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NIKOS
CHRISTODOULIDES

**On a mission to
restore Cyprus'
reputation**



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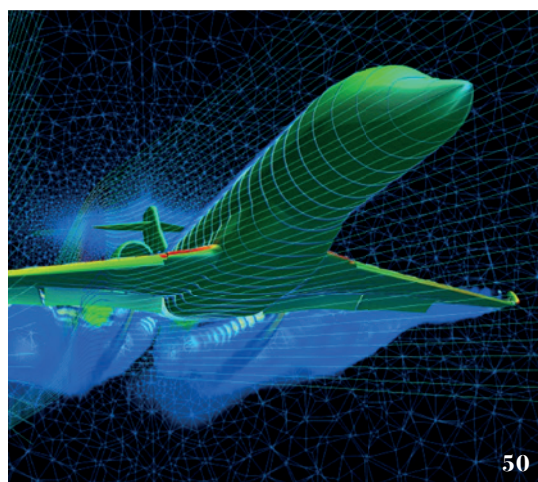
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Nikola Hendrickx



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President of Cyprus Nikos
Christodoulides in June 2023
in Strasbourg, France

NIKOS
CHRISTODOULIDES

**On a mission to
restore Cyprus'
reputation**

The Republic of Cyprus has a new president: Nikos Christodoulides, the former foreign minister who won the election on 12 February 2023. At 49, he is the youngest head of state ever to lead the divided island nation in the Mediterranean. He narrowly defeated Andreas Mavroyiannis, a Communist-backed diplomat, with 51.92 per cent of the vote in a second round of voting.

His victory, however, was not without drama and uncertainty. Christodoulides, who ran as an independent, was supported by centrist parties skeptical of the UN-led efforts to reunify the island, which has been divided along ethnic lines since 1974.

That year, Turkey invaded Cyprus after an Athens-backed coup attempted to unite the island with Greece. Turkish and Greek Cypriots now live on opposite sides of a buffer zone controlled by UN.

Many feared that Christodoulides' tough stance may complicate a lasting solution to the long-running conflict that has bitterly divided Cyprus, the EU's easternmost member. However, Christodoulides has already met with Ersin Tatar, the Turkish Cypriot leader and has announced that a solution to the 'Cyprus problem' is his top priority. He has also promised to crack down on corruption as the island faces the fallout from a scandal involving the sale of passports for cash and serious allegations of money laundering involving Russian oligarchs that have somewhat tarnished the country's image.

Cyprus's geographic position and cultural closeness to Greece accounts for why 77% of the country's population are Greek. This connection however became a problem for the country when Greek sovereign bonds were downgraded by credit rating agency Standard and Poor's to junk status in 2010. The Cypriot government and banking institutions suffered a big loss because of their large exposures to Greek debt.

Like most countries, Greece had to resort to debt to finance its spending. However, low government revenues due to rampant tax evasion, generous social security and pension payments, and unrestrained spending finally backfired when the global financial crisis erupted in 2007-2008. The problem-laden Greek economy was further impacted when tourism and shipping, the country's primary industries, suffered greatly due to the economic downturn. Over in Cyprus, despite austerity measures, the country also plunged further into recession. In 2012, the country's GDP shrank by 2.3%. To cover its budget deficit, Cyprus asked for help from Russia and was granted a €2.5 billion emergency loan, subject to a 4.5% interest per year.

But the Russian support barely had an impact to improve the country's declining economy. Consequently, credit rating agencies



INTRODUCTION TO anti MONEY LAUNDERING



also downgraded Cypriot sovereign rating to junk status. This further increased the country's borrowing cost, leaving the government with no choice but to seek a bailout from the European Union. During the latter part of 2012, multiple discussions took place regarding the conditions of the bailout. The European Union required strict austerity measures, such as reductions in civil service pay, social benefits, and raised taxes on tobacco, alcohol, fuel, property, and lottery winnings, as well as increased charges for public healthcare, in exchange for financial support. It was not surprising then, that the Cypriot population did not easily agree to these terms, and protests arose in opposition to the proposed plan.

Although the European Union and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) eventually approved the Cyprus bailout plan in March 2013, the vulnerabilities caused by the financial crisis exposed the country to other dangers.

Russia steps in

Russia has often been accused of using illicit financial transfers, corruption and other organised criminal activities as instruments of economic influence. Although it is generally not easy to link these alleged financial transfers directly to the Russian government, in many cases they can be traced to Russian-owned individuals, companies and other networks with links to the Russian state.

Money laundering schemes can be used to move funds illegally acquired in Russia out of the country and then used to purchase real estate or other legal goods and services, transforming them into seemingly legal assets. Such 'dirty', or even 'clean' money, transferred abroad can be used to finance corruption or other illicit business in the destination country that furthers Russia's geopolitical interests.

In the Mediterranean, there are numerous examples of allegedly illicit Russian money flowing to both legitimate and illicit businesses, particularly along the northern littoral states. However, Russian money had, until recently, no larger destination in the Mediterranean than Cyprus.

At the time of the country's financial crisis in 2013,



Cyprus Central Bank in Nicosia, Republic of Cyprus

there was an estimated \$32 billion in Russian cash in Cypriot banks, more than the country's annual gross domestic product (GDP) at the time. Russian bank loans to Russian-owned companies registered in Cyprus totaled another \$30–\$40 billion.

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is renowned for its independent analysis of major global events and understanding of regional contexts. Joanna Pritchett, a former visiting scholar at the organisation estimated Russia was the source of 25 percent of inward and outward foreign direct investment (FDI) flows in Cyprus at the time, as Russians “roundtripped” their money between the two countries.

Russians lost billions of euros in the bailout of Cyprus that followed the 2013 financial crisis, but the EU's bailout conditions converted some of those losses into shares in Cypriot banks, unintentionally giving some control over these banks to the Russians the EU had been trying to force out. But Even after the large losses from the 2013 financial crisis, Russian money continued to flow to Cyprus.

However, the situation changed drastically following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The US and its allies, imposed sanctions on companies, oligarchs and officials linked to President Vladimir Putin.



Joanna Pritchett

Media reports highlighted the assets of Russian oligarchs that were seized across Europe, such as yachts in Italy, villas in the south of France and priceless works of art in Germany. But these are relatively easy to find. The real challenge is to track down the billions of dollars that the oligarchs have hidden around the world.

And this challenge led investigators to Cyprus, among a number of other strategic locations around the world. This small Mediterranean island at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and the Middle East that was a holiday hot spot, became the centre of an international game of hide and seek.

Leonidas Malenis, the renowned Cypriot writer and poet who passed away in December 2022, famously called Cyprus “a golden green leaf, thrown into the sea”.

The island, with its beautiful sandy beaches, has a very rich history. According to one legend, it was here that Aphrodite, the ancient Greek goddess of love, beauty and passion, emerged from the blue waters of the sea. But today, the island of the gods has become a stomping ground for wealthy Russians.

Limassol, a city on the southern coast of the island, was a popular destination for sun-seeking Russians before Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Just a three-hour flight from Moscow, Limassol's combination of designer shops, fur stores, Cyrillic signs, and caviar-serving restaurants earned it the nickname “Moscow on the Med.” It was in fact after the collapse of the Soviet Union that oligarchs first began flocking to the island. However, it was neither the beaches nor the historical monuments that attracted them.



Leonidas Malenis

Alexandra Attalides, a Cypriot activist and MP, was one of 12 individuals worldwide recognised by the US State Department for their efforts to fight corruption. In May 2021, she was elected to the House of Representatives as a member of the Greens and was named an Anticorruption Champion by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, along with activists from Bulgaria, Malawi, and Thailand.

Attalides explains, “After 1989, when oligarchs seized the property of the Russian people and began building their empires, they may have feared that something might happen someday. So, they sought to safeguard their assets outside of Russia by looking for tax havens. At the time, we had a very low tax rate.”

A service industry that gradually prospered was established, specifically to draw in investors from abroad, and companies with ties to Russia.

Maira Martini, an analyst for Transparency International, a global non-profit organisation that monitors money laundering and works to end corruption in over 100 countries, says that for decades,



Alexandra Attalides

Cyprus was hard to beat for oligarchs or other shady individuals looking to hide their rubles. She explains, *“Cyprus historically built a financial system to attract foreign wealth. It offers both secrecy and security, which is what criminals and corrupt individuals usually seek. For many years in Cyprus, you could open a bank account or found a company without facing many questions, meaning you could deposit money without having to disclose your identity or the source of the funds.”*

Cyprus became as famous for its opaque banking system as for its beaches and turquoise waters. Like sun-seeking tourists, foreign money soon flooded the island. By 2012, the country had amassed nearly €72 billion in bank deposits, with about 30% of those deposits coming from Russian nationals.

In 2013, however, the situation changed. The debt crisis in neighbouring Greece threatened to destroy the Cypriot economy. To prevent the loss of all Russian capital, legislators promoted a ‘citizenship by investment’ programme, a system used by other countries to attract wealth.

The programme worked as follows: any foreigner who invested more than 2 million euros in the country, usually by purchasing real estate, could obtain a Cypriot passport. This was a highly sought-after possession because Cyprus is of course, a member of the European Union.



However, for many people, including Alexandra Attalides, this was unacceptable. She says, *“the people who were buying Cypriot passports were actually buying European passports. They were buying an open door to 27 countries.”*

From 2013 to 2020, Cyprus issued nearly 7,000 so-called ‘golden passports’, with almost half going to Russians. The Limassol skyline was suddenly dotted with high-rise luxury apartments, its port filled with mega yachts, and its stores frequented by ultra-wealthy Russians. However, in 2020, an undercover investigation by Al Jazeera revealed high-level corruption in the passport programme.

Cyprus had illegally issued hundreds of these ‘golden passports’ to criminals and fugitives. Following protests and pressure from the EU, the Cypriot government was forced to shut down the programme weeks later. However, the passports were still in circulation, and by issuing these documents to criminals, Cyprus had opened the door to Europe. However, these passports also provided access to Russian elites. At least a dozen now-sanctioned Russian oligarchs were issued



Russian Oligarch Oleg Deripaska

these passports.

Among the recipients of a ‘golden passport’ was Igor Kesaev, a Russian billionaire and businessman. He is the owner and president of the Merkur Group, which includes the Megapolis Group, Russia’s leading tobacco retailer. Kesaev also owns arms manufacturers and a chain of retail stores. He is said to have close links to the Russian government and security forces such as the FSB and the GRU.

Another recipient of the passport was billionaire Alexander Ponomarenko, who served as the chairman of the board of Russia’s largest airport. The US government describes him as one of Putin’s ‘enablers’.

The list also includes aluminium magnate Oleg Deripaska, a member of Putin’s inner circle. According to the US Treasury Department, he has been under international investigation for money laundering, illegal wiretapping and extortion, among other things. However, like most other oligarchs involved in these affairs, he denies the charges.

Maira Martini says that a Cypriot passport could make it easier for sanctioned oligarchs to purchase property and move assets. She also expressed concern about the close relationship between wealthy Russians and Cyprus, which is raising alarm internationally. Martini adds, *“If you are a small country that is very dependent on foreign money from a single country, this could even lead to conflict, right? Sanctions are only as strong as the weakest link, and I think Cyprus is one of the weakest links.”*



Maira Martini

In September 2022, then-Minister of Finance Constantinos Petrides announced that the passports of sanctioned oligarchs were being revoked and that Cyprus had seized 105 million euros of Russian deposits. While this is a significant amount, it represents only a small fraction of the estimated 5.6 billion euros in Russian deposits made in Cyprus in 2021 and 2022. He also added that the numerous properties and active shell companies that had been traced back to sanctioned Russians had been placed under increased scrutiny.

However, more often than not, Russian oligarchs do not list their names in connection with their assets. For example, according to US investigators, Roman Abramovich's planes were hidden under five shell companies, stacked like Russian nesting dolls, with addresses in the British Virgin Islands and the island of Jersey, all leading to an anonymous trust in Cyprus. However, it was not Cypriot authorities who ultimately moved to seize the planes; it was prosecutors from the US Department of Justice.

Data released by the Bank of Russia in 2019 showed that Russia's foreign direct investment (FDI) in Cyprus accounted for 50 per cent of all FDI



President of the Republic of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on October 24 2017, during the signing ceremony of a Joint Programme of Action

positions worldwide. Some of this investment was subsequently transferred to other parts of the European Union, making it difficult to trace back to Russia.

Money flowing from Russia into and out of Cyprus included both legitimate transfers and those used to finance criminal activities. For example, funds stolen from the Russian treasury were channeled through the now defunct Federal Bank of the Middle East (FBME) in Cyprus, and then used to manufacture chemical weapons in Syria.

For a long time, analysts had expressed concern regarding the influence that Russia exerted on Cyprus's policymaking and politicians through the significant inflows of money and people. The inclusion of Russian citizens in the country's voter rolls could undeniably have impacted future elections and decision-making processes within the government.

And to pursue this goal, Russian emigrants had even established a political party in Cyprus.

In September 2017, the announcement of the formation of 'I, the Citizen', created by Russian expatriates holding Cypriot passports was seen as one of the most contentious political movements in the island's history. After months of review, the Interior Ministry granted approval of the new party. Its leader was announced as Alexey Voloboyev, a businessman who operated a restaurant in Limassol and had previously funded a Russian radio station in Cyprus.



William Browder

A case that highlights the influence of Russian money in Cyprus involves William Browder, an American-born British financier and anti-corruption activist. He is the CEO of Hermitage Capital Management, the investment advisor to the Hermitage Fund, which at one time was the largest foreign portfolio investor in Russia. Browder accused a Cypriot government official of aiding a Russian mobster in laundering money through a property purchase in Cyprus.

In a more significant example, no arrests have been made in the FBME bank case. While Cyprus did not obstruct the EU's semi-annual renewal of sanctions on Russia for its aggression in Ukraine, which some had feared, decisions such as the 2015 agreement allowing Russian naval ships to access the country's ports demonstrated the extent to which Russian money could have an impact.

US Deputy Attorney General, Lisa Monaco is responsible for the Department of Justice's 'KleptoCapture Unit', which is tasked with locating the assets of sanctioned oligarchs hidden around the world. She acknowledges that hidden wealth is no longer whisked away by people fleeing with suitcases full of banknotes. It is rather consists of



Oleg Deripaska's seized jet

cryptocurrency, hidden planes and yachts, and highly layered assets. However, she is certain of one thing: *"Even for the most notorious actors, whether it's the mafia or rogue regimes, the best tool we have is following the money."*

The money trail has led Department of Justice investigators around the world and closer to home. Like the tourists who visit Cyprus, dirty money doesn't remain on the island forever. It is typically 'laundered' and invested in other Western economies. Investigators say this is one way Oleg Deripaska has been able to evade sanctions. Lisa Monaco adds, *"what the task force exposed was the network of enablers and money launderers, as well as facilitators who helped him hide his wealth in real estate here in Washington D.C., in Manhattan and other places in the United States...in works of art, in vanity businesses, including a music studio in Beverly Hills."*

In their case, the Department of Justice alleges that in 2020, Oleg Deripaska spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to arrange for one of his children to be born in the United States, even though he was under U.S. sanctions. As a result, that child is now a US citizen. Deripaska tried to do the same thing a second time, but US Customs managed to prevent that attempt.

