

EUROPE DIPLOMATIC

MAGAZINE



EMMANUEL
MACRON'S POWER
PLAY

**Controversial
maneuvers
and their
impact**



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Nikola Hendrickx

CONTROVERSIAL CHESS MOVE

**President Macron's
political maneuvers
under scrutiny**



Brigitte Macron and
Emmanuel Macron

Anything that French President Emmanuel Macron does seems to feed the rumour mill about his behaviour. It doesn't have to make much sense as a signal to his friends and enemies, but it will undoubtedly be interpreted that way. During a television interview in March, for instance, after his watch had caused a noise by catching on the table, he removed it. It seems like a very sensible move. It was, as you'd expect, an expensive watch (his critics are still arguing over just how expensive) and it has been suggested that he removed it because the interview was about the financial inequalities of the French population and he thought the sight of an expensive watch would antagonise his enemies and the French people at large. People do get odd ideas. I think most French people would have been more surprised to see their president wearing a cheap watch. I expect he's got more than one anyway. But his ownership or otherwise of personal timepieces is hardly relevant to the wider picture and is unlikely to count in international affairs.

Macron's popularity is certainly in some doubt. It's been argued that it relies more on public antipathy towards his far-right rival, Marine Le Pen, than it does on any affection for Macron himself, and that his most recent election win was down to the general dislike of Le Pen. On the face of it, he would be unlikely to win another election, although we'll never know because France's constitution restricts him to two consecutive terms of office. There's nothing theoretically to stop him from choosing to run for a third term but not until 2032, and that's still a long way away. His current term of office must end in 2027.



Marine Le Pen

Meanwhile, Macron is trying to redraw France's relationship with its former African colonies. It's a sensible move, given that he wants them not only to succeed politically and economically but he also wants them to remain on friendly terms with their former colonial masters. That looks increasingly unlikely, however. Back in March, on a visit to Kinshasa, Macron made it plain that he sees the African countries as equal partners with France. He is busily trying to dispel France's image in much of Africa as an arrogant former colonial power. That is not the image Macron wants to disseminate as he visits African countries that have long historical French links, some of them not very happy ones. Earlier this year, Macron shared his vision of renewing France's relations with African countries based more firmly on equality. Despite

that, however, France's long history of colonialism has left its mark, and when Macron met the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Felix Tshisekedi, there were a number of small-scale protests organised that demonstrated an increasingly anti-French sentiment. Macron may favour closer links between France and her former colonies, but it doesn't seem to be a sentiment that's reciprocated.



French President Emmanuel Macron and Democratic Republic of Congo President Felix Tshisekedi

In the case of the Central African Republic, France seems to have lost out to Russia's brutal Wagner Group of mercenaries. Indeed, it's been said that Macron abandoned the country to the Russian mercenaries deliberately, although as far as I know nobody has suggested a reason for doing so. The Republic itself is one of the world's poorest countries, its 5.5-million inhabitants ranking 188th out of the 191 listed by the Human Development Index as being impoverished.

Wagner Group figure Dimitri Sytii is now listed by the EU for sanctions because of the brutal acts he has organised and overseen. Russia claims he was the victim of a parcel bomb in the capital of the CAR, Bangui, in which he suffered serious injuries. The Russians blamed France or Washington. He was later transferred to a hospital in Russia. That may sound kind and caring, but the Wagner Group stands accused of serious human rights abuses, including torture and "extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and killings", according to the UN. Those are not the sorts of things you'd like to have on your CV.

You will remember reports from Ukraine of Wagner Group soldiers boasting of having machine-gunned prisoners of war or of stranding them in a pit into which the Wagner troops threw hand grenades. They didn't want the responsibility of having prisoners of war to look after. "We would torture soldiers, too," the man boasted, "there weren't any rules." That may explain why nobody sane would choose to be governed or controlled by members of the Wagner Group, with their obscene love of excessive violence.

The Key to the Piggy Bank

We must recall, however, that it was Macron's withdrawal from Africa that left the door open for the Wagner Group, and he must surely have known that they are notoriously brutal thugs. Sytii is also believed by the EU and by Washington to be the founder of a company called Lobaye Invest, dealing in mineral wealth mined in Africa, especially gold and diamonds. The company is subject to sanctions imposed by the EU and the US. Of course, very large sums of money are involved, so the Wagner Group does rather well for itself. In 2017, Russia informed the UN that it would like to send weapons to the CAR, which was under an arms embargo at the time. The UN agreed and Russia sent not only weapons but also advisors, sealed defence agreements, a political alliance and concessions on the gold and diamonds markets. It was a model that it can (and certainly will) export to other troubled countries. A large number of Wagner Group fighters have been killed but the Group itself has done quite well out of it; according to a diplomatic cable published by Politico, the CAR's mines could provide the Wagner Group with some \$1-billion (€0.9-billion).

Macron spent 72 hours on a whistle-stop trip around Gabon, Angola, Congo-Brazzaville and the Democratic Republic of Congo in a bid to improve France's image there, but it seems unlikely to have made much difference. No other European leader has visited Africa as frequently as Macron has as he struggles to put France's colonial past behind him, but it's still there, souring relations. History cannot simply be wiped out or erased. What happened stays happened, no matter what and it's always possible that African leaders will wake up to the damage the Wagner Group is doing. The fact that the group is upsetting the former colonial powers may be enough for them. However, one thing that can be said is that no other leader of a former colonial power has done more to build working modern relations

with the countries it had colonised than Macron for France. The Wagner Group's approach is somewhat more direct. For example, one of the Wagner Group's veterans in Africa is accused of organising the murders of three Russian journalists in 2018, as well as Vitalii Perfilev, a security advisor for Faustin-Archange Touadéra, President of the CAR. Under the influence of the Wagner Group, the CAR has become a vital hub of Russian influence, both economically and militarily. So what about that parcel bomb? It also contained a USB stick which exploded when it was connected to a computer, and that led to the Wagner Group blaming France or else the United States, although it was sent from Togo – which is a lovely country, by the way, populated by lovely people – by a man using a fake Spanish identity card.



President of the CAR, Faustin-Archange Touadéra



Macron seems determined to develop good relations, even with countries that had been colonised by other European powers. For example, he has visited a nightclub in Lagos known as the New Afrika Shrine, owned by an activist who is the son of a musician. In addition to Nigeria, he has also called in at Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Angola and in each of them he expressed a wish to establish closer relations with France without the shadow of colonialism hanging over it. He probably still has more chance of persuading immigrants of his good intentions than would be the case for the UK. Meanwhile, however, people are being forced to flee Sudan because of a vicious internecine war between two entities: the regular Sudanese army and the so-called Rapid Support Forces. (RSF) Foreign nationals and locals are dying in what has become a fire-fight between the two. Some governments are providing flights out of Khartoum, the capital, and some are not. The trouble erupted after a coup in 2021, when the country was run by a council of generals. Sadly, they fell out. One of them, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, heads the official armed forces, but he has fallen out with his deputy, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti. They

have disagreed on the best direction for the country and how to meld the RSF into the real army as well as who would then lead it.



General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo aka Hemeti (left), and General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan

Sudan has always been a source of conflict : back in the 1880s, General Charles Gordon found himself up against the Mahdi – or at least Muhammad Ahmad, who claimed to be the Mahdi, a figure from Islamic belief who is expected to appear at the end of time for a final battle. The word actually means “the Guided”, which assumes a heavenly direction under heavenly guidance. Both men were very devout and religious. They never actually met, although Gordon of Khartoum became a hero figure in British military history. He used deception to defend Khartoum including the use of dummies to look like soldiers guarding the walls of Khartoum and set up a private telegraph service to keep the Governor informed because his enemies had sabotaged the original one. Had they met, Gordon and the Mahdi would have had a lot to talk about. Britain’s more recent history in Africa and its various colonies is not so favourable

How to become really unpopular

To give a potted account of what the UK did, we must go back to 1948, when thousands of people from the Caribbean islands sailed for Britain aboard the ship called the Empire Windrush. They arrived with a legal right to live and work in Great Britain permanently, but the government of the time failed, first of all, to provide legal documentation stating those rights and then, in 2010, the government back then deliberately destroyed the landing cards that could have proved the truth of their stories. Instead, the UK government instigated what it called its “hostile environment policy” in a bid to make the Windrush people feel so unwelcome that

they might go home (even if they had been living in the UK for more than 60 years and had more than earned the right to call Britain “home”). Macron doesn’t have that particular hill to climb, but colonialism still leaves a stigma that’s hard to overcome. In the newspaper *The New European*, journalist Paul Mason refers to “the vindictive ecstasy of Suella Braverman (the Home Secretary)’s theatre of cruelty.” Strong words but perhaps not really very way surprising, given the circumstances. As Mason points out, the ruling Conservative Party purged its liberal wing during the Brexit crisis. Now the government cannot blame Brussels when things go wrong. Macron still can but doesn’t, of course. He should be pleased; Mason predicts that Braverman, having weaponised hate, will herself be sacrificed by her ruthless political colleagues.

Anti-French sentiment still runs quite high in some of the former colonies, of course. Macron has stated that France must demonstrate “a profound humility” in Africa, at the same time reducing its military presence around the continent. According to a report aired on France 24: “France will end its practice of hosting regular military bases in Africa and will instead establish ‘academies’ to be co-run by French and African armies. He said there would be a notable fall in French military personnel but an increase in efforts to provide training and equipment.” Macron has said he’s “proud” of France’s record in Africa as it gradually disentangles itself, but in the Sahel, for instance, there has been a worrying rise in attacks by extreme Islamic groups. The killings they have carried out have soared by around 50% in the past year. They were clearly not the work of the Mahdi.



Demonstration in Bamako, Mali against the French military intervention Serval

But it’s not only Russia that is starting to dominate the political scene in Africa. China is important, too. It was, after all, partly the newly-free countries of Africa – Europe’s former colonies – that voted with Mao at the UN to have Beijing replace Taiwan in the organisation to represent Chinese interests. Macron has been keen to establish a dialogue with Beijing because he can see relations between China and the West deteriorating, which would not be good for the EU (it wouldn’t be very good for China, either). Macron would also like to see China taking a more positive stance over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. A spokesperson at the Élysée Palace told a press conference, just before Macron’s departure for his visit to China, that: “China is the only country in the world capable of having an immediate and radical impact on the conflict, in one direction or the other.” Don’t hold your breath, would be my advice. It may be some little while before we can truly assess the impact of Macron’s visit.

I Russia's silly conditions

There's plenty in this world in 2023 today that should make a lot of people ashamed, although it seems not to. In February 2022, Macron told the UN General Assembly that Russia is guilty of imperialism (or attempting it) by its illegal attack with the clear intention of annexing Ukraine. He recalled that "Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council, through an act of aggression and invasion and annexation, broke our collective security ... when it deliberately violated the UN Charter and the principle of sovereign equality of states." I don't suppose Putin will lose much sleep over the accusation, true though it undoubtedly is. "The longer this war goes on," Macron said, "the more it threatens Europe and the world. It could lead to greater conflict where security and sovereignty no longer depend on the strength of alliances, but on the strength of armed groups... and subjugation of others." In other words, whoever owns the biggest guns will win. He added: "What we have seen is a return to the age of imperialism. France rejects this and will steadfastly search for peace." Macron has tried to instigate peace talks with Russia, but Putin's conditions are not acceptable, probably to anyone outside the Kremlin. He has basically said he's willing to talk peace as long as it's universally acknowledged that he has won the war and that Ukraine is now his. He hasn't, of course, and it isn't. Macron completely (and justifiably) rejects Putin's ludicrous demands, but he also rejects neutrality on the invasion by some of his allies "They are wrong," he stated bluntly. "They are making an historic error." President Macron stated: "Those who are keeping silent today are, in a way, complicit with the cause of a new imperialism.... that is trampling the current order."

Macron suggested that NATO had become, as he put it, "brain dead", claiming that the commitment to the Alliance by the United States is weakening. That was his opinion as he expressed it to the Wall Street Journal aboard a presidential jet. To be honest, to call NATO "brain dead" seems just a little strong. There is still a pulse, I think. He pointed out to The Economist newspaper that the Alliance is supposed to ensure that if any one member state finds itself under attack, all the other member states will join in defending it. Macron said he

was doubtful that Washington would abide by that principle and he wants all the NATO members to be "more assertive", developing their own defence capabilities in order to "secure peace" in a region still reeling from Putin's violence in Ukraine. He drew criticism from other member states for his comments, which seemed more designed to cause uproar than effective change.



Russian mercenaries providing security for the convoy of President Touadéra

Certainly, the Wagner Group's operation would seem to be carefully run, if somewhat ruthless, and it oversees the export of CAR gold and diamonds mainly through the Cameroonian port of Douala. Effectively, it would seem that the Wagner Group, with Putin's blessing, has taken over the role that was once France's. The organisation running the exports is called Diamville, which the EU believes to be a cover company for the Wagner Group. The Russians are getting everywhere but some outside observers note that with Putin constantly changing his excuse for attacking Ukraine that other countries will start to see through him rather more readily. You will recall that he claimed he had launched his "special military operation" to de-Nazify Ukraine (despite its lack of Nazis). He now says it was because Ukraine was poised to join NATO, an organisation that despite Macron's doubts and concerns, Putin still views as his enemy, whether it's "brain dead" or not, in Macron's strange assessment. But there was no talk of Ukraine joining the alliance until after Russia's invasion and it has only now applied to join as a defence against Putin's aggression. Putin appears to have got his timetable wrong. If Macron's true intention was to goad France's fellow-NATO members into taking a tougher stance, then it may be that Putin has persuaded them to do that, if only by shouting abuse and looking aggressive. Macron would certainly like to see a more assertive and self-assured NATO, less reliant on Washington in the event of a need for action.



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and French President Emmanuel Macron



Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) and French President Emmanuel Macron in the Kremlin, Moscow on February 7, 2022

Law and disorder

As you know (because it's in the news every day) Macron is not universally popular in France. Even one of his favourite restaurants has been attacked by protestors, simply because he likes to eat there. Riot police had to form a barricade around La Rotonde bistro, which was briefly set on fire. It's a very fine restaurant and its owners and customers certainly never deserved that. In fact, Macron has signed his new pension age into law anyway, after twelve days of street protests. The Nupes political alliance, a left-wing group, was one of several that lodged an appeal with the court over the reforms. Its leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who is officially a Socialist but well to the left of the party, said the "fight" would continue. Elsewhere in Europe, many are wondering why Macron's plan to raise the pension age by just two years – it will still be lower than in most other European countries – has made the French population so angry. After all, French men retire two years earlier than the European average and French women one year earlier. The level of fury and destructiveness is hard to comprehend. The French public, though, are clearly furious at Macron for tampering with their very generous system for people whose working life is coming to an end. They are exceptionally

proud that French pensioners are less likely to be forced to live in poverty than those in other European states. Raising the retirement age by so little would appear to outsiders as a modest reform that will cause no poverty. The French people would clearly dispute that.

Much later in the ongoing crisis, Macron told the newspaper *Le Parisien* that he should have done more to tackle the economic problems of the French people. He admitted that he should have been "more involved" and that he now wants "to re-engage in the public debate". He told the newspaper: "Perhaps the mistake was not to be present enough, to give consistency and carry this reform myself." He's certainly not very popular with the French people, attracting "boos" from the crowds during a walkabout in the Alsace. Macron said he had given himself a hundred days to "revive his mandate".

That won't be easy: even by his own calculation, the immediate economic future looks difficult, despite allowing for the fact that it's impossible for a politician to please everyone. He has introduced the Service National Universel (SNU) and wants to ramp it up, to involve more and larger territories, but without making it all compulsory everywhere at once, which may well be impossible to achieve anyway. It will, however, be compulsory with the aim of "conveying French values" for 16 to 25-year-olds. It involves one month of voluntary service, although he admits to there being a "logistical challenge" in introducing the scheme. Being both optional and compulsory at the same time will be a tricky thing to manage. On the economic front, he wants to abolish the housing tax and the television licence as well as proposing reductions on the first tranches of income tax amounting to more than €4-billion. Macron told the media that he wants working to pay better, putting the onus on employers to bring that about.



Anti-Macron demonstration

France's Pensions Advisory Council has said that the figures don't support claims that pensions spending is "out of control", and the suspicion is that Macron's plan is to prioritise tax cuts for businesses as he struggles to get France's national deficit below the 3% target set by the EU. In any case, the President seems to have lost the support of the people, two thirds of whom are said to be on the side of the protestors, with only 28% supporting Macron. Macron may be hoping that the violence and destruction being waged by the protestors may persuade more moderate sections of society to support him and abandon the protest, but there are no signs of that happening. In fact, there are signs – worrying for Macron – that the protest is intensifying and spreading more widely. The unpopular reform was passed without a vote, which has further stoked the fury of the crowds filling the streets.



France's Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne

France's Prime Minister, Elisabeth Borne, faced protestors when she visited a Paris supermarket and the angry chants drowned out her words. She remained remarkably calm. "We're in a democracy, so everyone can express themselves," she said to the TV news station BFM TV. "My priority is to bring calm", she said, "and to address concrete concerns". She then went into the store to discuss anti-inflation measures. Protests or not, the business of running the country continues, of course. The Constitutional Council approved the rise in the pension age but that clearly isn't the end of the matter. The French have always been inclined towards highly visible shows of strength when protesting. There has been a lot of destruction, and public anger was further heightened by the government's decision to use special powers that allowed it to by-pass a vote on the issue. That sort of behaviour never goes down well with the public.

Macron has stated that he has "heard the anger" (he could hardly miss it, with crowds shouting at him in the streets all the time) but insists his controversial measures are needed "to guarantee everyone's pension". Some of the protestors have argued that the measures would not be necessary if Macron would increase taxes on the wealthy and on employers instead. Macron has praised the calm and restrained ways in which most people have demonstrated their opposition to his plans. "Nobody, and especially not me, can remain deaf to this demand for social justice and for our democratic life to be renovated", he said. His only regret, he has said, is that he has failed to convince the wider public that the reforms are necessary.

Dearer and dearer (but not clearer and clearer)

What most worries those approaching retirement age in France is the speed with which prices are rising. They hear their pensions simply won't be enough to pay for the essentials of life. As with most political problems, at the end of the day it all comes down to money. In fact, the inflation rate in France has come down slightly, to reach a 6-month low of 5.7% in March, down from 6.3% the previous month. Prices for such goods as petrol have also come down, although consumer prices rose by 0.9% in March, following a 1% rise in February. The harmonized annual inflation rate fell to 6.7% after a record high of 7.3% in February. The consumer price index in January for the EU as a whole stood at 10%, which is much better than the rate in Hungary, for instance, which reached 26.2%, with Latvia not far behind at 21.4%. The Hungarians and Latvians



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met French President Emmanuel Macron at the G7 summit in Hiroshima where the French president called on the world not to be satisfied with a possible ceasefire between Kyiv and Moscow. He said « It would be a mistake for all of us, because experience has taught us that a frozen conflict will be a war for tomorrow »

would appear, of the surface, to have much more to complain about. Inflation rates are lower in the Euro area – the area using the shared currency – than in the EU as a whole.

