governments have earmarked some half a trillion euros in a bid to shield Europe's citizens and enterprises from soaring energy costs. Will this really help? Can it be enough? As the old saying goes, only time will tell, but at least it shows that the issue is not being ignored or forgotten.

More than 60% of world consumers get their electricity through power generating stations fuelled by the burning of coal, oil and natural gas, and even with nuclear in the picture that's

unlikely to change soon. Whether or not the Commission can come up with a solution that actually works is another matter entirely, of course, but citizens and businesses will undoubtedly need all the help they can get to survive this coming winter. The organisation Social Europe points out that there are no guarantees. “The issue is whether this helps to accelerate the transition to a renewables-based European energy system,” it asks in a press release, “which will permanently bring down energy bills, ensure energy security and contribute to a safer climate – or ends up in a ‘bonfire’ of fossil-fuel payments, subsidies and investments.” Social Europe clearly has some doubts about the viability of it all. “The fact that EU countries have spent €105-billion on Russian fossil fuels since the war over Ukraine escalated and fossil-fuel companies are announcing record profits does not suggest our leaders have been quick to learn their lesson.”

I Digging for penury

According to Bloomberg UK, massive windfall profits are predicted, enriching the oil shareholders hugely while winter energy bills look set to soar to triple their level of a year ago. The energy firms are anticipating excess profits of around £170-billion (€194-billion). Take BP, for instance. Having enjoyed the high prices that followed Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, its profits have tripled to £7-billion (€7.99-billion).

Shell is also enjoying the bounty. Between April and June 2022, its profits of £10-billion (€11.41-billion) has led to a promise to



The Aramco Haradh Gas Plant, located at the southern tip of the Ghawar oil field, which is the largest conventional oil field in the world



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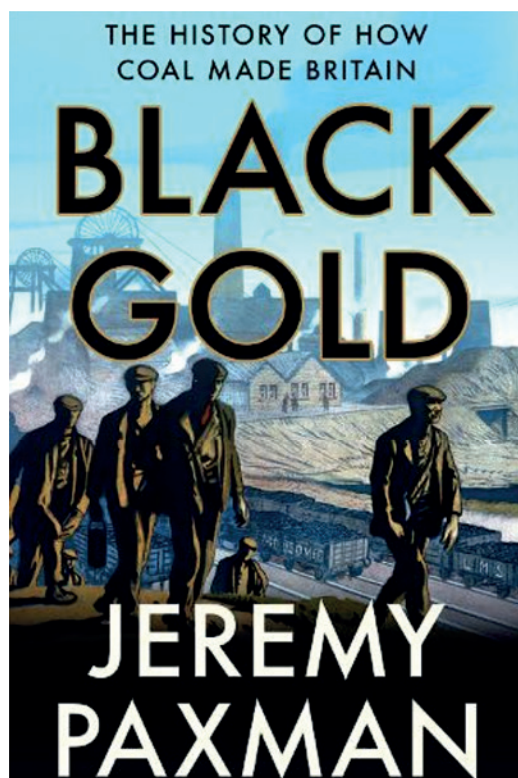
Peaceful action confronting Russian oil transportation in Denmark

shareholders of pay-outs worth £6.5-billion (€7.42-billion). Since we’ve been talking about gas prices, we mustn’t leave out Centrica, which enjoyed operating profits for the six months ending in June 2022 of a relatively modest £1.34-billion (€1.53-billion), which is five times higher than the company’s profits for the same period last year. Many in Europe must be cursing Russia for the fuel-starved winter freeze that lies ahead that ought to be avoidable, but not the shareholders in the giant energy companies. The unexpectedly large profits should at least help to mitigate the worst effects. I must, however, mention Saudi Aramco. Owned by the Saudi state (which is not hard up for a few cents), it reported profits of £40-billion (€45.65-billion) for just the second quarter of 2022. With so much effortless profit awaiting exploitation underground, it makes you want to go out and buy a long hand-drill. Or a spade, maybe. Even a strong drinking straw?

In March of 2022, whatever angry words were coming out of Brussels (and aimed at Moscow), China and the EU remained the two main destinations for Russian coal exports being transported by sea. Mind you, 2020 had been a bad year, as noted by the shipbroker Banchero Costa, who wrote that: “following a disastrous 2020, with the world hit by lockdowns and recession pretty much everywhere, global seaborne coal trade managed to rebound to some extent over the last twelve months.” Even the downturn doesn’t seem so bad in context. “In the full twelve months of 2021,” the shipbroker wrote on its website, “global seaborne coal exports increased by +45% year-on-year to 1,168-million tonnes from 1,117-million tonnes in 2020, according to the vessels tracking data from Refinitiv.” Before you cheer, though, the website report continues:

“This however is still well below the levels we had in pre-Covid times, being 9.8% down from the 1,295-million tonnes shipped during 2019.” That information comes from Dry Bulk Market, Hellenic Shipping News in March 2022.

Should Russia be worried? Indeed, is it worried? Apparently not. The on-line report continues, “The Russian Federation is the third largest exporter of coal in the world, after Australia and Indonesia.” That aside, it seems that Putin has just had laid claim to several Ukrainian cities he says are really be “Russian” so as to legitimise (in his eyes, at least) the looting



of Ukraine's museums and other storehouses of wealth. Notices on the outside of these buildings bear notices informing Russian soldiers that everything inside is actually Russian and should be taken back to Russia. And there's more: "in 2021, Russia accounted for 15.2% of global seaborne coal shipments. Russia's seaborne coal exports in the 12 months of 2021 increased by 9.6% year-on-year to 177.2 million tonnes. This was a significant rebound from a -6.5% year-on-year decline in 2020 caused by Covid lockdowns in Europe and elsewhere. Previous years also saw a positive trend, with Russian coal exports increasing by 5.1% year-on-year in 2019 and by 7.9% year-on-year in 2018." I wouldn't be surprised if the Kremlin chefs rolled out the kulich and apple cakes, along with plenty of vodka in celebration. As one Ukraine-born commentator put it on-line, "Russia lives in a parallel reality of 'alternative facts' and 0% truths."

There is another downside to the resurrection of coal. It produces smog, the word being a kind of portmanteau word for smoke and fog. On 8 December 1952, London and the south of England experienced a "temperature inversion", as it's called, locking the vast quantities of smoke coming from homes and factories somewhere near ground level with no way of escape. It's a not uncommon meteorological event.

As Jeremy Paxman puts it in his excellent book about the coal industry, 'Black Gold', the smog "cooled and then settled at ground level where it formed a dense cloud." To call it a 'cloud' doesn't really do it justice. With coal in use just

about everywhere in the capital, and with the government having finally lifted a ban on burning what was called 'nutty slack' (an especially dirty fuel), smoke was everywhere. Within a week more than 4,000 people had died, coughing all the way. Visibility sunk to almost zero and even league football matches were cancelled, while the buses that so many relied on to get them to work, school or the shops (all with scarves tied over their mouths and noses to keep out the filth) had to be guided around the streets by men carrying flaming torches. According to Paxman, greyhound racing at White City had to be cancelled because the dogs couldn't see the artificial hare in order to chase it. The Port of London police were issued with walking sticks that they could tap along the edges of the pavements. A performance of La Traviata at the famous Sadler's Wells Theatre had to be suspended at the end of the first act because the audience were coughing too loudly, while in cinemas people were complaining that they couldn't see the screen. Similar weather conditions had caused problems before and Paxman informs us that "by the middle of the 17th century, viewing the London smog (from a distance) was a tourist attraction," while the writer John Evelyn complained that smog had turned St. Paul's Cathedral into a "loathsome Golgotha".

No hot stoves, much hot air

Which brings us neatly to COP 27, the big climate conference that seems to be embarrassing the UK government. The organisers would like the UK's new King, Charles III, to attend and he has expressed a willingness to do so, but the British government has said a very firm "no", and the Charles of today is not in a position to order the beheading of the Prime Minister. As a result, King Charles organised a sort of mini-COP 27 inside Buckingham Palace. It's certainly a big enough venue as well as being a poke in the eye for prime minister Rishi Sunak and his cabinet. At the real event, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, the organisers have said there can be no back-sliding on the promise to stick to the established goal: to slash greenhouse emissions by 45 percent before 2030. But while the promises are being reiterated, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Greece and Hungary have all announced that they plan to extend the life of coal-fired power stations and factories and re-open these that have been recently closed, or at least lift the cap on how many hours the coal can be burned for. They don't really have much choice. Even Austria, which in 2020 celebrated the closure of its last coal-fired plant, has announced plans to re-activate the system in the event of emergencies. Indeed, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), coal consumption in Europe is likely to reach 8-billion tonnes in 2022, thus reversing a downward trend and matching the all-time record set in 2013, with Europe accounting for 5% of the burning.

The European Commission blames the worsening situation on Russia's "weaponization" of energy supplies, with the switch from gas to coal taking up to three winters to complete. Meanwhile, the EU is still urging other countries to phase out coal. The West has been accused (fairly, it would seem) of hypocrisy by subsidising coal and doing much too little to phase it out. The EU is still committed on paper, at least,



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to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by the end of this decade and to become climate neutral by 2050. It's hard to see how that can be achieved, but former Climate Action Commissioner Connie Hedegaard says she's working with Commission colleagues in the energy and transport departments to set new climate targets for 2030. This would mean setting a 2050 "road map" towards a low-carbon economy. Of course, the EU's objective to set 20% renewable energy targets, boosting



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Former Climate Action Commissioner Connie Hedegaard

renewable energy by 20% by 2020, was missed What a surprise!

It was Samuel Johnson, the 18th century English poet, playwright, essayist, moralist, critic, biographer, editor, lexicographer and devout Anglican, who is supposed to have written: "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." He almost certainly didn't say that at all. He probably wrote: "Hell is full of good meanings, but heaven is full of good works", being a devout Anglican. Intentions are laudable but fulfilling them is far from easy and is never cost-free. In any case, it doesn't matter; off-the-cuff remarks are seldom recorded but the written word is, of course. It is a certainty that many people have set out with good intentions only to abandon them in the face of reality. As for meeting Europe's greenhouse gas goals, it seems unlikely that we shall, or at least not in the near future: the whole idea of fixing targets is to aim at achieving them, if humanly possible. OK, so we miss them more often than we hit them, but at least we'll know we tried. We will (if only at a very gradual snail's pace) reduce our greenhouse gas emissions over time; everybody knows it's the right thing to do. On a Europe-wide basis only the European Commission has the power to effect change, which it's trying to do, but it won't happen quickly, certainly not overnight and probably not even in my lifetime. But as long as we're trying to head in the right direction, that must be good enough to be going on with. In real life, things are seldom perfect, but if we're sufficiently encouraged to continue with the fight, that'll have to do. For the time being, anyway.