The government case details how, as the war in Ukraine intensified, Deripaska used a Cypriot company to arrange travel on a private jet from Russia to Los Angeles for his pregnant girlfriend Ekaterina Voronina, moving money to rent a home for her in Beverly Hills. But when she landed in Los Angeles in the summer of 2022, she was stopped by customs officers. Voronina had lied to the Department of Homeland Security to conceal her ties to the Russian oligarch.

Announcing the indictment in September 2022, Lisa Monaco said, *"Deripaska sought to evade sanctions through lies and deceit to cash in on and benefit from the American way of life. But shell companies and*



Lisa Monaco

webs of lies will not shield Deripaska and his cronies from American law enforcement, nor will they protect others who support the Putin regime. The Department of justice remains dedicated to the global fight against those who aid and abet the Russian war machine".

Deripaska, his girlfriend and the U.S. resident who helped him are now charged with sanctions evasion. They are not in custody, but the Department of Justice has announced plans to seize his U.S. properties worth an estimated \$70 million. Back in Cyprus, investigators found a luxury villa in Paphos, west of Limassol, as well as more than a dozen active shell companies linked to him.

Credibility must be safeguarded



Russian oligarch Alisher Usmanov

In April 2023, just one month after newly-elected president Nikos Christodoulides assumed office, Cyprus faced another Russia-linked crisis, as policymakers tried to contain the damage, panic was palpable, and meetings followed one after another. Christodoulides talked with real urgency about the need to clamp down on sanctions violations if Cyprus is to protect its credibility as a business hub.

Following a series of reports that raised concerns about sanctions enforcement in Cyprus, UK and US authorities issued lists that contained 13 Cypriot entities and individuals who purportedly aided Russian oligarchs. The measures aimed to disrupt the financial networks of Vladimir Putin's close allies, Roman Abramovich and Alisher Usmanov. Their 'financial fixers' had their bank accounts and other assets frozen overnight. The people named included two dual Uzbek-Cypriot nationals, three Russian Cypriots and a Russian man with dual Israeli-Cypriot citizenship.

Following the publication of The Oligarch Files - a series of reports that raised doubts about sanctions compliance in Cyprus - by the Guardian newspaper, the Foreign Office took action.

The British government said Cypriot companies,



© GOCORP

Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich

including a prominent law firm, had helped Uzbek-born Usmanov, who is on both UK and US sanctions lists, manage ownership of a 16th-century Tudor manor in Surrey, England. According to a spokesperson for Usmanov, ownership of the property was long ago transferred to an irrevocable trust, and beneficial rights given up to the trust, donating them to family members.

The allegations have been very embarrassing for the new government in Cyprus with well-informed sources talking of panic in the island's financial services sector.

Soon after this, hundreds of firms reportedly

hurried to distance themselves from sanctioned Russians amid media reports that Kremlin-linked businesses also began to seek refuge from possible restrictions, in the island's separatist Turkish-controlled north. Unlike the internationally recognized south, the de facto mini-state in the north is outside EU jurisdiction.

But the British and American sanctions also conveyed another message: that the issue at hand was *"Cyprus' name as a reliable, financial and business centre"*, as the Greek Cypriot government spokesperson, Konstantinos Letymbiotis put it. The country's financial integrity seemed to be in jeopardy again, a decade after it barely escaped economic ruin in a banking crisis that revealed its dependence on Russian money, as the EU's easternmost member.

President Christodoulides was irritated by the new sanctions that named the 13 individuals, which underlined his country's firm Western alignment amid Russia's war in Ukraine. Christodoulides said that he was *"sending out the clear message that our country's credibility must be protected and we must in no way allow or enable anyone to tarnish the name of our country"*. Shortly later, a national unit for implementing sanctions was declared, and the government spokesperson stressed that *"no violation of EU sanctions will be tolerated"*. The UK is to provide technical support for the new unit.

On 21 April, the country's largest lender, the Bank of Cyprus, declared that about 10,000 accounts in the names of 4,000 Russian depositors would be shut down, amid rumours of more sanctions lists from London and Washington against Cypriots and Cyprus-based companies, to further sanction Russia for its war in Ukraine.

The depositors who hold Russian passports and are not residents of an EU country were informed by the Bank of Cyprus that their accounts will be shut down. The bank added that this action followed the suspension of Russia's membership



© CYFIELD

Cyfield Group's 360 Nicosia skyscraper could become the tallest building in the Cypriot capital. It rises 132 meters above a busy street and can be seen from almost anywhere in Nicosia



Fiona Mullen

by the Financial Action Task Force and the identification of Russia as a non-cooperative tax jurisdiction by the EU.

The account closures were viewed as going “further than” restrictions on Russian bank holders in other EU countries, where depositors have had their transfers restricted – with transactions over €100,000 prohibited – but have not been obliged to close down accounts. The Russians were granted two months – a notice period known as standard bank procedure – to seek other alternatives.

Financial analysts in Nicosia are of the opinion that the bank’s concern of being regarded as violating sanctions – and possibly ending up on the US Department of the Treasury’s list of specially designated nationals and blocked persons – had certainly affected its decision.

Fiona Mullen, the director of Sapienta Economics, a consultancy firm in Nicosia said, “*if the US stops a bank’s ability to trade in dollars, that bank cannot survive*”. She further added, “*I have been saying for a long time that the Republic of Cyprus needs to treat its reputation for international honesty as an existential issue just as it does the Cyprus problem*”, referring to talks aimed at reuniting Europe’s only divided state.

Negotiations with the rebel Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus have been frozen since 2017. “I think the lesson has finally sunk in,” she said.



European Parliament President Roberta Metsola and President of Cyprus Nikos Christodoulides in June 2023 in Strasbourg, France

Into the new era

Few countries have so deftly exploited geopolitical turmoil as Cyprus. After Turkey’s 1974 invasion following a coup aimed at union with Greece, the country’s ruined economy recovered amazingly after thousands of Lebanese, fleeing civil war, sought shelter in the internationally recognised south. During the Yugoslav wars, the island, by then a notorious tax haven – a status lost in 2019, when the corporate tax rate was raised to 12.5% – became the favoured place for the Milošević regime to launder money.

But following Cyprus’ endeavours in recent years to curb its reliance on Russian money – under pressure from US regulators who seek to not only curb Russian investment but the country’s influence in the region – bank accounts belonging to Russians have plummeted drastically. Only 2.2% of all bank deposits are held by Russians, a far cry from the tens of billions deposited in Cypriot bank accounts before the 2013 financial crisis. Cypriot authorities have not only closed 123,000 suspicious bank accounts but also about 43,000 shell companies.

As the country’s leader Nikos Christodoulides vowed to push ahead with the prosecution of law and audit firms that had aided Russian oligarchs, Washington released documents that amounted to a toolkit to facilitate the process. At least two other dossiers were expected to follow. Acknowledging receipt of the so-called “data package” on 9 May, President Christodoulides affirmed a new era had commenced in the EU member state long known as “Moscow on the Med” due to its financial ties with Russia, and reputation for slack regulations. “*It’s essential we approach this issue with the appropriate seriousness and do what we can so as not to allow anyone to smear the country’s name*,” he told a key economic forum in Nicosia. “*And I am certain that you who represent our economy realise and share the need to conclude this matter and move into the new era.*”

And the new era will demand a new statecraft. There may be some stormy waters ahead as President Christodoulides guides Cyprus into this new era.

This will by no means be an easy task. But the Cypriot people have inherited a legacy of courage and achievement from their Greek ancestors, and they need a leader who can harness their potential to solve the problems they face. President Christodoulides has promised to be that leader, and to work for the interest of all Cypriots, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or political orientation.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

EU HUMANITARIAN AIR BRIDGE DELIVERS ADDITIONAL MEDICINES AND RELIEF ITEMS TO AFGHANISTAN



© EUROPEAN UNION 2023

A new EU Humanitarian Air Bridge flight has arrived to Kabul to deliver nearly 100 tonnes of life-saving medical supplies and equipment to Afghanistan.

On this occasion, Raffaella Iodice, EU Chargée d'Affaires to Afghanistan said: "This solidarity in action: Today, we welcomed the arrival of nearly 100 tonnes of medical items and medicines to Afghanistan. Our EU Humanitarian Air Bridge flights are a very good example of the EU's assistance to the country: In cooperation with trusted humanitarian partners, the EU continues to deliver vital aid to Afghans in need."

This is the 29th cargo flight that has arrived since August 2021. EU humanitarian partners will make use of the shipment to support Afghans in need of medical treatment.

EU Humanitarian Air Bridge flights are part of the European Humanitarian Response Capacity (EHRC). Funded and operated by the EU Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) department, these flights help to fill critical gaps in the EU's humanitarian and emergency response. EU humanitarian assistance is delivered via trusted humanitarian partners on the ground.

The EU Humanitarian Air Bridge flight operations are intended to help reinforce humanitarian or emergency responses in countries facing fragile contexts.

These flights help fill critical gaps by facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid, emergency assistance, and the transport of humanitarian staff when required. The initiative was initially set up in response to the transport constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

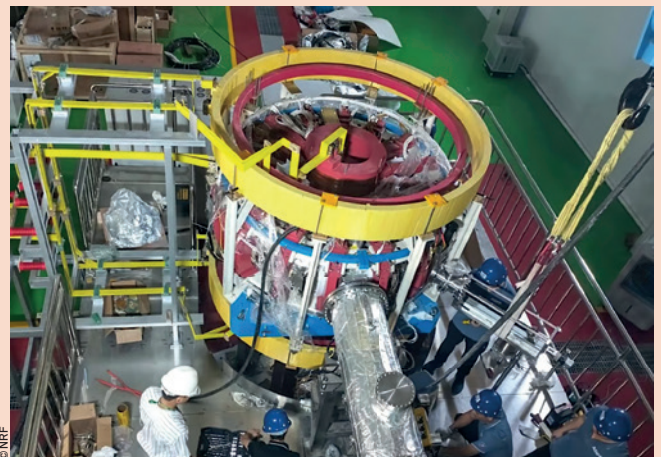
The EU Humanitarian Air Bridge is an ad hoc initiative operated on a needs-based approach. Its implementation brings together several actors: the European Commission, EU Member States, national authorities of the destination countries, and humanitarian and civil society organisations.

CHINA'S "ARTIFICIAL SUN" SET A WORLD RECORD BY GENERATING AND MAINTAINING EXTREMELY HOT, HIGHLY CONFINED PLASMA FOR NEARLY SEVEN MINUTES

It was last December that physicists working at the National Ignition Facility (NIF) in California succeeded in getting more energy out of a controlled nuclear fusion reaction than had been needed to start it off. That's a big step forward, but it's nothing like far enough to realise the dream of limitless, carbon-free power. The problem is that it involves plasma, which scientists have been studying since the 1940s, and it requires temperatures so high that it defies being held in any container. It must reach temperatures of 100-million°Kelvin, capable of melting its way through virtually anything. Most advanced countries are trying to achieve the goal, described by Omar Hurricane, a program leader at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California as "Superhard. We're basically making stars on Earth." China's EAST project, which has been operating since 2006, represents one of the most promising paths towards controlled nuclear fusion and its "artificial sun" tokamak recently set a world record by generating and maintaining extremely hot, highly confined plasma for nearly seven minutes. That may not sound like much but the first step towards the nuclear bomb was when humans discovered fire.

The best way to contain plasma seems to be with magnetic fields, because no known material can withstand temperatures which are several times hotter than the centre of the sun. The problem was explained in the Scientific American magazine: "In particular, deuterium-tritium fusion makes an intense flux of high-energy neutrons, which collide with the nuclei of atoms in the metal walls and cladding, causing tiny spots of melting." There's more: "The metal then recrystallises but is weakened, with atoms shifted from their initial positions." In the cladding of a typical fusion reactor, the article says, each atom might be displaced about a hundred times over the reactor's lifetime.

There are other obstacles to developing fusion energy. The fuel is a problem. Although deuterium constitutes 0.016% of natural hydrogen, and is therefore abundant, tritium forms naturally only in small quantities and, with a half-life of 12 years, it decays quickly. It



© NRE

HT-6M Tokamak developed at the Chinese Institute of Plasma Physics in Hefei, China

can be done but the technology is untested at large volumes. Even so, the world's largest fusion project, ITER (it means "the way" in Latin) is based in Southern France and has the support of the EU, China, India, the UK, Japan and South Korea, and it is expected to be the first fusion reactor to achieve continuous energy output on a scale comparable with a 500-megawatt power station. But ITER has been hugely expensive to build, and any commercial venture would have to be cheaper; its anticipated cost of \$5.45-billion (€4.97-billion) has quadrupled and may go higher. So how about China? Could it be sneaking into the technological lead? Its tokamak reactor ran at 120-million°C for 101 seconds, longer than any other country has managed, according to the magazine Popular Mechanics.

ECB SURVEYS EUROPEANS ON NEW THEMES FOR EURO BANKNOTES

The European Central Bank (ECB) is asking European citizens about their views on the proposed themes for the next series of euro banknotes. Until 31 August 2023 everybody in the euro area can respond to a survey on the ECB's website (<https://survey.ecb.europa.eu/euro-banknote-survey>). In addition, to ensure opinions from across the euro area are equally represented, the ECB has contracted an independent research company to ask a representative sample of people in the euro area the same questions as those in its own survey.



© ECB
ECB President Christine Lagarde

ECB President Christine Lagarde invites everybody to participate in the survey. She said "There is a strong link between our single currency and our shared European identity, and our new series of banknotes should emphasise this. We want Europeans to identify with the design of euro banknotes, which is why they will play an active role in selecting the new theme."

Developing our future euro banknotes

"We are working on a new series of high-tech banknotes with a view to preventing counterfeiting and reducing environmental impact," said Executive Board member Fabio Panetta. "We are committed to cash and to ensuring that paying with public money is always an option."

It is the duty of the ECB and the euro area national central banks to ensure euro banknotes remain an innovative, secure and efficient means of payment. Developing new series of banknotes is a standard practice for all central banks. In a world where reproduction technologies are rapidly evolving and where counterfeiters can easily access information and materials, it is necessary to issue new banknotes on a regular basis. Beyond security considerations, the ECB is committed to reducing the environmental impact of euro

banknotes throughout their life cycle, while also making them more relatable and inclusive for Europeans of all ages and backgrounds, including vulnerable groups such as people with visual impairment.