Macron, who, as I wrote earlier in this article, cannot run for office again, or at least not until 2032, insists that the changes he is bringing in – which were part of his second-term manifesto – are crucial and worth the sacrifice of his already-diminished popularity. He won't be getting many Valentine cards next February at this rate. As pointed out earlier, French men retire two years earlier than the EU average, and French women a year earlier. Meanwhile, the cost of living index for Europe shows an inexorable climb. According to the extremely useful Expatistan Cost of Living Index in Europe, Zurich is the most expensive city. The index takes Prague as its base city, its "reference city", with a cost of living index of 100 (Bologna in Italy gets the same score). Zurich gets a price index of 210, as does Geneva. The cheapest place on the table is Irkutsk in Russia, scoring just 38. But who would choose to live there? Paris comes in at 149, one point below Oslo in Norway. It's a fascinating table and well worth a visit.

The French people reject tax increases as an alternative model, saying that France already has an unusually high tax burden (one of the highest in Europe, in fact), and they argue that demographic changes make some kind of change inevitable: while there were 2.1 workers for each retiree in 2000, the ratio was 1.7 in 2020 and is expected to reach 1.2 by 2070. The consumer price index in January for the EU as a whole stood at 10%. The biggest price rises seem to have been in food, alcohol and tobacco. One can certainly give up alcohol and tobacco but it's not so easy to give up food.

In a televised address to the nation, Macron recently told the people: "We are a people who intend to control and choose our destiny, who do not want to depend on anyone, neither on the

forces of speculation, nor on foreign powers, nor on wills other than our own, and we are right." All very laudable sentiments, but it's an argument that doesn't really get him off the hook over his pension reforms, which he'd intended since his election to the Presidency in 2022 but which he'd put off, knowing they'd be unpopular. How right he was! His televised speech, though, is further evidence of his concern at the thought that France could become the "lapdog" of a powerful force, such as the United States. He touted the idea in an interview in early April with Politico and with the French daily newspaper, Les Echos. He managed to ruffle feathers (perhaps especially in Washington) by saying that France must avoid becoming a "follower" of the United States. "One cannot declare its independence: it is built through ambitions, efforts at the national and European level, in terms of knowledge, research, attractiveness, technology, industry, defence. And it is financed collectively through work," he said. In fact, as you may have noticed, it was quite a rambling sort of speech and not the most coherent on record. He also said that European and French independence is what will, as he put it, "allow us to obtain more justice". But Macron pushed the changes through without a vote, and it will take Prime Minister Borne a lot of clever words to reassure the French people that Macron is really a democrat with the will of the people at his heart. It's not a job I'd fancy.

So, there we have it: a government supposedly committed to "fiscal discipline", rejecting (it would appear) foreign powers and committing to labour, law, justice and "progress" in the months ahead. I wouldn't want Elisabeth Borne's job in that period. I would also put a small bet on Macron not achieving re-election even in 2032. The French people have long memories. But as former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson said, back in 1954: "a week is a long time in politics", so nine years may seem like an age but will probably go by in a flash. Who knows? He may even get back into the Élysée Palace in 2032 after all. On balance, though, I think that's fairly unlikely. In the meantime, however, he has sought to regain control of the political process following months of protests against his proposed reforms of the pension system by promising improvements to working conditions across the country. He also said that now is the time for greater unity. I'm not sure he'll get it.

Jim Gibbons

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The Elysee Palace in Paris

NEWS IN BRIEF

AI ACT: A STEP CLOSER TO THE FIRST RULES ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

- Once approved, they will be the world's first rules on Artificial Intelligence
- MEPs include bans on biometric surveillance, emotion recognition, predictive policing AI systems
- Tailor-made regimes for general-purpose AI and foundation models like GPT
- The right to make complaints about AI systems

To ensure a human-centric and ethical development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Europe, MEPs endorsed new transparency and risk-management rules for AI systems.

The Internal Market Committee and the Civil Liberties Committee adopted a draft negotiating mandate on the first ever rules for Artificial Intelligence with 84 votes in favour, 7 against and 12 abstentions. In their amendments to the Commission's proposal, MEPs aim to ensure that AI systems are overseen by people, are safe, transparent, traceable, non-discriminatory, and environmentally friendly. They also want to have a uniform definition for AI designed to be technology-neutral, so that it can apply to the AI systems of today and tomorrow.



Risk based approach to AI - Prohibited AI practices

The rules follow a risk-based approach and establish obligations for providers and users depending on the level of risk the AI can generate. AI systems with an unacceptable level of risk to people's safety would be strictly prohibited, including systems that deploy subliminal or purposefully manipulative techniques, exploit people's vulnerabilities or are used for social scoring (classifying people based on their social behaviour, socio-economic status, personal characteristics)

MEPs substantially amended the list to include bans on intrusive and discriminatory uses of AI systems such as:

- "Real-time" remote biometric identification systems in publicly accessible spaces;

- "Post" remote biometric identification systems, with the only exception of law enforcement for the prosecution of serious crimes and only after judicial authorization;
- Biometric categorisation systems using sensitive characteristics (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, citizenship status, religion, political orientation);
- Predictive policing systems (based on profiling, location or past criminal behaviour);
- Emotion recognition systems in law enforcement, border management, workplace, and educational institutions; and
- Indiscriminate scraping of biometric data from social media or CCTV footage to create facial recognition databases (violating human rights and right to privacy).

High-risk AI

MEPs expanded the classification of high-risk areas to include harm to people's health, safety, fundamental rights or the environment. They also added AI systems to influence voters in political campaigns and in recommender systems used by social media platforms (with more than 45 million users under the Digital Services Act) to the high-risk list.

General-purpose AI - transparency measures

MEPs included obligations for providers of foundation models - a new and fast evolving development in the field of AI - who would have to guarantee robust protection of fundamental rights, health and safety and the environment, democracy and rule of law. They would need to assess and mitigate risks, comply with design, information and environmental requirements and register in the EU database.

Generative foundation models, like GPT, would have to comply with additional transparency requirements, like disclosing that the content was generated by AI, designing the model to prevent it from generating illegal content and publishing summaries of copyrighted data used for training.

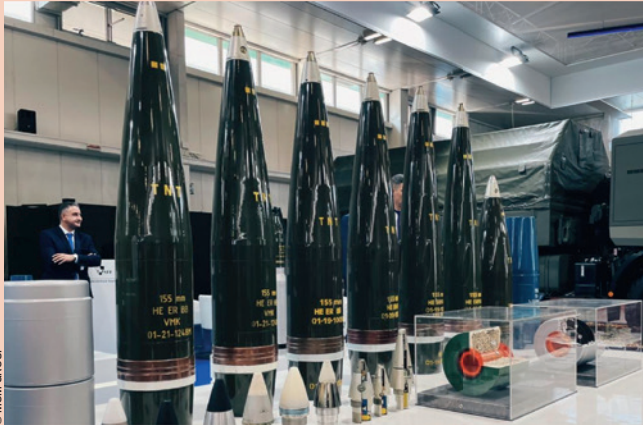
Supporting innovation and protecting citizens' rights

To boost AI innovation, MEPs added exemptions to these rules for research activities and AI components provided under open-source licenses. The new law promotes regulatory sandboxes, or controlled environments, established by public authorities to test AI before its deployment.

MEPs want to boost citizens' right to file complaints about AI systems and receive explanations of decisions based on high-risk AI systems that significantly impact their rights. MEPs also reformed the role of the EU AI Office, which would be tasked with monitoring how the AI rulebook is implemented.

Before negotiations with the Council on the final form of the law can begin, this draft negotiating mandate needs to be endorsed by the whole Parliament.

DEFENCE: €500 MILLION AND NEW MEASURES TO URGENTLY BOOST EU DEFENCE INDUSTRY CAPACITIES IN AMMUNITION PRODUCTION



© MSM GROUP

55-mm projectiles by the Slovenian company MSM GROUP

The European Commission has adopted the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), a proposal for a Regulation to support the European Union's industry in ramping-up its production capacities in ammunition and missiles.

The Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) is a direct response to the Council's call to urgently deliver ammunition, and if requested missiles, to Ukraine and to help Member States refill their stocks by introducing targeted measures. The Act aims at ensuring that the EU can ramp up its production capacity.

This Regulation aims at strengthening the responsiveness and ability of the EU defence industry to ensure the timely supply of ammunition and missiles in Europe. The framework laid down by this new Regulation will include:

- a mechanism to map, monitor and better anticipate the existence of bottlenecks in the supply chains.
- an instrument to financially support the reinforcement of the European Union's industrial production capacities.
- the introduction of a temporary regulatory framework to address the ammunition supply crisis.

Identify, monitor, and anticipate bottlenecks and shortages in the supply chains.

This Regulation will ensure the necessary information gathering at EU level and enable the Commission and Member States to anticipate shortages affecting the security of the supply of ammunition and missiles.

To this end, the Commission will conduct a mapping exercise to identify and continuously monitor the availability of ammunition and missiles as well as their components and their corresponding inputs. This exercise will better inform the use of financial support and regulatory measures.

Provide financial support to produce more and faster.

The proposed Regulation also includes measures to support the industrial reinforcement throughout the supply chains of ammunition and missiles in the EU. Financial support will

be provided in the form of grants to various types of actions contributing to the efforts of the European defence industry to increase their production capacities and tackle identified bottlenecks.

Next Steps

Responding to the urgency of the situation, within 5 weeks of the agreement on the three-track approach in the Council of the European Union, the Commission has adopted the proposal for a Regulation as a matter of high priority and will transmit it to the co-legislators. The Commission counts on the swiftest adoption possible in order to be able to initiate support for a ramp-up of the EU's defence industry production capacities of ammunition and missiles.

DEEPENING THE DEFENSE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE U.S. AND SPAIN

The U.S. Ambassador to Spain, Julissa Reynoso, and the Spanish Defense Minister, Margarita Robles, signed an agreement at the Spanish Ministry of Defense in Madrid, Spain, to deepen cooperation within the framework of the Defense Cooperation Agreement between U.S. and Spain on May 8, 2023. As President Biden had promised during his June 2022 bilateral meeting with Spanish President Pedro Sánchez, this agreement increases the deployment with two U.S. Navy destroyers permanently based at the Rota Naval Base.

The destroyers will join four others already stationed on Rota - the only U.S. destroyers homeported in Europe. Operating from Spain, these vessels are uniquely positioned to make contributions to collective defense, with daily operations in various missions including ballistic missile defense and anti-aircraft warfare.

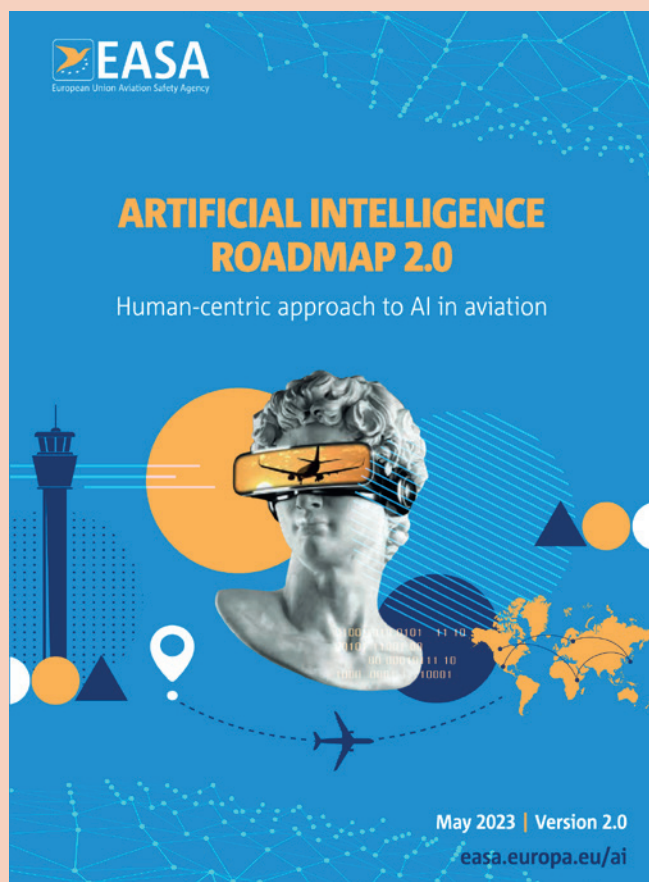
"Our Defense Cooperation Agreement is more than a security document, it is the reflection of a relationship based on shared beliefs, that democracy is the best system of government, that anyone in any part of the world can enjoy the guarantees and promises that human rights grant, and that the international order based on law is the best guarantee of peace and security," said Reynoso.



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The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Roosevelt at the Naval Station Rota, Spain

EASA ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ROADMAP 2.0 PUBLISHED



A human-centric approach to AI in aviation

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has released its AI Roadmap 2.0, which aims at taking the human-centric approach to the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in aviation one step further. (<https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/document-library/general-publications/easa-artificial-intelligence-roadmap-20>)

The updated roadmap expands upon the initial proposal that was published in February 2020, drawing upon the experience gained from concrete AI use cases involving stakeholders from the aviation industry, academia, and research centres.

The document provides a comprehensive plan for the safe and trustworthy integration of AI in aviation, with a focus on safety, security, AI assurance, human-factors and ethical considerations.

The development of the EASA AI Roadmap is part of the Agency's ongoing efforts to promote the safe integration of new and emerging technologies in aviation.

SWEDEN INTENDS TO SEND ESA ASTRONAUT TO THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION

At the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs, USA, on 18 April, ESA signed a letter of intent with the Swedish National Space Agency to send an ESA astronaut to visit the International Space Station on an Axiom mission.

The flight and the name of the astronauts assigned to

the mission will need to be approved by the partners of the International Space Station as well as the commercial flight operator Axiom.

ESA's Director General Josef Aschbacher said after signing the letter of intent, "The ESA astronaut policy was developed for exactly these opportunities, flying on commercial flights in partnership as we transition Europe's access to space and diversify the space market.

"I hope to see more Europeans working inside ESA's Columbus laboratory on the International Space Station soon."

The intent is to send an ESA astronaut who would fly with Axiom as a project astronaut and start training at ESA's European Astronaut Centre (EAC) in Cologne, for the flight, with an ambitious scientific and educational programme for their 10-day stay aboard the Space Station developed by ESA and the Swedish National Space Agency.

ESA would be the crew provider for this mission and will sign an agreement with Axiom to define and implement the mission and will prepare all the operational support needed for such a flight. The Swedish National Space Agency will negotiate directly with Axiom for the flight.

In November last year ESA announced Career and Reserve astronauts as well as an astronaut with a physical disability at the ESA Council at Ministerial Level. ESA's five Career astronauts started training at EAC last month.

The Swedish National Space Agency represents Sweden in ESA and the majority of the Swedish space budget is invested in ESA programmes. Being a member of ESA provides Swedish scientists and industry access to space technology advanced international space projects.

ESA, the Swedish National Space Agency, and the government of Sweden will host a press event with more details on the mission and assignment at a later date once the astronaut is confirmed by the Space Station partners and Axiom.



The Columbus Laboratory

The Columbus laboratory is Europe's largest single contribution to the International Space Station. Permanently attached to the Harmony module, this pressurised laboratory allows researchers on the ground, aided by the Station's crew, to conduct a wide variety of research in a weightless environment. Experiments in space science, Earth observation and technology can also be conducted outside the module, thanks to four exterior mounting platforms that are exposed to the vacuum of space.

MORE THAN 2,000 CANS OF MILLER HIGH LIFE SMASHED BY BELGIAN CUSTOMS

Miller High Life has marketed itself as the “Champagne of Beers” for many years.

The American brewery’s century-old motto is allegedly in violation of the French government’s protected “Champagne” mark of origin, according to the Comité Champagne, which represents the French growers of the well-known sparkling wine. The Comité Champagne has asked for the destruction of a shipment of 2,352 cans.



© CHAMPAGNE.FR

Given that the items did not comply with the designation of origin specified by European Regulation 1308/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of December 17, 2013, on the shared organisation of markets for agriculture-related goods.

The package, which was bound for Germany, was intercepted by customs officials at the Belgian port of Antwerp.

The shipment was already on its way to Germany when it was discovered that its packaging, which contains their well-known “Champagne of Beers” phrase, violates France’s PDO for Champagne. Kristian Vanderwaeren, general administrator of the Belgian General Administration for Customs and Excise, stated that his organisation performs thousands of checks on designations of regulated origin each year.

“We also consult each other on the decision to destroy these goods and on the manner in which we have them destroyed if a counterfeit is proven, as is the case here.”

“This destruction is the result of a fruitful partnership between Belgian customs authorities and the Comité Champagne,” said Charles Goemaere, managing director of the Comité Champagne. It reaffirms the value that the European Union places on designations of origin and honours the producers of Champagne for their tenacity in defending their designation.



© MILLER HIGH LIFE

A Mille beer bottle with the Champagne of Beers label

COUNCIL OF EUROPE-ECPAT OVERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR MORE RESOURCES TO TACKLE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION IN MOLDOVA

The Republic of Moldova needs to devote more resources to identifying and supporting victims of child sexual exploitation, including from the most vulnerable groups, according to a joint Council of Europe and ECPAT international country overview.

The overview says that the country’s socio-economic situation and high migration rates have left many children vulnerable to violence, neglect, and exploitation. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has added further strain to the Moldovan child protection system, with refugee children facing heightened risks of trafficking and exploitation.

Although comprehensive criminal legislation exists and a specialised commission has recently been approved, a number of issues still need to be addressed. Reporting of sexual offences remains low and child-friendly justice procedures would benefit from further improvement. There has been a significant increase in sexual abuse and exploitation of children via technology: out of the 1,745 calls made in the first half of 2021 to the online platform that provides counselling to children who experienced online sexual abuse, 89% (1,554) of the calls were from children, with most referring to sexual extortion. Traditional norms and beliefs in the country contribute to the lack of awareness around gender-based violence among the country’s child population.



© UNICEF MOLDOVA

Suggestions for improvement include:

- Closing existing loopholes, such as the provision that requires offenders who benefit from sexual services provided by children to know for certain that the child is below 18.
- Enhancing protection for children in the context of travel and tourism.
- Establishing a single entity responsible for coordinating all online child safety efforts.
- Integrating education on the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation into the core curriculum rather than offering it as an optional subject.
- Improving access to justice for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, with a focus on simplifying legal procedures and increasing child-friendly practices within the justice sector.
- Putting in place mechanisms to involve children taking into account their evolving capacity.

FIRST-IN-HUMAN TRIAL OF ORAL DRUG TO REMOVE RADIOACTIVE CONTAMINATION BEGINS

NIH-Funded Clinical Trial Will Determine Safety, Tolerability of Experimental Drug



International ionizing radiation warning symbol

A first-in-human clinical trial of an experimental oral drug for removing radioactive contaminants from inside the body has begun. The trial is testing the safety, tolerability and processing in the body of escalating doses of the investigational drug product HOPO 14-1 in healthy adults. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health, is funding the Phase 1 trial, which is sponsored and conducted by SRI International of Menlo Park, California.