Jim Gibbons

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Miriam Lexmann

FULFILLING EUROPE'S DUTY

**The never-ending struggle
of Miriam Lexmann
against the tyranny and
lies of despots**

“Lukashenko, like Putin, is an aggressor and one day they must face justice,” said Miriam Lexmann, a Slovakian member of the European Parliament for the centrist European People’s Party group. “However, we must also ensure that as we continue to support the Ukrainian people against Russian aggression, we must also double our efforts to support the Belorussian people in their desire for freedom.” The war in Ukraine and the brutal leadership of Belorussia are just two of the many things going on in the world about which she has very firmly-held views. She is deeply involved in a wide variety of issues as a member of the European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Delegation for Relations with Belarus. These are currently not very cordial: Lexmann has made plain in speeches and debates that she is no fan of Belarus’s Kremlin-loving dictator, Viktor Lukashenko, who seems to act more like Vladimir Putin’s obedient lapdog than the leader of an independent country. She has also taken a tough line over China’s brutal treatment of the Uighur people who live (or lived) in that country’s Northwest region. Oscar Wilde once said that: “A man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies.” In Lexmann’s case, it seems, she will take on any person, body or government that appears indifferent to the needs and well-being of a person or group of people, which suggests a lack of regard for who is likely to consider her an enemy. It was Britain’s wartime leader Winston Churchill who said: “You have enemies? Good. That means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life.” She certainly has, and has been condemned for her words and actions, but only, it seems, by the kinds of people involved in subjugating others and inflicting his or her will on them.

Miriam Lexmann could be said to owe her seat in the European Parliament to Britain’s bizarre (and very narrow) decision to quit the



Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin

EU. The redistribution of parliamentary seats once the UK delegation had gone created the vacancy into which she stepped. Prior to that, she had been active in a number of civil society movements engaged in the transition of Central and Eastern European countries from Communism. Lexmann worked for a while for the often-underestimated Council of Europe on civil society development programmes, mainly dealing with the former Soviet Union countries and the Western Balkans. She is a keen fighter against deliberate disinformation and its impact on liberal democracy. Since 2015, Lexmann has been running the International Republican Institute’s Beacon Project, whose aim it is to support better transatlantic dialogue as a means of defending her political policies against threats, wherever they may originate, at home or abroad.

Lexmann calls herself a “Christian Democrat”, which implies membership of Europe’s centrist political grouping, but in her case the religious connection – the “Christian part, in other words – is not just a convenient label. She really means it and has had relatives who died for their beliefs. “I would like to mention my great-uncle, a Catholic priest and a Dominican, who refused to sell his soul to any tyrannical regime,” she wrote on the website of the Hong Kong Free Press (unsurprisingly, freedom for Hong Kong is another of the causes for which she campaigns). She went on to explain more about her great uncle, for whom the word ‘great’ seems unusually apposite. “Risking his own life, he saved lives of the Jews during the Second World War. Later he died, aged 52, in a communist labour camp, refusing to give up his faith, the source of what he saw as his internal freedom.”



Silvester Krčmery and Pope John Paul II

On the same website, she also praised the courage of her fellow countrymen Silvester Krčmery and Vladimír Jukl, whom, she wrote, “despite 14 years imprisonment still had the courage to build a strong base for an underground Church. These structures – secret meetings for prayers and talks and informal spiritual, religious, and political education— helped create another important pillar for our freedom today: hundreds of people across the country who became internally free.” She mentioned that it was the work of Krčmery and Jukl that led to the famous Candle Demonstration in 1988 in support of religious and political freedoms. The demonstration was planned by Marián Šťastný, executive vice-president of the Slovak World Congress and his associate Paul Arnold of Switzerland. The demonstration was, of course, brutally suppressed at the time, but Lexmann points out that it had been worthwhile: in 1990, multiparty elections saw the beginning of moves to turn what was still Czechoslovakia into a market economy, but the marriage couldn’t last much longer, and the Czech Republic and Slovakia agreed to a divorce. Despite early difficulties with a weak economy and high unemployment, but the early 21st century things were improving and in 2004, Slovakia joined the EU and five years later adopted the euro as its



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Bratislava, capital of Slovakia

currency and it also joined NATO. The country began to enjoy freedom of thought and freedom of religion.

If you're doubtful about the importance of religious observance in a political struggle you have only to look back to the time of the Anglo-Saxons, when the death of one king and the evolution from one religion into another changed a country (in this case England) hugely and permanently. Mercia's King Penda inflicted huge damage to Christian Northumbria, according to the Venerable Bede, turning Mercia into the most powerful kingdom of the time, in the words of Marc Morris's excellent book, "The Anglo-Saxons". The book says that Bede referred to the Mercians as "ignorant idolaters", although he grudgingly acknowledged that Penda was "exceptionally gifted as a warrior."

Decisions, divisions and derisions

There are various versions of the anecdote about a comment supposedly attributed to the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, who, when asked if the Pope should be invited to a peace conference in Tehran, is said to have replied: "How many legions has the Pope?" The person supposedly posing the question has been said to have been Winston Churchill, South Africa's Jan Smuts or the US President of the time, Franklin D. Roosevelt, among several others. It depends upon who is telling the story. It's almost certainly an exchange that didn't happen, but the fact that it was recalled and written about (in the US media, first of all) suggests that the Pope's political power was seen by some, at least, as not inconsiderable. It also acknowledges that however many legions the Pope may have had at his disposal, at least in terms of moral strength, Stalin knew that the Soviet Union had more. But times have certainly changed and "Uncle Joe", as he was often called, would not have everything his own way today.

But it's not Lexmann's thoughts and opinions about Belarus that have led to her being sanctioned by the Chinese government. "The totalitarian apparatchiks of the Chinese Communist party continue to suppress and destroy human freedom and dignity," she said in a speech at the European Parliament. "In the case of organ harvesting, as with forced labour, they even make profits from their crimes against humanity." Lexmann thanked the Independent Tribunal for its work looking into forced organ harvesting. Lexmann gave a lot of detail, much of it unpleasant and generally unpalatable, in speaking about what the Chinese Communist Party, the CCP, has been doing.

Today, the CCP has been using forced organ harvesting to target dissidents to their regime – ethnic, religious or other minorities – such as the Uighurs, Tibetans, Muslims, Christians, political prisoners, or the Falun Gong practitioners. Lexmann told her fellow MEPs that the practice is part of a system of oppression used by the CCP against those it sees as dissidents. "Nobody in China is safe," she said, "For too long we have remained silent about the CCP's widespread crime. Today, it is time to investigate these crimes, and for us to do all in our power to stop these abhorrent crimes." Few would disagree with that sentiment, although the government in Beijing certainly does, of course, and has imposed sanctions on Lexmann for her words. Hers is one of several names on Beijing's list of those to be targeted. China seems able to do what it likes to its own citizens but it is more thin-skinned than an elderly maiden aunt whenever it is criticised.

The Global Times lists a number of "provocations" used by Beijing to justify its sanctions. "China's sanction list includes two main types of subjects," it reports, "first, parliamentarians promoting anti-China proposals concerning Xinjiang and scholars giving baseless 'evidence' for their accusations against China; and second, EU's human rights agencies or organizations interfering in China's internal affairs for a long time."

According to Cui Hongjian, director of the Department of European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, "The response is a precise - and even harder - strike back at the EU's sanctions over Chinese officials for so-called 'human rights abuses in Xinjiang,'" he told the Global Times. He goes on to complain that: "Instead of contributing to the bilateral relations between China and Europe, these EU parliamentarians and institutions continued to lie and deceive the world by spreading rumours and continually propagating strongly prejudicial agendas and narratives against China."

He claims to be quoting 'experts', but without identifying them. I suppose we must assume them to be members of the CCP and close



© DONG FANG

National Congress of the Communist Party of China



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Xi Jinping

to the government; apparatchiks of some sort, in other words. After all, most people would argue that these “strongly prejudicial agendas” are fully justified. China is huge, cares nothing for human rights or the opinions of anyone who is not a member of the CCP and it seriously mistreats its own citizens, it seems, to the point of selling off their organs for profit. Let’s face it, Lexmann is never going to make it onto Xi Jinping’s Christmas card list.

So, what effect will these targeted sanctions have? Well, they won’t make the victims change their minds, so they certainly won’t be effective. The issue was discussed at a conference in April 2021 organised by the Center on the United States and Europe and the Brookings-Robert Bosch Foundation Transatlantic Initiative. For the European Parliament, Lexmann was joined by German Green Reinhard Bütikofer and there were others taking part, too. China blamed its actions against the EU, the UK, the United States and Canada as being in response to sanctions they had impose on various Chinese officials linked to human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The panellists agreed that China’s response proves that “the CCP fundamentally misunderstands both democratic governance and the ‘mood’ towards China in Europe.” According to Bütikofer, the



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German Green Reinhard Bütikofer

Chinese government never really understood what the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement meant to Europe. The Chinese believed, he said, that they had finally succeeded in “driving a wedge between the European Union and the US”, seeing it as “a great political gift from the European side to Xi Jinping.”

It seems that China’s diplomats don’t really understand diplomacy at all; to them it’s all a war game, which must have winners and losers. Lexmann told the meeting that democracies often make the mistake of believing that economic cooperation will encourage regimes to follow democratic principles, but “totalitarian regimes have learned how to use economic cooperation to support the regime.” The West shows a sign of friendship and non-aggression, and the totalitarian regimes simply laugh, deriding our naivety.

Smoke gets in your eyes (and everywhere else)

As Lexmann told the European Parliament, “Across the world, Communist totalitarianism is responsible for some of the worst crimes in human history. These crimes are real, and they are still occurring today.” Rather less so, of course, than back in the bad old days of a divided Europe. Even so, with so many former Communist states now enjoying a measure of freedom, there will always be tyrants keen to stamp their seal on free countries. “Let us not forget that many European states still continue to suffer the consequences of communist totalitarianism,” Lexmann told a meeting at the European Parliament. “Murders, terror and oppression, communities destroyed, families torn apart, no basic freedoms. These are but some of the deep traumas left upon us.”

Of course, we must not forget Ukraine, nor the pain and terror inflicted on that country by Russia, whose leader seems not to acknowledge the existence of its neighbour and former satellite, and certainly not as an independent country. “How we respond to Putin’s aggression against Ukraine and its people today will define the world we will live in in the future,” Lexmann told her fellow MEPs. “Ukraine is fighting for our values today and we must do everything we can to end the aggression and restore peace.” She reminded MEPs (as if they really need much reminding in today’s climate) of the huge numbers of Ukrainians and their families seeking refuge from Russian brutality. “Nowadays, there is often talk about the polarization of society,” Lexmann said. “But now we are witnessing that people can unite to help those who need it. I am proud of us, both Slovaks and other Europeans, to welcome people in need with an open heart.” Some of those European hearts seem more open than others in these times of rising nationalism.

It’s not only the issue of freedom of thought that is causing concern. Take the case of Serbia, where Chinese influence has been growing. Nothing wrong with that, you may think: a poor country being helped by a very rich one. But not all China’s investment can be viewed in a positive light. That’s why Lexmann and German Green MEP Reinhard Bütikofer initiated a letter, since signed by twenty-six MEPs, expressing their concern to Oliver Várhelyi, the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, about the environmental damage resulting from several heavy industry projects by companies that are Chinese-owned.