The seven themes shortlisted by the ECB's Governing Council :

Birds: free, resilient, inspiring

Birds know nothing of national borders and symbolise freedom of movement. Their nests remind us of our own desire to build places and societies that nurture and protect the future. They remind us that we share our continent with all the lifeforms that sustain our common existence.

European culture

Europe's rich cultural heritage and dynamic cultural and creative sectors strengthen the European identity, forging a shared sense of belonging. Culture promotes common values, inclusion and dialogue in Europe and across the globe. It brings people together.

European values mirrored in nature

Europe is a living place, but also an idea. The European Union is an organisation, but also a set of values. The theme highlights the role of European values (human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights) as the building blocks of Europe and links these values to our respect for nature and the preservation of the environment.

The future is yours

The ideas and innovations that will shape the future of Europe lie deep within every European. The images created for this theme represent the bearers of the collective imagination through which people will create this shared future. This theme signifies the boundless potential of Europeans.

Hands: together we build Europe

Hands are familiar to all of us but no two pairs are the same. Hands built Europe, its physical infrastructure, its artistic heritage and its achievements. Hands build, weave, heal, teach, connect and guide us. Hands tell stories of labour, age and relationships, of heritage, history, and culture. This theme celebrates the hands that have built Europe and continue to do so every day.

Our Europe, ourselves

We grow up as individuals but also as part of a community, through our relationships with one another. We have our own stories and identities, but we also share a common identity as Europeans. This theme evokes the freedom, values and openness of people in Europe.

Rivers: the waters of life in Europe

Europe's rivers cross borders. They connect us to each other and to nature. They represent the ebb and flow of a dynamic, ever-changing continent. They nurture us and remind us of the deep sources of our common life, and we must nurture them in turn.

The shortlist of themes takes into account the suggestions made by a multidisciplinary advisory group, with members from all euro area countries.

Timeline for the new designs

The outcome of the surveys will be used by the ECB to select the theme for the next generation of banknotes by 2024. After that a design competition will take place. European citizens will again have the chance to express their preferences on the design options resulting from that competition. The ECB is expected to take the decision on the future design, and on when to produce and issue the new banknotes, in 2026.

THE EU SHOULD BAN UNREPAIRABLE PRODUCTS



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The EESC (European Economic and Social Committee) has suggested that products which cannot be repaired should not be marketed in Europe, and that merely requiring producers to inform consumers when a product cannot be fixed is not enough.

The EU's new Right to Repair is a great step forward on paper, says the EESC. But a consumer wishing to fix a smart phone or an appliance that breaks down rather than buying a new one could stumble into a number of practical hurdles that will make it too hard to or expensive to have it repaired, if not downright impossible. The EU should go further and ask Member States to ban any practice of intentionally making products unrepairable.

There can be no right to repair if objects are designed to be unrepairable, says Thierry Libaert, rapporteur for the EESC opinion.

In its opinion on the proposed directive, the EESC suggests a number of practical measures to beef it up and ensure that the repair option remains viable and affordable beyond the guarantee period, also from a business perspective. Proposals include:

- offering incentives to opt for repair – even simple ones, like offering an extension of the guarantee period when a product is repaired during that time;
- allowing innovative solutions such as 3D printing to produce spare parts, or refurbishing, which involves giving products a second life, or developing a market for second-hand parts;
- launching training and retraining programmes to teach repairers the skills they need for a job which used to be based on mechanics, but is now increasingly confronted with connected devices. More generally, there is a need to address the shortage of repair workers in Europe.

The repair sector creates value and high-quality jobs in Europe which are hard to delocalise. It generates 404 jobs per 10 000 tonnes of repaired materials – 50 times more than disposing of these materials as waste, which has become the predominant trend in recent years. 65% of consumers dispose of their faulty products, and this translates into 7.5 million tons of waste a year.

Like the Right to Repair Directive, the Green Claims Directive is intended to empower Europeans to buy sustainably. Consumers are more and more willing to do so, but have very little trust in producers' claims about the environmental performance of their products and services and are confused by the multitude of green labels on the market.

The new directive should make environmental labels and claims credible and trustworthy, but it has weaknesses. In the EESC's view, it should ban claims based on offsetting, since several consumer authorities and a number of court cases have found that claims such as

“climate-neutral” or “plastic-compensated” based on counterbalancing emissions by investing in climate solutions projects (such as planting trees) are scientifically incorrect and always misleading to consumers.

The EESC also flags up the need for consistent legislation. « There is a danger that what's pushed out the door comes back through the window », says EESC rapporteur Angelo Pagliara. « The Green Claims Directive should be a model for a minimum level of protection against greenwashing. Its requirements should be reflected in sectoral legislation, so that there is no way to opt out, find loopholes or weaken consumer protection ».

ING AND EIB PROVIDE €600M IN NEW LOANS TO SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN THE NETHERLANDS, BELGIUM AND LUXEMBOURG TO BOOST SUSTAINABILITY

• The European Investment Bank is stepping up its cooperation with ING to support entrepreneurs with loans and leases with favourable terms for new investments that have a positive impact on the climate and the environment.

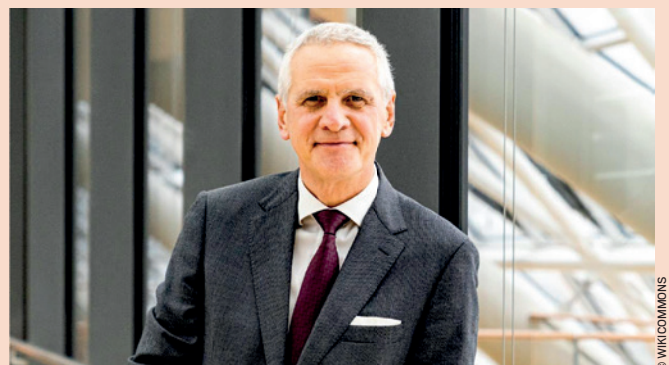
• This is the eighth joint programme between the European Investment Bank and ING aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises based in the Benelux since 2009 and the second programme aimed at boosting sustainability since 2019.

ING and the European Investment Bank have strengthened their long-term partnership by making over €600 million available for new loans and leases to small and medium-sized enterprises in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Half of this sum will go to corporate clients of ING in the Netherlands and the other half to corporate clients of ING in Belgium and Luxembourg.

In the eighth such transaction since 2009, the EIB is lending €300m to ING, which is putting in an equal amount to provide a total of €600m in new loans and leases to entrepreneurs for sustainable investments. The EIB's loan allows ING to provide loans and leases at a lower interest rate.

Starting in 2009, the seven previous programmes have provided financing on attractive terms to around 3,000 companies, totalling €1.85 billion.

Saskia Bauters, Head of Business Banking Sales at ING Belgium: “The agreement with the European Investment Bank allows us to offer our business customers a significant interest rate discount for financing sustainable projects. The benefit fits perfectly with the other elements of our sustainability strategy. The discount can be the push that makes SMEs choose the most sustainable solution. In this way, we support our customers and work together towards a sustainable economy that will help achieve climate objectives.”



Kris Peeters, Vice-President of the EIB

© WIKICOMMONS

Kris Peeters, Vice-President of the EIB “by now it is clear to almost everyone that becoming more sustainable is a must. As Europe’s climate bank and also within the framework of the European Green Deal, the EIB wants to offer support and encouragement at both the macro and micro level to green society. Thanks to this partnership with ING, we can also reach out to small and medium-sized businesses, and now give them too an extra incentive, in the form of interest rate rebates, to really start doing something about the environmental aspect of their operations.”

Applications for a loan or lease must meet ING’s usual credit conditions. In addition, ING carries out checks to ensure that the financing is used for an investment that contributes to climate and environmental improvement. To this end, conditions are laid down in the agreement between the EIB and ING that are consistent with the EU Taxonomy Loans and leases are available for companies with up to 3,000 employees. The total investment may not exceed €25 million, and the loan amount is a maximum of €10 million. The final approval of the loan or lease rests with ING.

TRIAL OF ANY WEAR, ANYWHERE CLOTHING SHARE SERVICE FOR OVERSEAS VISITORS



Japan Airlines (JAL) and Sumitomo Corporation will launch a trial of the “Any Wear, Anywhere” clothing sharing service (“the Service”) for foreign tourists and business travelers to Japan who use JAL-operated flights and will measure the environmental value of using the Service.

With more and more people flying again after the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the recent emphasis in sustainability, there is a growing movement around the world to promote sustainable tourism. Travelers increasingly desire to make more sustainable choices regarding their travel destinations, accommodations, transportation etc., they still lack sufficient options. For example, most travelers now enjoy eating at restaurants and staying at hotels at their destination, but they generally bring their own clothing from home.

The concept of the Service is therefore to provide a travel experience with minimal luggage by offering clothing rentals at the destination, thereby creating environmental value. By expanding the use of the Service, we aim to create an environment where travelers can use local options for all aspects of their clothing, food, and accommodation, transforming travel and business trips into more sustainable experiences. In providing the Service, Sumitomo Corporation will be responsible for developing the reservation system as well as for the procurement, laundering, and delivery of clothes. All clothing items available for rent will be obtained from excess stock of apparel and pre-owned clothing, thereby promoting the concept of a circular economy. JAL will monitor changes in passengers’ checked-in baggage weight and verify the reduction effect of carbon dioxide emissions by reduced airplane weight due to use of the Service.

OPTIMISE PROJECT PROPOSES ALTERNATIVES FOR MILITARY NAVIGATION

The OPTIMISE project has proposed a combination of technologies to provide alternative positioning, navigation and timing (PNT) systems for military navigation when Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) are disrupted.

With funding from the European Commission’s Preparatory Action for Defence Research (PADR), the OPTIMISE project - *innovative Positioning system for defence in GNSS-denied areas* – is part of broader initiatives to explore alternatives to GPS and Galileo for military navigation. OPTIMISE focused principally on aircraft navigation scenarios in GNSS-denied environments.

GNSS refers to a constellation of satellites providing signals from space that transmit positioning and timing data to GNSS receivers. The receivers then use this data to determine location. However, if such systems, which include Europe’s Galileo, were jammed by an adversary, the need for flexible and reliable alternatives would be crucial.

OPTIMISE, which had a budget of approximately €1.5 million, trialed reliable and secure ways to allow data from different sensors and signals to work together and achieve the integration of different positioning, navigation and timing technologies. Those included relying on star sensors, radars, ground antennae such as telephone masts, atomic clocks and data fusion software.



Real-time Demonstration

At the final session of the 28-month project at the European Defence Agency (EDA) in Brussels, OPTIMISE detailed the scenarios and requirements, and the developed technologies and validation activities including ground and flight tests. The technology integration, testing and operation of the different types of OPTIMISE sensors were showcased together with a detailed analysis of the data, via a multi-sensor/multi-platform software architecture for navigation.

The OPTIMISE demonstration showcased the systems integration and data collection during ground and flight tests hosted by the University of Žilina; such tests were complemented with simulations using the information from a reference flight trajectory.

OPTIMISE also elaborated, within its exploitation plan, a roadmap for the further development of the individual technologies and the overall project integrated system. The follow-up of part of the work within OPTIMISE will be continued in a EDA Category B (Cat. B) project. The project is also related to the work conducted under the Capability Technology Groups of EDA (namely CapTech Guidance, Navigation and Control and CapTech Space).

OPTIMISE brought together nine beneficiaries from four countries. Led by Skylife Engineering SL of Spain, it also includes

MBDA ITALIA SPA of Italy, SENER Aeroespacial Sociedad Anonima, also of Spain, France's Office National D'Etudes et de Recherches Aerospatiales, Symlinks SAS, STAR NAV and SYSNAV SAS, Zilinska Univerzita v Ziline of Slovakia, and Spain's La Asociación de Investigación y Cooperación Industrial de Andalucía "E. de Paula Rojas".

OPTIMISE was selected under the 2019 call for proposals for the EU Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR) managed by the European Defence Agency.

OPTIMISE was selected following an EU-wide PADR call for proposals on the topic of 'Future Disruptive Defence Technologies - Emerging Game-changers', in the sub-topic related to autonomous positioning, navigation and timing.

EUROPEAN STATES' MIGRATION CO-OPERATION WITH TUNISIA SHOULD BE SUBJECT TO CLEAR HUMAN RIGHTS SAFEGUARDS

"Council of Europe member states should insist on clear human rights safeguards in any further migration co-operation with Tunisia", said the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, in relation to the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding between the European Union and Tunisia which foresees, among other things, closer co-operation on migration.

"Comprehensive human rights safeguards must be an integral part of any migration co-operation activity between Council of Europe member states and third countries, including Tunisia. Such safeguards should ensure that support does not result, directly or indirectly, in human rights violations at the hands of those third countries. The recently reported serious human rights violations against refugees and migrants in Tunisia only make the inclusion of such safeguards more pressing.

The text of the Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Tunisia relating to migration only includes very general language on human rights, and no concrete indication of whether safeguards would be put in place or what those would be. I therefore call on Council of Europe member states which are also EU member states to press for immediate clarification of the human rights safeguards that will be put in place and to insist that the migration-related aspects of the agreement are not further implemented until adequate safeguards have been established. Such safeguards should include, at a minimum, the publication of a comprehensive human rights risk assessment, full transparency in the provision of funding, the setting up of independent monitoring mechanisms to assess the human rights impact of specific activities under the agreement, and the ability to suspend any activities found to be negatively impacting on the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Failure to establish clear and concrete safeguards in migration co-

operation activities will only add to the worrying trend of human rights being sacrificed to European states' attempts to externalise their responsibilities."

SYRACUSE 4B MILITARY COMMUNICATION SATELLITE SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHED

Syracuse 4b will join syracuse 4a in orbit to boost communications capabilities for french armed forces

The SYRACUSE 4B military communications satellite was successfully launched by an Ariane 5 from the Guiana Space Center, Europe's Spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana.

The two satellites in the SYRACUSE IV defense communications system, SYRACUSE 4A and SYRACUSE 4B, were built for the French Armement General Directorate (DGA) (Direction Générale de l'Armement) by the consortium of Thales Alenia Space (a joint company between Thales 67% and Leonardo 33 %) and Airbus Defence and Space. As the lead contractor, Thales Alenia Space was responsible for the SYRACUSE 4A satellite, launched in 2021, and the payloads for both SYRACUSE 4A and SYRACUSE 4B. Airbus Defence and Space is in charge of the SYRACUSE 4B satellite, based on the all-electric Eurostar platform, and supplies key components for the two payloads.

SYRACUSE 4B will join SYRACUSE 4A in orbit, forming the SYRACUSE IV satellite segment, which replaces the previous SYRACUSE III generation (SYRACUSE 3A and 3B). SYRACUSE 4A and 4B are designed to be compatible with the current system, while also delivering additional capacity and new functions for armed forces, especially more capacity and flexibility, plus faster throughput and expanded coverage. Because of its improved flexibility, the satellite can meet the needs of forces deployed anywhere in the coverage zone, while also efficiently managing its X and Ka-band bandwidth resources.