Internal radioactive contamination occurs when radioactive elements are absorbed through wounded skin, inhaled or ingested. This could happen as the result of a nuclear power plant accident or the detonation of a “dirty bomb” or nuclear weapon. As the atoms of radioactive elements decay, they emit ionizing radiation, which can damage DNA, tissues and organs. One method for reducing the risk of this damage is to remove the radioactive elements from the body as soon as possible after contamination occurs.

The Food and Drug Administration has approved two products for removing internal radioactive contamination. These drugs, both based on diethylenetriamine pentaacetate (DTPA), are administered intravenously by a healthcare provider and can remove three radioactive elements: plutonium, americium, and curium.

In contrast, HOPO 14-1 has been formulated as an oral capsule, which would be easier than an intravenous drug to stockpile and to deploy and administer during an emergency. Preclinical research has shown that HOPO 14-1 can effectively remove many radioactive contaminants, including uranium and neptunium in addition to plutonium, americium and curium. These studies also have found that HOPO 14-1 is up to 100 times more effective than DTPA at binding and removing these radioactive elements.

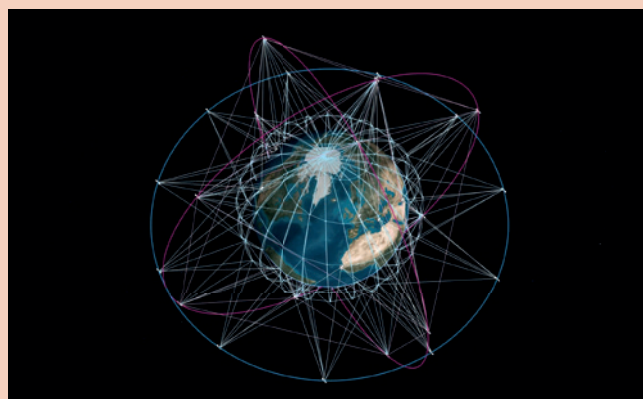
NIAID has funded the discovery and development of HOPO 14-1 since 2006. The active pharmaceutical ingredient in the drug is called 3,4,3-LI(1,2-HOPO).

The clinical trial is taking place at a site in Plymouth,

Michigan, USA under the leadership of Sascha N. Goonewardena, M.D., a physician investigator at SRI's Clinical Trials Unit and an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School in Ann Arbor. The study team will enroll 42 healthy participants ages 18 to 65 years in seven groups of six. Each participant in the first group will receive a 100-milligram (mg) dose of HOPO 14-1. The subsequent groups will receive increasingly higher doses of the study drug up to 7500 mg in the final group, if lower doses are deemed safe. Participants will undergo intensive safety monitoring and will be followed for 14 days to measure the absorption, distribution and elimination of the study drug. Results are expected in 2024.

EUROPEAN SPACE AND TELECOMS PLAYERS SIGN PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT TO BID FOR IRIS2 CONSTELLATION

A group of European space and telecommunications players have come together to form a partnership to respond to the European Commission's call for tender related to the future European satellite constellation IRIS² (Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite). IRIS² aims to bring a new secure and resilient connectivity infrastructure to European governments, businesses and citizens.



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The open consortium will be governed by Airbus Defence and Space, Eutelsat, Hispasat, SES and Thales Alenia Space. The consortium will also rely on the core team of the following companies: Deutsche Telekom, OHB, Orange, Hisdesat, Telespazio, and Thales. Together, they will aim to create a state-of-the-art satellite constellation based on a multi-orbit architecture that would be interoperable with the terrestrial ecosystem.

This partnership will set up an integrated best-in-class European space and telecoms team across these companies to leverage the expertise and capabilities in the field of secure satellite communications solutions. The consortium will encourage start-ups, mid-Caps and SMEs to join the partnership, resulting in a more innovative and competitive European space sector where new business models will emerge.

The integrated team aims to foster collaboration among all European space players across the whole connectivity value chain with a view to enabling EU's strategic autonomy through the delivery of sovereign, secure and resilient government services to protect European citizens. The team will leverage synergies between government and commercial

infrastructures. The teaming partners are also well positioned to provide commercial services to bridge the digital divide across European territories and to increase Europe's global outreach and competitiveness as a space and digital power on the global market.

IRIS² will deliver resilient and secure connectivity solutions to governments to protect European citizens and will provide commercial services in the interest of European economies and societies. It will also bolster the EU partnership policy by offering its infrastructure abroad. IRIS² is the EU's new flagship space programme for a digital, resilient and safer Europe.

EIB PROVIDES €40 MILLION FOR WINGCOPTER TO SCALE UP ELECTRIC DELIVERY DRONES AND LOGISTICS SERVICES

- **Wingcopter's cargo drones will bring rapid, clean and cost-effective deliveries to hard-to-reach rural areas across the globe.**
- **The EIB's €40 million investment will help the company ramp up production of its flagship Wingcopter 198 model, expand delivery services in Europe and abroad, and accelerate the firm's innovation efforts.**
- **The agreement is supported by the InvestEU programme to help facilitate the transition to a sustainable economy.**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) will provide a €40 million quasi-equity investment into Wingcopter GmbH, a European leader and pioneer in unmanned delivery drone technology and related services. Founded in 2017 in the German state of Hesse, Wingcopter's electrically powered unmanned aircraft are already delivering goods as part of several small-scale commercial and humanitarian projects. For example, in Malawi, a joint project with UNICEF and Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has seen Wingcopter's drones deliver life-saving medicines and medical supplies to rural communities in hard-to-reach areas.

The EIB investment is backed by the European Commission's InvestEU programme under its sustainable infrastructure window. Using electric cargo drones to deliver urgently needed goods can replace carbon-intensive modes of transport such as motorcycles, vans and helicopters, thereby

contributing to the transition towards a green and sustainable economy.

The Wingcopter 198 is expected to be operated for the first time in Germany this summer when Wingcopter launches a pilot project in southern Hesse to test the potential of on-demand transport of groceries and other consumer goods. The project's goal is to improve local supply in rural German communities through a sustainable delivery service and will be conducted together with the Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences. It is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Digital and Transport.

What makes Wingcopter's cargo drones truly unique is their ability to take off and land vertically while flying quickly and efficiently over long distances like an airplane without the need for expensive infrastructure. They can carry up to 5 kg and cover distances of up to 100 km. The core hardware and software is patented worldwide. Already running on pure battery power, the Wingcopter team, together with Hamburg-based ZAL Center of Applied Aeronautical Research GmbH, is currently developing a green hydrogen energy system to power Wingcopter's drones for even longer flight times.

The EIB's investment comes alongside existing funding from a strong international group of investors, including leading European retailer REWE Group, Japanese Fortune 100 conglomerate ITOCHU, Silicon Valley-based Xplorer Capital and Uber co-founder Garrett Camp's investment arm Expa. Together, the investor commitments will enable Wingcopter to extend the capabilities of its flagship drone, obtain regulatory approval in key markets and deploy its drones at scale in sustainable last-mile delivery networks to become a global logistics services provider across multiple sectors.

Wingcopter is a German manufacturer of unmanned, all-electric delivery drones and provider of drone delivery services, specialising in improving medical supply chains and the logistics of urgently needed goods.

Thanks to its patented tilt-rotor mechanism and proprietary software algorithms, the Wingcopter 198 can take off and land vertically like a multicopter, while flying long distances as efficiently and quickly as a fixed-wing aircraft, even in rain and wind.

Wingcopter's investors include the EIB, REWE Group, Salvia, XAI technologies, Xplorer Capital, Futury Capital, ITOCHU, DRONE FUND, SYNERJET, Expa, Hessen Kapital III, and Corecam Capital Partners.





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



ALPINE PUZZLEMENT

**How Switzerland
seems to be bending its
neutrality to help Ukraine
resist Russia's invasion**

The Russians, it seems, will believe any old rubbish fed to them by Vladimir Putin, the murderous dictator who heads their government. It's hard to believe they are all stupid but if they believe Putin, a proven liar with a long history of giving out false information according to what best serves his self-obsessed purpose, then they must at the very least have been extremely gullible. In case any uncommitted Russians happen to be reading this (unlikely, I know) let's make one or two things straight. Ukraine is not, as Russia's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, claimed, run by "Kyiv's neo-Nazi regime". That is just, quite frankly, nonsense. The regime in Kyiv is not by any manner of means Nazi. You'd think Putin would be able to recognise Naziism, since it's the political policy on which he runs Russia, but it seems he chooses not to. Ukraine, unlike Russia (in every possible way) is not Nazi. Putin's Russia is. Putin has accused the Swiss of abandoning the country's long-held policy of neutrality to help prop up a Nazi state. As with so many of his utterances, it's simply untrue. When I was little, my mother said that if I told a lie my nose would grow longer. In Putin's case, perhaps the "nose-extension" theme has been reapplied to his notorious table: every time he tells a fib it gets a little longer, in which case his desire to take over other countries may be necessitated by his ever-lengthening table. I can't say this often enough: Putin is a liar. He's also a self-obsessed mass murderer but for here and now let's just call him a liar. Anyone who believes his (and Ms. Zakharova's) claims of Naziism on Ukraine's part is either one of Putin's willing puppets or a complete fool. Or possibly both.

Not that Switzerland hasn't helped some fairly dodgy regimes in the past, such as the Soviet Union, for instance. Back in the days when the KGB was set on acquiring Western technology by fair means or foul (mainly foul), Putin arrived on the scene to become involved in a string of front companies that Russia had set up in Switzerland but also in Germany, Austria and Liechtenstein to run the smuggling operations for Western military technology that Russia needed. Russia used trusted agents to amass high-tech blueprints and other goods with which Moscow hoped to defeat capitalism. The KGB had agents working inside Siemens, Bayer, Messerschmidt and Thyssen and Putin was personally involved in their espionage operations, together with his Stasi colleague, Horst Jechmlich. Putin always claimed that he'd used no false names or other such subterfuge, but he called himself Platov back then, which he later explained away to students as a "technical pseudonym". If



Vladimir Putin has awarded Maria Zakharova the medal of the Order of Friendship

you want to know more about Putin's time spying with the intention of destroying capitalism on behalf of his Communist masters, I can only recommend Catherine Belton's book, "Putin's People". It's very scary and explains just what a truly unreliable, untruthful and (from our perspective) unreliable person Putin was, is and is likely to remain. He was (and may still be) a committed Marxist but his actions and attitudes seem to align him more with today's neo-Nazis, whom he claims to despise.

Putin's recollections of the KGB, in which he served, of course, are interesting more for what they don't include than for what they do. The KGB, of course, changed its name many times: the GPU, GPRU, NKVD and MGB, before settling on KGB. It was based on a secret decree written by Lenin and called the Cheka, the main building block for the Soviet police state, set up to protect the party and its leadership and to dispense what its members referred to as "revolutionary justice".



Felix Dzerzhinsky, the first head of Soviet counter-intelligence

Those who served in it from the outset called themselves "Chekists" right up until its supposed disbandment in the 1990s. Long after that, Putin still referred to himself as a "Chekist." It seems likely that Lenin would have had little time for him. The Cheka's first leader was Felix Dzerzhinsky, a Polish man expelled from his school for persistently speaking Polish when the Tsars were still in charge, insisting that everyone must speak Russian. By a strange irony, it's one of the things upon which Putin is also insistent: the Ukrainians must speak Russian. Stalin would have hated that, being a Georgian who insisted on using his mother-tongue. Dzerzhinsky was said to have lacked any sort of sense of humour. He was also described as being "puritanical", which perhaps points the way towards Putin's own supposed puritanism today. Seeing what Putin's troops get up to in Ukraine the idea of Puritanism doesn't really fit very well. Interestingly, it was Lenin himself who, in a note to Dzerzhinsky,

suggested that this new organ of the state should only make its arrests at night. The people of Russia, innocent or guilty, came to dread the sound of a knock on the door during the small hours, when they felt most vulnerable.



Swiss House of Parliament

Russia under Stalin was a strange place. But there again, Stalin himself was a strange man. He could be (albeit rarely) quite humble. When the Second World War ended and his troops planted the Soviet flag on Germany's Reichstag in Berlin, Stalin felt he had let people down by failing to halt the Nazi advance earlier. At an assembly of army commanders in the Kremlin, he said that the people of Russia would have had the right to criticise the leadership. "Another people might have said to the government: 'you have not lived up to our expectations, go away, we will set up another government'. Our soviet people, above all our Russian people, did not do that." Stalin raised his glass and toasted "the Russian people for its trust." It was a remarkably humble – and surprising – act on Stalin's part. By that time, Britain was a fading

power and it was during the Potsdam Conference that Churchill was voted out of power.

Switzerland maintained a state of "armed neutrality" throughout both world wars. Nobody attempted to conquer it, possibly because its extremely mountainous terrain would have made that difficult. Now the Swiss must decide what to do in response to Russia's armed aggression. It may be keen to retain its neutrality, but that doesn't mean it cannot react at all. It has adopted the new EU sanctions against Belarus and Russia and is also applying new financial and travel restrictions on a hundred more individuals and bodies. The Federal Council has also added the oligarch Aleksandra Melnichenko to its list of those facing sanctions. According to Reuters, the list of individuals and entities on the list for sanctions now includes military personnel held responsible for atrocities committed in Bucha, people involved in politics and the spread of disinformation (a Russian speciality under Putin, it seems), as well as some oligarchs and their families. Reuters has also said that the Swiss will apply sanctions to four new Russian and Belarussian banks, including Russia's largest, Sberbank (SBER.MM) which can no longer participate in the SWIFT transaction system, which is likely to severely hamper commerce.. Switzerland's President, Ignazio Cassis, has expressed his shock at Russia's military aggression and in an address to the 77th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2022, he urged Moscow to put a stop to its war in Ukraine. It seems very unlikely that Putin and his allies will take any notice. Putin just thinks the rest of the world is being unfair in opposing his illicit invasion of a sovereign country which he (and his disciples, but nobody else) claim to be "Nazi".



The seized \$600 million 'Yacht A', owned by Andrey Melnichenko

A TANGO WITH TANKS

Switzerland's complicated diplomatic dance to get Leopard tanks to Ukraine's front line

Pity poor Switzerland. No, not poor in the monetary sense, of course. But when it wants to play a useful part in today's tangled world, leaping over the diplomatic hurdles that it has erected for itself in order to do so isn't easy. It can't even send Swiss-made ammunition for the Leopard tanks that are now in Ukrainian hands. Just to explain why it's needed; the Leopard 2 is a German-made main battle tank. It has a range of some 500 kilometres and carries a 120mm smoothbore gun as its main weapon. It can reach speeds of 68 kilometres-per-hour. It also carries two 7.62 calibre light machine guns.



The Swiss army currently has 134 Leopard tanks in service and 96 in storage

Kyiv needs them to defend the country from Russian armour because many of Ukraine's weapons date back to Soviet times or very soon after. Experts believe that Moscow intends to step up its war, knowing that Ukraine's available defences are few and elderly. Russia wants a quick victory while Ukraine believes the best way to end the war is through a battlefield victory.

Switzerland has, of course, retained its neutrality since 1815, but there is growing pressure from the country's neighbours and Swiss public opinion to loosen the rules that prevent buyers of Swiss-owned weapons from re-exporting them to a country at war. However, Russia's illegal invasion has changed things. Thierry Burkhardt, leader of Switzerland's centre-right FDP party, told Reuters: "We want to be neutral, but we are part of the western world." Existing treaties prevent the Swiss from supplying weapons to combatants in a war, and also prevent other countries from re-exporting Swiss arms, (Germany wants to buy some of Switzerland's old Leopard 2 tanks to compensate for those sent to Ukraine) but Swiss voters are getting angry and a recent opinion poll shows that 55% want it to be possible to re-export weapons. The rules are strict, though, and Green MP Marionna Schlatter has expressed the fear of a "slippery slope" towards ending neutrality. But even those politicians most devoted to neutrality seem to be having second thoughts. Ukrainian soldiers could train to use the tanks in three to six weeks.

No-one wants to escalate this conflict that Russia began, but the Russian mercenaries doing most of Putin's fighting now say they will stop taking prisoners of war, simply killing those it captures. It may be against international law, but Russia doesn't seem to care and many now want to stop them.

Switzerland managed to retain its neutrality in both world wars (narrowly in the First World War), although some of its army officers clearly sided with the Nazis in the Second. Hitler's Luftwaffe regularly flew through Swiss airspace, against the rules on neutrality, but after eleven German planes had been shot down it stopped. Hitler was furious: German aircraft shot down with German-made anti-aircraft weapons. He even sent saboteurs to try to make it impossible to fly from Swiss airports, but they were captured and imprisoned. The Swiss were also somewhat ambivalent concerning those seeking asylum because of race or religion, although those being sought by name by the Axis powers could gain asylum there. All in all, it seems odd that Russia is now accusing Switzerland of taking Ukraine's side. It has no reason to, other than a strong dislike for armed aggression by one country against another. And if the Russians still respect (or remember through their history lessons) the great leader of the Bolshevik movement and of Communism, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, they should recall that his memory is still revered by a few in Switzerland (most seem to prefer to forget the link). Lenin successfully persuaded the Swiss authorities in 1914 that he was not a deserter.



Lenin on the front page of the Swiss weekly Schweizer Illustrierte in December 1917

He and his wife, Nadia Krupskaya settled in peaceful, middle-class Bern while he tried to establish contacts with local left-wing politicians, albeit not very successfully. His ideas, which he put forward at the secret Zimmerwald and Kiental conferences of 1915 and 1916, were attended by

various left-wing dissidents. Lenin himself wanted to use the First World War to help spur an armed uprising against capitalism. His ideas were, in the main, rejected by other delegates. He found it especially hard to convince the highly influential Bernese Social Democrat Robert Grimm of his ideas.

In 1916, Lenin moved to Zurich (with the permission of the Swiss authorities) where he rented a 2-room flat. In a letter to his mother he said he liked Zurich very much and he and his wife spent many afternoons just sitting admiring the lake and its surroundings. Perhaps it was one of the happiest periods of his life, although he could not have known that at the time. He was not hugely successful in gaining new recruits and his interest in persuading the Swiss to join him faded when he learned of the revolution that had started in Russia, so in April 1917 Lenin left Switzerland and travelled to St. Petersburg. By October of that year the Bolsheviks had taken control of the country and Lenin became a hero of the far left. Moving ahead a couple of decades, by 1940, Hitler had seized all Germany's neighbours except for Switzerland. Meanwhile, Hitler had decided he hated the Swiss for reasons that are still not very clear. In 1942, Hitler described Switzerland as "a pimple on the face of Europe" and as a country that "no longer had a right to exist". Moreover, he denounced the Swiss as "a misbegotten branch of our people." Not very complimentary. Many have asked why Hitler didn't order an attack, but as one commentator pointed out, it's never wise to attack your banker. Anyway, his views of the Swiss seem now to be being echoed about Switzerland by Putin

Chemical products for sale



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy with the President of the Swiss Confederation Ignazio Cassis in Kyiv in October 2022 for the signature of the Memorandum of Partnership between Ukraine and the Swiss Confederation on cooperation in the field of digital transformation

Switzerland admits that it provides some services to Ukraine. Military training, for instance, and also a range of humanitarian cargoes, mediated by the Swiss embassy. The Swiss purchased 4,000 tons of humanitarian goods from their manufacturers and also supplied chemical reagents, which can be used to

check if a particular chemical is present because of the way a substance reacts to it. Examples of reagents include Grignard reagent, Tollens' reagent, Fehling's reagent, Collins reagent, and Fenton's reagent (don't ask me what they're used for; I was always a duffer at chemistry). According to the website Thought Co, for example H₂ (hydrogen gas) and O₂ (oxygen gas) are reactants (or reagents) in the reaction that forms liquid water: $2\text{H}_2(\text{g}) + \text{O}_2(\text{g}) \rightarrow 2\text{H}_2\text{O}(\text{l})$. However, a substance may be used as a reagent without having the word "reagent" in its name. Basically, it's a way of checking for the presence of a particular chemical or group of chemicals in the substance being tested.