The letter especially draws attention to several Chinese heavy industry investments in and around Smeredovo, Bor and Kostolac and also the Shangdong Linglong tyre factory in Zrenjanin. The letter urges the Commissioner to remind the Serbian government of the legislation to which it should adhere, as well as various EU laws



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Olivér Várhelyi (Hungary) - Commissioner designate for Neighbourhood and Enlargement

relating to the accession process. Serbia applied for membership in 2009 but negotiations only began with the electoral defeat of Slobodan Milošević in 2000. With him out of the way, the EU officially recognised the Balkan states as serious potential membership candidates. This followed the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki in June 2003. If Serbia is to become a fully-functioning member state, it will have to clean up its act, not only in terms of its politics but also literally in its care for the environment, and in that respect, China isn't helping. Bütikofer, who also chairs the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with China, points out that Chinese investments in heavy industries have raised air pollution levels to dramatic new heights whilst also endangering the quality of drinking water. There are already dangers for those living closest to the factories but, he says, no foreign investor should be allowed to simply by-pass EU rules, because pollution and environmental damage don't respect international borders.



The launching ceremony of the Shangdong Linglong tyre factory in Zrenjanin, Serbia attended by the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, Director of "Shandong Linglong" Wang Feng and H.E. Ms Chen Bo, Ambassador of China to Serbia

Even so, most Serbians, it seems, look favourably upon China, especially for its contribution of medicines when the COVID outbreak began, although the EU provided more money. However, there is growing concern around the world about illegal "police stations" that China has set up in several countries. Ostensibly, they are to assist Chinese citizens living abroad in the renewal of such things as driving licences, passports and other documentation, but there is evidence that they have also been targeting dissidents against Xi's regime, too. Miriam Lexmann has certainly drawn attention to their existence through her speeches at the European Parliament: "non-democratic regimes including Russia, Iran and the Chinese Communist Party continue to seek to weaken and divide our societies," Lexmann warned.

"Their use of hybrid threats, including disinformation, cyber or espionage, shows a wider context of operations aiming against us," she said. "The shocking revelation about the illegal Chinese police stations operating across 16 EU Member States show that we are not only lacking an effective response, but that we even close our eyes to serious threats." Lexmann says the EU needs what she calls "a holistic approach". But just in case Beijing may think that she is somewhat fixated on China, she used the same speech to condemn what she called: "the barbaric decision of the Iranian Parliament to execute about 15,000 protesters." She is prepared to go into battle against any regime that tries to enforce its views by simply killing anyone who disagrees with it.

Softly, softly?

Lexmann believes Europe has been taking too soft a line with hostile regimes and it's time to put that right. "For too long we were naïve, falsely believing that by engaging with authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, we can change them," she wrote. "Today, we see the consequences of this naivety. Instead, these regimes have been seeking to corrupt our democratic processes; degrade our economic strength; divide our society; undermine our alliances and rewrite international norms to suit their malign interest, and even worse they seek to subvert the very notion of truth." Take the case of Hong Kong, which was at one time promised autonomy by the CCP. Sadly, Chinese promises are not considered to be sacrosanct by the CCP.

In today's troubled world, of course, China is not the only cause for concern; far from it. We have only to look towards Ukraine and Russia's brutal assault on it in the apparent belief that it should belong to Russia. Ukraine gained its independence from Russia in 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. But while trying to maintain good relations with Russia, Ukraine's then president, Leonid Kuchma, was making overtures towards the West. However, a 2002 general election led to a hung parliament and there were even allegations of electoral fraud. In 2004, fresh elections brought in Viktor Yanukovich as president, but it became clear that the election had been rigged and the opposition leader of the time, Viktor Yushchenko, headed mass protests in 2004. The election result was declared void by the Supreme Court and the election itself was re-run in December 2005, with Viktor Yushchenko becoming president, while relations with Russia went from bad to worse. The Ukrainian parliament voted to drop its attempts to join NATO (which had deeply distressed Moscow) and there was more unrest in 2013, with crowds demonstrating in the streets because Yanukovich refused to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. There were suggestions that his decision was a result of pressure from Russia. Thousands demonstrated, chanting "Ukraine is Europe", which is geographically accurate, of course. At least 77 protestors in Kyiv



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Miriam Lexmann

were killed by security forces with Yanukovych fleeing to Russia to escape his very angry people. The opposition party took over the government. Russia under Vladimir Putin seems unable to accept that it is unlikely ever to win a popularity contest among its neighbours.

For those committed to protecting human rights and to free and fair elections, the work never comes to an end. Take the case of Georgia, for instance. The European Parliament discussed the slow erosion of media freedom and the safety of journalists trying to report from the country. Certainly, it's not a comfortable place from which to report. The head of Mtatvari Arkhi TV, Nika Gvaramia, for instance, has had his appeal against his sentence rejected at the Tbilisi Court of Appeal, after he had been found guilty on what Lexmann described as "trumped up charges". Lexmann told the European Parliament that she "abhors" the court's decision, describing it as "yet another example of selective justice", which she said puts Georgia's path towards closer European involvement in question. "This kind of political persecution of the critics of the government under Irakli Garibashvili is putting Georgia's EU perspective at risk," Lexmann pointed out. "Such actions go against the European Commission's recommendations. Most importantly, such actions



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Viktor Yushchenko, former President of Ukraine

go against the will of the Georgian people." The sentence, like the rejection of the appeal, is clearly unjust and designed solely to silence a clever critic. Presumably, the government of Georgia also hopes it will discourage others from daring to criticise. "The message from the EU is clear," Lexmann Tweeted. "It is now time for the Georgian government to deliver instead of making poor excuses." She went on to say that at present, Bidzina Ivanishvili, illegally rules Georgia at Russia's behest, obeying Moscow's edicts. It's worth noting that Ivanishvili is Georgia's richest man and founder of the Georgian Dream Democratic Georgia Party. He made his money from metals and banking in Russia before returning home.

Russia is not the sort of country most people would probably want as a neighbour. Its leaders have very firm views about just how independent its neighbours should be allowed to be. Currently 20% of Georgia's internationally recognized territory is under Russian military occupation. Russia does not allow the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) monitors to enter South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which is in violation of the Six Point Ceasefire Agreement. EUMM is mandated to cover the whole territory of Georgia, within the country's internationally recognised borders, but the de facto authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have so far denied access to the territories under their control. It's clearly not a satisfactory arrangement but Russia seems disinterested in abiding by agreements, even those that have ended conflicts.



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President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych with Vladimir Putin in 2012

Following a diplomatic career, Lexmann joined the International Republican Institute as the Director of EU Regional Programmes. She is a Member of the Board of the Anton Tunega Foundation, named after one of the first martyrs of the communist regime in Central Europe. Lexmann lectures on international relations at the University of Kent in the UK as well as writing reports and articles. She joined the International Republican Institute as the Director of EU Regional Programmes. She is a Member of the Board of the Anton Tunega Foundation, named after one of the first martyrs of the communist regime in Central Europe. The foundation strives to support democracy by providing political education and supporting educational programmes raising awareness about the communist past. Lexmann also serves on the Advisory Board of 'digiQ', a Central European association for online safety and prevention. In fact, Lexmann has a wide variety of interests, but virtually all of them are devoted to protecting freedom of speech, freedom of thought and the protection of democracy itself. Looking at the world around us it seems unlikely that her work will ever be complete. For certain, however, she will continue to fight.


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AFGHANISTAN

Surviving in the shadow of Sharia law





AFTER THE WITHDRAWAL OF US TROOPS FROM AFGHANISTAN ON 14 APRIL 2021, THE TALIBAN LAUNCHED AN OFFENSIVE, CONQUERING PROVINCE AFTER PROVINCE AND FINALLY REACHING THE CAPITAL KABUL ON 15 AUGUST, OVERTHROWING THE GOVERNMENT AND FORCING THEN-PRESIDENT ASHRAF GHANI TO FLEE THE COUNTRY. AT THE BEGINNING OF SEPTEMBER, THE TALIBAN ANNOUNCED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT.

TALIBAN AND NON-STATE ACTORS TARGETED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, WOMEN ACTIVISTS, JOURNALISTS, HEALTH WORKERS, AID WORKERS, RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES, AMONG OTHERS. THE TALIBAN TAKEOVER TRIGGERED A WAVE OF DEADLY REPRISALS. SEVERAL THOUSAND PEOPLE, MOSTLY SHIA HAZARAS, WERE FORCIBLY DISPLACED FROM THEIR HOMES. THE TALIBAN REGIME QUICKLY REVERSED THE MEAGRE PROGRESS THAT WAS MADE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND DRASTICALLY RESTRICTED THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND EXPRESSION. AND THE SUSPENSION OF INTERNATIONAL AID LED TO A FURTHER DETERIORATION OF HEALTH CARE, WHICH WAS ALREADY SEVERELY COMPROMISED BY THE COVID PANDEMIC.



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Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid

After the Taliban took power, a coordination council was initially formed between them and the former members of the Afghan government in order to achieve a peaceful transfer of power.

In a press conference on 17 August 2021, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid stated that Afghanistan posed no threat to any country, that women's rights would be respected within the framework of Islam, that they would be able to study and work, and that the media would survive provided they respected Sharia law.

However, it was widely reported that several women were forced out of their offices, according to witnesses, and the Afghan website Gandhara confirmed that the Taliban had shut down many media outlets across the country.

There were obvious discrepancies between the Taliban's promises and events on the ground.

On 15 August 2022, the Taliban celebrated the first anniversary of their takeover of Kabul. For many Afghans, however, this was a very sad day.



© EDW

The Taliban is an armed movement that advocates a police state that functions according to an extremely regulatory interpretation of Sharia law. They have excluded women from public life and show little interest in the development of society. It is not interested in organising a modern state. The regime also operates on a limited ethnic basis with a strong Pashtun influence.

The Taliban are in the process of systematically dismantling the progress made in human rights over the last twenty years. A climate of fear prevails throughout the country.

In rural areas, the return of the Taliban has not necessarily changed much. Internal security seems somewhat better assured, and traditionalist discourse suits the conservatives.

But poverty is spreading fast. And in the cities, women have been marginalised again. They are excluded from many public professions and are no longer allowed to move outside their cities on their own. Girls' schools and grammar schools have been closed. Full-face veils have become compulsory again. Interference in private lives is the order of the day, and abuses of power include the forced marriage of young girls.

I Rights of women and girls

Even in the final stages of the doomed peace talks, women were severely underrepresented. The government delegation included only four women, the Taliban none. In the government of former President Ashraf Ghani, four ministerial posts were held by women, but they were not represented in the Taliban's provisional government. Shortly after coming to power, the Taliban dissolved the Ministry of Women's Affairs and its provincial departments.

In August 2021, a Taliban spokesperson told reporters that women should not go to work until "*proper systems*" were in place to "*ensure their safety*". In September, female ministry staff were told to stay at home while their male counterparts returned to work.

Women were reportedly not allowed to enter their workplaces or were sent home in different parts of the country, except for those who worked in the passport department of Kabul airport or in the health sector. In some cases, women were reportedly escorted home by Taliban fighters who told them they would be replaced by a male relative.

Female lawyers, judges and prosecutors were de facto dismissed and forced into hiding. They risked reprisals from men who had been convicted and imprisoned by them for domestic violence or other gender-based violence, and who had been released by the Taliban.

According to witnesses, former prisoners and Taliban fighters raided the homes of several women judges.

I Right to education

After taking power, Taliban leaders announced that a "safe learning environment" had to be created before women and girls could return to school. Boys were able to resume school in mid-September, but the situation for girls remained uncertain.

Even where schools and other educational institutions were open, school attendance was low, especially for girls, due to the intimidation and harassment faced by teachers and students.