Unlike commercial satellites, SYRACUSE 4A and 4B have to stand up to a wide variety of potential threats, including jamming, to guarantee service continuity and resilience. Both SYRACUSE 4B and SYRACUSE 4A feature the latest cyber-defense and data encryption technologies, sectors in which Thales is a leader for both ground and space applications.

Other contributors to the SYRACUSE IV system include Telespazio, the joint company between Leonardo (67%) and Thales (33 %), in charge of satellite positioning and stationkeeping, while also supporting the French defense ministry by contributing to operation and upgrades over the satellites' design life of more than 15 years. Thales supplies the user ground segment, based on its Modem 21 high-performance, high-security transmission system. It also provides hardened tactical and naval ground stations, along with airborne stations, to ensure communications availability and confidentiality for all types of threats.

"Thales Alenia Space's teams can be very proud of the launch of the SYRACUSE 4B satellite, which is an excellent example of collaboration within French industry," said Hervé Derrey, President and Chief Executive Officer of Thales Alenia Space. "For SYRACUSE 4B, we reproduced the same payload that has been operating flawlessly on SYRACUSE 4A, launched in 2021 and qualified in orbit since September 2022, providing armed forces with secure end-to-end communications."

France's SYRACUSE "milsatcom" program kicked off in 1980 and handles all military communications between mainland France and units deployed in theaters of operation. By ensuring full strategic independence, this program addresses requirements for long-range





Ariane 5

and secure communications, protected against electronic warfare (EW), without requiring local ground infrastructure. The first three generations of SYRACUSE satellites, built by Thales Alenia Space as prime contractor, were deployed from 1984 to 2015.

FREE WIFI4EU ALL OVER EUROPE

If you are travelling through Europe and need internet, you can connect to a WiFi4EU network in one of the 7 233 towns and villages to enjoy free Wi-Fi in public spaces such as parks, libraries, museums, or town squares. WiFi4EU is funded under the Connecting Europe Facility by the EU.

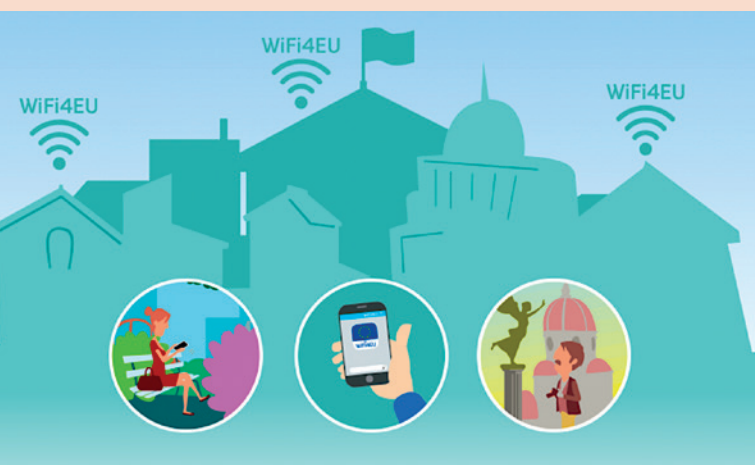
Citizens and guests of local municipalities within the European Union benefit from a free Wi-Fi connection in public places thanks to WiFi4EU.

WiFi4EU is an initiative led by the European Commission to bring public Wi-Fi connections to local municipalities. WiFi4EU seeks to create a pan-European network of public hotspots for Europeans in municipalities throughout the European Union.

Local municipalities applied for a voucher worth €15,000, which covers the costs of installation of a Wi-Fi hotspot in the town, functioning for a minimum period of three years. All local residents and visitors of the successful municipalities are now able to access the internet freely.

WiFi4EU is completely free to use. The rules laid out by the European Commission ensure that neither monetary remuneration, nor other indirect forms of payment, via advertising or data farming, are on the WiFi4EU network for the three-year period of engagement.

Connecting to the WiFi4EU network is very simple. The European Commission mandated that the network's name (its SSID) must be 'WiFi4EU'. This is the same everywhere, making the WiFi4EU hotspots recognisable across Europe. On connecting to the free Wi-



Fi network for the first time, you will be redirected to a secure login page (a captive portal). You will be able to sign in with a simple click-to-connect functionality. Once you have connected to the Wi-Fi network, you can begin to surf freely using WiFi4EU! What is more, if you disconnect and reconnect within a 12-hour period, you will not be required to log in again.

ZEROWASTE PIX 2023 PHOTO COMPETITION

This year the European Environment Agency is inviting



avid photographers across Europe to capture both the good — sustainable, and not so good — unsustainable — production and consumption patterns, habits and behaviours in our daily lives. This year's EEA photo competition 'ZeroWaste PIX', calls us all to reflect on the state of modern lifestyles.

The aim of **ZeroWaste PIX** is to raise awareness and inspire change, conveyed through photographs, whether it is an image of factories, landfills or a community garden that bring people together around a shared sense of purpose.

Our **production systems and consumption patterns** are vital aspects of our economy and livelihoods. As consumers, we enjoy numerous conveniences and benefits to our quality of life due to industrial production. However, we know this comes at a huge cost to our environment and increasingly to our own health and well-being. Our production and consumption systems have led to increased pollution and relentless resource extraction, degrading our nature and causing biodiversity loss.

Participants can enter photos in **four categories**:

- **Circular and smart**
- **Eco-lifestyles**
- **Wasteful production**
- **Consumption mania**

The winner of each category will receive a cash prize of EUR 1,000. Additional prizes are awarded to the best **youth entry** as well as the public's favourite photo, determined by an online vote.

Participants have until Tuesday, 3 October 2023 to submit their photographs. Winning entries will be announced 10 November 2023.

Who can participate?

Participants have to be at least 18 years old and citizens of one of the 32 EEA member countries or six cooperating countries, including the 27 EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

TO SUBMIT YOUR PHOTO <https://europeanenvironmentagency.wufoo.com/forms/p1ucmg9a0k7tbql/>



NO MAN IS
AN ISLAND

But he can build one
if he wants to



F-35B Lightning IIs fly over Wake Island, August, a U.S. Territory which is a strategic refuelling stop for military aircraft in the middle of the Pacific Ocean

Think of an island in the Pacific and you're likely to imagine palm fringed sands, coconuts falling from trees and hula dancers. A few years ago, during a working visit to the beautiful country of Togo in Africa, a friend of mine was knocked unconscious right before my eyes when a coconut fell on his head. The coco palms there were very tall, so it had fallen a long way before connecting with his head with a loud, hollow "clonk" sound. It wasn't funny but we laughed, even so (and he recovered quickly once he regained consciousness). If, however, you are a strategist in Beijing you may imagine man-made islands instead, dotted with early warning stations and sites from which to launch missiles or fire heavy weapons in the event of conflict. There are also helipads, anti-ship missile batteries and in one photograph two Type 022 Houbei-class catamarans which are fast-attack missile carrying vessels, according to an analysis by The War Zone publication. To be perfectly frank, the entire sea was misnamed. "Pacific", after all, means peaceful, but with frequent storms, strong winds and sometimes mountainous waves, it's seldom as peaceful as its name suggests, even without the world's politicians and armed forces getting involved. Perhaps that's just as well because it seems as if China's view of the Pacific Ocean is somewhat different anyway. Xi Jinping seems to think the Pacific has too few islands, so he has decided to create a few more.

Take a look at the Spratly Islands, for instance, in the South China Sea. They form a disputed archipelago of not only islands but also islets, cays, and reefs (lots of them), there are also some old atolls that are partly or wholly submerged. The archipelago itself lies just off the coasts of South Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia but recent aerial photographs have revealed that its component parts now serve China as a major intelligence source and military base, complete with missile-launching boats, runways (one of them three kilometres long) as well as a KJ-500 early warning and control aircraft.



A Planet Skysat captured this image of Fiery Cross Reef in the South China Sea in 2020. Constructed between 2014 and 2017, Fiery Cross reef is one of China's seven artificial islands in the Spratly Islands and represents a continued military presence in the region



French Polynesian President Edouard Fritch during his visit to the aquaculture project being built by the Chinese company Nui Ocean Foods

The United States is nervous about the development, of course, especially as the Spratly chain seems to be growing, with new, previously uncharted islands popping up where there were none before.

"No man is an island" is the title of a poem written by John Donne in 1623. Arguably, it's not a poem at all, but a prose section of a larger work, written while he was ill. It is meant to suggest that we all need each other and cannot exist as single, unrelated entities. Certainly, when a vessel gets into difficulties in the unforgiving ocean, he or she may need the help of others, but that probably isn't the thinking of Xi Jinping. He seems to be concentrating more on facilitating attacks on potential enemies. As it is, the facilities China has installed could be used to cut off shipping routes that currently supply Taiwan and Japan, preventing access from the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Washington claims to be monitoring developments in the region very closely.

China's interest in French Polynesia began in the 1980s. In the years that followed, China acquired a number of hotels, among other investments, all seemingly aimed at increasing its influence. In recent years, it has acquired several hotels including two with five-star ratings and also has an important diplomatic network within the archipelago. It has now extended its influence beyond the purchase of real estate and has got involved with investment projects, such as creating an aquaculture area on the Hao archipelago, the furthest archipelago from Tahiti, located 919 kilometres from the local capital. Xi is nothing if not ambitious and he's clearly interested in more than hula dancers.

To carry out this massive project, China would invest more than 600 million euros over the next ten years. There are clearly going to be huge economic benefits for the archipelago, according to L'École de guerre économique (the School of Economic Warfare, or EGE). However, hidden behind this project is an overwhelming ambition on the part of Beijing, whose primary objective is to meet ever-growing domestic demand for fish. The waters of the Exclusive Economic Zone of French Polynesia are rich in fishery and mineral resources. But Beijing's real goal is to expand its sphere of influence to the far reaches of the Pacific. Of course.

| Wanting it all

So, what has this got to do with what's happening among the Spratly Islands? According to the EGE, "To achieve its goals, China has built an important network of influence within the archipelago,"

which is clearly what US spy planes have been photographing. “The aquaculture project shows the desire to exclude France in its Indo-Pacific policy and this on its own territory. Thus, it was able to take advantage of the 1982 Defferre Accords allowing French Polynesia to acquire autonomy in its administrative and financial management, only the sovereign poles such as Defence and Justice are retained by the Metropolis.” None of this makes easy or comfortable reading in Washington, but in view of the region’s proximity to Australia and New Zealand, it doesn’t go down too well in Canberra or Wellington, either.

In 2007, China created a consulate on the island of Tahiti. Although it had a purely administrative role, the Consulate serves (and successfully) to help Beijing increase its influence on the island. This makes it possible to extend China’s influence in the economic field by improving connections with the local business network. By using this facility during the Covid-19 crisis, Beijing was able to use what’s been called “its diplomacy of the mask by delivering 2.2 million surgical masks and 15.8 thousand FFP-2 masks”. FFP-2 masks are the kind you can buy in a pharmacy.



Antony Géros, President of the Assembly of French Polynesia and Chinese Consul, Tiam Lixiao in Papeete in June 2023

This policy has increased China’s hold on the island by “replacing the French State in its sovereign role of protecting the population”, as EGE expressed it. Finally, in 2013, the Confucius Institute was formalized within the University of Papeete. You might almost argue that China was using the beliefs expressed in John Donne’s poem about no man being an island to make itself invaluable and completely essential. And it doesn’t end there, with China and the United States competing with each other for influence. According to Reuters, delegations from both countries have been visiting Honiara, the capital and largest city of the Solomon Islands, situated on the north-western coast of Guadalcanal, both hoping to extend their countries’ influence.

The China International Development Co-operation Agency has been funding infrastructure projects in the Solomon Islands ever since 2019, when Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Manasseh Sogavare, changed his country’s diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to Beijing. But to be on the safe side, Sogavare met with not only the vice chair of the China International Development Cooperation Agency, Tang Wenghong, but also with Kurt Campbell, Indo-Pacific coordinator of the US National Security Council, with whom he is said to have “reiterated our support for a free, open, secure and prosperous Solomon Islands”, according to a statement from the US Embassy in Honiara.



© SOLOMON ISLANDS PORTS AUTHORITY

The main port in Honiara

But while Australia, New Zealand and Japan worry about Chinese intentions, “closely monitoring developments which might impact on our national interests,” China none-the-less plans to upgrade the ageing international port in Honiara and two domestic wharves in the provinces, with the multi-million dollar construction contract going to the sole bidder in “a competitive tender”, the China Civil Engineering Construction Company, according to Mike Qaqara, who is an official at the Solomon’s infrastructure development ministry. The prospect of a “new military base” so close to Australia has raised a few eyebrows but according to the Eurasian Times, this has been dismissed by Beijing as “baseless hype”. One imagines that China would show rather more concern if Australia, New Zealand or Japan started building something similar on China’s doorstep. Meanwhile, the Solomon Islands’ government has welcomed the \$170-million (€1.56-million) project, funded by the Asian Development Bank, which includes improvements to the old port, construction of a new domestic port and the roads needed to service it all. Both the Solomon Islands and China have denied that the upgrade will include a naval base, pointing out that their security pact would simply not permit it. Doubts have been expressed, however, by the Prime Minister of Samoa, Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, one of the ten Pacific island leaders who declined to sign a regional trade and security pact with China. She told the media in Australia: “This is a commercial port, although it might morph into something else...’dual purpose’.” That would not go down well in Canberra.

Too few Islands? let’s build more

It’s now being reported by Western officials that China has been enlarging and building on land in the Spratly Islands group for the first time. Previously, China had militarised reefs and island land formations, apparently as part of its bid to



A Chinese H-6K bomber flying over the islands and reefs in the South China Sea



Vietnamese and Chinese coast guard vessels in the South China Sea

seize control of vital commercial shipping routes, something Western leaders fear. Now, according to Bloomberg, the New York-based news agency, it has begun to build military infrastructure on land not previously owned or controlled by China. The work has been carried out by Chinese maritime militias at four sites it did not previously occupy. It has also been building up industrial infrastructure on islands it has constructed in the disputed waters. Needless to say, the United States is not the only Western power to dispute China's claim to sovereignty over the South China Sea. It would be a very valuable resource for China if it was permitted to exercise that assumed power: eleven billion barrels of oil, as



Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Group Offshore Engineering of China delivering a deep-sea fish farming platform. Measuring 123.8 metres long, 66.8 metres wide, and 11 metres high, the platform can accommodate an estimated 200,000 fish in 91,000 cubic metres of water

yet untapped, and, according to the Center for Preventative Action, 90-trillion cubic feet (5.4-trillion cubic meters) of natural gas. China has not only annoyed the United States with its territorial claims: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam are also concerned. What's more, in addition to the oil and gas, the Spratly Islands provide rich fishing grounds.

China claims that the area is part of its "Exclusive Economic Zone", its EEZ, and that under international law that means that foreign militaries cannot undertake intelligence-gathering activities there, which would ban reconnaissance flights.