Swiss soldiers equipped with chemical protection masks

Switzerland also initiated financial assistance to both the Ukrainian and Moldovan governments for this year to a value of 140-million Swiss francs (€142.69-million). The Russians argue that this is a break with neutrality and that therefore the Swiss government is "taking sides". Let's see: small country, only recently independent, under vicious attack from huge, well-armed neighbour...Yes, it's easy to see how a "neutral country" may feel encouraged to "take sides", almost inevitably on the side of the small victim of unprovoked and deadly attack and against the unprovoked attacker, it would appear.

Putin also seems to have his eye on Ukraine's elected leader, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has described himself as: "Target number one; my family is target number two." Russian troops have tried to storm the presidential compound twice, according to Zelenskyy's advisor. As for Switzerland, it would seem that Russia itself gave up on Swiss neutrality through its actions. The Swiss Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER) said that it is now applying strict sanctions to the Wagner group for "their active involvement in Russia's military aggression against Ukraine" and for the mercenary group's "dissemination of pro-government propaganda and disinformation." Putin is not the only liar



A Swiss soldier firing the NLAW (New Light Anti-Tank Weapon)

engaged on Russia's behalf; it seems to be official Kremlin policy.

For example, in an on-line message from Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, she claimed that: "Despite more than two centuries of experience in implementing the policy of external neutrality, after the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine (*they still won't call it a war, which it clearly is*), Bern abandoned its traditional neutrality and unequivocally came out in support of Kyiv's neo-Nazi regime." As we all know, that is a lie on several levels. Kyiv's government is not "neo-Nazi" in any way or by any standard, and Russia's aggression has no excuse at all. Putin simply wants to expand the territory under his control. He is greedy for land, for towns and cities, for farms and factories and his record of fair governance is virtually non-existent. The plain truth would seem to be that he's a gangster.



Swiss army soldiers protecting the border during WWII

Were Putin to decide to invade Switzerland he would face the same obstacles that has affected previous aggressors: the Alps, which are naturally defensible. Hitler certainly wanted to invade, as did his ally Benito Mussolini: Operation Tannenbaum, previously referred to as Operation Grün, was a planned invasion of Switzerland and Liechtenstein by the Axis Powers during World War 2. By June 1940, France had been defeated, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Belgium were occupied while Austria and Czechoslovakia had been incorporated into the German Reich. Italy, Hungary, and Romania were already allies or even satellites of Nazi Germany, while Francisco Franco's fascist regime ruled in Spain. Democracy had been all but snuffed out across the entire European continent. But Switzerland, surrounded on all sides by Nazis and their vicious pals, stood apart. It made Hitler furious; he considered that the Swiss people should be his natural allies and their fierce independence infuriated him. In many ways, including his reputation for lying, Hitler had a lot in common with Putin. Germany's planned invasion simply never happened, and nobody is completely certain why, even today. We must simply be very pleased that it turned out like that.

Russia and its mercenary allies, the Wagner Group, are merciless and ruthless in their bid to emerge supreme. The leader of the group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, recently ordered his fighters to start killing every Ukrainian soldier they find rather than take the men as prisoners of war, according to the Radar Online website. The order was allegedly posted on the Wagner PMC Telegram



Wagner fighters in Ukraine



Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin on a rooftop in Ukraine

account. It may not come as a surprise, but it is in breach of the United Nations laws and the four Geneva Conventions governing the conduct of wars. Not that Putin and friends have much time for standards of conduct being observed, nor for international law. He is a mass killer, as well as a confirmed liar, with no morals at all, so it's inevitable that they will be, too. It strikes me as strange that a man who condemns any laws that permit human rights to people who identify as homosexual or transgender as "satanic" should applaud simple murder and even torture as being fine, but Putin is a very strange person indeed.



Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom

He will doubtless be annoyed that Sweden has now expelled five Russian embassy staff for spying. Foreign Minister Tobias Billström said in a statement that their activities were

"incompatible" with their diplomatic status. Switzerland, of course, has been and remains a popular place in which Russian oligarchs can stash their wealth. Any assets belonging to Putin, however, or to Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin or Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, will be frozen and confiscated, while its airspace is closed to flights from Russia. Entry bans have been imposed on anyone linked to Putin or the Russian government. Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chair of Putin's Security Council has issued the warning at a conference in Moscow that the world is "probably" on the verge of global war, with a growing risk of nuclear confrontation. Only Putin is stupid enough, surely, to use nuclear weapons just because he wants to rule over a larger country. He says avoiding it is "more important than climate change". Where Putin is concerned, ambition seems to have largely displaced common sense.

There's not a lot the rest of the world can do about this. It could cave in, allowing Putin to take Ukraine and any other country he fancies (probably quite a lot), but it won't, because a world ruled by an apparent psychopath like Putin would be virtually uninhabitable. Nobody wants that, except Putin himself, of course, and his coterie of acolytes. So, let's all hope that Putin develops a little common sense and backs away from provoking a nuclear confrontation. After all, Russia is not the only country with nuclear missiles at its disposal. Ironically, if Putin ever goes completely mad and unleashes his nuclear holocaust, one of the few places on Earth that would be relatively safe and well-protected would be the Alps of Switzerland.

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The Scottish National Party's home page photo

A MOTORHOME TO NOWHERE

**Scotland's
independence party
finds itself driving
into deep trouble**

**“Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led;
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victory!”**

That song, often sung in celebration of Scotland and its desire for independence was written by Scotland's most famous poet, Robert (Robbie) Burns. Perhaps I should translate it for readers who are unfamiliar with the Scottish dialect. It means (and true Scots please forgive me for this):

Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,

Fellow-Scottish people, we who have shed our blood fighting alongside William Wallace, the Scottish knight and fighter for Scottish independence who helped lead his people during the First War of Scottish Independence, defeating an English force at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297.

Scots, wham Bruce has aften led;

Fellow Scots, who have also fought under the leadership of Robert the Bruce, King of the Scots from 1306 until 1329. He took over leadership of the Scottish forces from William Wallace and seized the throne, only to see his army defeated by England's Edward 1, but he later defeated an English army at Loudoun Hill and went on to hold his first parliament as King of the Scots in 1309. He then defeated a much larger English army at the famous Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. The war dragged on for several years, however, although Bruce was recognised by the Pope as King of an independent Scotland in 1326.



Statue of Robert the Bruce near Stirling Castle



Statue of William Wallace near Bemersyde House, Scottish Borders

**Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victory!”**

Welcome to your blood-soaked grave, or to celebrate the defeat of the English and to win the war.

More recent bids for independence have been rather more peaceful and less reliant on plate armour, chainmail and the claymore, the traditional two-handed Scottish sword whose name derives from the Scots Gaelic words, claidheamh-mòr, which means “great sword” in Gaelic. It was not the only weapon used by Scottish soldiers, of course, but it became so famous that it has even lent its name to an anti-personnel mine that is still used by the various armies of today under its Scottish name, despite having been invented and named by an American. Scottish regiments have long been famed as very effective fighters.



Robert the Bruce, King of the Scots kills Sir Henry de Bohun on the first day of the Battle of Bannockburn

In the 11th century, much of Scotland, especially the wealthy south and east, was ruled by a single monarch, the King of the Scots. The Scots themselves had occasionally recognised English overlordship, but the King himself was too powerful to have to fear “private enterprise” attacks of the sort that had devastated Wales or Ireland. But it was also arguably not rich enough (and probably too far from London) to attract the attention of an ambitious English king. Just how many sheep does anyone want anyway?

The Scots had benefited when King David made the most of the various civil wars during Stephen's reign to take Northumbria from England, but by and large Scotland remained focussed on Scottish affairs, with the Kingdom extending its boundaries among the islands and along the western seaboard generally until the King of Norway ceded the Western Isles in 1266 under the Treaty of Perth. Contemporary military treaties and marriages show that Scotland was becoming increasingly European in its outlook. It still is : in the Brexit referendum, most Scottish voters chose to keep their country in the EU. It was English voters, swayed by false propaganda and untrue media stories spread mainly by Conservative members of parliament, who settled the country's future.



© SNP.ORG

Winnie Ewing stunned the political world by storming to victory in the Hamilton by-election on November 2, 1967

Just at the moment, the political party devoted to obtaining independence for Scotland, the Scottish National Party or SNP, needs to be effective at fighting what seems to be a concerted effort to discredit it, or perhaps remove it altogether, partly brought about by some silly decisions and a bit of bad party management. My attention was first drawn to the issue of Scotland's independence when I became a television correspondent covering the European Parliament and moved to Brussels, one of my favourite cities, and it was there that I met Winnie Ewing, a Scottish Nationalist in the European Parliament. I always found her feisty, determined, well-informed, thoroughly European and never afraid of a fight. It was an attitude she needed, and a very similar accolade was paid to her by the last leader of the SNP before the present holder of that post (and Scotland's First Minister until 2023) Nicola Sturgeon. She said it was Winnie Ewing who had encouraged her to go for the leadership of the party.

Where's the money? (What money?)



© HENRY NICHOLLS/ANPA POOL/EDM

Peter Murrell and Nicola Sturgeon in 2022

Among the silly decisions that emerged towards the end of Sturgeon's remarkably successful reign was the revelation that her husband, Peter Murrell, who was the SNP's Chief Executive, had deliberately misled party members (and everyone else, including the media) about the number of members the party has. It came out as plans were being drawn up for a leadership contest. By that time, Sturgeon herself had resigned and her husband had been arrested, with the police searching the couple's home following a dawn raid on

the house and on Morrell's office. As *The Courier* and *Evening Telegraph* memorably put it: "Not since the glinting guillotine of the French Revolution has there been such a swift and decisive end to a political power couple's reign." We should recall that Louis XVI and his wife, the Habsburg princess Marie Antoinette, who was just 14 when the marriage took place, both went to the guillotine during the French Revolution.

Sturgeon's rôle as leader of the party has now ended, her place having been taken by Humza Yousaf, who now faces a massive challenge to restore public confidence in the party. The recent problems have already been cited by UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak as reasons to refuse to listen to any arguments put to him by Yousaf. Politics is a very dirty business, and the SNP has a high price to pay for allowing its leaders to take their eyes off the ball. After all, the affair has been most humiliating for the SNP and for all those who still want Scottish independence.



© UK PARLIAMENT

Stephen Flynn

The problem (well OK, ONE of the problems) is that people suspect foul play even where there demonstrably is none. The SNP will also face problems over finding money with which to pay its bills. There is a scheme to help fund opposition parties throughout the UK, introduced in 1975 by Edward Short and known ironically, as "Short Money". The amount parties receive depends on their audited accounts. As the third largest party in Westminster, the SNP should do well, receiving almost £1.2-million (€1,36-million) last time around, which it spends on staff, of which there are around 25 at Westminster. To qualify, the party must present an auditor's certificate by a certain deadline, but the SNP's auditors left the party last year and new ones have yet to be appointed. If the party doesn't get the money, some staff are almost certain to lose their jobs. That will happen if the party fails to meet the deadline for filing audited accounts, as would appear to be highly likely. The SNP's leader at Westminster, Stephen Flynn, has asked the House of Commons for extra time in which to complete and submit the party's accounts, but the House of Commons would be prevented by the rules from granting the request.



A Scottish Daily Express headline about Colin Beattie's resignation

Can Yousaf restore trust in the party in the meanwhile? Can he get the money the SNP needs? If not, can he remain as party leader and First Minister? Or are staunch believers in an independent Scotland going to be reduced to saying: "Come back William Wallace (or Robert the Bruce), all is forgiven."

What's more, how can anyone explain the existence of a luxurious motorhome parked outside the Dunfermline home of Murrell's mother, a 92-year-old widow, where it had remained unused for two years? It has now been seized by the police. It belongs to the SNP, but why? Could it be an emergency "battle bus" for the Holyrood elections, to be brought into service only if the COVID pandemic comes back? Then why was it not returned to the seller when it was found not to be needed? Again, there is no clear answer, not even from Colin Beattie, the SNP's former treasurer. Nobody seems to know why it was bought in the first place. When he was asked if he'd been involved in the purchase, Beattie replied: "No, I didn't know about it," which is also odd. But according to The Herald newspaper, "The SNP accounts for 2021, which Mr Beattie signed off on 30 June 2022, include new 'motor vehicles' worth £80,632 (€91,104) after depreciation among the party's assets." It gets stranger and stranger, yet the payment for the mysterious motorhome comes from money raised and subsequently set aside to fund another independence referendum, an idea that seems to be off the road at present. Yousaf's task in restoring public confidence will certainly not be an easy one.

I Going anywhere?

Quite apart from the unexplained motorhome, there have been suggestions that some of the £600,000 fund for another referendum were spent on a fridge-freezer. No-one has yet explained what such

an item has to do with Scottish independence or referenda of any kind. Unless it was to help Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) acclimatise themselves to possibly being out in the cold for years? That is not a serious comment; the SNP will undoubtedly make a come-back. Meanwhile, being a left-leaning party, they can expect to lose quite a few seats to the Labour Party, whose social and economic policies most resemble its own.



Ian Blackford



Màiri McAllan the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition

The SNP's urgent requirement for an auditor was demonstrated recently by an email sent out to several such companies, saying: "We are urgently seeking a statutory auditor to comply with our obligations to the Electoral Commission as well as an audit of our Westminster group at the House of Commons." Time is clearly running out, which explains the urgent nature of the email from Susan Ruddick, who is currently acting chief executive of the SNP. Various senior figures in the SNP, including former Westminster leader Ian Blackford, have assured the media that the party remains solvent.

Blackford admitted that membership numbers had taken a hit but maintained that the SNP can still boast of having 70,000 members and said the SNP will certainly contest any elections. The party has every reason to believe that old quotation from Shakespeare's wonderful play, 'Hamlet', spoken by Claudius: "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions." The SNP clearly needs William Wallace or Robert the Bruce to be in charge. Meanwhile, however, Humza Yousaf, and the MSP who was his closest rival for that leadership position, Kate Forbes, have urged members to "stay the course" in the face of yet more accusations of secrecy and financial mismanagement.

One of the biggest problems facing the SNP in governing Scotland is the constant interference from British Conservatives, trying all the time to undermine policies on such issues as climate change. The Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition, Mairi McAllan, has hit out at UK government moves to limit the ability of a Scottish administration to establish links with governments overseas. She described the moves as 'unacceptable', after UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly ordered British officials to sit in on any meetings between SNP ministers and foreign governments.

The Conservatives claim it's to ensure that Holyrood doesn't 'undermine British government policy', but many in the SNP see it as an attempt by English ministers to constrain Scotland's freedom of action. McAllan has described that as "unacceptable". Meanwhile, the Conservative Peer who negotiated Britain's withdrawal from the European Union for Boris Johnson has once again demonstrated his apparent dislike of democracy.

The Daily Record reported that: "Lord Frost's call for the Tory Government to strip Holyrood of powers shows he and his fellow

Brexit fanatics have lost the plot. Devolution is the settled will of the Scottish people, and the Parliament has gradually acquired extra powers." From his speeches and comments, it would seem that Lord Frost would not be happy until the Union Jack is flying over every capital in the world.



Lord Frost

© ROGER HARRIS



The Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh

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The newspaper said that Lord Frost wants to reverse every move towards devolution, regardless of public opinion: “The idea that short-term challenges justify a reversal of devolution is opportunistic nonsense. Devolution is bigger than any one party and to suggest otherwise is absurd.” Lord Frost doesn’t have many fans among those who opposed Brexit, either. They dismiss him as an ultra-nationalist who simply hates all foreigners. He clearly sees the Scots as foreigners, too, who must be brought under English control. This could be an exaggeration, of course, but few of the things Lord Frost has said in public have run counter to that verdict.

The Daily Record is scathing about the record of the UK Conservatives in power and who Lord Frost seems to think should be in control of Scotland in the light of the problems currently besetting the SNP itself: “It is also worth thinking about the record of the governing party Lord Frost believes should benefit from a power grab. A party that over the past 13 years has punished the poor with policies such as the bedroom tax and the rape clause. Ministers who cut the top rate of income tax while telling the rest of us to tighten our belts. Tories who partied hard in Downing Street during lockdown while ordinary Scots were unable to attend funerals of loved ones. A party whose reflex is to appeal to the lowest common denominator by demonising vulnerable minorities. And a government which, under Liz Truss, nearly wrecked the economy with the most reckless budget in decades.” The newspaper is clearly not fond of the UK’s government or ruling party.

I Where you were

The SNP Government has now launched an initiative first promised by Nicola Sturgeon that Scottish citizens should have access to services near their homes. It should be possible for their needs to be met no more than 20 minutes away from wherever they live.



Joe Fitzpatrick

It’s not going to be easy in a country as large and spread out as Scotland, but the consultation process has begun. Planning Minister Joe Fitzpatrick launched the scheme at the Scottish Young Panners Network annual conference in Stirling. “We want to help people to meet their daily needs within a reasonable distance of their homes,” he told delegates, “While helping them to live healthier lives and contributing towards the achievement of our net zero targets. We can really get to the heart of what matters to people by working with them to shape our towns and communities of the future.” There will be a lot of obstacles to overcome in order to achieve such an ambitious goal. Those behind the scheme hope it will reduce car use and encourage people to walk or cycle more.



Jim McColl

Sadly, it probably won’t encourage more people to get around using the ferries that are supposed to carry people to and from Scotland’s many islands. The SNP had promised to overhaul the ageing service with brand spanking new vessels. In March, after the Scottish government-owned Ferguson went into administration, the contract reallocated to a company in Turkey. However, further delays to their construction were announced, with the one vessel due for launch in May now not expected to sail before the autumn. The other promised vessel, still unnamed and only known as “hull 802”, promised for service by March 2024, won’t be hitting the water before September that year. Those whose livelihoods depend on being able to get to and from the islands must wait yet again. In his December 2022 budget, ex-Deputy First Minister John Swinney said that an extra £60 million (€68-million) had been allocated to completing construction of the vessels at Ferguson’s shipyard. Ex-shipyards boss Jim McColl has accused Sturgeon of lying and has suggested improper dealings. The building of new ferries was a job put out to tender and won by Ferguson Marine in 2015, but there are now claims that a Polish shipyard offered a better deal and an earlier completion date, although they failed to win the tender.