Mohammad Ashraf Ghani

Sexual or gender-based violence

Violence against women and girls remained widespread but was too rarely reported. In the vast majority of cases, the alleged perpetrators were not prosecuted

Beatings, harassment, forced prostitution, deprivation of financial maintenance and forced and early marriage were still the main forms of violence against women

Violence against women escalated when legal and other support mechanisms for women, including women's shelters, began to close. When the Taliban ended all institutional and legal support for women, they faced even more violence, which they dared not report for fear of the consequences.

Erasing women from public life



TOLOnews and other TV channels in Kabul followed an order of the Ministry of Vice and Virtue regarding covering female presenters' faces

Since coming to power, the Taliban leadership has “institutionalised” widespread and systematic discrimination and gender-based violence against women and girls.

Indeed, the world is witnessing an attempt to completely oust women and girls from public life in Afghanistan, including from the institutions and mechanisms that had been established to support and protect the most vulnerable among them.

In the latest step to enforce its policy of exclusion and discrimination, the Taliban regime has banned Afghan women from visiting parks and gardens in Kabul, one of the last free spaces they had enjoyed since the return of the fundamentalist Islamist regime.

On 7 November, the Taliban instructed those in charge of parks and gardens in Kabul to deny women access to these facilities. Previously, separate opening hours and days had been introduced so that men and women would not meet. But “*in many places the rules were violated*”, justified Mohammad Akif Sadeq Mohajir, spokesman for the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. “*There was mixing and the hijab was not respected. That is why such a decision was taken at this time,*” he continued.



On the heights of Kabul, the Ferris wheel of Afghanistan's largest amusement park has come to a halt, as have the swings, rail cars and other rides that embellished the vast complex with its breathtaking views. Now only a handful of men stroll casually through the quiet alleys of Zazai Park, which was built more than six years ago. Before the Taliban restrictions, it could accommodate up to 15 000 visitors on a weekend.

The decision will condemn Habib Jan Zazai, the co-builder of the facility, to shut down his operation, in which some \$11 million has been invested and which employs about 250 people. “Without women, the children will not come alone,” he notes. “I would have liked the Taliban to give us convincing reasons,” he regrets, explaining that many mothers have organised parties there in recent years.

And in another attempt to exclude women completely from public life, it was announced on 13 November that gyms and public baths or “hammams” are henceforth off-limits to Afghan women as well. According to the Ministry for



© FACEBOOK

Habib Jan Zai

the Prevention of Vice and the Promotion of Virtues, the reason for this latest move is that the trainers in the women's gyms are male and that women must be confined to their homes to preserve Islamic virtues.

Return of corporal punishment

Days after passing a series of draconian laws on women, the Taliban's Supreme Leader, the secretive Haibatullah Akhundzada, has ordered the country's judges to apply all extreme aspects of Sharia law, including public executions, stoning and amputation of the limbs of convicted thieves



© NRF

Taliban's Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid shared the announcement on Twitter on 13 November, saying the order was "mandatory".

Sharia law provides for the punishment of serious offences under Islamic law, such as adultery, drinking alcohol, theft, banditry, apostasy and rebellion.

However, in order for these sentences to be enforced, these facts must "normally" be proven to a high degree, which in the case of adultery includes the testimony of four adult Muslim men.

This policy further isolates Afghanistan. The international community continues to provide substantial humanitarian aid, but development assistance is conditional on respect for human rights, which of course include the rights of women and children, according to a UN Security Council resolution. This condition is important because these principles are universal, even if their application must be adapted according to the culture and history of each country.

The Taliban met for the first time with a joint US-European Union delegation in Doha on 12 October 2021, the same day that G20 leaders pledged to work together to prevent a humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan.



© DOHA NEWS

The Taliban delegation arriving in Qatar

At a virtual G20 summit hosted by Italy, the EU pledged to provide €1 billion in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

With the economy crippled and a severe humanitarian crisis looming, the Taliban asked for international support even though their regime was not recognised by any country. The direct talks in Doha between representatives of the Taliban, the United States, Canada, the EU and several European countries, including the United Kingdom, were mediated by Qatar, a country close to the Taliban.

The return of the European Union

A European Commission spokesperson said on 21 January 2022 that the European Union would re-establish a physical presence in Afghanistan to better deliver humanitarian aid and reiterated that it did not officially recognise the Taliban-led government.

This is the first such announcement by a Western power since EU member states and many governments evacuated their diplomatic staff after the Taliban invaded the Afghan capital in August 2021. *“The EU has started to restore a minimum presence of international staff from the EU delegation to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and monitor the humanitarian situation,”* said Peter Stano, European Commission spokesperson for external relations.

In the meantime, however, the Taliban has managed to raise colossal sums, up to \$1.6 billion a year. In a June 2021 report, UN revealed that *“most of this money comes from criminal activities such as opium production, extortion and ransom kidnapping.”*

In addition, the Taliban announced that they will ban the trade in heroin and opium, which, however, they have been using to finance themselves for many years. However, to compensate for the loss of this revenue, they can count on the



A Taliban in front of a seized Blackhawk helicopter in August 2021



© NRF

Taliban beating a woman

exploitation of the lithium and other mineral deposits they have seized, estimated at \$1,000 billion

Lithium is an important ingredient in the production of car and smartphone batteries and many other industrial and high-tech applications.

One year and four months after the Taliban took power in Kabul on 15 August 2021, women's freedoms are even more restricted, public executions and other forms of corporal punishment have been reinstated, and famine is on the rise across Afghanistan

What is daily life like in the country? What is the scale of the humanitarian disaster?

After the fall of the old regime, what is most evident is the obvious loss of prestige for the West, which has allowed the country to fall into the hands of the Taliban twenty years after its first disastrous intervention. And all this in the face of an increasingly opportunistic China, which sees this situation as an opportunity to establish itself in Afghanistan and permanently displace the influence of the United States and Europe in that country.

Since the 19th century, Afghanistan has been fought over so often that it has become known as a graveyard for invading armies. Today, the “Great Game” of influence continues with other players ... a game of influence between the great powers that could lead to major geopolitical shifts in the not too distant future.

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STANDARDISATION

How is the European Defence Agency helping to ensure EU armed forces have interoperable and interchangeable arms, ammunition, fuel and protection?

IN THE BATTLEFIELD DEFENDING UKRAINE, SOME UKRAINIAN SOLDIERS HAVE BEEN SPOTTED WEARING A MISMATCH OF WESTERN UNIFORMS, ACCORDING TO MEDIA DISPATCHES. FROM FRENCH BODY ARMOUR TO U.S. FATIGUES AND BRITISH DESERT CAMOUFLAGE, UKRAINIANS CAN USE WHATEVER DONATIONS WILL KEEP THEM WARM AND DRY - WHATEVER FITS AN INDIVIDUAL BETTER. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO THE MIX OF WESTERN ARMS AND AMMUNITION FLOWING INTO UKRAINE, IT IS NOT SO EASY.

World Food Day (WFD) is celebrated on October 16, 2022. The day is observed every year around the world on 16 October in honor of the date of the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 1945

Among EU Member states, if one nation's rifles fire NATO's standard 5.56 mm ammunition, other assault rifles used by another nation may not. Artillery systems have different barrel lengths that determine the size of ammunition they fire, depending on their ranges, and many have different loading mechanisms, or even have their own shells. As Ukraine's armed forces transition away from Soviet legacy weapons in search of better precision and range, issues can also arise around spare parts. All these factors are a challenge for battlefield commanders and the command-and-control systems they depend on.

NATO has ways to promote common military standards, covered by a standardisation Agreement of NATO Allied countries, known as STANAGs. Implementation of standards is voluntary, however, and in Europe's fragmented defence market, many countries still produce and operate incompatible weapons, a well-known problem that the war in Ukraine is now highlighting. As EU nations step up their weapons deliveries and seek to replenish supplies, the European Defence Agency's (EDA) work on standardisation will continue to be key.

In search of a solution: EDA's role

Although The European Defense Agency does not develop standards, the Agency plays a central role in selecting certain Best-Practice Standards – including from civilian European standardisation organisations, NATO and others – and encourages Member States to apply them. If necessary, during the selection process, experts may identify requirements which can be developed by a standardisation organisation. EDA sees European defence standardisation as a strategic tool for improving armaments cooperation and enhancing the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). In 2011, EDA established the European Defence Standards Reference System (EDSTAR). EDA has been working in complementarity with NATO to enhance interoperability to increase cooperation on interoperability.

EDSTAR: Part of a future common defence market

EDSTAR today contains guidance for roughly 2,300 standards and standard-like specifications for Member States and the EU defence industry. Agreeing on standards during capability development and procurement helps the harmonisation and standardisation of the defence market. Through a special internet platform, EDSTAR provides the necessary guidance and selection of Best Practice Standards for several domains. This web-based service is designed to assist governmental organisations and Europe's defence industry across the spectrum of capabilities. The benefits are numerous, beyond improvement of operability. Here are just a few:

- Limited variety of necessary items of supply and optimum use of standardised parts
- Safeguarding of common logistics
- Avoidance of parallel expenditures for research,

development, and testing of defence materiel

- Strengthening cooperation during military operations
- Opening the EDTIB market and reducing the risk of dependence on a single or specific suppliers

From ammunition to CBRN

Here are some examples of EDA's current work on standardisation, in which expert groups select best-practices:

- **Ammunition:** One technical domain focuses on the design, testing and qualification of ammunition, taking NATO standards as the base and reducing the many standards to use a classification system. It includes all conventional ammunition such as all calibres, warheads, rocket motors, torpedoes/under-water ammunition, grenades and missiles. The sorts of things not included are: explosive materials, which are already handled by a separate expert group, and nuclear, chemical and biological weapons (see below).
- **Fuel and lubricants:** Another technical domain focuses on fuels (petroleum and oil) and lubricants, as well as other alternatives in their gaseous, solid and synthetic forms used in the EU defence sector. The aim of experts' work is to identify and select best practice standards within the EDSTAR fuels and lubricants area to streamline the variety of products. In a very fragmented market, it also ensures the products can be delivered and used across the EU's national forces, that they work with a wide range of equipment, meet the NATO standards, national and European regulations, minimize hazards in storing, handling and keep the focus on green defence and climate change impact.

CBRN: CBRN defence is defined as “all measures designed to defend European forces against any nuclear, biological, chemical and radiological incident”. EDA is working to help include standards on detection, protection, hazard management, warning and reporting, and medical countermeasures. This does not mean that EDA can create a perfect shield of safety, but rather find a good compromise that offers the best security for European soldiers in mitigating the effects of a possible attack or event and in deterring any adversary from using CBRN weapons or agents.



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FOOD FOR THE FUTURE

**Suffering from food
shortages sooner or later**



World Food Day (WFD) is celebrated on October 16, 2023. The day is observed every year around the world on 16 October in honor of the date of the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 1945

Scientists have been studying this for a while. The aim is to reduce the total amount of animal products eaten by humans and replace them with delicious plant-based alternatives to minimise the impact of the human diet on the planet.

But scientists and nutritionists now say that eating alternative “foods of the future” such as lab-grown meat, algae and even insects would protect the planet and provide food for a growing population, but also provide better nutrients and high-quality protein than an exclusively plant-based diet.