China likes to warn off potential rivals by threatening them with laws that it prefers to ignore. In these days of satellite imagery, it would seem to be a fairly pointless ban. In 2016, the Philippines brought a case against China at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea. China lost on most of the country brought but it declines to accept the court's authority. Given that it ignores international law, it has built ports, airstrips and military facilities all over the Paracel and Spratly islands, as well as militarising Woody Island with cruise missiles, fighter jets and a radar system. The United States has tried to counter China's over-reaching ambition by seeking to uphold the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea, conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) and talking up its support for partner nations in Southeast Asia. China only appears to believe that its own laws should be followed. But the United States is determined to maintain freedom of navigation in seas that only China believes it owns. And, of course, Beijing continues to construct bases with a strong potential military use. Not to be out-done, the United States has increased its own military activity in the region, including more FONOPS, during 2018.

In 2013, the Confucius Institute was formalised as part of the University of Papeete, ostensibly with the aim of promoting Chinese culture internationally with such events as exhibitions to show off the social and technological advances made by the Chinese Communist Party. Some have accused it of seeking to influence the faculty and even being behind possible acts of corruption, although there is no proof. Paris has been receiving warnings about the dangers of Chinese activity since 2014, but it has only now started to react. According to EGE, it was not until President Macron travelled to Polynesia in July 2021 that there was a real response from France to the Chinese involvement in the island and the stupidity of it in ecological terms. The State is supported by ecological associations who publicly (and loudly) condemn the nonsense of the aquaculture project. As the EGE points out, future fish will be raised in waters that are still potentially radioactive. Anybody want a radioactive salmon? From 1966 to 1996, the Hao archipelago was home to the Pacific Experimentation Center, the organization used to conduct nuclear tests in the region. Such a concentration of fish at that time would inevitably lead to the pollution of the waters that will flow out of the lagoon and pollute the fishing areas of the archipelago. China seems somewhat oblivious to environmental issues where its economic and military interests are concerned.

According to EGE: "If China can afford to project its ambitions on the most insular territory of French Polynesia, it is partly due to its management of the project's communication. Patiently but surely, it has been able to infiltrate the different strata of the economic and political circles of the archipelago. With the support of its diplomatic institutions based on the island, it disseminates its thinking and extols the economic and political benefits of increased relations between the two parties." It was Teddy Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, who, speaking in 1901, first used the expression: "speak softly, and carry a big stick." It's a saying that Beijing seems to have taken very much to heart.

From a social perspective, the French State has undertaken restoration work on Hao Atoll in order to build an Adapted Military Service Regiment (RSMA) that allows young people aged 18-25 who have dropped out of school to build a professional project in a military setting. And if China is sometimes slow to respond, it's not alone, according to a report by the EGE: "Aware of the delay, the President of the Republic has tried to show his support for his overseas department through various visits to the archipelago on the theme of preserving the environment, the local economy with particular attention to local fishermen and the investments to be made to develop social action."

China's pursuit of the offshore resources it has boasted about has not been welcomed in the United States, where Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has described it as "completely unlawful". He accused China of employing bullying tactics to gain control over the disputed waters. For its part, China says the US distorts facts and international law, although it goes on building military bases on artificial islands, always against Washington's wishes, although it has not accused them of being "illegal" until now. Relations between China and several other countries have been worsening recently, although it's unclear what the USA might want to do about it.

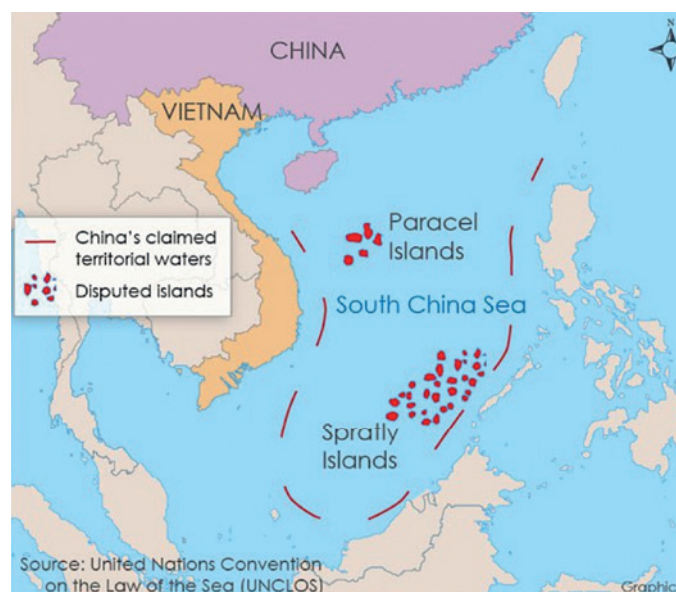
As I mentioned earlier in this article, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam contest China's claim to almost all of the South China Sea. The countries have wrangled over territory for decades, but tension has steadily increased recently. Beijing claims an area known as the "nine-dash line" and has backed its claim with island-building and patrols, expanding its military presence there, although it insists its intentions are peaceful. It's hard to be convincing about your country's "peaceful intentions" when they're backed up with military threats. In denouncing China's territorial claims, Pompeo said that China has "no legal grounds to unilaterally impose its will on the region." He told the media that Washington rejects Beijing's claims to the waters off Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia, stressing that any action by the People's Republic of China action "to harass other states' fishing or hydrocarbon development in these waters - or to carry out such activities unilaterally - is unlawful," adding that: "The world will not allow Beijing to treat the South China Sea as its maritime empire." But that may, of course, be wishful thinking.



Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen observing a military maneuver

No-one is about to back down, of course, which leaves the situation in limbo. In the meantime, it seems to be a somewhat one-sided dispute, with China arguing that it is not bound by international conventions or laws while at the same time using them to condemn the actions of others. At the end of the day, of course, it all comes down to money and power, which China wants to secure for itself in the face of opposition from neighbours. When

a BBC team flew over the disputed area aboard a US military aeroplane, the pilot was warned to leave immediately "to avoid confusion". But there is very little confusion, just a lot of threats and posturing by a country determined to impose its will. There is surely no obvious misinterpretation of its intentions: building airports, negotiating local deals and China's claim of territory leave little room for confusion. For example, France constructed an 8-kilometre runway on Hao Atoll (also known as Harp Island) that was designated as an emergency landing site for NASA's Space Shuttle. It's of particular interest to China as a former French military base, formerly used for France's nuclear tests.



The "nine-dash line"

China is developing Hao Atoll (or rather it is being developed for China by Tahiti Nui Ocean Foods) for aquaculture with the backing of the archipelago's Vice-President, Tearii Alpha, despite criticism of the deal from France's President Macron. Located in the Tuamotu Archipelago, Hao also has a 3,420-metre military airstrip, which is one of the longest in the Pacific. With a population of around 1,700, Hao served as a staging post between France, Papeete and the nuclear testing sites at Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls, where France conducted a total of 193 nuclear tests between 1966 and 1996.

We will have additional information for you in the next edition of Europe Diplomatic Magazine but focused more on the issue of China's global fishing expansion. Who knows what may have happened there by then? While all parties seem keen to play down their military interest in a place, you can be sure that ambitions are being honed and will be very far from what ever the politicians may be saying! Perhaps we should recall the last lines of John Donne's poem about 'no man being an island', too: "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

Anthony James

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Fugitive Slaves, 1867
by Theodor Kaufmann

THE ANTI-SOCIAL CONTRACT

**Today's UK government
turns its back on Jean-
Jacques Rousseau's dreams
of universal freedom**

“Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains,” wrote Jean-Jacques Rousseau at the start of his famous book, or treatise, if you prefer, called *The Social Contract*, written in 1762. He clearly believed (and wanted others to believe) that governments have a duty to care for those who live under their rule. Many of us today would find such a view to be “enlightened” and modern. Of course, a lot of people and groups (most especially governments, it seems) haven’t shared Rousseau’s idealistic views. Take the UK, for instance. The present government is now onto its fourth leader since David Cameron’s time in office, which ended in 2016. Of those four, the first was Theresa May, who lasted from 2016 to 2019. Next, staying in post until 2022, was Boris Johnson, whom many of the party’s more right-wing followers still wish was in charge, although he broke his own lockdown rules during the COVID pandemic by hosting parties at his official residence while the rest of us were forbidden to meet up with our families or friends. Perhaps he believed that, as Prime Minister, he could order the infections to stay away? Pathogens are never good listeners, however. The briefest tenure was that of Liz Truss, who became Prime Minister on 5th September 2022 and lasted only until 20th October in the same year. A fleeting term of office, indeed. She was replaced by Rishi Sunak, who is still there, many might say clinging on, in the English phrase, “by the skin of his teeth”.

I Vote-winning strategies?



U.K. Home Secretary Priti Patel and Rwandan Minister Vincent Biruta signing the Migration and Economic Development Partnership between the U.K. and Rwanda on 14 April 2022

He knows his party is not at its most popular, so he and his lieutenants are considering a plan to win back popularity by holding a referendum on whether or not the UK should remain part of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). They hope that by removing the limited level of protection available to migrants, the government will be able to deport asylum-seekers to start a new life in Rwanda, a plan that has since been voted down by Parliament. The UK had already spent millions on funding the deal, and it’s understood that work is still going ahead on proposals to build temporary accommodation not far from the capital, Kigali.

The properties rendered habitable so far are not being wasted, despite the legal problems, but are being made available instead to Rwandans and their families. Waste not, want not, as the saying goes. After all, it’s thought that the UK government had signed a deal with the East African country worth £140-million (€163-million) in order that Rwanda would provide the accommodation.

The government points out that since 2028 there has been a



Migrants aboard an inflatable raft

marked rise in the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers undertaking hazardous crossings on the way from Calais to Dover. Most of them have got away from war-ravaged countries like Sudan, Afghanistan and Yemen, or from others like Iraq or Iran. But when the plan was challenged in court the judges ruled that it was illegal. That decision has come as a relief to the migrants themselves, after the migrant charity Asylum Aid said that there had been several cases of deliberate self-harm amongst those scheduled to go to Rwanda. Steve Smith, the charity’s Chief Executive, told the “i” newspaper that: “Amongst the people we are supporting there have been attempted suicides and self-harm due to the fear caused by the Rwanda policy. Now, after all that trauma, judges have ruled that Rwanda is not a safe country.” It is also not exactly on the direct route from Calais to Dover, according to my atlas. The change of heart has been welcomed by Cafod, the Roman Catholic Church’s official aid agency, which described the original scheme as “not only immoral, but now proven to be unlawful.” Analysing the Court’s ruling for the “UK in a Changing Europe” website, Doctor Joelle Grogan wrote: “The asylum seekers argued that their claims would not be properly and fairly determined in Rwanda, and there was a real risk of refoulement (which means they would be forcibly returned to their home country to face persecution even if they had a good claim for asylum). The case concerned ten asylum-seekers from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Vietnam, Sudan and Albania. The asylum seekers challenged the decision of the UK government to remove them to Rwanda where their asylum claims would be considered (under Rwandan law), instead of having their claim considered in the UK.

The court decision hasn’t gone down well in Rwanda, either, which resents being described as “unsafe”. That is how it was described by the UK Court of Appeal. According to Yolande Makolo, a Rwandan government spokesperson, “Rwanda is one of the safest countries in the world.” Makolo also pointed out that the country has received praise from such organisations as the UKHCR for its “exemplary treatment of refugees.” It has, however, been listed as being involved in people trafficking, sexual exploitation and forced labour. In other words, it



Kigali, capital of Rwanda

may not be the worst country in sub-Saharan Africa but neither is it entirely innocent. It could be argued, of course, that no country truly is, including the UK. Rwanda suffered a civil war in the period 1990-1994, however, leaving a legacy of regional instability, while there are large volumes of unregulated small arms in circulation. These are sometimes used in local robberies, together with grenade attacks, but even so, violence levels are relatively low.

One thing is unarguable, however: the whole affair has rebounded badly for the British government. Not surprisingly, the Conservatives are trailing in the opinion polls after twelve years in power as the next general election approaches. In fact, it's still some way in the future, although it must be held by January 2025. On the current predictions, the Conservative Party, still dogged by tales of Boris Johnson's illegal drinks parties and other misdemeanours during Government COVID lockdowns, (including his many reputed lady friends), would lose heavily to Keir Starmer's Labour Party. A surprisingly large number of Conservative members of parliament, especially from seats beyond the supposed "red wall" that theoretically separates Northern England from the South and north (it's only a wall of imagination) are saying they will step down before the next election. Meanwhile, the economic and social prospects in Rwanda itself are improving, with signs of a jobs recovery after the pandemic.

In February 2022, according to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, unemployment dropped to 16.5%, compared with 23.8% in November 2021. That's a fall of 7.3 percentage points. Unemployment remained relatively higher among females (isn't it always?) at 18.2%. Overall, however, the figures show a steady and sizeable improvement. Meanwhile, Rwanda's labour underutilisation rate, which deals with unemployment (but also with underemployment and the potential labour force) declined to 52.8% in February, albeit much higher among females (58.8%) than males (46.7%). As usual. Interestingly, one of the leading lights of the (ultimately successful) campaign to get Britain out of the EU, Nigel Farage, is said to be considering leaving Britain. He says his bank doesn't seem to like him. Well, if he's looking for a country with reasonable work prospects, Rwanda would seem to fit the bill.

What sort of Britain?

Not that there aren't issues for Farage to get involved with in the UK itself. For example, Conservative MPs, still smarting about the Rwanda decision, are now talking about a referendum on whether or not Britain should remain a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), because without it, there would have been no obstacle to the deportation plan (although it would have upset those more Liberal-minded voters). The ECHR is a Council of Europe body, set up in the wake of the Second World War, with 46 member states and 46 elected judges. The UK Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, remains determined to enforce the Rwanda deportation plan. She told the media that she is: "determined to stop the small boats arriving in the UK" and has promised there must be no backsliding on that, despite Britain's shortage of available labour. What's she going to do to stop it? Buy a submarine? But a shortage of labour seems less important to the Conservative party than the government's right to do what it likes with people, without let or hindrance. At present, it's a big thorn in Rishi Sunak's side and the row over the Rwanda deportation plan has simply reignited it.