McColl has claimed that the two vessels will be obsolete by the time they hit the water. In fact, the £220-million (€250-million) contract to build the vessels went to a shipbuilder in Turkey.

There is a danger here, in the light of all the delays, that people living on the islands may be obliged to move elsewhere, simply to enable movement. The Scottish government have always said they take the islanders' transport difficulties seriously, but there's little evidence of that, with regular ferry users branding the existing system "chaotic", saying that businesses on the islands are "at the point of extinction" and that the problems extend beyond delays to building vessels to a deadline. One has to wonder how this ongoing saga of disaster fits with the "twenty minutes from home" policy, too. It's hard to imagine how someone living in, say, South Uist or Barra could get to an appointment in central Glasgow in twenty minutes. As it is, it's already being predicted that the inadequacy of the ferry service will hit tourism to the islands this summer, which would be a shame, because there are few places more beautiful on Earth than those wonderful, wild Scottish islands. It would be worth rowing there in a small boat, if the ferries aren't running.

The SNP's treasurer, Colin Beattie, was arrested as part of the investigation but has been released without charge, although the matter may not be over. Police Scotland released the following statement: "A 71-year-old man who was arrested earlier today, Tuesday, 18 April 2023, as a suspect in connection with the ongoing investigation into the funding and finances of the Scottish National Party, has been released without charge pending further investigation."



Colin Beattie

The man was questioned by Police Scotland detectives. A report will be sent to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service." Needless to say, the England-based right-wing newspapers are having a field day, trotting out lots of anti-Scottish stories, some of them of somewhat dubious provenance. The fear among SNP planners is that the crisis –

effectively self-made – has severely damaged the case for Scottish independence. The confusion that has come to light, with very senior ministers denying all knowledge of the crisis, is certainly not reassuring.

We did it! Well, some of it



"I will attend the Coronation ceremony as First Minister, on behalf of the Scottish people. Many people across the country will also take part in the celebrations by watching the ceremony on big screens, hosting street parties or taking part in charity events or volunteering."

Humza Yousaf
First Minister



Humza Yousaf's official announcement concerning the Coronation

Meanwhile, however, the party itself is boasting about Humza Yousaf's achievements. "Every single day, Humza and his team have been relentlessly focused on delivering progress for the people of Scotland – protecting people against the Tory cost of living crisis and building a fairer nation," says the party's website. This help takes the form of cutting unaffordable energy bills and providing £15-million (€17-million) to help fund school-age childcare. These and others like them are proud boasts, so clearly the SNP is not quite in the doldrums that the more right-wing press would prefer. The SNP have also attacked the Conservative government's anti-immigration laws, describing them as "cruel and unnecessary". In a broadcast to party members, Yousaf has boasted that the SNP is not dwindling, as their political rivals claim, but is actually winning over more members. He pointed out that party number have now reached 74,800, yet neither the Conservatives nor Labour Party will reveal their membership numbers in Scotland. Yousaf accused the other two parties of hypocrisy and pointed out that the SNP remains Scotland's biggest political party, which it undoubtedly is and likely to remain so.

I started this article with a quote from Robert Burns from the poem "Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn", written in 1799. True Scottish nationalists may like to recall the next verse when recalling Lord Frost's comments about curbing the autonomy already given to Scotland: "Now's the day, and now's the hour, See the front of battle lour; See approach proud Edward's power, Chains and slavery." Stirring stuff, indeed, and not written to make readers love England more, but those most critical have the law on their side, in which case another Burns poem springs to mind: "A fig for those by law protected! LIBERTY's a glorious feast! Courts for cowards were erected, Churches built to please the PRIEST."

By Robin Crow

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© MICHAŁ SIERGIEJEWICZ

Opposition politician and activist Vladimir Kara-Murza makes the sign of the cross on the spot where Boris Nemtsov was shot and killed in Moscow

**A MODERN
MIKADO?
NOT EVEN
CLOSE!**

**Russia imposes ludicrous
penalties on those who
disagree with the man
inside the Kremlin**

It was the aim of the Mikado in the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta of that name to try to make the punishment of wrongdoing fit the crime itself in some way, so that the perpetrator is laughed at in a gentle way, not beaten to a pulp. "My object all sublime I shall achieve in time," the Japanese law-giver sings, "To make the punishment fit the crime, the punishment fit the crime." The fictional Japanese judge wants the law-breaker to be made fun of as his punishment: "To make each prisoner (re)pent, unwillingly represent, a source of innocent merriment, of innocent merriment." It requires subtlety, a quick brain and a desire for peaceful rule in a peaceful country, none of which attributes are within the grasp of Vladimir Putin, President of Russia. No-one could ever accuse him of being a devotee of justice and even-handedness, and certainly not very judicious, either.

The sentences being handed down to those who question his judgement are truly excessive and out of proportion to whatever the accused is alleged to have done. They would be more appropriate for serious acts of criminality, such as murder or, perhaps, a armed robbery. If you compare Russia with France, say, disagreement with the President takes the form of street demonstrations, with fires being lit and banners being waved. The demonstrators may annoy those in government but they haven't been shot, nor locked up for years; that's not the European way. Putin's punishments certainly don't fit the crime; on the face of it, they are out of proportion to the supposed wrong-doing under discussion. Now Vladimir Kara-Murza, a Russian-British former journalist, has been handed down a sentence of 25 years in prison simply for disagreeing with Putin and questioning the wisdom and indeed justification of his blood-thirsty invasion of Ukraine.



Vladimir Kara-Murza in a Moscow court

Under any other government in history such a ludicrous outcome would have been seen as a sign of weakness, rather like the violence of a brainless playground bully, proving his ineptitude by acts of violence, but Putin seems to believe that the

length of the sentence is emblematic of his – Putin's – strength. Surely, that is at the very least a misjudgement? It was Britain's former Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who said: "Being democratic is not enough, a majority cannot turn what is wrong into right. In order to be considered truly free, countries must also have a deep love of liberty and an abiding respect for the rule of law." You won't find that in Putin's Russia.



Vladimir Kara-Murza on CNN on March 2022

Russia has always been, it seems, a place of sadness and deep, deep depression. The British humorous writer P.G. Wodehouse wrote: "Freddie experienced the sort of abysmal soul-sadness which afflicts one of Tolstoy's Russian peasants when, after putting in a heavy day's work strangling his father, beating his wife, and dropping the baby into the city's reservoir, he turns to the cupboards, only to find the vodka bottle empty." Russia really needs to throw off this stubborn image of misery and desperation, but it will never be able to do that while Vladimir Putin remains in charge. Russian writers down the years have generally summed up life in Russia quite well. As Leo Tolstoy put it in War and Peace, "All we can know is that we know nothing. And that's the height of human wisdom." I have never met Putin and I have no great desire to do so, but I liked Gorbachev a great deal when we met. And I also liked his interpreter. The two of them were visiting the European Parliament in Brussels and standing with me just outside the press bar. They were perfect gentlemen. It was Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States from 1801 to 1809, who wrote that the government you get is the government you deserve, but that can't be true surely? That would be just too cruel for the poor Russians. Nobody, surely, can deserve Vladimir Putin. Kara-Murza speaking on CNN, described the Kremlin as a "regime of murderers". It sounds reasonable, too. Putin set aside any sort of respect for justice, apparently deciding to use the courts and Russia's legal system as weapons with which to silence anyone who disagrees with him.

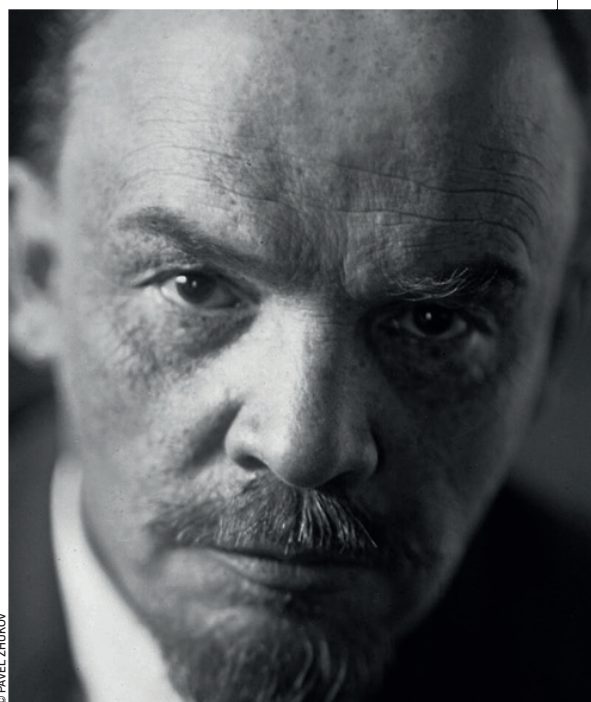
Kara-Murza was a close friend of the former opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, murdered in 2015 and he has himself, it's alleged, been poisoned more than once. He nearly died from kidney failure on the first occasion, blaming the attempt to murder him on the Kremlin.

Concerns have been growing over Kara-Murza's health after he was declared too unwell to attend his hearing. According to Britain's Guardian newspaper, more than 450 people have had criminal cases opened against them simply for opposing the country's invasion of Ukraine. Some are said to be facing

sentences of up to 15 years for offences as seemingly insignificant as posting anti-war messages on social media. What it means is that the past year has been the most repressive in recent Russian history. Putin appears to be living according to the rules that applied in previous centuries: outright brutality and an attempt to silence those who oppose him through outright murder and severe repression. Life was rather like that under Germany's Third Reich: agree with us or die.

Hitler rides again (but speaking russian this time)

There is no doubt that Stalin's change of position on Naziism and Hitler brought the Second World War to a much earlier end. Now, it seems, Putin is emulating Hitler and using violence and terror in his attempt to impose his undemocratic and dishonest rule on Europe and the wider world. Putin seems to believe he is above criticism and entitled to take whatever action he feels like, however cruel, in pursuit of his goals. He still believes that Russia needs the *Vozhd*, a leader and boss who is beyond criticism or reproach. It used to be Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, inventor of the Soviet system and creator of the Soviet Union, about whom school children were obliged to read what were, in effect, hagiographies. There could be no criticism, of course, and the children were taught to refer to him as Dyedushka, which means "Grandfather".



Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in 1920

One old comrade who had rather gone off him said of him that he "desired good but created evil". Putin has had his mausoleum, which still attracts long lines of sightseers and admirers, renovated and restored. Putin needs Lenin, it would seem, but is not personally a shadow of the man himself in character terms. Furthermore, it's not at all certain that Putin ever "desired good" although he has undoubtedly created evil. What he seems to have desired is power, nothing more, nothing less. The price doesn't seem to matter.



British Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly

As for Kara-Murza, he is 41 years old and a father of three who holds both Russian and British passports, but he was charged not only with treason for opposing Russia's invasion of Ukraine but also of discrediting the Russian military by spreading "false information" about its behaviour in what the court slavishly referred to as Russia's "special military operation" (the world knows it's a war but Putin prefers to soft-pedal on its description). Whatever Putin's supporters choose to call it, an invasion is an invasion and it has been denounced as "a blatant violation of international law and the UN Charter". The British Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, has condemned the ludicrous prison sentence that the Russian court has imposed on Kara-Murza and has also denounced "Russia's lack of commitment to protecting fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression". There is concern among Kara-Murza's friends and family over Russia's very poor record in maintaining the health of prisoners. His long-term chances during his unjust incarceration are not great but Kara-Murza remains defiant, despite the murders of others who have stood up to the dictator in the Kremlin. Let's take a quick look at Russia's record.

Anna Politkovskaya was a reporter who was shot dead in her apartment building in 2006. Then there was Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer who was murdered in police custody in 2009. Boris Nemtsov, a prominent opposition politician was shot outside the Kremlin in 2015, while outside Russia's borders, Alexander Litvinenko, a former KGB agent, was poisoned with the rare and highly radioactive metal polonium in 2006 in London. Slightly luckier were Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia who narrowly survived an assassination attempt, carried out by means of a nerve agent, in Salisbury in 2018. Now, the imprisoned opposition figure Alexei Navalny is said to be in failing health following a suspected poisoning. Putin's clumsiness in the removal of those who don't support him would almost seem funny, like an incident in some

kind of situation comedy, were it not for the deaths his brutality is causing. Putin is a dictator who probably feels that he doesn't need to hide his culpability for murder because he wants people to be frightened of him.

Stories of cruelty

This is a tragedy, because Russia has played a huge role in the evolution of literature, with giants like Tolstoy, Chekhov and Dostoyevsky whose works are still read and admired today. All the people of the future will remember about Russia is its mindless brutality and the way in which it ignores civilised standards that apply elsewhere in the world. Russia deserves a better legacy. Unfortunately, Putin seems to attach no importance to issues of legacy and reputation. It's not that Russia isn't concerned with its reputation and its place in history; a new military museum has just opened in Moscow but it has already been accused of blurring history and propaganda. Open Democracy, who sent a representative to see the museum, says that it seems deliberately to mix the illegal invasion it's staging in Ukraine with the brave resistance to Hitler's Nazis. They are not at all the same thing, of course, but Putin and his followers would like you to think so.

Honesty and Putin have long been estranged, it seems. The museum, according to Open Democracy, is basically a propaganda tool to legitimise the brutal invasion of Ukraine, with all its death and suffering. "History plays a key role in the official Russian discourse surrounding the invasion of Ukraine," says Open Democracy, "In particular, the Second World War – or the Great Patriotic War, as it's known from the Soviet perspective – and its supposed parallels with Russia's current war has become a major trope in the state's efforts to legitimise Putin's foreign policy and compel the population to endure the hardships it entails." How much Putin shares those hardships that his own brutal policies are inflicting on the Russian people is open to discussion, of course. Probably very little, although Putin would face arrest if he tried to take a holiday in the South of France. I don't suppose he'll oblige us like that, however.



Ex-Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia

You may not be surprised to discover that human suffering is a recurrent theme in Russian literature. Boris Pasternak, who wrote *Doctor Zhivago* was also famous for translating other writers' work into Russian. His translations of such great literary

figures as Goethe, Schiller, Calderón de la Barca and Shakespeare remain popular. In 1958 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature but it so annoyed the Communist Party that he was obliged to reject it. It was only in 1989 that his son, Yevgeny, was able to accept the award on his behalf, although he had died in 1960. Set in the period between 1905 and the Second World War, it was never possible to publish *Doctor Zhivago* in the old Soviet Union, even though it now forms part of the canon of works in Russian for students of literature and it is still popular with the public. Despite everything, I would imagine that Omar Sharif, Julie Christie, Geraldine Chaplin and Rod Steiger, who starred in the film version, are probably safe from Putin's anger.



Wagner Group mercenaries

Whatever Putin does next we can at least be certain that it will be brutal and inhuman. A former Wagner Group mercenary has admitted participating in the summary executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war. He told Britain's *Guardian* newspaper that his group had been told not to take prisoners. He told the newspaper he had "no regrets" and would like to go back and do it again. Another Wagner fighter admitted having killed civilians, including children – in one case a little girl of 5 or 6 years old who was screaming – because he'd been told "not to let anyone out". The Wagner fighters in this case were convicted murderers who'd been offered freedom in return for their "service" to the Russian state. It makes us wonder just what sort of a state Putin wants Russia to be. Is he trying to build for himself a record of mindless thuggery to rival Stalin? At least Stalin brought education and a few good things, albeit heavily outweighed by his savage cruelty. Putin, it seems, wants to be remembered purely for his vicious style of rule and lack of compassion. These reports rather confirm that the Wagner group is not made up of real soldiers,

merely thugs who murder people for money. There is increasing evidence of the war crimes for which Wagner is responsible, but the blame must rest solely with Putin. Ukrainian President Zelensky has promised to punish those who have committed such atrocities, but he'll have to catch them first. One thing seems clear: Putin certainly won't punish them. After all, they're simply doing what he wants: helping to instil a sense of fear in the country he's supposed to be running to ensure that there is no organised opposition.

Russia is a very troubled country and having Putin in charge can only make things worse. The Russian people know that, too, fleeing their country in droves when Putin mentioned a partial mobilisation last September. Some even engaged in serious self-harm to avoid being forced to fight. Those suffering from HIV are automatically exempt from recruitment, which led to a massive upsurge in the sale of fake documents to provide exemption. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Russia comes fifth in the international league table of AIDS cases. The Russian health ministry has dismissed the figures as "provocative propaganda" but when one sufferer received a phone call to tell him he's been recruited and he responded that he had AIDS, the recruiter responded by saying: "What difference does it make where you croak". Given the mind-numbing insensitivity of the Russian state, it comes as a surprise to hear Putin saying that Russia cannot have a problem with HIV/AIDS because Russia has no drugs and no prostitution. And presumably a president who stays deeply asleep in the face of public concern. Russia has become a nightmare state, in denial at the official level about its many problems and apparently opposed to any form of sex education on the grounds that it would lead to promiscuity and an increase in HIV/AIDS cases.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

Don't expect any breakthroughs in a state without a heart. Putin has said that the West's support for gay and transgender rights is no better than "satanism". One is tempted to say that where Satan is concerned, Putin should know. In any case, any mention of homosexuality is illegal there. What Putin has failed

to explain (and it's hard to see how he can blame western "immorality") is why up to a hundred new HIV/AIDS infections are recorded among women in Russia every day. Putin thinks the answer to such issues is strict morality, which condemns sex acts outside marriage but is happy to see its soldiers, already condemned murderers in many cases, slaughtering children. It's a very strange kind of morality that doesn't really stand up to close scrutiny.



Russian President Vladimir Putin

But let's get back to the case of Kara-Murza. While the slaughter of children is apparently laudable, saying anything negative about Putin is not. Some of the Wagner fighters who've been apprehended displayed swastika tattoos, so their commitment to fair play and peace would seem to be in some doubt. It's been reported in The New European newspaper that hospitals in the Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine are so overcrowded that some doctors are refusing to treat patients and those known to be infected with HIV/AIDS are mixing freely with others who are not infected (at least to start with). Putin's idea on justice would shock people living in medieval times while his standard of morality clearly is not aligned with those that apply in the rest of the world. That's why, of course, he can condone ludicrous jail terms for anyone who disagrees with him. The rest of the world must keep an eye on Kara-Murza, because Russia's reputation for looking after its prison inmates is far from good. Putin, it seems, is a totally heartless brute who bangs on about morality whilst having none of his own. Once anyone falls into Putin's power, his chances of a long and healthy life (even one spent behind bars) dwindle to zero.

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Russian President
Vladimir Putin and
Defence Minister Sergei
Shoigu (left) with other
high-ranking generals

FRACTURED LOYALTIES

**Division and dissent
within the Russian
military**

It has now become clear that the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was a major strategic miscalculation that exposed the weaknesses and limitations of the Russian military. Despite its numerical and technological superiority, Russia was unable to achieve most of its objectives and met fierce resistance from Ukrainian forces supported by its Western allies.

One of the main reasons for this failure was the lack of cohesion and coordination within the Russian military, which led to poor planning, logistical problems, low combat readiness and other shortcomings.