Apart from the fact that the extraction of these future foods requires far less land and energy and produces far fewer greenhouse gases than animal or even plant foods, lab-grown meat, proteins from mushrooms, fly larvae, some types of algae and mussels actually provide the same amount or more protein than animal or plant foods.

In addition, this alternative food contains several other nutrients that are considered crucial for a balanced and healthy diet, such as zinc, vitamin A and vitamin B12. For example, some algae contain 20 times more vitamin A than eggs. In comparison, vegan diets are usually deficient in vitamin B12 and Omega fatty acids, leading to major imbalances over time.

Laboratory-grown meat has already been successfully obtained from cells of animal origin. Over several weeks, the cells in the laboratory are provided with nutrients and certain growth factors, so that they develop into a normal piece of meat that can then be cooked, roasted or grilled like any other type of meat. Most importantly, it smells, tastes and looks the same and contains the same amount of important nutrients, so it has no disadvantages for human nutrition. It is not yet on sale in supermarkets, but some start-ups are already promoting it.

The production of such foods of the future is still a new and emerging industry. However, it is expected to be receptive to major changes towards sustainability. While traditional agriculture is considered a major cause of climate change, alternative and energy-efficient meats could help meet the needs of a growing global population.

The consumption of insects (over 1,900 edible species) has long been common, especially in Asia. Fried crickets or roasted worms are the norm in many restaurants in Thailand, but also in Mexico.

The trend is now also making its way into the Western diet as an environmentally friendly protein alternative.

I remember seeing fried insect dishes and also insect bars in the supermarket at a World Food Congress in Berlin a few years ago. It is not clear how successful these new trends are, but it is a fact that we are all moving in this direction. Insect farming can successfully compete with animal farming. It requires less land, water and energy for mass production and releases fewer greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. At the same time, insect production could help reduce food waste, as insects can be fed with unwanted fruits and vegetables.

Theworldcounts.com estimates that we have about 25 years until the end of natural seafood. Considering that much of it is already contaminated with microplastics, it is clear that we need to find a way to prevent this and find alternatives.

Aquaculture is one of them. Scientists have studied many species of fish and selected some, such as pangasius or tilapia, that grow quickly and do not have problems with crowded habitats, so they are cheap to produce. In some parts of the world, people are already used to these fish species, which are becoming more and more popular.

Seafood is another great way to eat in an environmentally friendly way as it has a much smaller carbon footprint. They are considered healthier than animal meat and are a rich source of protein and macronutrients that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Nutritionists also say that jellyfish could be another future nutritional solution. The 25 edible species of jellyfish are low in calories and fat, but rich in protein and antioxidants, and are already consumed in some Asian countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Japan.

While an estimated one-third of the world's agricultural soils are already degraded, experts are looking for alternatives and see marine plants as an important future food source.

Seaweed is one of them. Today, there are about 10 000 different species of seaweed, of which the best known is probably nori (the dried leaves that are wrapped around sushi). They are used in many



Thai grasshoppers snackfood in Bangkok, Thailand



delicious dishes such as soups, stews, salads and even cakes or smoothies.

Cactus plants are also considered a future alternative for a plant-based diet because they are rich in fibre and micronutrients. They grow in dry regions and do not require careful maintenance. There are over 1,500 species of cactus, many of which are edible. They are already consumed in Latin America, used in fruit juices or grilled and served with eggs or in salads and tacos. Together with other cereals and pseudocereals such as quinoa or amaranth, they have become increasingly popular, especially in recent decades. In many countries, they can now be found in organic food shops.

Nowadays there is a trend towards a plant-based diet to reduce the consumption of animal products. Plant-based meat looks and tastes like meat, but is made from plants.

Soy is usually the main ingredient in plant-based foods. It is rich in protein and comes in many forms such as tofu, edamame beans or tempeh. However, it is not recommended for everyone as it can affect thyroid function, especially in women.

Eating lentils, chickpeas, beans, nuts and seeds is also recommended by nutritionists if you choose a plant-based diet.

In addition to all these dietary changes, one important action we can all take to combat climate change and prevent world hunger and food shortages is to stop wasting food.

It is estimated that more than 891 million tonnes of food are wasted worldwide every year! About one third of the world's food is lost or wasted. More greenhouse gases are emitted through food waste than in all countries in the world except China and the USA.

Food is lost or wasted all along the food supply chain, from the production stage, through processing and manufacturing, to supermarkets, restaurants or at home. Food 'waste' refers to food that is fit for consumption but is deliberately thrown away at retail or consumption.

In the EU region alone, around 88 million tonnes of food are wasted every year. This corresponds to 174 kg per person, 143 billion euros or 170 000 000 tonnes of CO₂. (Source: <https://www.eufic.org>) The extent of food waste is similar in high, upper and lower middle income countries across Europe.

The EU Commission supports the exchange of best practices on food waste prevention through the EU Platform on Food Loss and Food Waste. The Commission plans to propose legally binding targets to reduce food waste in the EU by the end of 2023. The Waste Framework Directive is expected to propose measures to reduce food waste and increase preparation for reuse or recycling

of waste. Some European countries have already enacted internal legislation to prevent food waste. In February 2016, France passed a law to combat food waste that prohibits supermarkets from destroying unsold food and instead requires them to donate it.

Due to its strict food waste prevention policies, sustainable farming practices and also healthy eating habits, France is now ranked first in the Food Sustainability Index, a study by The Economist Intelligence Unit and the Barilla Centre for Food & Nutrition Foundation that looks at 34 countries. Every morning, more than 2,700 French supermarkets send nearly expired food to more than 80 warehouses across the country, saving 46,000 tonnes of food each year.

In Norway, there are now special supermarkets dedicated exclusively to the sale of nearly expired food. There are also numerous platforms where people can learn more about how to use food efficiently. The country wants to halve its food waste by 2030. Germany now has the same goal. (In Germany, about 11 million tonnes of food are thrown away every year).

Denmark now has the most food waste initiatives in Europe. Thanks to the active and effective campaigns of a non-profit organisation called Stop Food Waste ("Stop Spild Af Mad" is the original Danish name), the population has significantly changed its consumption habits, with very visible results.

Worldwide, Japan and South Korea are pioneers in the fight against food waste.

But we can all do something about it. Eating healthier and more sustainably, planning our meals more carefully, shopping responsibly and moderately, organising our fridge and storing food properly, learning new cooking skills, composting and recycling food waste or donating food are just some of the simple ways we can all contribute to a greater cause.

And what could be more important than saving the future of our home, planet Earth?

Alexandra Paucescu



Together against food waste - stop wasting food



Michael Gahler at the European Parliament during a debate calling for measures against Turkey, following military operations in Syria

STANDING UP TO THREATS

**A German MEP wants the
EU to get tougher with
bullies**

“Don’t bow down to bullies,” is the message of German MEP Michael Gahler to his fellow EU lawmakers. Gahler is the spokesperson on Foreign Affairs for his political group, the centrist European People’s Party (EPP). He is being targeted by both China and Russia, but doesn’t seem too worried about either of them. Being seen as a potential enemy by a country, entity or group that is not friendly towards the European majority can be seen as a sign of bravely standing up to bullies, after all. “I am glad that NATO is finally returning to reality with a new strategic concept,” he said about Europe’s reaction to attempts by tyrannical regimes to tell them what to do, “and that Russia is assessed as the most urgent threat to Europe.” I don’t imagine that many in Western Europe (let alone within the EU itself) would disagree with that assessment.

In a recent speech in the European Parliament, Gahler made clear his position: “In this systemic conflict between our peace-loving democracies and a belligerent dictatorship, we have seen in recent weeks a renewed escalation on the part of the deeply fascist aggressor: mobilization, especially in areas with national minorities, and a farce of vote to give the impression that here a Ukrainian population is just waiting to be brought home to the Reich,” Gahler sees Russian subterfuge, presumably designed to mislead whatever allies he has. “That’s when the Potemkin façade of pseudo-legitimacy collapses for all to see. Now it must be a matter of making Ukraine winter-



President Roosevelt Signing Lend Lease Act in 1941

proof – economically, humanitarily, socially and, above all, in the stabilization of arms deliveries.”

Gahler is unhappy with being compelled to provide arms but feels there is no choice. “Yes, unfortunately it is required. I would like to see the American Lend-Lease Act in Europe, at least in some Member States. (The original version, which ran from 1941 to 1945, was aimed at supplying food, oil and materiel to America’s allies on the basis that it would help them to defend the United States and that the equipment, including ships and aeroplanes supplied would be returned when the war ended). In today’s case, this would speed up arms deliveries because it makes individual permits superfluous.”

Gahler has made clear his firm belief that Ukraine’s place is inside the European Union, no matter what Putin and his cronies believe. “Ukraine should work on its European integration and make itself so attractive that the EU cannot resist giving it membership,” Gahler said in an interview with Promote Ukraine. He also told the media: “We are not going to make concessions, and I assure you, Germany will not be a country that will make concessions to Russia.”



Portrait of Ivan IV the Terrible by Viktor Vasnetsov, 1897

Very few countries in Europe would choose to make concessions to Russia and certainly not too many of those. Hungary has expressed some support for Putin, but whether that is sympathy for a determined dictator or fear of not showing support is unclear. Putin is said to be an admirer of the Tsars of old, but things didn’t turn out too well for them in the end. They had a habit when engaging in conflict of painting themselves into a corner from which elegant escape was impossible. That seems to be what is happening to Putin in Ukraine.

Take the example of Ivan the Terrible, as he’s known in the West. Even that popular name is a mistranslation, with “the Terrible” being written as “Грозный” – “Grozny” – which doesn’t mean wicked or evil. It takes the more original English meaning of “Terrible” as “inspiring terror” or “formidable”. It can also mean: “courageous, magnificent, keeping enemies in fear and people in obedience”, which is more in keeping with the rôle of a leader. Certainly, he seems to have been somewhat unbalanced at times.

Ivan was born in August 1530 and ascended the throne as Grand Prince of Moscow when he was just three years old, following the death of his father, Vasili III, the Rurikid ruler of the Grand Duchy of Moscow. Vasili had contracted blood poisoning after an abscess developed on his leg. He had taken over the leading position from Ivan III Vasilyevich, known to history as Ivan the Great, leading to Vasili III (who came after “the Great” and before “the Terrible”), sometimes being referred to jokingly as “Ivan the Barely Adequate” or “Ivan the Ordinary”, which is a bit unfair. Presumably, when Putin idolises ancient Tsars and dreams of being likened to them, it’s not Vasili III he’s thinking of. In fact, it’s probably Ivan the Great, who reigned from 1462 and who greatly increased the amount of territory under Moscow’s rule through war. He ascended the throne after serving as regent for several years because his father, Vasili II, was blind. Once in charge, Ivan the Great began wars of conquest against his dynastic relatives and rivals.

He also renovated the Kremlin in Moscow (he must have made a good job of it because it is a truly magnificent building, as all the world



The siege of Kiev, on December 6, 1240

knows), introduced new laws and in 1480 he defeated the Great Horde, restoring Russia's independence after 240 years, following the fall of Kiev to the Mongols in 1240. These were dangerous times, with rival leaders and even rival capitals. Perhaps it's that sort of "wild west" type of existence (or perhaps more a "knights in shining armour" style that Putin favours, if only as long as he emerges the brilliant victor.