Now the Conservatives, fearing an electoral wipe-out in 2025 (or earlier), are clinging to the idea that most British people dislike foreigners (especially if they arrive on small boats wanting asylum) and that pandering to that bizarre form of xenophobia could be a vote-winner. It worked for the Brexit referendum, of course, to such nonsensical cries as "we want our country back" and "we won't be ordered about by foreigners". I know people who really do believe that sort of thing and want no truck with continental Europe, even if some of them still go there on holiday. That's why the Conservatives are talking about adding a referendum on leaving the ECHR to their policy plans. According to the "i" newspaper one minister said: "a promise of a vote on leaving the ECHR may be our best shot." If it really is, then I must say I find that rather sad. One back-bencher, Jonathon Gullis, is quoted as having said that Sunak could commit to quitting the ECHR – a set of international laws intended to prevent a repeat of the horrors that characterised World War II – "in an attempt to recapture the spirit of the 2016 Brexit referendum in a vote expected next year". One former government aide is quoted as saying: "it would be Brexit part 2". It would also be a nightmare for those who are disadvantaged or have escaped from a conflict at home, hoping to find peace and, possibly, a job, without having to travel to Rwanda for it. Many committed Conservatives view the ECHR as "encroaching on national sovereignty". But, of course, that



Home Secretary Suella Braverman (right) visits Norrsken House, an innovation hub in Kigali, Rwanda



Jonathon Gullis

was exactly what it was set up to do: limit the powers of member states to permit or even carry out atrocities. The ECHR is supposed to protect people's rights and freedoms, but it's protection that gets in the way of a Conservative government determined to deal with the problem of asylum seekers in its own way.

The "i" newspaper reports the case of an anonymous young man (his anonymity is hardly surprising, under the circumstances) who fled conflict zones in his bid to make a new life for himself. Despite the court ruling out deportation to Rwanda (for the time being) he told the newspaper he won't feel safe until his claim for asylum is granted. The British government plans to appeal the verdict. The young man the newspaper featured had been travelling for four years but within a week of his arrival he received a letter from the Home

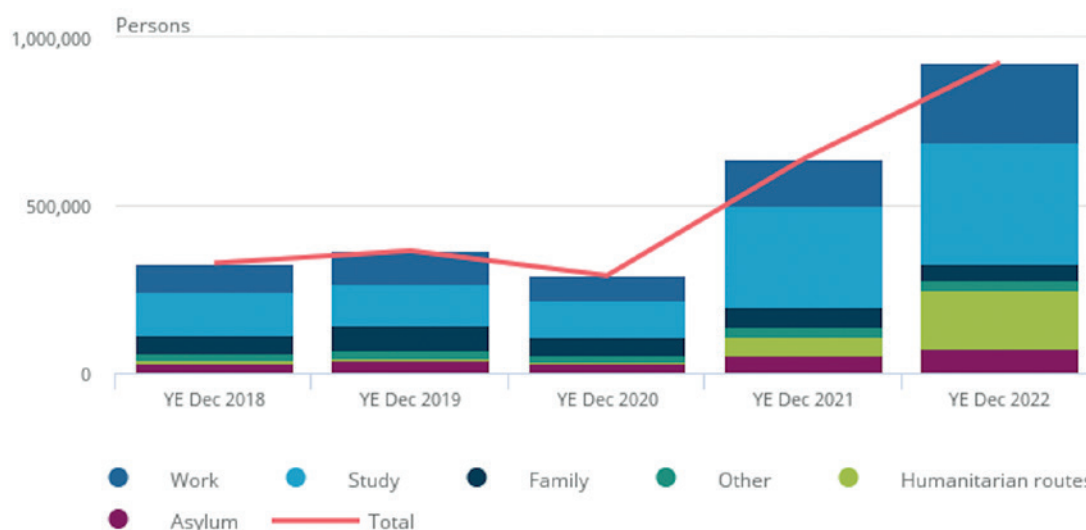
Office stating that he was to be sent to Rwanda, so the Court of Appeal's verdict that such a move would be unlawful was extremely welcome, as well as being timely. It may not, however, be the end of the story. Sunak remains confident that the verdict of the Court of Appeal will be overturned by the Supreme Court. Gullis told the "i" that the government should simply ignore the ruling. That would certainly be one way of quitting, without the bother of a referendum: get thrown out. But in this latest case, even the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees got involved, giving evidence in support of the asylum-seekers' argument and reflecting international concern about UK refugee policy at the highest level. The Court reiterated that the judgment was not a view on the political merits of the case – that was a matter for government – but its only concern was whether the policy complied with the law as laid down by Parliament.

Letting down the family?

Strangely, it was Boris Johnson's maternal grandfather who helped create the ECHR, having been a member of the European Commission of Human Rights (a Council of Europe body) from

Figure 3: The increase in non-EU immigration since 2021 is attributed to people arriving in the UK for work and on humanitarian routes

Total number of non-EU nationals who immigrated long term into the UK by reason for immigration, between 2018 and 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics, Home Office



The MS Victoria I was chartered by the Scottish Government to provide temporary accommodation to those fleeing the war in Ukraine. The ship, has been providing people with accommodation until they secure somewhere to stay on a longer term

1962 to 1984, including a spell as its president from 1972. One commentator wrote that he must be turning in his grave that Johnson wants to undo his life's work for short-term political gain. The House of Commons library defines asylum as "protection given by one country to someone fleeing from persecution in their own country". The number of applicants in the UK's case peaked in 2002 at 84,132.

After that the statistics show the numbers falling sharply to reach a 20-year low in 2010, with 17,916 applicants. But of course, that's still a lot of people and certainly more than today's Conservative party would feel comfortable with. As of June 2022, the total "work-in-progress" asylum caseload consisted of 166,100 cases, with 101,400 cases still awaiting a final decision. In 2021, 42% of applicants came from the Middle East, while 23% came from African countries. Sometimes, it works for those seeking a new life: between 2014 and 2022, 54,000 people were resettled or relocated somewhere in the UK under various schemes. For the statistically minded, in 2021 there were some nine asylum applications for every 10,000 people living in the UK.

This is one of those intransigent issues that the UK government would very much like to go away, apparently without taking any sort of definitive action, if avoidable. Now it has come in for criticism in Scotland. A letter has been sent by Edinburgh Council to the government informing them that it would not permit the cruise ship MS Victoria to be used as what it called a "floating prison" for asylum seekers, some of whom have been waiting for years for a Home Office decision on their rights to remain in Britain. It is currently moored in the port of Leith. In fact, as the news broke, the UK Government's secret plan to recommission the cruise ship, which had been used to house families fleeing the war in Ukraine, as floating accommodation for asylum seekers has been met with fury by Scottish authorities and refugee groups. The Scottish government argues that the temporary housing of refugees from Russia's war in Ukraine is quite a different matter from providing accommodation for asylum seekers.

I Similar but not the same

There are strong reasons for the difference, too: under the government's Homes for Ukraine visa scheme, Ukrainians can stay in the UK for three years and are permitted to work, possibly even finding ways to support themselves in private accommodation, so that the ship would be a stop-gap measure and purely temporary. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work, nor to claim social financial benefits. The Scottish government argues that the two kinds of use cannot be compared because of the difference in their "rights and agency". What is more, Forth Ports, which operates the Port of Leith, warned that the vessel could not remain beyond July. The UK government had also sought to assure Forth Ports that it should not be used for refugees. Most of the asylum seekers are from such places as Afghanistan and Syria, and there is no guarantee that they will ever be able to go home. The Scottish Government also pointed out that it had been given no information about how long-term asylum seekers could be supported in terms of their healthcare and general welfare. The Government hit back by claiming that it had only been informed at the last minute that the vessel was to be used to house Ukrainians.

The current asylum system costs £3 billion (€3.5-billion) a year, including around £6 million (€7 million) a day on hotel accommodation. A total of 51,000 asylum seekers are living in the UK in temporary accommodation, including hotels as well as special reception centres. Figures from the Migration Observatory at Oxford University show that the backlog of asylum seekers awaiting a decision has risen 13-fold since 2012 and is one of the worst in Europe. More than two thirds of people are obliged to wait for more than six months for a decision; some must wait for far longer. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has pledged to clear the backlog by the end of 2023, but it's hard to see how. It is already seen by many as an insoluble mess.

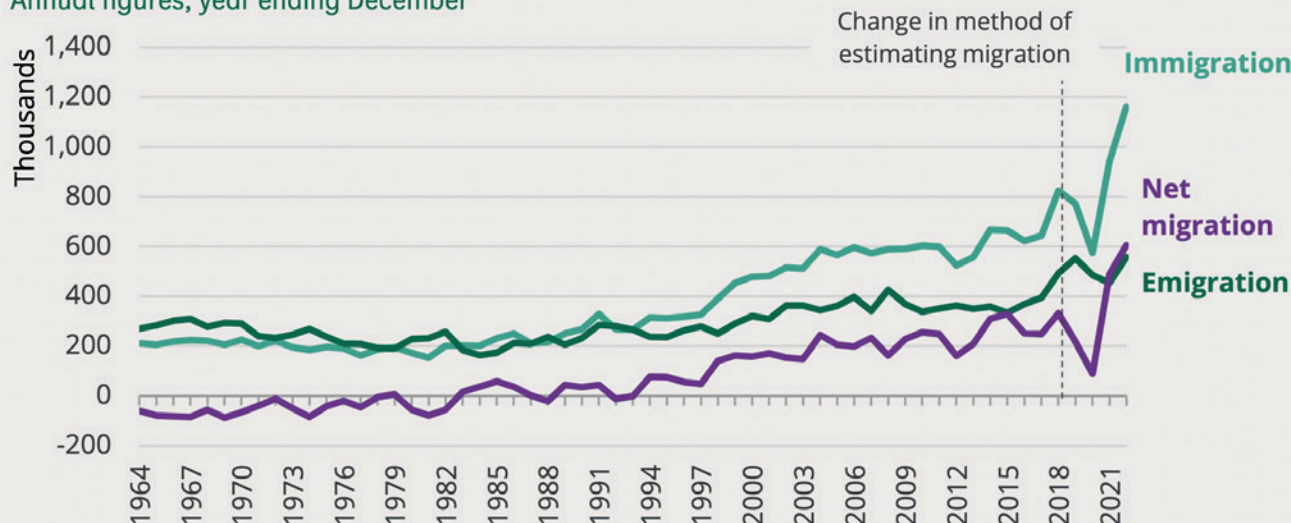


UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak visits a Border Force cutter boat in the Dover Strait

Strait. Picture by Simon Dawson / No 10 Downing Street One asylum seeker who was due to be housed in my old home area, the North East of England, was left abandoned on the street after a 350 mile taxi ride from Folkstone in Kent because the private contractor with responsibility for housing that had been booked by the Home Office simply failed to turn up. The government-funded Mears Group blamed what it called a "miscommunication with the transport provider". It has apologised but the asylum seeker might still have had to sleep rough on arrival, had not a very intoxicated neighbour agreed to take him in. The house in which he ended up spending the night was infested with rats and had neither electricity

Estimates of international migration in the UK 1964-2022

Annual figures; year ending December



nor a refrigerator. In fact, the Home Office's record in this area leaves a lot to be desired, while the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, remains committed to sending all asylum seekers to Rwanda, regardless of what the courts may say or how safe they would be when they got there, and she has described the Court decision as "disappointing". The government still argues that the Rwanda plan would serve to deter those who might otherwise use "illegal, dangerous or unnecessary methods", such as small boats, to cross the English Channel. The asylum seekers may choose to dispute the "unnecessary" part of that definition.

Dealing with the current situation is certainly far from easy. Some 12,000 asylum seekers are to be considered for refugee status without having to face interviews or meet with officials. Instead, the decisions will be based on the answers given in a 10-page questionnaire, at least for those coming from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, if they applied before last July. The aim is to reduce the backlog in accordance with Rishi Sunak's promise. Home Secretary Braverman remains determined to put a stop to asylum seekers arriving on small boats. Sunak promised last December to cut by half the numbers waiting for longer than six months for a decision. By dropping face-to-face interviews in favour of questionnaires, however, the government may be making it easier for those who arrived by what are called "irregular" routes to stay, which is certainly not what Braverman seems to want.

A record 45,756 people reached the UK in small boats last year and quite a few of them are having to be accommodated in hotels. Braverman told the BBC: "It's clear we have an unsustainable situation in towns and cities around the country", with (what she called) "overwhelming numbers of people arriving here illegally." A record 45,756 people successfully reached the UK in small boats last year.

The Refugee Council and the British Red Cross have urged the government on previous occasions to introduce an accelerated process for asylum seekers from countries with high acceptance rates. Last year, they recommended 40,000 cases from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Syria, Sudan and Iran should be in this category. According to the BBC: "The exclusion of Sudanese and Iranian asylum seekers from the list of people offered the Home Office's streamlined process is because the grant rates for those nationalities is slightly lower, although still about 80%." Speaking to BBC's Breakfast programme,



High Courts of Justice in London

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer said the asylum system was "broken".

Some leaders like people to follow them, and, even more, to emulate them. I must refer them back again to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous work, "The Social Contract", in which he points out that some of our leaders are so awful that their embracing of any form of belief should put others off it. He argues for plurality of belief, saying: "But anyone who dares to say 'Outside the church there is no salvation' should be expelled from the state". It's a strongly argued point of view, even if many people would disagree. He gives a sound example, too, having been a strong critic of royalty, aristocracy and religion and who saw official armies as "disgraceful mercenaries" serving only the rich and powerful: "The reason for which Henri IV is said to have embraced the Catholic religion is one which should make all honest men abandon it, above all any prince who knows how to reason." And it's still true today, when you look around you at many of our current crop of political leaders. Would you want to emulate them? Rousseau would not have liked them.

Jim Gibbons

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SUCH
WOMEN AS
SEEM GOOD
TO YOU

**The Taliban tries to
make women less
attractive by law**

The Qur'an attaches a lot of importance to women, even if the Taliban do not in Afghanistan. In fact, the 4th chapter of the Holy Qur'an is simply called "Women". It's from there that the advice comes: "Marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, four; but if you fear you will not be equitable, then only one, or what your right hands own, so it is likelier you will not be partial." OK, so the advice is very different from, say, the Christian or Jewish religions, and, indeed, quite incompatible with common law, in most civilisations. Multiple wives are generally prohibited. It is possible for a man to be greedy. There used to be a music hall joke about it: "What's the punishment for bigamy?" Answer: "Two mothers-in-law". I never said it was funny. In the book "Women in the Qur'an" by Esmā Lamrabet, she writes that "For a long time, the question of the status of Muslim women has been taken hostage between two extreme interpretations: a very rigid conservative Islamic approach and a Western, Islamophobic and ethnocentric approach." Lamrabet goes further: "The Muslim woman, the victim of choice during centuries of stagnation and decadence, continues today to survive in a social system which perpetuates, of course to different degrees, oppression in the name of religion." In Lamrabet's book, she explains the problem in the first chapter: "The problem is that women and their status in Islam is a contentious subject and it would be difficult for anyone to deny this. But what is the truth of the matter?" I think very few people would argue with that analysis, but Lamrabet continues: "Is it truly religion, as a system of values, which oppresses us or a collective social reality which appropriates the religious in order to reformulate it according to a hierarchical representation which suits it and which allows it to better affirm its powers?" My own opinions veer towards the latter.