The Russian military is composed of various branches and services, each with its own history, culture, doctrine and interests. These include the ground forces, the air and space forces, the navy, the strategic missile forces, the airborne forces, the special operations forces and others. While some of these branches have been modernised and reformed in recent years, others have lagged behind and suffered from chronic underfunding, corruption and mismanagement. This has led to significant gaps and imbalances in the capabilities and readiness of the various units and formations.



Only one Soviet-era T-34-85 tank was on show at the 2023 Victory Day Parade in Moscow compared to hundreds of modern vehicles and tanks in previous parades

For example, ground forces were neglected and marginalised by the Russian leadership, which prioritised strategic deterrence and air power over conventional land warfare. Ground forces have received less funding and attention than other troop types, resulting in outdated equipment, inadequate training, low morale and high attrition. Many of the units involved in the invasion of Ukraine were ill-prepared and ill-equipped for large-scale conventional warfare against a determined enemy. They had difficulty moving over long distances, securing supply lines, communicating with other units and overcoming Ukrainian defences.

The Russian army, known for its enormous strength and historic military prowess, has been struggling with internal conflicts that are gradually coming to light. These internal struggles, often characterised by power struggles, ideological disputes and personal rivalries, have created a complex web of tensions within the ranks of the Russian armed forces.



Vladimir Putin surrounded by military personnel during his latest annual New Year's address

The roots of this internal conflict within the Russian army can be traced back to its historical evolution and the Soviet legacy. The centralised command structure of the Soviet era fostered a culture of obedience and strict hierarchy.

However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent transition to a market economy, the military underwent significant changes, including a reduction in manpower and financial constraints. This shift, coupled with the emergence of new political and economic interests, created fertile ground for internal conflicts.

In more recent times, and especially since the beginning of the Russia's invasion of Ukraine, disagreements regarding military doctrine and strategic priorities have deepened ideological fault lines within the Russian army. Divergent perspectives on the role of the military in modern warfare, the use of hybrid tactics, and engagement of private military companies and other non-state actors in conflicts have further polarised the ranks.



A member of the Ukraine Special Police Force guarding Russian prisoners

Fragmentation



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A Ukrainian girl on top of a destroyed tank

When we think of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, we usually think of Russia crossing the border into Ukraine, but this statement is not entirely accurate. Yes, Russia's official forces have crossed the border, but Russia's military presence is actually fragmented, not in the sense that they are fighting each other, although there are certainly internal conflicts in the army, but rather that the Russian armed forces are not a unified organisation. Given Russia's poor war management, this may not be surprising. However, there is some intention behind this fragmentation, which raises the question of why Putin has developed such a system. Under the circumstances, there are probably a number of good reasons.

And while this fragmentation has some serious consequences for the prospects of war, it is not ideal for the Kremlin on balance. As a starting point, of course, we have the traditional military. The army has been the main player in the war so far, but the navy has kept Ukraine under a blockade, and Russian airborne troops are present, though not nearly as strong as analysts had predicted at the start of the war.

Two days after the invasion of Ukraine, the president of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, announced that units of his special forces had been sent to Ukraine to support the Russian army. In fact, Kadyrov's fighters were part of the first wave of attacks on Ukraine and were killed en masse, together with a key commander around the Hostomel airbase. In March 2022, it was reported that elite Chechen units had been sent to Kyiv to assassinate Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski, but that the group had been neutralised after a leak from anti-war elements within the Russian Federal Security Service.

As the Russian advance faltered, many fighters are said to have retreated to the Chechen capital Grozny, having suffered heavy casualties. However, it is believed that Kadyrov sees the invasion as an opportunity to strengthen his power and prestige by sending his men to prove his loyalty to Putin, whose patronage is key to Kadyrov's authority.

Secretly, many Chechen soldiers feel that they have been sent as cannon fodder into a poorly planned war, but since the Chechen strongman has little regard for the opinions of his people, it is unlikely that this will be the last time he puts them in harm's way.

'Non-state' and 'sub-state' actors

The current war in Ukraine has made it clear that in this new age of warfare, non-state and sub-state actors play a greater role than ever before. In a conflict situation where state structures are not as effective as they could be, non-state actors can have a disproportionate impact on the situation, as has been particularly evident in eastern Ukraine.

The non-state actors are the various private military companies (PMCs) involved in the conflict. The largest and most prominent among them is, of course, the Wagner Group, which was primarily responsible for the conquest of large areas around the city of Bakhmut and whose commander, the turbulent Yevgeny Prigozhin, is among the few who dare to openly criticise the top Russian army generals and even the president.



© NRP

Ramzan Kadyrov inspecting his troops



© NRP

Yevgeny Prigozhin commanding his men in Ukraine

This high-profile confrontation once again undermines the vertical power structure of President Putin, who desperately needs convincing victories on the Ukrainian front. However, it is likely that behind Prigozhin's surprising freedom of speech lies a well-orchestrated Kremlin political project... time will tell.

Then there is the Patriot Group, which works closely with the Russian military intelligence agency GRU. It is even suspected that this private military and security company works on the direct orders of the Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu.

Another private military company is active on the front lines. It is known as ENOT, a Russian acronym for the United Communist People's Partnerships. It was founded in 2011 by Igor Mangushev, a Russian mercenary and nationalist political advisor, with the aim of uniting various militias in the Donbass into a single and more effective fighting force.

Even Gazprom, Russia's main energy company, runs a PMC involved in the war. In a February 2023 press release, the Ukrainian government warned of the danger the unit could pose at certain stages of the war.

Private armies are illegal in Russia, so of course Moscow has used them for decades. Now it's making them the main invasion force. Convoy PMC was founded in Russia-occupied Crimea in 2022 by Sergei Aksyonov, head of the Kremlin-backed administration of Crimea. Born in 1972 in the Soviet Republic of Moldova, Aksyonov was a businessman suspected of having links to organised crime. In 2014, shortly after the Russian annexation of Crimea, Aksyonov rose to prominence when Putin appointed him head of the new administration on the peninsula.



Sergei Aksyonov

Now the PMC is drawing increasing attention on social media as it recruits fighters. According to Western intelligence reports, the rise of this new Russian militia comes as the Kremlin seeks to encourage the emergence of other mercenary groups to compete with Wagner, which has clearly become too powerful for the Russian defence establishment.

Sub-state actors include the armed forces of the Luhansk People's Republic, where a mercenary group known as 'Prizrak' or Ghost Brigade operates and has attracted many foreign fighters. Like Luhansk, the armed forces of the Donetsk People's Republic are also actively involved in the war alongside Russian troops.



Leader of rebel Prizrak Brigade, Alexey Mozgovoy (third from left) was assassinated in 2015

Toxic rivalries

While Russian ground forces supported by various private military companies and mercenary groups are involved in the brutal fighting in eastern Ukraine, a different kind of conflict is simultaneously playing out in the high ranks of the military establishment in Moscow: Vladimir Putin is dismissing and replacing his senior commanders while competing factions vie for his approval.

The disputes between senior officers within the Russian army over strategy in Ukraine are creating tensions at the top and show that Russia's war effort is not as unified and coherent as it might seem. They also raise questions about Putin's role and authority in the conflict and whether he can achieve his goals without alienating or losing his security forces.

The military, like any organisation, is made up of people and is therefore fundamentally vulnerable. And where there are people, there is also an organisational culture. Culture can affect a military's performance as much as the capabilities of its weapons or the number of its personnel. All the tanks in the world do not mean much if the system that maintains them is weakened by corruption and false reporting. But the component that explains why systems adopt inefficient structures, struggle with coordination or are filled with mutual distrust and self-sabotage is undoubtedly politics.

Where the political interests of the individual diverge from the interests of the collective, bad things

happen, and where leaders begin to place more emphasis on loyalty than competence, a system will never realise its full potential.

In war efforts, ideally all the forces and capabilities available to a state are pooled. But sometimes it is more in one's own interest for another to fail than for a joint victory. The concept is similar in military affairs, but the consequences are deadlier.

The Wagner Group, for example, supported Russian interests in attacks on strategic locations such as Bakhmut and Soledar and suffered heavy losses. However, the group's role has led to a bitter rift between the Russian Ministry of Defence and Prigozhin, who are competing for recognition and influence.

A few days after Prigozhin's declaration of victory, which was promptly denied by a Ukrainian spokesman, the Russian Ministry of Defence announced that it had taken Soledar after air and artillery attacks and airborne operations. In fact, Wagner was not even mentioned at first, but after Prigozhin accused the military of "stealing Wagner's victory", it praised the group's "courageous and selfless effort" in storming the city.

Prigozhin has strongly condemned the military leadership for mistakes in Ukraine, claiming Wagner was more effective than the regular forces. He has found a strong supporter in Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who has sent elite soldiers to Ukraine, who also criticises the military leadership and the Kremlin for being too weak and hesitant.

Although both warlords have sworn allegiance to Putin, their public criticism of the Kremlin's most senior generals was unprecedented in Russia's tightly controlled political system and challenged the Kremlin's exclusive right to do so.



Kadyrov's Chechen Special Forces in Ukraine

Implications and consequences

Power struggles have affected the operational readiness of the Russian army as internal conflicts divert attention from training, readiness and strategic planning. The focus on internal power struggles has led to a decline in combat power and undermined the military's ability to respond to threats.

Moreover, internal rivalries within the army seem to undermine loyalty to the chain of command and discipline. Factional loyalties and personal ambitions have eclipsed the larger mission, undermining trust and compromising military effectiveness.



Wagner PMC recruitment advert, Russia

Similarly, recent cases have also shown that effective decision-making processes within the military hierarchy are also hampered by tensions and rivalries within the ranks. Competing factions push for policies that suit their own interests, which can hamper the ability to formulate coherent and unified strategies.

Finally, ongoing internal conflicts have weakened the institutional fabric of the military. The erosion of trust, corruption and ideological divisions have hindered the development of professional and performance-oriented armed forces and undermined the long-term stability of the Russian military apparatus.



Damaged and abandoned Russian armoured personnel carriers

The axe falls

Sixteen months have elapsed since President Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and the Russian military is still struggling to make significant gains on the battlefield. Military advances around the towns of Soledar and Bakhmut have been marginal, and what Russian soldiers have captured has been destroyed in the process. So this is also an unusually futile war.

Obviously there are many Russians who realise how badly it went, that none of the Russian objectives were really achieved and that this has set the country back years. But there seems to be a kind of rallying effect and the atmosphere is not one of expressing treasonous thoughts; many Russians even seem to be in a state of denial.

But ending this war without having achieved its objectives is certainly not one of President Putin's options, at least for the moment. If he did, he would have to settle accounts and weigh the costs of the war against what he has achieved.

This could have an impact on the overall strategy at the moment. And one explanation for the ferocity with which the Russian army went after Bakhmut is that Putin still seems to have the idea that if he can only take all of Donetsk and hold all of Luhansk, it might work.

This, however, required a radical change in military leadership. In an unusual shake-up in the midst of ongoing military operations, President Putin has dismissed senior commanders, transferred a number of others and replaced many of them with lower-ranking officers, in what many analysts see as a purge.



Colonel General Aleksander Chayko



Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlyov

The generals in charge of Russia's eastern and western military districts have lost their orders. **Colonel General Aleksandr Chayko** was dismissed as commander of the Eastern Military District in May 2022, and **Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlyov**, commander of Russia's Western Military District, was dismissed on 3 October 2022. He was to be replaced by Lieutenant General Roman Berdnikov. The Western Military District is one of five military districts that make up the Russian armed forces. Zhuravlyov's reported departure follows dramatic Russian losses in north-eastern Ukraine in April 2022 and Ukraine's recapture of Lyman, which Russia had used as a key logistics centre in the Donetsk region.



General Dmitry Bulgakov (centre)



General Gennady Valeryevich Zhidko

A week earlier, the Defence Ministry had announced that the deputy minister in charge of logistics, **General Dmitry Bulgakov**, had been replaced. At the end of May 2022, it was reported that **Colonel General Gennady Valeryevich Zhidko** had assumed overall responsibility for the Russian armed forces during the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, replacing Army General Alexander Dvornikov. However, on 8 October 2022, he was replaced by **Army General Sergei Surovikin** as the new Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine.



Army General Sergei Surovikin (left)



Colonel General Aleksander Pavlovich Lapin (right)

General Sergei Vladimirovich Surovikin was initially commander of the Army Group South of the Russian Armed Forces. On 8 October 2022, he became commander of all Russian forces that invaded Ukraine, but was replaced by Valery Gerasimov in January 2023.

Colonel General Aleksander Pavlovich Lapin was commander of the Central Military District of the Russian Armed Forces at the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine.

After being criticised by senior military officials as well as Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and Wagner commander Yevgeny Prigozhin for incompetence and abandoning the strategic city of Lyman, he was dismissed by Putin. However, in a reshuffle in January 2023, he was appointed Chief of Staff of the Russian Ground Forces.



General Sergei Kisel



Lieutenant General Vladislav Ershov

British military intelligence reported on 13 May 2022 that the Kremlin had arrested **Lieutenant General Sergei Kisel**, the commander of the elite 1st Guards Tank Army.

Due to great losses in personnel, weapons and military equipment, the commander of the 6th Army, **Lieutenant General Vladislav Ershov**, as well as the commander of the 22nd Army Corps of the Southern Military District, **Major General Arkady Marzoev** were also dismissed.



Major General Arkady Marzoev



Vice Admiral Igor Osipov

In April 2022, the commander of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, Vice Admiral Igor Osipov, was suspended for the sinking of the flagship cruiser 'Moskva' after an apparent Ukrainian missile attack.

In January 2023, the Kremlin appears to have dismissed Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky, the current head of Russia's elite airborne forces from a high-level operational role in the Ukraine campaign. He was appointed head of Russia's elite airborne troops in June 2022, having suffered heavy losses in the early days of the war in Ukraine.



General Aleksander Vladimirovich Dvornikov (right) known as "the butcher of Syria" for his brutality against civilians



Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky (left)

General Aleksander Vladimirovich Dvornikov who was given command of Russia's Southern Military District after gaining notoriety for his brutal campaigns in Syria, was tasked with conquering the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas in early April 2022 after a large-scale assault on Ukraine failed due to fierce Ukrainian resistance.

General Dvornikov, known as the 'Butcher of Syria', suddenly disappeared from public view in June 2022. His disappearance led to speculation that he was no longer in command of the campaign. His absence from public view was reminiscent of Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu's 13-day absence in March 2022 after the first failures in Ukraine.

Perhaps most remarkably, **General Valeriy Gerasimov**, the Chief of the Russian General Staff - a position roughly comparable to that of the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs - and First Deputy Minister of Defence, remains in his post as Commander-in-Chief of Russian forces in Ukraine, having replaced General Surovikin. According to British intelligence, however, it is unclear whether he still enjoys President Putin's confidence.

Tatiana Stanovaya, senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center noted that Gerasimov's appointment is another attempt by Putin to solve his military problems by turning over the top leadership. *"He is trying to reshuffle the pieces and is therefore giving chances to those who he finds persuasive," she wrote. "But in reality, the problem is not with the people, but with the tasks at hand."*



Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, Valery Gerasimov (left), Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu (right)

Before his appointment, General Gerasimov was in charge of the operation in Ukraine, as Viktor Alksnis, a former colonel in the Soviet Air Force and one of the leaders of the failed effort to save the USSR in 1991, pointed out. *"This decision reflects the understanding by our political and military leadership that the special military operation has failed and none of its goals has been fulfilled in nearly a year of fighting,"* Alksnis wrote on his messaging app channel. *"Replacing Surovikin with Gerasimov will change nothing."*

And Mark Galeotti, a specialist in Russian military and security affairs at University College, London, said the appointment handed General Gerasimov *"the most poisoned of chalices as he now will bear direct responsibility for any more setbacks. Gerasimov is hanging by a thread."* In a commentary on Twitter Galeotti added. *"He needs some kind of win, or a career ends in ignominy. This may well suggest some kinds of escalation."* Galeotti also warned that frequent reshuffling of Russia's generals could erode allegiance in the officer corps. *"If you keep appointing, rotating, burning your (relative) stars, setting unrealistic expectations, arbitrarily demoting them, that's not going to win loyalty,"* he said.



Mark Galeotti at a NATO meeting

Future prospects

The conflict in Ukraine, which shocked the whole world when it erupted in February 2022, has in some ways become normalised. A historical analogy for this period could be the middle of 1915. The First World War began in 1914 and heavy fighting was still ahead in mid-1915, but all the major parties were confident that they would win and survive many more months or years of hostilities.

It is likely that Russia will eventually be defeated and Ukraine will recapture most or all of the occupied territories, but a collapse of Putin's regime is unlikely even if the war aims are not fully achieved. Surprisingly, the Kremlin seems to be benefiting from the West's support for Ukraine, as it can continue to tell its population that NATO is at war with Russia.

Many military and academic experts believe that the war will last until the end of 2023 because the Russian president wants to keep the conflict going until his expected re-election in March 2024.

In this way, he can argue that Russia is threatened from outside and that he is the only one who can defend it. It is possible that the coming months will see a shift towards a more united and consolidated Russian power elite, with a significant reduction in the role of all non-conventional forms of warfare, such as private armies, convicted criminals, mercenaries and ethnic battalions, and an increase in Russian protection of occupied territories.

We are now in a war of attrition and major changes are unlikely to occur until after mid-2024. Only when the direction the Russian regime is taking becomes clearer and both Ukraine and the West seem to be tired of the ongoing conflict, may some concrete options for ending the conflict emerge.

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<p>The woman by the motorway</p>  <p>DATE OF DISCOVERY: 16 March 1986</p> <p>ESTIMATED AGE: 27-33 years old</p> <p>THE CASE: Found along the A6 motorway, in the direction of Heilbronn, Germany.</p> <p>OPERATION IDENTIFY ME</p>	<p>Teteringen girl</p>  <p>DATE OF DISCOVERY: 25 December 1990</p> <p>ESTIMATED AGE: 15-25 years old</p> <p>THE CASE: Found in the woods in Teteringen, Netherlands, near the A27 motorway.</p> <p>OPERATION IDENTIFY ME</p>	<p>The woman on the boat</p>  <p>DATE OF DISCOVERY: 16 January 1998</p> <p>ESTIMATED AGE: 25-35 years old</p> <p>THE CASE: Found following a fire in a houseboat at Jacob van Lennepkade in Amsterdam, Netherlands.</p> <p>OPERATION IDENTIFY ME</p>
<p>The woman in the Gaasp river</p>  <p>DATE OF DISCOVERY: 19 September 1999</p> <p>ESTIMATED AGE: 18-35 years old</p> <p>THE CASE: Found in a container floating in the Gaasp river in Amsterdam, Netherlands.</p> <p>OPERATION IDENTIFY ME</p>	<p>The woman in the Scheldt</p>  <p>DATE OF DISCOVERY: 20 April 2002</p> <p>ESTIMATED AGE: 20-40 years old</p> <p>THE CASE: Found in the Scheldt River, near the King Baudouin monument in Antwerp, Belgium.</p> <p>OPERATION IDENTIFY ME</p>	<p>The body in the carpet</p>  <p>DATE OF DISCOVERY: 30 July 2002</p> <p>ESTIMATED AGE: 22-35 years old</p> <p>THE CASE: Found in the Weser River in Bremen, Germany, wrapped in a carpet.</p> <p>OPERATION IDENTIFY ME</p>
<p>The woman in the Meuse</p>  <p>DATE OF DISCOVERY: 7 June 2005</p> <p>ESTIMATED AGE: 25-40 years old</p> <p>THE CASE: Found in the Meuse River, near Jambes, a borough of Namur, Belgium.</p> <p>OPERATION IDENTIFY ME</p>	<p>The woman in the suitcase</p>  <p>DATE OF DISCOVERY: 12 October 2005</p> <p>ESTIMATED AGE: 16-22 years old</p> <p>THE CASE: Found in a red suitcase in the canal at Thorbeckesingel, in Schiedam, Netherlands.</p> <p>OPERATION IDENTIFY ME</p>	<p>The woman with the artificial nails</p>  <p>DATE OF DISCOVERY: 31 May 2009</p> <p>ESTIMATED AGE: 14-24 years old</p> <p>THE CASE: Found in the Albert Canal in Visé, Belgium.</p> <p>OPERATION IDENTIFY ME</p>

DO YOU
KNOW ANY
OF THESE
WOMEN ?