Ivan the terrible, meet vlad the greedy

Russia is, of course, a vast country: 17,075,4002 kilometres overall, with a population of almost 150-million people. Most of its citizens – more than 80% - are ethnically Russian, but there are a great number of ethnic minorities, too, such as Avars, Bashkirs, Buryats, Chechens, Chuvash, Germans, Jewish, Komi, Mari, Mordovs, Tartars, Udmurts and Yakuts. It is also home to a lot of people from the former Soviet republics, including not only



Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov) of Pskov and Porkhov (left), Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and Russian President Vladimir Putin

Ukrainians but also Belorussians, Kazakhs and others. The country stretches from the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Black Sea in the south and from the Baltic in the West to the Bering Strait in the east. That's a pretty vast country by anyone's reckoning, which poses the question: why on Earth does Putin want more? What is so special about Ukraine, for example, that he wants to add it to his personal fiefdom? The country already has more land than any single entity could need, want or even govern effectively, with more oblasts than you can see from any point apart from outer space. Ukraine does have vast lands for grain production and is rich in coal (if anyone still wants it) plus extensive oil and gas reserves. They're dwarfed by the massive reserves of Russia, of course. It also had a population of very nearly 52-million in 1991; I expect the figure is higher now.

It's possible, based on previous behaviour, that Putin simply thinks that he should be in charge of everything, everywhere. Perhaps he does. We can, perhaps, put that down to simple greed. Or megalomania, perhaps. Not satisfied with being the ringmaster of his personal circus, he also wants to be the chap riding every elephant, forcing each lion and tiger to cower and then performing on the tightrope and the trapeze, perhaps simultaneously. As it is, ringmaster or simply a bully, Putin seems to be emulating the acts of Ivan the Great, who vastly expanded the territory ruled by Moscow. He also brought the various territories of the Rurikid princes under Moscow's control, leaving the princes without titles or the right to leave their lands to their descendants. He went to war with Novgorod, too, and after defeating its forces twice in battle, the Novgorodians were obliged to sue for peace and to recognise Ivan as supreme ruler in 1478. When Putin talks of his admiration for the Tsars of old, could it be Ivan the Great he means? Part of the problem then involved religion: Poland, after all, was Roman Catholic, not Orthodox, like Russia, and one of Putin's most earnest supporters is Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, who has been quoted as saying: "Russia has never attacked anyone." His knowledge of history would seem to be somewhat deficient and the many Ukrainians who have seen their relatives killed and their homes, hospitals and schools destroyed must be feeling rather angry about a man of the church lying so blatantly. Pope Francis has also criticised Kirill, saying that he: "cannot transform himself into Putin's altar boy." Kirill has said that Russia was forced into military action because the West had forced Ukraine to accept such events as Gay Pride marches, which he considers to be insulting to God.

History tries to repeat itself

Ukraine may be one of Gahler's main concerns but it's not the only one. He is also worried about the possible break-up of Bosnia and moves by the Republika Srpska (RS) towards secession. The 26-year-old Dayton Peace Accords, brokered by the United States, were supposed to end the ethnic wars, but EU Foreign Policy chief Josep Borrell has warned that separatist rhetoric is on the increase, fuelled by continuing ethnic divisions that threaten to put a match to the tinderbox yet again. It is an issue of great concern to Michael Gahler. He urged the EU to act against the secessionists of the RS



President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik during a meeting with President of Russia Vladimir Putin in Moscow on September 2022

before, as he put it in the chamber, the “little green men of Russia turn up” to capitalise on the disintegration of Bosnia. It’s something they’re very good at. “The recent concrete steps towards the secession of the Republika Srpska undertaken by the nationalist leadership under Milorad Dodik should ring all alarm bells,” he warned his fellow MEPs. Dodik, a member of the Bosnian-Serb presidency, has said that the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska entity would adopt laws and amendments annulling all the previous laws imposed by the EU’s High Representative in the country and also withdraw its consent on all the reforms already agreed, such as the reform of the army, the reform of the fiscal council, the Indirect Taxation Authority, state police, intelligence agency and other bodies, transferring their powers back to whatever authority previously held them.

Gahler has strongly urged the Office of the High Representative (OHR), in charge of overseeing the implementation of the civilian aspect of the Dayton Peace Agreement, as well as the EU, to issue a strong statement condemning the vote and declaring it illegal. Gahler warned that in the event of Republika Srpska’s secession would receive the active support of Putin. “You know what happens if we allow Dodik to declare independence?” he said. “The next day he will be recognised by Putin who takes revenge for Kosovo and the ‘green men’ are probably on standby somewhere, perhaps in Nis (Serbia) in the Russian Information Centre.



President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, President Alija Izetbegovic of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and President Franjo Tudjman of the Republic of Croatia initial the draft of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995

We cannot allow that to happen; let us react properly and in time.” But the rest of the EU seems not very keen on discussing the issue. Gahler fears that the affair could destabilise the entire region unless the EU acts quickly. Nothing would please the bloodthirsty Putin more than another war in which he could involve himself and kill a few more people who may be sympathetic to the West.

The fact is that Ukrainian troops are now hitting back at Russian forces using weapons captured from them. In October, they were seen firing a captured Russian 152.4 mm howitzer Msta-B near to the city of Kupyansk. There have been other examples, too. Gahler, together with fellow MEPs Viola von Cramon-Taubadel (Alliance 90-The Greens) and Nicola Beer (Free Democratic Party), is trying to overcome Western scepticism over the possibility that Ukraine could win this war. As reported in Euractiv: “Russia has suffered losses. It lost battles to capture Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and Chernihiv; withdrew forces from Northern Ukraine; ceded control over the North-Western Black Sea; and scrambled to save some of its troops from Izyum-Kupiansk.

Putin’s regime insists those moves were ‘gestures of goodwill’. However, in reality Russia withdrew troops from those battles when persisting would only mean more losses.” And, of course, Putin’s claim ignores the fact that he has no good will at all, for anyone. Putin, for instance, would never agree with the 19th century American journalist and diplomat John L. O’Sullivan, who wrote in 1837: “Understood as a central consolidated power, managing and directing the various general interests of the society, all government is evil, and the parent of evil...The best government is that which governs least.” Putin, it would seem, wants to govern the whole world. Gahler is convinced he can be defeated. As Euractiv put it in an editorial: “Swiftly and diplomatically ending this war would have been wonderful, but Moscow doesn’t have words of concession or compromise in its vocabulary.”

Crime and punishment?

Gahler is also concerned about recent developments in the Western Balkans. During a recent debate on a committee report, he told his fellow MEPs: “that the document calls on Western Balkan governments to step up efforts to implement the necessary reforms, noting that ties between organized crime, politics, and business had existed before the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and continue to exist.” The problem with that sort of institutionalised



© EUROPA EU

Michael Gahler

criminality is that it spreads, and continues to spread unless it's tackled, as Gahler pointed out. "Therefore, in the report, we call for opening former Yugoslav archives, notably, those of the former Yugoslav secret service (UDBA) and the military intelligence agency (KOS)," he said.

The report calls for prompt, even urgent action on the part of the EU. "Organised crime and corruption," it argues, "first and foremost hurt the citizens of the Western Balkan countries, as they undermine their right to safety and social cohesion as well as their trust in the democratic system, create obstacles to democratic reforms and hamper the accession process, while also having potential and actual negative impacts on the security and stability of EU Member States." The report also points out that urgent reform is what the people of the region want and deserve, together with aspirations for EU membership. "Depriving countries of the Western Balkans of a European perspective is worsening the situation as regards organised crime," it reads, adding that: "it can be improved by fostering the EU integration process and cooperation with the Member States; stresses that fighting organised crime and advancing EU integration are mutually reinforcing processes, hence the need to accelerate the EU integration process." But, of course, these things take time.



© EUROPA EU

Destroyed Russian tank in Ukraine



© INF

Tsar Nicholas II

Strangely, Gahler even thinks that the COVID pandemic may have helped the region in its bid to join the EU. Just before the EU-Western Balkans summit in 2020, Gahler issued a statement. He said, "Do not lose sight of the geopolitical consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Western Balkans must not fall into the Russian disinformation trap. The region has a better future with the EU".

Warning countries not to listen to the honeyed words of Putin has become a regular refrain. "Europeans must turn this crisis into an opportunity and mitigate the impact of the pandemic together", Gahler said. The EU set aside €3.3 billion to help fight COVID-19 in the Western Balkans. Of course, every country has its ultra-nationalists who believe their homeland is so superior to everyone else's that they should be in charge everywhere. There are a depressingly large number of British people who still think that way, I'm afraid, as if the days of empire never ended. Some British newspapers seem to share that silliness, trumpeting British superiority for no sound reason. It leads to conflict, of course, and in Russia's case, it's a belief that Putin likes to encourage because it disrupts things. Putin, presumably, believes it's Russia's destiny to recover the one sixth of the world's land surface it ruled from 1721 until 1917, when it all came to an end with the abdication of Nicholas II.

It's worth looking at how that vast empire came about. In the 17th century, the Russian nobility started looking for a new bloodline for its monarchy and chose Michael Romanov, who came of a noble family and was elected Tsar in 1613. His son, Alexis, came to the throne in 1645, but was very much under the influence of others, including the then Patriarch, Nikon, rather as Putin seems to be in the sway of Kirill. Michael's other favourite, Boris Ivanovich Morozov, became unpopular with the people, causing an uprising in 1648 in which Morozov was exiled, and eventually led



French Caesar self-propelled howitzer supplied to Ukraine by France

to the Great Peasant Rebellion of 1670 to 1671. Interestingly, the tsar's powers were without legal limits, although with the empire being so vast, there was actually very little in the way of governance at all, the state's powers being limited to the collection of taxes, when they could persuade people to pay. The Cossacks and the people of Siberia lived in what were effectively autonomous communities. That's not something Putin would encourage.

I Get tough on a bully

Gahler has called on Western powers to increase their military assistance to Ukraine to ensure that the nation wins its war with Russia as soon as possible. That may sound a little optimistic, but Gahler wants to take the fighting to the Russians. When he was asked in the hemicycle about strengthening military aid to Ukraine in order to prevent a long war, he said it was "exactly" the task the West is facing.



German army MARS II/MLRS-E Multiple Launch Rocket System supplied to Ukraine by Germany

"It's exactly the point. Weapons, weapons, weapons," he told the Ukrainian news platform, Ukrinform. "We must upgrade our weapons deliveries," he told his interviewer.

"We need to coordinate closely with Ukraine on the needs that there are on the ground." As with most things in life, it's never quite as simple as it sounds. "We should in parallel start producing and upgrading the weapons production. Where the weapons are needed now is in Ukraine. Everybody needs to understand that. And we, Europeans, who are closest, we need to do more and orient ourselves to the deliveries of the United States and Britain – they have delivered most.