Having read the Qur'an, I cannot imagine Muhammad approving of the Feast of Herod, as described in Chapter 14 of the Gospel of St. Matthew in the Christian bible. Not apropos



Dance of Salome / by Robert Fowler

that particular event, it is written in the Qur'an: "O believers, draw not near to prayer when you are drunken," and the guests almost certainly were. Probably, anyway. John the Baptist, says the Gospel, had told Herod Antipas that he could not have the Princess Herodias in his bed (which is what he wanted) because she was married to Herod's brother, Philip. Her daughter, Salome, however, was ordered to dance to entertain those enjoying the party and Herod promised to give her whatever she asked for if she pleased the crowd. Goaded by her mother (clearly a rather unpleasant woman, if apparently quite sexy) she pleased the guests immeasurably and so she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a plate. It was at best a very odd choice, but Herod had to keep his promise, if with great reluctance. I suppose if you're going to have your head cut off, it's some slight compensation to know that the man ordering it didn't want to. We don't know what sort of dance Salome did, but it probably wasn't a waltz, a rumba or a pole dance. In any case, it very much pleased the guests, it seems, who'd been drinking heavily, one assumes. It wasn't until Oscar Wilde's play in 1891 that it turned into the Dance of the Seven Veils, an early form of striptease, the veils coming off one by one. It probably wasn't the first time (and it certainly wasn't the last) that a man lost his head over the sight of a woman's naked body. In fact, it wasn't just a case of Oscar Wilde fantasizing: to the French she had come to symbolize, in the words of the French novelist Charles-Marie-Georges Huysmans, "the symbolic incarnation of undying lust". She sounds like the sort of young woman who'd always be welcome at any party. Wilde had also been influenced by Gustave Flaubert, whose story about Salome has her dancing on her hands, presumably upside-down, which may conjure up an interesting vision in the male imagination.

There are a number of versions of the story, but all of them suggest Salome was a very sexy lady who liked to show more than was considered proper at the time as a form of entertainment. Sex never goes out of fashion, after all. Nor, it seems, does exotic dancing. But if you think about the circumstances described in St. Matthew's Gospel, Salome must have been very young.

Never forget the women

You would not know it from the utterances of the Taliban but Muhammad wrote a lot about women's behaviour, none of it requiring them to cover themselves from head to foot and not to carry out any sort of work. The Taliban's interpretation



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Esmā Lamrabet



Afghan women wearing the Burka in Kabul

of how women should behave and be treated is a world away from what is written in the Qur'an. It places an obligation on women to ensure their menfolk are obedient to the Faith. "If a woman fear rebelliousness or aversion in her husband, there is no fault in them if the couple set things right between them; right settlement is better; and souls are very prone to avarice." The Qur'an seems to assume that men will have the leading rôle but does not authorise the mistreatment of women. "You will not be able to be equitable between your wives, be you ever so eager; yet do not be altogether partial so that you leave her as it were suspended." Wise words, although I'm not keen on the idea of one man having several wives (and several mothers-in-law).

When I was in Afghanistan, I observed, of course, that men and women were regarded very differently. The Mujahideen lived in a tented community, not far from the border with Pakistan. I noted that the men of the family would emerge into the open first, with the women following meekly behind. But one of the men came to our small group because his daughter had a bad headache and he needed help. One of my colleagues, a very kind Frenchman, found her some painkillers – paracetamol and aspirin, I think – and got a wonderful smile of gratitude from the young woman for his kindness. Much of the kow-towing to men seemed to be more for show than from deeply-held beliefs.

Those who see Muslim women as prisoners and those who see them as truly liberated – if not in the way it might be done in the West – still face the same intractable problems. "Between these two diametrically opposed visions," writes Lamrabet, "the Muslim woman ultimately remains a prisoner, despite herself, of a discourse which in both cases, ignores her person, her aspirations and her will...Between a frozen Islamic thought which assiduously ring-fences women's issues and a Western ideology which takes pleasure from denigrating Islam through those same issues, one struggles to think of a third way, through which Muslim women can emerge from this ideological impasse."

In the case of the Taliban, however, women have no rights at all. The leaders didn't get that idea from the Qur'an: nowhere does it describe woman as sub-human creatures who exist only to be abused. In their latest bout of needless cruelty, they have ordered the closure of all beauty salons. The ruling comes from the Taliban's Ministry of Vice and Virtue, which could be renamed "the Ministry of Cruelty and Blind Stupidity". The excuse, given by Afghanistan's Supreme Leader, is that their existence puts economic pressure on bridegrooms and their families, who are expected to fund the beauty treatments

prior to matrimony. On the doors of the closed salons, which showed posters with pictures of the treatments available (albeit not anymore) the women's faces have been painted over on the orders of the Taliban. One is left to conclude that the Taliban fear that women are cleverer than them (which wouldn't be hard) and so are clamping down to prevent the danger that their intelligence might otherwise threaten the ruling positions of the Taliban themselves.

That fear of being overtaken by woman must run very deep. There is absolutely nothing in the Qur'an to support the Taliban's pointless misogyny: "Misogyny is hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women. It is a form of sexism that is used to keep women at a lower social status than men, thus maintaining the social roles of patriarchy. Misogyny has been widely practised for thousands of years." And it has always been wicked, pointless and evil.

The ludicrously titled "Vice and Virtue



Taliban Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada



Taliban Interior Minister Khalifa Sirajuddin Haqqani

ministry" announced that the beauty salons used fake hair and shaped women's eyebrows, which a ministry spokesman said is "prohibited in Islam". No, it isn't. I've read the Qur'an and I don't recall a single mention of eyebrows. An even more ludicrous excuse given was that the over-use



UN's Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif

of make-up could prevent women's skin from absorbing water during Islamic prayer rituals. So buy some cream! These claims are so thoroughly stupid that one might be inclined to laugh at them, but under the brutal rule of the Taliban, you probably wouldn't dare. They're a very cruel (dare I say "ungodly"?) bunch. There are any number of other restrictions imposed since the Taliban took power in August 2021. The new rules were not for the benefit of Afghanistan's citizens, since it removed one of the very few sources of income an Afghan woman could have. The Taliban have closed off every other source of earning a livelihood. Women have described life in Afghanistan as meaning that they are obliged to exist in "prison-like" conditions. The United Nations Human Rights Council give examples of what they call "grave, systematic and institutionalised discrimination against women and girls, which, they say, "is at the heart of Taliban ideology and rule". For that to be true, however, the Taliban would have to actually have hearts. Clearly they don't. One analysis accuses the Taliban of trying to erase women altogether from public life.

In a statement, Nada Al-Nashif, the UN's Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights said: "Over the past 22 months, every aspect of women's and girls' lives has been restricted. They are discriminated against in every way." The UN went further in a recent report. Women have been banned from further education by a government that seems to fear that women are cleverer than men, if less violent. After initially segregating the genders, women are no longer allowed to study. It means the end of the road for the roughly 90,000 women who were on university courses in 2018 when the Taliban decided to turn back time to the middle ages or earlier.

The Taliban's excuse this time was, they claimed, because too many female students "hadn't worn appropriate Islamic attire, such as a hijab, and there had been a mixing of genders". What a surprise, at a university. Clearly, the

Taliban, who would appear to be poorly educated, have never heard of, say, Katherine Johnson, a leading mathematician at NASA, or Tiera Guinn, who is a rocket scientist. They probably don't know about Marie Curie, either, the Polish born genius who became head of the physics lab at the Sorbonne University. There was Jane Goodall, who became famous for her work with primates. I could go on and on, but I suspect the Taliban neither know nor care about the advancement of science. After all, the Taliban have excluded women from the jobs market and banned women from working with the United Nations.

Stupid rules imposed by stupid people?

The sheer crass stupidity of the Taliban and its leadership is hard to comprehend. Women have also been banned from working with non-governmental organisations such as "Save the Children", the "Norwegian Refugee Council" and others, forcing them to close down any humanitarian missions they were running in Afghanistan. The effect of this silly gender manipulation is extremely negative, according to UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric, who said it was hard to imagine how Afghanistan would deal with the many challenges it faces without the active participation of women and the education they can provide. The Taliban's new rules are, quite



Afghan schoolgirls before the occupation by the Taliban



Frightened Afghan girls in Kabul



An Afghan girl studies at home with the help of her mother after being denied the right to continue studying at school

frankly, beyond stupid. Yamini Mishra, Regional Director for Amnesty International's South Asia office said that barring women from working for humanitarian NGOs was extremely unwise. "It is as if the Taliban are intentionally driving the country into famine." But it gets worse. "Their discriminatory policies are bringing shocking levels of food insecurity and making the delivery of international assistance almost impossible." Furthermore, women in need of assistance are only allowed to accept it from other women. They are forbidden to have contact with men who are strangers to them. If the Taliban really believe that men brought into contact with women they don't know will immediately engage in sexual activity they must have a very poor opinion of their own self-control!

In the light of all this, you may not be surprised to learn that Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women, and also for mothers and babies. Every year some 70 out of every 1,000 pregnant women die during pregnancy or while giving birth. Even if they successfully bring a baby into the world, it's a serious struggle to feed their young, often because they do not have enough to eat to produce the milk their babies need. The humanitarian organisation, Doctors Without Borders, has said that excluding women from higher education and banning them from working at aid organisations has seriously impacted on access to medical care. Women cannot even reach medical assistance that is not on their doorstep because of the travel restrictions the Taliban have imposed.

There is a problem here, because it appears that the Qur'an gives men the right to beat their wives, although the severity of the beating is not clear. The verse in question, An-Nisa, 4:34, instructs men to look after women, but permits "correction" if the women overstep the mark. The verse says (although this depends on the translation): "As for those women whose ill-will you have reason to fear, admonish them first; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them." Translations vary and the word used about the offense, *nushuz*, represents a condition of considerable conflict between man and wife, although it is most often translated as insubordination still, some translate it as "adultery". An alternative translation takes a softer approach: "And if you sense ill-conduct from your women, advise them first, but if they persist, do not share their beds, but if they still persist, then discipline them gently. But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them." So, no instruction regarding a beating in this case, which seems fairer to me, since men are

normally stronger than women (OK, not always).

It's no wonder some Muslims find it confusing. According to Asma Lamrabet's book, *Women in the Qur'an*, the issue should ideally develop in three stages: firstly with an attempt at reconciliation through talking to each other; secondly by the man refraining from touching his wife in the marital bed, supposedly as a means of coercion. If that doesn't work, the third phase is *fa-dribuhunna*, which translates as "beat her" or just "correct her". However, the Prophet was well-known for having an aversion to all forms of violence, especially against women. He reacted to this suggestion of violence by giving women the right to *Qishās*, which basically means "an eye for an eye". In other words, if he is violent towards you, respond in kind and thump him, too. It was a revolutionary idea at the time and even today is regarded as "unthinkable", although I can't see why. Many commentators argue that it is simply a way of bringing equality to the household. Certainly, it came as a bit of a shock to, for instance, a Bedouin tribal society. My advice, however, would be not to try to apply that rule to the Taliban, who might very well cut your hand off if you raise it against one of them.

During his life on Earth, many women came to see the Prophet, often about the mistreatment they received from their husbands. Given his surprising response, it seems unlikely that Mohammad would endorse the recommendations of the Taliban in daily life. In fact (and perhaps not surprisingly) a large number of men approached him, claiming that his recommendation would incite women to rebel against their husbands. It seems likely that it was intended to encourage equality of treatment for both men and women.



The Afghan and ISAF football teams in 2010



© UNICEF/ALESSIO ROMENZI

Women at the UNICEF-supported Mirza Mohammad Khan clinic in Afghanistan

According to Lamrabet, “The Qur’anic vision of the institution of marriage is a vision based on love, compassion and mutual help.” While the Qur’an appears to endorse the idea that a woman who rebels against her husband (and/or commits adultery, depending on the translation) can be beaten, it seems somewhat ambivalent as to how fiercely the concomitant beating can be administered.

I An eye for an eye?

In case you’re wondering how Afghanistan’s women’s teams can compete in international competitions, they have to live in exile in Australia. The Taliban’s ludicrous edict forbids women in Afghanistan from visiting parks, fitness facilities, public pools, gymnasias, or sports clubs. They are not allowed to play football, no matter what they’re wearing. In other words, Afghan women are not allowed to compete anywhere. Additionally, whether at home or wherever else they may find themselves, Afghan women are obliged to wear a burqa, which covers virtually the entire body. If they do not, their male relatives will face jail sentences. And, of course, females who enjoy sports are not permitted to compete. The rules are, of course, completely ridiculous; Afghan women cannot travel to see a doctor (and there are very few female doctors anyway) without being accompanied by a “mahram” – a father, husband or brother to play the part of

chaperone. Needless to say, females can only receive treatment from female doctors, of which there is a severe shortage. Of those who actually exist, they, too, must abide by the same ridiculous restrictions, so of the very few female doctors Afghanistan has, most are obliged to stay at home virtually all the time. How this helps their mortal souls is quite beyond the comprehension of any rational person. The same applies to midwives. The Taliban’s decision to exclude women from higher education and to impose restrictions on travel is quite exceptionally cruel and absolutely pointless and stupid.

It seems clear that the Taliban want to exclude women from education, work, travel, medical assistance or an ability to lead a normal life of any kind. The cruelty of the Taliban is exceptional and utterly pointless. Indeed, it defies logic. The Qur’an is not like that, even if it sometimes seems to be ambivalent. According to Lamrabet, it was never intended that women should effectively disappear from everyday life. If they do, then humankind is at an end. Lamrabet stresses repeatedly that Muslims must participate (the Qur’an does not exclude women from this obligation) in order to speak up for their faith. It is an obligation placed upon them, but one that the Taliban think should be ignored, which makes no sense. As Lamrabet writes: “It is clear in the higher objectives of the Qur’anic vision, called *maqasid as-Shari’ah*, this determination to include women at all levels of social participation.” If the Taliban force the Afghans to ignore this order from their God, then surely what awaits them is Gehenna, another word for Hell. See you there, guys, but don’t forget the cream against burns.

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ON THE DEFENSIVE

Europe grows increasingly interested in missile defence systems



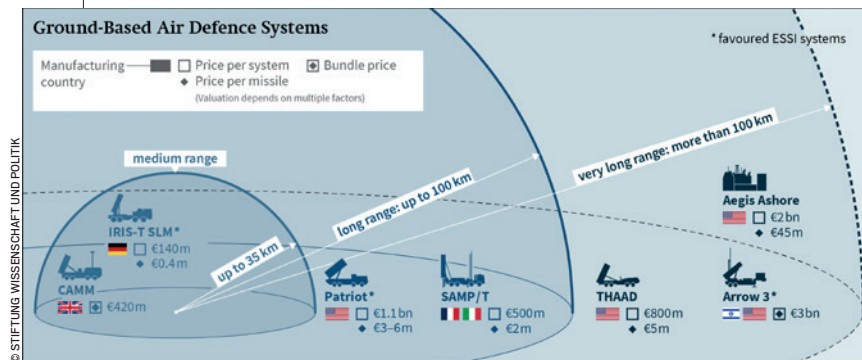
A Patriot Missile System

Everyone is getting in on the act. The more Europe's governments fear themselves to be under threat, the more they think about protecting themselves. It's a very natural reaction. Interest has increased considerably since Putin launched his unprovoked assault on Ukraine. A man who could launch such an aggressive military action without reason could, presumably attack anyone, anywhere. Even Switzerland is reported to be keen on participating in the European Sky Shield defence umbrella, despite critics pointing out that such a move would be incompatible with the country's long-standing tradition of robustly-held neutrality. But of course, neutrality is fine when you don't have war planes overhead dropping bombs and firing missiles at you. Reuters quotes Switzerland's defence ministry as saying: "Switzerland wishes to participate in the European Sky Shield initiative and a declaration of intent is due to be signed in Bern." Poke even the most peaceful and loving dog hard enough and often enough and you may get bitten. It's a lesson Russia has yet to learn.