Interpol makes details of
Black Notices publicly
available for first time

Belgian, Dutch and German police as well as INTERPOL have launched Operation Identify Me to seek the public's help in identifying 22 deceased women who are believed to have been murdered.

Details on each case have been made available on the Operation Identify Me appeal page, (<https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Notices/Operation-Identify-Me>) showing facial reconstructions of some of the murdered women, as well as videos and pictures of items such as jewellery and clothing which were discovered at the various land and water sites where the women's remains were abandoned.

The information available on INTERPOL's website also includes characteristics such as estimated age, hair colour, eye colour and other physical characteristics.

Leading actresses, singers and sports women from the participating countries are supporting the initiative, including actresses Carice van Houten and Veerle Baetens, singers S10 and Axelle Red, boxing champion Regina Halmich and sports reporter Katrin Müller-Hohenstein.

"Most of the 22 victims died violently, and some were also abused or starved before they died. Partly because the women are likely from countries other than where they were found, their identities have not yet been established. It is possible that their bodies were left in our countries to impede criminal investigations," said Carina van Leeuwen and Martin de Wit in a statement by the Netherlands Police, which initiated the public appeal.

"We want to stress that we are looking for names", says Carolien Opdecam of the Belgian police. "The victim's identity is often the key to unlocking the mysteries of a case."

With some of the murdered women believed to have come from specific regions in Eastern Europe, identifying them may also provide evidence on the perpetrators of these crimes. Anja Allendorf of the German police said: "In similar investigations, establishing the victim's identity ultimately has led to the arrest of a suspect."

In Operation Identify Me, INTERPOL has for the first time made public some details of Black Notices which are used to seek information and intelligence on unidentified bodies and to determine the circumstances surrounding the death.

The Notices can include information on the location where the body was found, physical descriptions of the body or clothing, and any other details that might be relevant to identifying the deceased.

"Black Notices allow law enforcement agencies to collaborate and share information across borders, ultimately helping to bring closure to the families of the deceased and bring offenders to justice," said Susan Hitchin, Coordinator of INTERPOL's DNA Unit. "Advances in technology across the different fields of forensic human identification have been significant in helping solve cold cases."

Since 2021, INTERPOL has been providing investigators with a new global tool, the I-Familia database, to help identify unknown bodies through international family DNA kinship matching.

Members of the public, particularly those who remember a missing friend or family member, are invited to consult www.INTERPOL.int/IM and contact the relevant national police team should they have any information. For biological relatives who believe one of the women could be their missing loved one, national police once contacted can liaise with INTERPOL for international DNA comparison.

WATCH VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7MVOtli3Jo>



The woman in the dam

Operation Identify Me: Seeking the names of unidentified victims of murder

Case name: The woman in the dam

Case code: 2023-BEL03

- **Date of death (estimated):** Between 1994 and 1995
- **Date of discovery:** 9 May 1996
- **Location:** Belgium: In the lake at the foot of the dam of La Plate Taille in Froidchapelle.
- **Sex:** Female
- **Estimated year of birth:** Between 1961 and 1971
- **Estimated age:** Between 25 and 35 years old
- **Height:** 160 - 170 cm
- **Skin tone:** Undetermined
- **Hair colour:** Undetermined
- **Eye colour:** Undetermined
- **Clothing:** The woman was wearing presumably red jeans from 'VOS Jeans', white socks with a red and blue stripe and a black shoe with a wide heel from 'CYPRES' in size 37.5.
- **Tattoos, birth marks, scars:** Undetermined
- **Jewellery:** None

The case: Just a few kilometres from the border with France lies the municipality of Froidchapelle, a small village in a wooded area. Nearby is the largest dam in Belgium: the dam of La Plate Taille. On 9 May 1996, the body of a woman was found in the lake near the dam. The body may have been in the water for up to 1 or 2 years. To date, her identity is unknown.

Characteristics: The woman was between 25 and 35 years old and between 1.60 and 1.70 meters tall. Striking detail: her left leg was 2 cm shorter than her right leg.

She wore presumably red jeans from "VOS Jeans", white socks with a red and a blue stripe and a black (left) shoe with a wide heel from 'CYPRES' in size 37.5.

WATCH VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oap0G8nHzv0>



Dacia-Romania Palace

ART SAFARI

A successful Romanian art story

Art Safari is undoubtedly one of the most popular art events in Romania today and has the great merit of having brought art closer to the public and especially to young audiences over the last decade. It is the kind of art event that is able to attract audiences of different ages and professions, who may or may not be familiar with the artistic phenomenon.

Ioana Ciocan, CEO of Art Safari and Romanian commissioner at the Venice Biennale d'Arte, explained, *"With this project we want to change people's relationship with art and win them over. Our mission is to promote the visual arts by offering truly special experiences - a very ambitious goal. The public in our country was not used to such artistic events. The number of visits to museums and art galleries, the consumption of culture in general and art in particular was nothing out of the ordinary."*

So we took the opportunity to impress with something completely different! All in all, we offered a great but also different experience: exhibitions with original curatorial concepts, organised according to international standards in collaboration with Romanian museums and private collectors (a first at the time!), but also with museums and galleries abroad. People had the opportunity to see prestigious art, but also to spend their time in a pleasant way."

We explored the city by opening symbolic but forgotten buildings of Bucharest. Finally, we organised night tours with live music and prosecco (the best-selling product) and organised fine culinary experiences on site."

In the beginning, Art Safari was a pop-up museum that travelled throughout the capital city of Bucharest, to various iconic buildings and places full of history and interesting stories that have yet to be discovered by the general public. The journey started in 2014 at George Enescu Square in the middle of the city and then continued at the Ciclop Garage, where a fully functional garage was transformed into a large-scale exhibition space for art, to the amazement of the public (a great marketing move, I might add). The Victoria Tower or the Kretzulescu Galleries were some of the other famous venues Art Safari used for their culturally brilliant events.

From 2021, Art Safari will be held three years in a row at the same wonderful place on Lipscani Street, the Dacia Palace, a building that was closed to the public for decades. Built more than 120 years ago in the classical Viennese style, the building was once the seat of a bank, then an insurance company or a newspaper office, where the famous Romanian poet Eminescu also worked. The palace is an architectural jewel that has been renovated in recent years and brought back to life in a spectacular way through art.

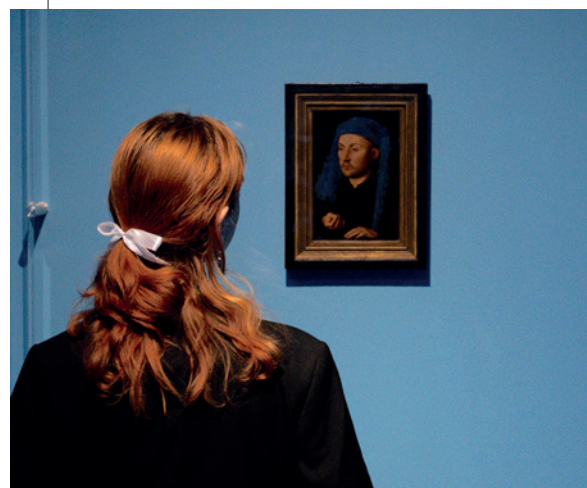


Art Safari modern art

"We must thank the Ministry of Culture for recognising the importance of Art Safari on a national level, and the Bucharest City Museum for giving us the opportunity to live in this emblematic building (the future seat of the Bucharest Art Gallery) and open it to the public through a cultural partnership." (Ioana Ciocan, CEO Art Safari).

The number of visitors to the Art Safari exhibitions increased year by year, so there was soon a need to accommodate a larger audience and longer periods of time. What began as a short-term art event expanded into a six-month exhibition that increasingly resembled an art and culture marathon. For the first time in the event's history, Art Safari 2023 will have three major editions of three months each. *"It has become a museum for temporary exhibitions of prestigious Romanian and international art"* (Ioana Ciocan).

They have also organised an unexpected exchange of exhibits with other museums in Bucharest (Antipa National Museum of Natural History, Technical Museum, Cotroceni National Museum and Romanian Peasant Museum) and brought prestigious international collections of Dali, Picasso or John Constable to Bucharest in collaboration with the Victoria and Albert Museum in London or the National Portrait Gallery.



'The Man with the Blue Hat' (1430), by Jan van Eyck (1390-1441)

What was new and important for Art Safari from the very beginning was that art was explained in a way that everyone could understand, both in the exhibition spaces and during the guided tours. The temporary exhibitions always offered something attractive for the public (a new exhibition, installations and events), and the scenography was very special and offered visitors an immersive experience.

Through the great effort of an extremely enthusiastic team, but also through an integrated vision of art, the organisers succeeded in explaining the concept of the Art Safari and attracting more and more visitors to their art world.

Visitors were also invited behind the scenes. Besides the spectacular art on display, there is another, unseen show: all the extraordinary machinery behind the Art Safari. From the set-up of the venue to the transport of the artworks to the storage of the works and their exhibition process. All these details wowed the audience in Bucharest and beyond. Importantly, Art Safari also managed to attract visitors from the capital and the rest of the country as well as foreign tourists, representatives of major galleries, museums and cultural institutions from abroad who chose Bucharest for an artistic city break.

In the ten years of its existence, Art Safari also organised exhibitions in more unconventional places such as the Bucharest metro or Henri Coandă International Airport. All these initiatives have contributed to raising Art Safari's profile, informing the public and also attracting new visitors. The visitor experience that Art Safari offers has always been an important part of the overall marketing effort. Immersive experiences, installations and new media techniques transform art into an exhibition that is accessible to many, one that all people can understand and enjoy.

In addition, each edition has an entire pavilion dedicated to 'super-modern' art created by various artists of the younger generation, which is very popular with the very young audience.

An important aspect of the Art Safari concept is that art must be for everyone, regardless of age or cultural intelligence. Children have not been forgotten. They have their own museum within the whole event. Art Safari Kids is a programme of art workshops and guided tours of the Art Safari exhibitions designed especially for the youngest visitors, combining education and art, making full use of the magnificent artworks on display in the Art Safari pavilions to impress the little ones.



'Courtyard in Seville' by Pablo Salinas Teruel

This is also one of the reasons why the whole art event is so popular with young people and you always see families visiting together. There is something for everyone.

The Art Safari team has proven over the years that they know how to appeal to the general public, what the younger generation wants and likes and how to make art interesting for the more tech-savvy Generation Z. With a strong Instagram content and presence, the exhibitions are a magnet for those who may never have entered a museum in their lives before and might not have done so under other circumstances.

As another unique attraction in Bucharest, but of course also due to the great success that the famous Night of Museums has in the city every year, Art Safari has decided to offer guided night tours for small groups. They promise to reveal the secrets behind the art exhibitions, told directly by Art Safari guides and curators. These events take place every Friday and Saturday between 10pm and 1am and herald a full repertoire of emotions and a complete experience of a perfect evening in the city, with art, relaxation and complimentary prosecco all rolled into one. I'd say it's a perfect combination for social media success.

Today, the Dacia Romania Palace is basically a cultural hotspot in Bucharest where you can spend your time visiting the four Romanian and international art exhibitions currently running, see the immersive installations, visit a bookshop or spend time in the on-site café.



'Flirting with the matador' by Pablo Salinas Teruel

In 2023, the main goal of the 11th edition of Art Safari is to organise a major exhibition dedicated to Ion Theodorescu-Sion (1882-1939), an outstanding figure in Romanian art between the two world wars, who experimented with and combined very different styles, from Impressionism, Pointillism, Divisionism, Post-Impressionism to Realism.

The 2023 edition also achieved the historic feat of presenting five world-famous masterpieces from the Brukenthal National Museum in Sibiu (Romanian city, former European Capital of Culture) for the first time in a temporary exhibition on Romanian soil.

The artworks are considered to be the most valuable works of art in Romania. Among them is the famous painting 'The Man in the Blue Hat' (1430) by Jan van Eyck (1390-1441). Jan van Eyck is one of the world's greatest artists and is often considered the father of the Nordic Renaissance and the first of the great European portrait painters. This is a very valuable and rare work, as only 20 paintings by the Flemish artist are known worldwide, and this is the only one in Romania.

It was acquired in the 18th century by Baron Samuel von Brukenthal and was long thought to be a work by the German painter Albrecht Duerer. The painting is one of a series of paintings by the artist such as 'The Man with the Red Turban', which is considered a self-portrait and is in the National Portrait Gallery in London, or 'The Man with the Ring', which is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.



Opening of the Art Safari exhibition 2023

The Art Safari 2023 temporary exhibition also featured 'Ecce Homo' (1543), the famous painting by Titian which, along with seven other important works was stolen from the Brukenthal Museum in 1968. and

which was recovered 30 years later by Interpol. A later version of this painting from 1548 is on display at the Prado Museum in Madrid.

The 'Brukenthal Exclusive' paintings had to be specially guarded and transported to Bucharest, as the five works of art have an insurance value of 75 million euros.

Another highlight of Art Safari 2023 was the exhibition 'Masters of Spanish Painting'. For this, the Spanish Embassy in Bucharest and the Cervantes Institute collaborated with Art Safari to present the Bucharest public with a hundred never-before-exhibited paintings by 34 different Spanish painters. The paintings, which come from various private collections, were collected and brought to Bucharest thanks to the great work of C2C Proyectos Culturales, which curated the exhibition, especially through Ms Helena Cosano, and managed the entire operation and related logistics.

Micaela Ossola Revilla, First Secretary for Consular, Cultural and Administrative Affairs at the Spanish Embassy in Bucharest, told me in a telephone conversation that this art exhibition was the largest exhibition of Spanish painting in Bucharest and 'the perfect way to introduce Spanish art to the Romanian public'. She also said that this is not the first collaboration with Art Safari and C2C: last year they jointly organised the exhibition 'Picasso, Falla and the Tricorn', which revolved around the production of the ballet with the same title. C2C is very active throughout Europe, with several exhibitions in different European capitals as we speak.



José Antonio Hernández Pérez-Solórzano, Spanish ambassador to Romania

Focusing on the 19th century and the rise of Impressionism, the exhibition highlights the career of the great Spanish painter Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (1863 - 1923), who excelled in painting portraits and monumental works with social and historical themes, depicting traditional Spanish life of the time, as well as more exotic subjects from North Africa. Most of his works depict people and landscapes in the sunlight of his native Spain. Using bold pigments and techniques that broke new ground in painting and broke with the established and accepted canon of the time, he combined an impressionistic style of painting with narrative and anecdotal themes.

'On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the death of the Spanish master Sorolla, titled 'El maestro de la luz', this exhibition shows the connection between Spanish art and the world.' (Micaela Ossola Revilla)

"Sorolla captured like no other how the light of the Mediterranean can turn everyday scenes into something special. His fellow Spanish Impressionists, whose works we can also admire in this exhibition 'Masters of Spanish Painting', each portrayed a part of Spain in the late 19th century that helped build the romantic idea of Spain that was prevalent in the 1800s" (José Antonio Hernández Pérez-Solórzano, Spanish ambassador to Romania)

This is the third year that the Spanish Embassy has cooperated with Art Safari. The aim is to build even closer relations with the Romanian public, strengthen cultural cooperation and promote cultural exchange between the two countries.

Another important item on the agenda of Art Safari 2023 was the 'Memory Palace', a mnemonic art practised since ancient times, based on the memory of places we already know, with which we connect in different ways the new elements we want to memorise. The idea of this memory palace is to show how contemporary artists take up the past to reinterpret it in view of a hopeful future.



Ioana Ciocan, CEO Art Safari and Romanian commissioner at the Venice Biennale d'Arte

The exhibition on the second floor of the Dacia Palace, set up like a labyrinth, presents a selection of eight artists and two duos from the French art scene (from different generations and cultural backgrounds) who have participated in the Marcel Duchamp Prize over the last fifteen years. The multi-award-winning Romanian artist Mircea Cantor, who won the Marcel Duchamp Prize in 2011, was also among those celebrated at the event.

"After presenting a major exhibition in partnership with the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for the first time in Eastern Europe in 2022, Art Safari is honoured to present the French contemporary art scene through the Marcel Duchamp Prize, a reminder of the close cultural ties and ongoing artistic dialogue between France and Romania", said Ioana Ciocan at the opening of the exhibition.

For the second part of 2023, Art Safari is planning two new high-profile exhibitions: Love Stories, featuring artworks from the collection of the National Portrait Gallery in London, and Bags: Inside Out, an exhibition of iconic bags from the collection of the Royal Victoria and Albert Museum.

Whether it shows Romanian art or internationally renowned works, Art Safari's mission is to create a dialogue between all the actors involved in the cultural phenomenon: Museums, artists, curators, art collectors and national and international cultural institutions, so that art lovers can embark on a fascinating journey. It is also, as Ioana Ciocan points out, about cultural diplomacy, because all the international exhibitions organised by Art Safari benefit from the support of the embassies and cultural institutes of the respective countries in Romania.

Art Safari is a celebration of art, a powerful product that has brilliantly managed to adapt its offer to the demand and audience of the 21st century. The organisers deserve credit for bringing art closer to the people and making it understandable and interesting for everyone.

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© YOM - STUDIO BORLENGHI

MONACO'S 10TH ENERGY BOAT CHALLENGE

**50+ boats and 23 nations
engaged in yachting's
energy transition expected
in Monaco in July**

The Yacht Club de Monaco is organising the 10th Energy Boat Challenge, the greatest gathering for alternative energy sources, from July 3 through July 8 in the Principality of Monaco.

There are now 27 teams registered in the Solar and Energy programmes, which are primarily made up of engineering students. The first YCM E-Boat Rally from Monaco to Cala del Forte in Italy has drawn about 15 professional competitors who are attending to showcase their newest improvements. With its 100% electric press and safety boats, YCM has also set itself the objective of having zero emissions. There will be more than 50 boats out on the bay of Monaco's waters altogether.