And of course our partners in Central and Eastern Europe have done a tremendous job but Germany, France, Italy, Spain – major western countries inside the EU – they need to do definitely more and also not argue about their own defensibility," the MEP added, responding to concerns that have been expressed about Western military powers being left with severely depleted weapons stocks. His answer is simple: "If Western powers deliver weapons to Ukraine, and Ukraine uses them to reduce Russian military potential, this automatically reduces the threat Russia poses to Europe," he has pointed out. "If Russians have less to threaten us, it's good for us, and for that purpose, we should deliver our available weapons to Ukraine to shorten the war, to push the Russians to their own borders, and then to make a rethinking in Moscow possible," Gahler said. He is not the only German politician to call upon his country to supply more battle tanks to Ukrainian defenders. They are of superior quality to the type currently being fielded by the Russians, by and large.



© MAH_SADEGH/TWITTER

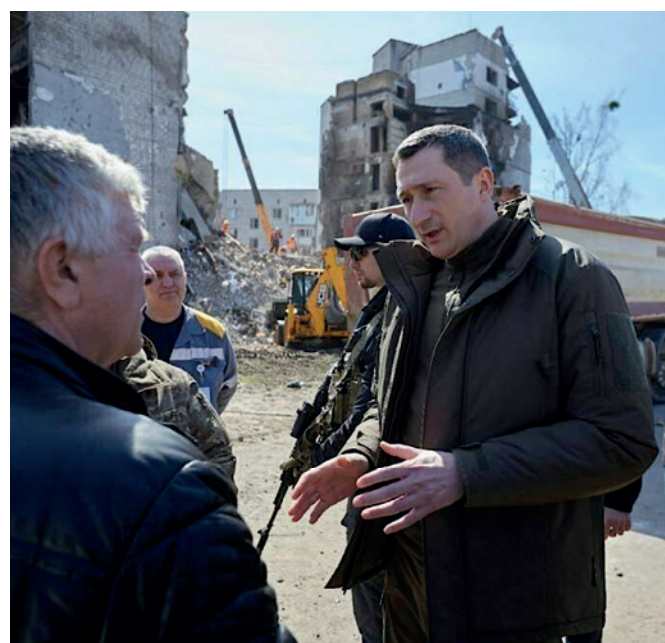
Mahsa Amini

Gahler would like to see Ukraine inside the European Union, although that might be difficult in the middle of a war. “Ukraine should work on its European integration and make itself so attractive that the EU cannot resist giving it membership,” he said. “Ukraine is like a bride who wants to be married, but the EU is still a bit hesitant.” Is it an understandable hesitancy at the moment, of course. It goes without saying that Russia dislikes Gahler and targets him for surveillance, but he’s not alone. “He is one of ten Europeans, including five MEPs, blacklisted by the Chinese authorities in retaliation for the sanctions agreed by the European Union for human rights violations in the Xinjiang region.”

He has also upset the Iranian authorities, you will not be surprised to learn, by condemning the killing of Masha Amini in Iran and the brutal suppression of any form of protest. Gahler has called for a “transparent” investigation into her killing, which he’s unlikely to get. The Iranian (supposedly) religious authorities are determined to retain control and to ensure that it’s invariably men who’re in charge, not women. “It is high time that the old men stop preaching to young women on how to dress and live”, Gahler said in his capacity as EPP Group Spokesperson on Foreign Affairs. I found it unnerving when I was among the Mujahideen in Afghanistan to see how a man would emerge first and alone from a family dwelling, with one or more women, fully veiled, of course, following on in single file behind. What makes some men consider themselves so superior to women that they can ignore their needs and concerns? It’s complete nonsense; I’d like to see how these brave, bullying men with their fierce beards would cope with giving birth. I wonder how brave they’d be then?

As for the immediate future, Gahler wants to see Germany deliver 200 Leopard tanks to the

Ukrainian forces to give them battlefield superiority. Russia’s T-14 Armata tanks are better than the previous generation and certainly tougher and better-built, but probably still not up to the standard of the Leopard 2A7. However, its ammunition may not have the penetrative power offered by the Armata because Germany refuses to use depleted uranium, sticking with tungsten instead. A depleted uranium sabot round like the U.S. Army’s M829A3 would be more effective, but it would be a step too far for Germany. But a number of well-informed MEPs, including Michael Gahler, believe Ukraine can emerge the victor. Despite continuing Western scepticism, Ukraine can win and it can defeat Russia in its war of aggression, write MEPs Viola von Cramon-Taubadel Nicola Beer and Michael Gahler, defeating the blood-soaked ambitions of Putin and his ilk, even as they target Ukraine’s power and water supplies, inflicting black-outs on the suffering country.



© DECENTRALIZATION.GOV

Oleksii Chernyshov, Minister for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine

At the time of writing, Ukrainian government minister Oleksii Chernyshov claimed that 408 sites around the country had been struck, including 45 energy facilities. Among them are thermal energy plants that generate steam for heating homes and businesses. He has also targeted utility networks that have left parts of the country without access to drinking water. If Putin thinks he can persuade the Ukrainian people that they’d be better off under his rule, he seems to be going a very strange and self-defeating way about it. When the Soviets of old sang of “raise the scarlet banner high” it was in a very different world, when the red in the flag came from blood (“Their life blood soaked its every fold”). The song is about maintaining the struggle in the face of brutal violence and threats. “Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,” run the words, “we’ll keep the Red Flag flying here.” It was all about the people – the ordinary people – standing up to their brutal overlords. In this modern age, it means standing up to the unfeeling brutality of a single megalomaniac. But the people (including Michael Gahler, of course) can still win.

Robin Crow

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Carnot batteries can store electrical energy in the form of heat

ENERGY

Bridging periods of reduced sunlight and peak loads in a climate-neutral way using salt

- Together with stakeholders from industry and research, DLR has developed a storage system that can be used to compensate for fluctuations in renewable energies.
- The Carnot battery developed in the EU project CHESTER can store electrical energy in the form of heat and supply electricity and heat when needed.
- Researchers have successfully commissioned a pilot system at the DLR site in Stuttgart.
- Focus: Energy, energy storage, energy efficiency, climate change

Solar power at night? Wind energy without wind? The German Aerospace Center (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt; DLR) as a scientific project participant together with industry and research groups, has built and successfully tested a storage system for renewable energies. Known as the Carnot battery, the system can store electricity in the form of heat that can be reused to generate electricity when needed. Nitrate salts serve as the heat storage medium.

On an industrial scale, the technology has the potential to compensate for fluctuations in renewable energy sources. This makes it another important step towards a secure and reliable supply of renewable energy.

Storing renewable energy using salt

Bridging periods of reduced sunlight and peak loads in a climate-neutral way is a core challenge of the energy transition. Energy storage will make it possible to use surplus energy when there is no wind or sunlight.

In the Compressed Heat Energy Storage for Energy from Renewable Sources (CHESTER) research project, the participants built and tested



Carnot batteries can be used to compensate for fluctuations in solar and wind energy

a Carnot battery at the DLR site in Stuttgart. “We are working on optimising the technology so that it can be used by industry,” explains Maike Johnson, who is in charge of the project at the DLR Institute of Engineering Thermodynamics.

Electricity – heat – electricity

The heart of the Carnot battery is a latent heat storage system, developed by the DLR Institute of Engineering Thermodynamics, which is filled with approximately two cubic metres of nitrate salts. Using the electricity that represents the energy, a high-temperature heat pump heats the salt to 150 degrees Celsius. “Latent, because the salt is melting during the heat process. A part of the heat input seems to be hidden ‘latently’ in the loosening of the bonds in the salt crystals”, explains Maike Johnson. As a result, depending on the salt, the latent heat storage system can absorb around twice as much energy as could be achieved by simply heating the crystals.

The typical storage time of Carnot batteries is several hours to days. To discharge the stored energy, a second circuit transfers the heat to a heat engine that drives a turbine-generator unit. The electricity generated in this climate-neutral way can be fed back into the grid.

Heat exchangers resemble snowflakes

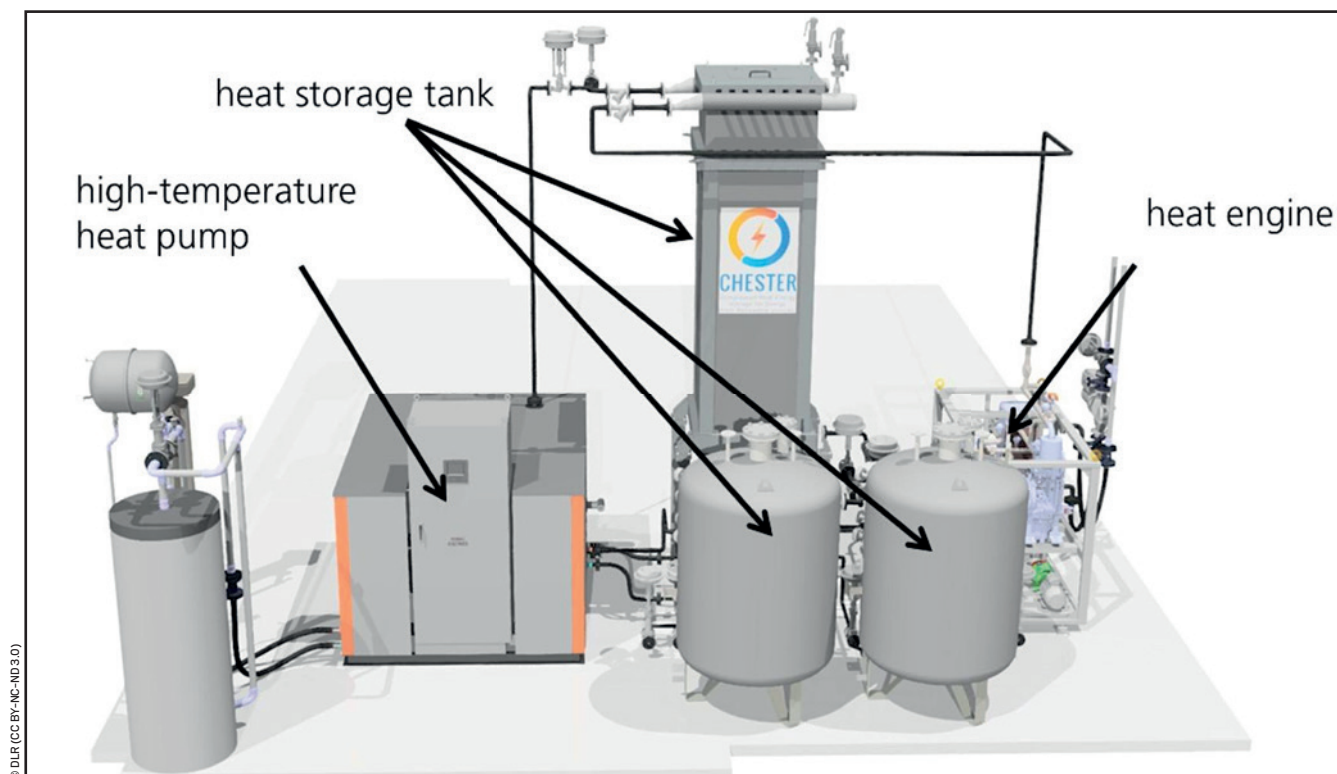
The novelty of the DLR heat storage system lies in its heat exchangers. The pipes, designed empirically and mathematically by the DLR Institute of Engineering Thermodynamics run entirely through the storage tank. They have two channels for the coolant circuits – one for charging and one for discharging the heat storage tank. This allows for operation with different coolants to couple the different process components of the storage system.

For efficient energy transfer between the steam circuits and the salt, the heat exchangers have a fin-like cross-section that resembles a snowflake. This results in a large contact surface for the salt.

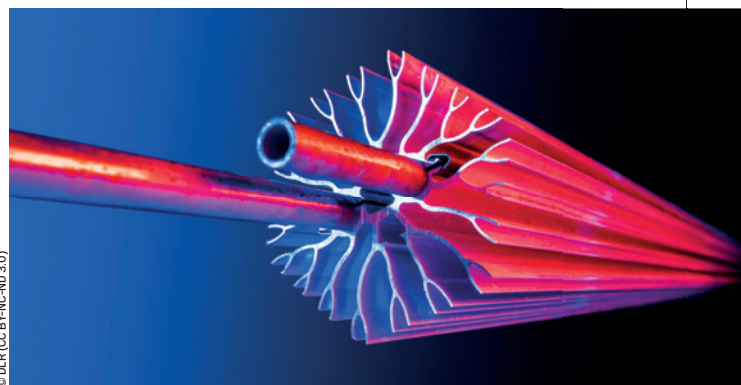
Individual components assessed prior to test run

Over recent months, the researchers have individually tested all of the system’s components and each process of the energy storage cycle. “The main challenge is to find and set the optimal operating parameters. For a stable heat transfer between the heat pump and the storage tank and then to the heat engine, all components have to work together in harmony and at the necessary level of performance,” explains Maike Johnson. “How much coolant is needed? How quickly can the salt be heated and cooled? How much power can we obtain from the stored heat?”

The researchers are now testing different load scenarios, heat



Carnot battery pilot plant at the DLR site in Stuttgart



The heart of the Carnot battery consists of a heat accumulator filled with nitrate salts

flows and temperature curves to determine the system's limits. In the case of larger systems, heat losses and different operating conditions may be particularly important, which is why this is currently being investigated using a pilot plant

Carnot batteries for sector coupling

A great advantage of Carnot batteries is that they can easily be connected to other energy systems for sector coupling. In addition to generating electricity, they can also provide heat. This is particularly interesting for industry, as the stored high-

temperature heat can be used directly in many industrial processes. In addition, Carnot batteries can be coupled to seasonal heat storage systems that can store the thermal energy for months.

The size, capacity and energy management of Carnot batteries can be adapted to the respective requirements of each process. This makes them suitable for an application known as 'smart district heating', for example. This involves local electricity and heating networks in the vicinity of the storage facility that supply residential estates or office complexes with energy.

About Chester

In the CHESTER consortium (Compressed Heat Energy Storage for Energy from Renewable sources), DLR works alongside eleven other research institutions and industrial partners:

TecNALIA as project coordinator, Iren, the University of Stuttgart, PlanEnergi, Aiguasol, Encontech BV, Ghent University, the Polytechnic University of Valencia, the University of Ulster, PNO Innovation and GoiEner.

The European Union supported the project with five million euros through its Horizon 2020 research and innovation funding programme.

TIMELESS CHIC

STANDOUT FASHION AND BEAUTY TRENDS

THE MOST SOUGHT-AFTER COATS FOR THIS WINTER

Soft Puffer coats, wrap-around vests, and other 'faux fur' items... a quick look at the social networks and fashion websites reveals the four trendiest coats for this winter

1 Aviator coats and jackets

Definitely the biggest outerwear trend of the year, a shearling aviator jacket is one of the few pieces that never really goes out of style. It's a piece every woman needs in her autumn/winter wardrobe, especially if one is into casual outfits, like fashion blogger Maria J.



© GOLDEN GOOSE

The Chelsey sheepskin jacket pays homage to nature thanks to its natural colour palette (Golden Goose spotted on farfetch.com)



© INSTAGRAM @MARIAJBLOGS



© SAINT LAURENT

Aviator jacket made with metal-free tanned leather, featuring a front zip closure, front pockets with shearling trim, and contrasting leather details (ysl.com)

2 Shearling/teddy coats and jackets

The shearling or teddy coats and jackets still have their place in our winter wardrobe this year. From classic 'shearling-on-the-inside/suede-on-the-outside', to fluffy crops, and long soft-pile options, there's quite literally a jacket and coat for every taste. Another plus: they're incredibly versatile.



© MAX MARA

Designed in 2013, the Max Mara Teddy Bear Coat immediately became an 'it' coat. Stars and influencers loved its perfect alchemic blend of glamour and playfulness. Its special camel-hair texture on a silk base creates this unique 'faux fur' (maxmara.com)



© INSTAGRAM @MALWINA0BRZUT



© ZADIG & VOLTAIRE

Opt for a warm winter in this Zadig&Voltaire buttoned coat in soft shearling (zadig-et-voltaire.com)

| 3 The wool coat

While it was “number one” last winter, in an ultra-long version, the wool coat is still impossible to be overlooked this winter. Sometimes oversized, reaching almost down to the feet, it is a guarantee of elegance.



© MAX MARA STUDIO

Straight cut coat with detachable belt
(Max Mara Studio spotted on breuninger.com)



© INSTAGRAM @OHMESS



© JOSEPH

This coat by Joseph is as cosy as it looks. It's crafted from a tactile alpaca-wool blend and finished with elegant, oversized lapels and a tonal tie belt (spotted on mytheresa.com)

| 4 The Puffer coat

The Puffer coat has not yet spoken its last word! Even though it has been very fashionable in recent years, it is still one of the most sought-after categories for the colder months. Whether long or short, plain, colourful or with glitter, the Puffer coat is still a statement piece that no wardrobe should be without.



© HERNO

The Meribel Puffer has an alpine aesthetic with a highly insulating down padding that wraps you in a shimmering velvet corduroy, giving you an elegant feel wherever you wear it (Herno spotted on harrods.com)



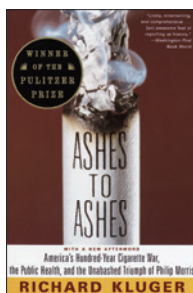
© INSTAGRAM @VOGUEANDCOFFEE



© MONCLER

This long 'Gaou' down jacket reinterprets Moncler's aesthetic with an unexpectedly iridescent nylon texture (moncler.com)

BOOKS



| Ashes to Ashes

America's Hundred-Year Cigarette War, the Public Health, and the Unabashed Triumph of Philip Morris

By Richard Kluger

Here for the first time, in a story full of the complexities and contradictions of human nature, all the strands of the historical process—financial, social, psychological, medical, political, and legal—are woven together in a riveting narrative. The key characters are the top corporate executives, public health investigators, and antismoking activists who have clashed ever more stridently as Americans debate whether smoking should be closely regulated as a major health menace.

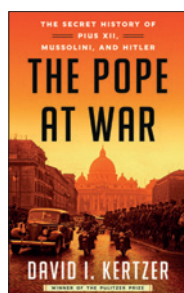
We see tobacco spread rapidly from its aboriginal sources in the New World 500 years ago, as it becomes increasingly viewed by some as sinful and some as alluring, and by government as a windfall source of tax revenue. With the arrival of the cigarette in the late-nineteenth century, smoking changes from a luxury and occasional pastime to an everyday—to some, indispensable—habit, aided markedly by the exuberance of the tobacco huskers.

This free-enterprise success saga grows shadowed, from the middle of this century, as science begins to understand the cigarette's toxicity. Ironically the more detailed and persuasive the findings by medical investigators, the more cigarette makers prosper by seeming to modify their product with filters and reduced dosages of tar and nicotine.

We see the tobacco manufacturers come under intensifying assault as a rogue industry for knowingly and callously plying their hazardous wares while insisting that the health charges against them (a) remain unproven, and (b) are universally understood, so smokers indulge at their own risk.

Among the eye-opening disclosures here: outrageous pseudo-scientific claims made for cigarettes throughout the '30s and '40s, and the story of how the tobacco industry and the National Cancer Institute spent millions to develop a "safer" cigarette that was never brought to market.

Dealing with an emotional subject that has generated more heat than light, this book is a dispassionate tour de force that examines the nature of the companies' culpability, the complicity of society as a whole, and the shaky moral ground claimed by smokers who are now demanding recompense.



| The Pope at War

The Secret History of Pius XII, Mussolini, and Hitler

By David I. Kertzer

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

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

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

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

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



| The splendid and the vile

A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz

By Erik Larson

On Winston Churchill's first day as prime minister, Adolf Hitler invaded Holland and Belgium. Poland and Czechoslovakia had already fallen, and the Dunkirk evacuation was just two weeks away. For the next twelve months, Hitler would wage a relentless bombing campaign, killing 45,000 Britons. It was up to Churchill to hold his country together and persuade President Franklin Roosevelt that Britain was a worthy ally—and willing to fight to the end.

In *The Splendid and the Vile*, Erik Larson shows, in cinematic detail, how Churchill taught the British people "the art of being fearless." It is a story of political brinkmanship, but it's also an intimate domestic drama, set against the backdrop of Churchill's prime-ministerial country home, Chequers; his wartime retreat, Ditchley, where he and his entourage go when the moon is brightest and the bombing threat is highest; and of course 10 Downing Street in London. Drawing on diaries, original archival documents, and once-secret intelligence reports—some released only recently—Larson provides a new lens on London's darkest year through the day-to-day experience of Churchill and his family: his wife, Clementine; their youngest daughter, Mary, who chafes against her parents' wartime protectiveness; their son, Randolph, and his beautiful, unhappy wife, Pamela; Pamela's illicit lover, a dashing American emissary; and the advisers in Churchill's "Secret Circle," to whom he turns in the hardest moments.

The Splendid and the Vile takes readers out of today's political dysfunction and back to a time of true leadership, when, in the face of unrelenting horror, Churchill's eloquence, courage, and perseverance bound a country, and a family, together.



| The Peacemaker

Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink

By William Inboden

A masterful account of how Ronald Reagan and his national security team confronted the Soviets, reduced the nuclear threat, won the Cold War, and supported the spread of freedom around the world.

With decades of hindsight, the peaceful end of the Cold War seems a foregone conclusion. But in the early 1980s, most experts believed the Soviet Union was strong, stable, and would last into the next century. Ronald Reagan entered the White House with no certainty of what would happen next, only an overriding faith in democracy and an abiding belief that Soviet communism—and the threat of nuclear war—must end.

The Peacemaker reveals how Reagan's White House waged the Cold War while managing multiple crises around the globe. From the emergence of global terrorism, wars in the Middle East, the rise of Japan, and the awakening of China to proxy conflicts in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, Reagan's team oversaw the worldwide expansion of democracy, globalization, free trade, and the information revolution. Yet no issue was greater than the Cold War standoff with the Soviet Union. As president, Reagan remade the four-decades-old policy of containment and challenged the Soviets in an arms race and ideological contest that pushed them toward economic and political collapse, all while extending an olive branch of diplomacy as he sought a peaceful end to the conflict.

Reagan's revolving team included Secretaries of State Al Haig and George Shultz; Secretaries of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Frank Carlucci; National Security Advisors Bill Clark, John Poindexter, and Bud McFarlane; Chief of Staff James Baker; CIA Director Bill Casey; and United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. Talented and devoted to their president, they were often at odds with one another as rivalries and backstabbing led to missteps and crises. But over the course of the presidency, Reagan and his team still developed the strategies that brought about the Cold War's peaceful conclusion and remade the world.



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