This one-of-a-kind international event, which focuses on open source R&D and features a complete schedule of maritime challenges at sea, daily Tech Talks, industrial pitches, and a conference, is funded by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation. Important participants in the yachting industry, such as the Sanlorenzo, Oceanco, Ferretti, and Monaco Marine shipyards, are also partners, along with Credit Suisse, BMW, and SBM Offshore.

The Principality continues to uphold its long legacy as a technological testing ground, well over a century after the inaugural powerboat seminars drew industrialists from all over the world to learn about the newest advancements in propulsion. According to YCM General Secretary Bernard d'Alessandri, "YCM intends to be a driving force in the environmental change, an objective that is part of the collective "Monaco, Capital of Advanced Yachting" strategy.



YCM General Secretary Bernard D'Alessandri

As in previous years, conversations about sustainability will continue throughout the Monaco Energy Boat Challenge with a half-day symposium on July 6th, headlined Challenges, Engagement and Adoption, to assess the obstacles still to overcome and the advancements made. The fourth Hydrogen Round Table will be held the next day (Friday, July 7), and it is being organised by the YCM, the Energy Transition Mission, and the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation. International hydrogen project developers will join forces with governmental and institutional stakeholders from Monegasque, France, and other countries. It's important to note that every year, there are more prototypes related to hydrogen that compete in this challenge, from two in 2019 to six in 2021, seven in 2022, and nine teams this year.

The Solar Class has just finished its dossiers, and the Energy Class registrations concluded in mid-January.

There will be representation both ashore and at sea from 27 teams representing 23 different countries, including teams from as far away as India, Turkey, Croatia, and the United States of America. Open Sea Class competitors have until June 1st to finish their entries.

In an effort to foster interactions between engineering students and business, YCM is expanding its channels of communication, such as the Job Forum. This project, which was started in 2019, will continue throughout the event to address the rising demand for internships and jobs for aspiring engineers to satisfy industry needs. It has been a great success, therefore this year a networking event called "Live Career Day" is being held for the first time on June 15 to get these interactions between yachting experts and young engineers started.



An additional innovation to the Job Forum is a Corporate Mentoring Programme, which was introduced at the beginning of the year to help integrate industry and university teams and provide the latter with specialised guidance on their goals and projects.

What makes this conference unique is the laboratory idea that sees innovative technologies in action, being put through their paces in a variety of contests on the sea. The first-ever YCM E-Boat Rally, organised in collaboration with Aqua superPower as one of the answers for the future of yachting, is one of the new highlights for this 10th edition. It seeks to bring together a record number of builders of electric boats already on the market. On a route between Monaco and Ventimiglia (16 nautical miles one way), all of their talent will be put to the test. The first E-Dock, a bamboo-structured eco-design pontoon with AC (alternative current) and DC (direct current) chargers, will be launched in order to accommodate them. It will be able to give quick and dependable power to more than 20 boats at once. For boats that are DC compatible, it will serve as a floating platform for quick charging.

The YCM will fully utilise battery options in the form of a small solar power facility. The portable electricity generator has multiple outputs (USB, DC, AC, wireless) to power a variety of devices, which guarantees complete energy independence for the PC team in charge of organising boat races at the YCM.

In addition to the Monaco Energy Boat Challenge, YCM is stepping up efforts to further its environmental objectives. A few examples include the addition of charging stations for electric vehicles (cars and boats) in the YCM Marina, the purchase of three electric tenders to support its youth competition teams, the use of BTL biofuel, and the creation of a water recycling system for the Club's swimming pool. Energy conservation on every level is the main objective.

The Monaco Energy Boat Challenge demonstrates that technology is effective and existing, in keeping with the wishes of YCM President, HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco, who thinks that "faced with the climate emergency, it is imperative that living proof of progress replaces the promises." By hosting this event, YCM hopes to play a significant role in the environmental transformation and promote the Principality as a leader in ethical yachting.

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A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FROM MEP MS RASA JUKNEVICIENE



Europe Diplomatic Magazine fully adheres to all internationally accepted standards and codes of conduct for journal editors, and consequently abides by the rules and regulations governing this field of activity.

These include the two following basic obligations regarding accuracy :

- 1 - The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text.
- 2 - A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion must be corrected promptly and with due prominence, and - where appropriate - an apology published.

In the March 2023 edition of Europe Diplomatic Magazine, we published an article entitled RIGHTING HISTORICAL INJUSTICES - A Lithuanian MEP continues her life-long battle against cruel and rapacious regimes

We publish the reader's comments and the author's response herewith, in complete open mindedness and in a conciliatory spirit.

Trajan Dereville, Chief Editor

Dear Kingsley Brooks,

I would like to sincerely thank you for the elaborate feature that you have published in the

March issue of the European Diplomatic Magazine (pp. 34-39). I was humbled and flattered to find such a comprehensive article featuring my work at the EP and beyond.

There was, however, a paragraph that I found deeply unsettling. While I fully understand the wish to present different sides of every story, the attempt at objectively portraying the figure of Jonas Žemaitis- Vytautas has allowed an untruthful Soviet narrative to seep into the article.

Selective and often outright falsified narrative of the World War II was at the heart of Soviet historiography and the legitimizing myth of Soviet greatness. Discrediting Lithuania's (and other Soviet- occupied countries') resistance against the occupation was one of the key components of this grand narrative. Just as in Ukraine today, the Nazi or fascist label was one of the main tools used. Unfortunately, the paragraph in question features untruthful claims that discredit the memory of Jonas Žemaitis- Vytautas. The paragraph is quoted below:

"Jonas Žemaitis has been described as pompous with an inflated ego when he became an officer. He has also become involved in street-fighting, which hardly seems very heroic. He may also have been one of a group of deserters who surrendered himself to the Germans, but that's not something that Lithuanian patriots like to talk about. And it may not even be correct, of course. It's also true to say that even if people like Žemaitis- Vytautas were not the flawless heroes the stories like to convey and even if he swore undying allegiance to Adolf Hitler when he joined the Auxiliary Police Service Battalion, in the end his service to his country and its independence was valuable, which is presumably why he still has the admiration of Juknevičienė, who would clearly never have aligned with the Nazis."

Jonas Žemaitis- Vytautas does not just "presumably" have "the admiration of Juknevičienė". In 2009, Lithuania's Parliament

adopted a declaration recognizing Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas as the *de facto* President of the Republic of Lithuania between 1949 and 1954, as he served as the Head of the state- succeeding organization that fought to restore country's independence¹. He was the leader of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters – country's organized armed resistance against the Soviets – which, although comparatively “little” (as noted in the article), included around 100 thousand members who sustained the fight for nearly a decade until 1953². The resistance was systematic and organized; it is assessed to have had significant consequences for local Soviet policies and laid the foundation for later dissident resistance against Soviet totalitarianism³.



© NRP

Jonas Žemaitis

Given his importance and state-level recognition, extensive historical research has been conducted into Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas biography with the purpose of delineating the truth and casting out Soviet lies. The paragraph above, although carefully worded, insinuates that Žemaitis-Vytautas biography is ambiguous, not known, and that he is likely to have collaborated with the Nazis. Neither is true. I am convinced that reputable media outlets have a duty not to feature unverified and untruthful claims in any form.

1 <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.339103>

2 <https://genocid.lt/centras/lt/1486/a/>

3 <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2017-09-21-1944-1953-m-partizaninis-karas-tautos-pergale-ar-pralaimejimas/>

Firstly, I would like to inquire into the sources of the claims about Žemaitis-Vytautas personality – I have not come across such character judgement. To the contrary, I have come across positive assessments (e.g. see the official evaluation by his superiors at his attestation upon graduation in Eidintas, Soudaitis, Surgailis, 2020, p. 26, where he is described as “tactful, polite, tidy” and “virtuous, honest, just”). Moreover, I struggle to see the political importance of discussing how his character may have been perceived. What were the reasons behind choosing these particular subjective impressions as important facts to note in this article? And what were the sources?

Secondly, Jonas Žemaitis did desert from the Red Army and surrender to the Germans. This is a well documented fact; there is no conspiracy around it. “Lithuanian patriots”, as they are referred to in the quoted paragraph, do talk about this, as this was part of his biography. Understanding the historical context is crucial in judging it, however. After the Soviet Union annexed Lithuania, country's armed forces were also forcibly incorporated into the Red Army. By extension, Žemaitis automatically became a Red Army officer. Deserting from an army of an occupying totalitarian regime that committed crimes against humanity against thousands (e.g., the forced mass deportations of entire families that started in June 1941 in the occupied Baltic states) is just as much an act of resistance against the occupying force, as it is a willful desertion into the German hands. Importantly, when requested by the German authorities, Žemaitis refused to join German military forces and retreated into the countryside where he joined an underground pro-independence civic movement (Eidintas, Soudaitis, Surgailis, 2020, p. 46 and p. 49). Plainly stating the fact of his desertion next to false claims of sworn allegiance to Hitler leaves a distorted and historically inaccurate impression of willful and substantive collaboration with the Nazi regime.

Finally, and most importantly, Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas did not swear to Adolph Hitler; to the contrary, he went into hiding in order not to have to enter into a formal alliance with the Nazi authorities. Below you may find a summary of the unsuccessful Nazi efforts to form a Lithuanian SS Battalion, sourced from Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas biography, published by the Military Academy of Lithuania:

In late 1943, it became clear that the Nazi Germany might lose the war. Lithuania was under the Nazi occupation at the time. The Nazi authorities started mobilizing the local men into SS battalions and Lithuania was the only occupied country where the effort was boycotted en masse. Instead, sensing the nearing possibility of the second Soviet occupation, acting local Lithuanian administration agreed to form the Lithuanian Territorial Defense Force (LTDF, *Vietinė Rinktinė*), led by Lithuanian General P. Plechavičius and acting with a sole mandate to fight the Red Army if it advances into Lithuania.

Such forces were formally created and thousands of men volunteered to join, including Jonas Žemaitis, who led one of the groups for two months, until the Nazi authorities declared they would rename the LTDF into an SS battalion, issue SS uniforms, and take it under their direct command. General P. Plechavičius refused to follow through with the order and ordered the battalions to only listen to his command. He was arrested by the SS and the Nazi German Police. The enlisted soldiers were taken to the Salaspils concentration camp near Riga, approximately 50 of them were imprisoned. 84 officers were executed in the mass shooting ground near Vilnius and near Marijampolė. Jonas Žemaitis was on leave on those days, but was informed about the situation and went into hiding, as he was also unwilling to comply with the SS orders. (Based on Eidintas, Soudaitis, Surgailis, 2020, pp. 49-51).

In light of the facts above, I feel obliged to react and defend the memory of Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas, as he is no longer able to defend himself. Considering the weight of the allegations made in the Europe Diplomatic Magazine article and their particular importance for my work as the coordinator of the informal MEP Group on European Remembrance, I would like to kindly request to publish a retraction and correction. I would also like to publish this letter as my reaction in the next issue.

With kind regards, Rasa Juknevičienė

Sources quoted:

1. Eidintas, Alfonsas, Darius Juodis, and Gintautas Surgailis. 2020. *Partizanų Generolas Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas (The Partisan General Jonas Žemaitis-Vytautas)*. Vilnius: Generalo Jono Žemaičio Lietuvos karo akademija (General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania), <https://www.lka.lt/uploads/Dokumentai/Mokslinė%20veikla/Leidiniai/Gen.%20Jonas%20Žemaitis%20Vytautas%20LT.pdf>
2. Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras (Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania). "Antisovietinis pasipriešinimas 1944-1953" (Anti-Soviet Resistance 1944-1953), <https://genocid.lt/centras/lt/1486/a/>
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The monument to Jonas Žemaičius-Vytautas in Šimkaičiai Forest, Lithuania

4. Vaitkevičius, Vyktas. 2017. "1944-1953 m. partizaninis karas: tautos pergalė ar pralaimėjimas?" ("1944-1953 partisan war: nation's victory or defeat?") in *Bernardinai*. September 21, 2017, <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2017-09-21-1944-1953-m-partizaninis-karas-tautos-pergale-ar-pralaimėjimas/>. [Last accessed April 26, 2023]

CORRECTING HISTORY

As we all know, Russia has always deployed a wide range of weapons in its long fight against freedom and justice, and one of its most effective is the distortion of truth. Or, to put it another way, lying. In an article I wrote earlier this year about the much-admired Lithuanian politician Rasa Juknevičienė, I think I may have fallen for that same old Russian trick by writing that General Jonas Žemaitis was thought to be a bully with an inflated ego who had surrendered his unit to the Nazis. However, we must bear in mind that following his arrest by the Soviet forces he had been opposing, Žemaitis was interrogated by none other than the notorious Soviet Marshall Lavrentiy Beria. So fearful were the Soviets of Žemaitis becoming a national hero as an opponent of the Soviet Union that they set about destroying his reputation, too. I regret to say that I also fell for it.

I once saw the memorial to Žemaitis, I seem to recall, proudly commemorating a great man and a brave one, who, having fought against the Nazis turned his ire against the Soviet Union. His aim was to secure freedom for Lithuania: freedom from both the far right and the far left. He succeeded, too, eventually, and is rightly remembered as a national hero. I apologise unreservedly to his many admirers for seeming to sully his reputation. So fearful were the Soviets and especially Beria of what the General's memory could achieve that they have never revealed where they buried his body after his execution by firing squad. They believed that even the discovery of his dead body could harm the Soviet Union. And, of course, they made up a succession of lies.

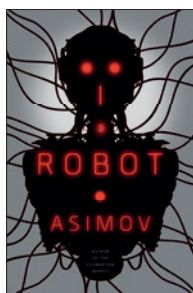
I cannot remember where I found the negative references I used in my article: there were many, mixed and a long time ago. I shall endeavour to avoid any that have a smell of Russian propaganda in future. At this dangerous time, the world has the need of more people like General Jonas Žemaitis to take a stand against that arch-liar, Vladimir Putin. I am glad, however, that it has honest and brave politicians like Rasa Juknevičienė to point out errors and to defend the reputations of those who are themselves honest and courageous.

Sincerely,

T. Kingsley-Brooks

T.Kingsley.Brooks@europe-diplomatic.eu

BOOKS



I, Robot

By Isaac Asimov

This classic science fiction masterwork by Isaac Asimov weaves stories about robots, humanity, and the deep questions of existence into a novel of shocking intelligence and heart

"A must-read for science-fiction buffs and literature enjoyers alike." - *The Guardian*.

I, Robot, the first and most widely read book in Asimov's Robot series, forever changed the world's perception of artificial intelligence. Here are stories of robots gone mad, of mind-reading robots, and robots with a sense of humor. Of robot politicians, and robots who secretly run the world - all told with the dramatic blend of science fact and science fiction that has become Asimov's trademark.

The Three Laws of Robotics:

- 1) A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
- 2) A robot must obey orders given to it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
- 3) A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

With these three, simple directives, Isaac Asimov formulated the laws governing robots' behavior. In *I, Robot*, Asimov chronicles the development of the robot from its primitive origins in the present to its ultimate perfection in the not-so-distant future - a future in which humanity itself may be rendered obsolete.

"Tremendously exciting and entertaining . . . Asimov dramatizes an interesting question: How can we live with machines that, generation by generation, grow more intelligent than their creators and not eventually clash with our own invention" - *The Chicago Tribune*.



One Minute to Midnight

By Michael Dobbs

Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War

In October 1962, at the height of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union came to the brink of nuclear conflict over the placement of Soviet missiles in Cuba. In this hour-by-hour chronicle of those tense days, veteran *Washington Post* reporter Michael Dobbs reveals just how close we came to Armageddon.

Here, for the first time, are gripping accounts of Khrushchev's plan to destroy the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo; the handling of Soviet nuclear warheads on Cuba; and the extraordinary story of a U-2 spy plane that got lost over Russia at the peak of the crisis.

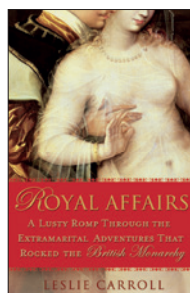
Written like a thriller, *One Minute to Midnight* is an exhaustively researched account of what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. called "the most dangerous moment in human history," and the definitive book on the Cuban missile crisis.

PRAISE

"[Dobbs] succeeds brilliantly, marshaling diverse sources to relate an intensely human story of Americans, Russians and Cubans caught up in what the late historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. termed 'the most dangerous moment in human history' . . . [Filled] with memorable characters in extraordinary circumstances and exotic settings . . . *One Minute to Midnight* evokes novelists like Alan Furst, John le Carré or Graham Greene." - James G. Hershberg, *The Washington Post Book World*

"Dobbs writes it up like a thriller." - *The New York Post*

"With new info and angles, this hair-raising analysis traces the trail of mishaps and miscalculations that nearly ended life on earth." - *American History Magazine*.



Royal Affairs

By Leslie Carroll

A Lusty Romp Through the Extramarital Adventures That Rocked the British Monarchy

A funny, raucous, and delightfully dirty history of 1,000 years of bedroom-hopping secrets and scandals of Britain's royals.

Insatiable kings, lecherous queens, kissing cousins, and wanton consorts-history has never been so much fun.

Royal unions have always been the stuff of scintillating gossip, from the passionate Plantagenets to Henry VIII's alarming head count of wives and mistresses, to the Sapphic crushes of Mary and Anne Stuart right on up through the scandal-blighted coupling of Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Thrown into loveless, arranged marriages for political and economic gain, many royals were driven to indulge their pleasures outside the marital bed, engaging in delicious flirtations, lurid love letters, and rampant sex with voluptuous and willing partners.

This nearly pathological lust made for some of the most titillating scandals in Great Britain's history. Hardly harmless, these affairs have disrupted dynastic alliances, endangered lives, and most of all, fed the salacious curiosity of the public for centuries. *Royal Affairs* will satiate that curiosity by bringing this arousing history alive.



The Declassification Engine

By Matthew Connelly

What History Reveals About America's Top Secrets

Every day, thousands of new secrets are created by the United States government. What is all this secrecy really for? And whom does it benefit?

Before World War II, transparent government was a proud tradition in the United States. In all but the most serious of circumstances, classification, covert operations, and spying were considered deeply un-American. But after the war, the power to decide what could be kept secret proved too tempting to give up. Since then, we have radically departed from that open tradition, allowing intelligence agencies, black sites, and classified laboratories to grow unchecked. Officials insist that only secrecy can keep us safe, but its true costs have gone unacknowledged for too long.

Using the latest techniques in data science, historian Matthew Connelly analyzes a vast trove of state secrets to unearth not only what the government really did not want us to know but also why they didn't want us to know it. Culling this research and carefully examining a series of pivotal moments in recent history, from Pearl Harbor to drone warfare, Connelly sheds light on the drivers of state secrecy - especially incompetence and criminality - and how rampant overclassification makes it impossible to protect truly vital information.

What results is an astonishing study of power: of the greed it enables, of the negligence it protects, and of what we lose as citizens when our leaders cannot be held to account. A crucial examination of the self-defeating nature of secrecy and the dire state of our nation's archives, *The Declassification Engine* is a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving the past so that we may secure our future.



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