According to Reuters (and as reported in Al Arabiya) this communal missile defence system, originally proposed and created by Germany, now has 17 European member countries. They have all signed up and there is increasing interest being shown elsewhere. Apart from Germany itself, the UK, Sweden and Finland also enjoy the scheme's protection. The idea behind it is to reduce the cost of providing such defence systems as Patriot missiles. Some Swiss commentators, including Werner Gartenmann of the lobby group Pro Schweiz, have pointed out that the whole thing doesn't really fit with the idea of Switzerland being strictly neutral.

But if Germany is providing the wherewithal behind the European Sky Shield, that doesn't mean it doesn't buy missile protection elsewhere.

The German government has approached the country's lawmakers to request permission to buy Israel's exciting new Arrow 3 missile system at a cost of almost €4-billion, according to the Agence France Presse news agency. First, they would have to agree to a down payment of €560-million. Nobody said it would be cheap. The full system is unlikely to be



delivered before the final quarter of 2025 and the quoted price is already a billion euros higher than expected. Where's all the money coming from? Well, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told the media that it's vital to bolster defences following Russia's unprovoked military invasion of Ukraine.

In fact, the German government is leading the moves to bolster NATO's air defences following Russia's relentless missile attacks on private apartments, schools and hospitals in Ukraine. Did Putin really think this would be as easy as taking Crimea? If so, he's been shown to have been very wrong. Quite a number of European governments have so far signed up for the European Sky Shield initiative and its defensive anti-missile missiles can destroy incoming ordnance while the missiles are still in space.

The European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) was formally initiated in October 2022 during a meeting of NATO defence ministers. Interest in the scheme has been heightened by Russia's vicious attack on Ukraine. Putin's claim that his aim was to "de-nazify" the country was clearly nonsense from the outset. The only Nazis in Ukraine were the ones Russia put there during its vicious land-grab. Meanwhile, ESSI's approach is to procure the necessary weapons jointly but to operate them on a collective basis. Once upon a time, NATO's air and missile defence systems were at the point of constant readiness, just in case East and West came to blows. With the ending of that cold war, the urgency seemed to go out of it all. Putin may not be another Joseph Stalin, but only in as much as he appears not to have an over-riding system of political beliefs for which to fight. "Putinism" is certainly not "Communism", nor any other recognisable "ism". He just seems to want to run the world.

Preparing for an uncertain future

Germany, meanwhile, has adjusted to various ways of providing defence. Back in 1995, Germany joined with the United States, together with France and Italy, to form MEADS, the Medium-Extended Range Air Defense System. The MBDA missile manufacturer, working with Lockheed Martin, had been chasing just such a contract for years, but although doubtless disappointed, the firm stands to benefit by providing a licensed manufacturing facility for the Patriot GEM-T. So not everything is lost. And there is no doubt that the Arrow 3 Patriot and the IRIS-T SLM air and missile architecture would greatly improve defence possibilities for partner countries.

French President Emmanuel Macron has been urging his fellow-European leaders to "think twice before buying non-EU forms of defence." That would rule out the Arrow 3, too, so his colleagues may not be listening right now. The Arrow 3 is a long-range missile system, designed to shoot down incoming missiles before they reach



The Arrow 3 missile defense system



A Patriot Air and Missile Defense launcher fires an interceptor. The Patriot Missile System is a highly mobile air defense guided missile system designed to engage and intercept any aerial threats whether it be aircraft or tactical ballistic missiles under any weather conditions and in natural or induced environment

Earth's atmosphere. Certainly it would boost the defence capability of all those countries that signed up for it. It's not before time, given how Western leaders (in Europe and, to an extent, further afield) have let the whole business of air defences slide quite a bit. The defences were originally there because Russia (in the form of the Soviet Union, was reckoned to pose a threat. They were allowed to slip because Russia seemed to be coming into the West's drawing room to share a cup of tea and some biscuits. It's now seen to be needed again because that strange Putin character has shown himself to be very different from that nice and very charming Mikhail Gorbachev and to have designs on bits of Europe that belong to other countries, or even just to themselves. Germany has been under-spending on defence (in the views of many) for years, but now such perceived laxity is coming to an end, and fast.

It wasn't so much the simple fact of Russia's unprovoked war with Ukraine but its relentless missile strikes on civilian targets. Don't expect any change of heart or regret from a country that still believes it has the right to seize local children en masse and "Russify" them.

That's why fourteen NATO allies met together in Brussels in October 2022 to begin work on the missile plan. "This commitment is even more crucial today, as we witness the ruthless and indiscriminate missile attacks by Russia in Ukraine, killing civilians and destroying critical infrastructure," said NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană. The 14 NATO allies included Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, the United Kingdom. "In this context, I strongly welcome Germany's leadership in launching the European Sky Shield Initiative." Geoană added: "The new assets, fully interoperable and seamlessly integrated within the NATO air and missile defence, would significantly enhance our ability to defend the Alliance from all air and missile threats." Which we must assume means "from Russia", although there are other irresponsible rogue states out there.

We shouldn't forget, for example, that the UK, Canada, Sweden and Ukraine, along with Afghanistan and a few citizens of Iran itself, are taking legal action against the Iranian government for the downing in 2020 of a Ukrainian passenger jet, resulting in the deaths of all the 176 passengers and crew. They want the International Court of Justice, the highest court of the United Nations,

Participants in the European Sky Shield Initiative



to rule that Iran acted illegally in shooting down Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 on 8 January, 2020. They also want Iran to apologise and pay compensation to the relatives of those who died.

| Skyborn protection



Defence Ministers from 14 NATO Allies and Finland during the European Sky Shield Initiative in Brussels, Belgium in October 2022

The Sky Shield initiative will allow all participating nations to jointly develop an air and missile defence system using interoperable, off-the-shelf solutions. This multinational and multifaceted approach offers a flexible and scalable way for nations to strengthen their deterrence and defence in an efficient and cost-effective way. There was a reference to the need to ramp up NATO's defensive capabilities in a meeting in Brussels in October 2022 of NATO defence ministers. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was clear in addressing the ministers: "In this working session, we will address NATO's defence and deterrence and the implications of Russia's war in Ukraine for Allied security," he said, referring also to the need for greater cooperation among NATO members. "We will discuss measures to ramp up our production and strengthen our industrial base," he said, "So that Ukraine has what it needs to prevail as a sovereign and independent nation. And that we have what we need to defend our nations. We stand united as Allies and in solidarity with Ukraine."

Let me welcome the strong message from the UN General Assembly clearly condemning Russia's illegal annexation of Ukrainian territories. And calling for the reversal of these illegal acts. The overwhelming majority in the UN demonstrates that Russia is isolated." Isolated it may be, but it is still heavily armed and fairly indiscriminate in the way it deploys its weapons. For most countries around the world, the morality of its violent actions is also in some doubt.

Fear of Russia's unpredictable violence led to this year's Paris Air Show giving over a lot of display space to radar systems and missile defence launchers, although President Emmanuel Macron spoke out against Germany's Sky Shield plan. He argued that European countries shouldn't be obliged to rely on non-European missile systems, such as the Raytheon Patriot system or Israeli Aerospace Industries' (IAI) Arrow 3, which would be central to Sky Shield. Macron warned those attending: "What Ukraine shows is that we can only give Kyiv what we have and produce." He said that Israel's so-called "Iron Dome" would not be an appropriate option for Europe.

A recent report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, based in Washington, said that Europe's military forces do not have enough systems to counter long-range missiles, whether guided or unguided. Many of those they do have date from the Soviet era and may not be very reliable. Macron told those attending that the Franco-Italian SAMP/T missile defence system has been delivered to Ukraine and is operational, having been delivered in May. He also told his audience that five European countries – France, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia and Hungary use the French-made Mistral air defence missiles, made by weapons company MBDA, even though some of the countries involved have also signed up to Sky Shield.



A French-made portable Mistral launcher

France's initiative will be run by its arms procurement division, Direction Generale de l'Armement (DGA). Of course, these things inevitably take time. To start with, nobody seems to know how many missiles are involved, although French defence officials have suggested a figure of close to a thousand. It's understood that the production rate for the Mistral missile, currently around 20 units a month, will rise by 40%, or to around 28 units a month by 2024. Whichever system is chosen, it will take time to train up the people who must use them. The nervousness about Russia's unpredictable president is widespread. Take Poland, for instance, a neighbour of Russia with some unhappy history of their relationship to consider. Poland is also developing its missile defence capability. Nancy Jones-Bonbrest, who is spokeswoman for the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency (MDA), said the Aegis Ashore Poland site would be completed and ready for acceptance tests by the US Navy by the end of 2023, according to PAP, the Polish state news agency. Sited in Poland, it will be under American control and command. After completion, the site at Redzikowo in northern Poland will become America's second such missile defence site in Europe, Jones-Bonbrest told the news agency.

Ukraine, the target of so many Russian attacks, claims to have successfully brought down more than 3,000 Russian targets, much



A Russian Kh-101 air launched cruise missile reportedly shot down by Ukrainian air defenses. (Ukrainian Air Force on Twitter)

to the delight of President Zelensky. “First of all, I congratulate our anti-aircraft warriors - the warriors of the anti-aircraft missile troops of the Ukrainian Air Force, who are celebrating their holiday today, he told a crowd, according to the news source Ukrinform. “I thank you for every target you have shot down,” he said. “More than 3,000 targets have been shot down: more than 180 aircraft, more than 130 helicopters, nearly 40 ballistic and more than 1,000 cruise missiles, more than 1,600 drones of various types... All this means thousands and thousands of lives saved by you, hundreds of critical infrastructure facilities that you have protected,” Zelensky said.

Missile, missiles, everywhere

What about elsewhere? Russia itself, for instance? It has an A-135 anti-ballistic missile system, but only around Moscow at the time of writing, although there are plans to extend its range. Then there are S-300PMU1 and PMU2 missiles, supposedly capable of intercepting an IRBM (Intermediate



Bruno Gruselle

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USSR General Secretary Gorbachev signing the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe in Paris, November 19 1990

Range Ballistic Missile) attack. There are also the “enhanced” S-300VM/VMK missiles, supposedly capable of dealing with ballistic missiles with re-entry speeds of 4.5 kilometres per second, while the S-400 is said to be capable of knocking out ballistic missiles with a 3,500 kilometre range, with even higher re-entry speeds of 4.8 to 5 kilometres per second. Russia has a lot of very advanced missiles at its disposal, as Ukraine knows only too well. China has successfully tested its own exo-atmospheric interception capabilities with tests in 2010 and 2013. The United States has exo-atmospheric “kill” vehicles of its own while other parts of the defence system may be integrated into National Missile Defense, which would, according to the experts, provide strong measures to counter any incoming missiles.

To be perfectly honest it's probably rather pointless to list the missiles at any country's disposal because they won't want other – less friendly – countries to know what they may have up their sleeves. Bruno Gruselle, of ENSTA Bretagne, noted that French policymakers believed that 1972's Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the policy of “mutually-assured Destruction” (remember that?) gave an assurance of “strategic stability”. At least, it would if everyone kept their word, but very often they don't. Another thing that has been pointed out is that the more the big, powerful nations boast of their missile capability, the more other, small countries want their share. In The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, a stern critic of the idea of missile defence, Yousaf Butt, warned that: “Just as with nuclear weapons, the US infatuation with missile Defence will cause other nations to desire this expensive technology.” Meanwhile, Russia has threatened to conduct a pre-emptive strike on US-led missile defence facilities in Eastern Europe. It's all one big happy family in the defence community. Gruselle was among the French security experts to cast doubt of the feasibility of intercontinental ballistic missile defence. Current missile defences are vulnerable to manoeuvrable hypersonic vehicles, which can manoeuvre at speeds high enough to get around missile defences. One of the countries currently trying to develop such weapons is China. If those who research, design and build armaments devoted their energies to science and space research, we'd possibly be holidaying on the moons of Jupiter by now.

It's Russia's extensive use of short-range ballistic missiles and cruise missiles in its war of aggression against Ukraine that has



A building in Ukraine destroyed by a Russian missile

underscored Europe's collective lack of adequate defence against such systems and against more capable future threats. In May 2022, the European Commission argued that member states needed to strengthen their multilayer air and missile defence systems. So far, however, it has been difficult to discern a coherent response at the EU level.

NATO is building a missile defence system, basing it in several member states around the Mediterranean Sea, although the plans for it have been changed several times, partly because of objections from Russia. It's been a long time coming, after a feasibility study was launched at a NATO summit in Prague back in 2002. Vladimir Putin, at that time Prime Minister of Russia, objected strongly, arguing that it could lead to a new arms race and enhance the possibility of mutually assured destruction. He also threatened that Russia could decide to freeze its compliance with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which is intended to limit deployments across Europe. In 2007, Russia gave notice of its intention to suspend the CFE Treaty. Next, in 2008, the United States and Poland reached agreement on a new base to hold ten interceptor missiles, with protection from MIM-104 Patriot air defence systems in Poland. Russia,

always suspicious of a plot, sent a letter to the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten, stating that if the country agreed to this merger of assets, it would make their warships targets for Russian nuclear missiles. Denmark's former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Holger K. Nielsen pointed out that in the event of a war, Danish warships would be targets anyway.

Meanwhile, say the experts, ballistic missiles are now gaining in popularity once again, because they give such countries as China, Iran, North Korea and – of course – Russia an ability to strike at distant targets without exposing their vulnerable warplanes to being intercepted or shot down. That's why the ability to intercept ballistic missiles between launch and delivery has become so important. And remember, the faster and higher a ballistic missile can fly, and the further it can go to reach its target, the more difficult interception becomes and the more important the weapon itself. But the effectiveness of these weapons is by no means certain. The technical difficulties have been described as more difficult than hitting one bullet with another. How useful they would prove in a real conflict is hard to predict. One thing is certain: both sides to any serious conflict would have a good supply of them to hand, however useful or, indeed, useless.

Many French experts considered the spending on missiles to be a waste of money; they were, they argued, based on unproven technology and lacked operational or political usefulness. The French Defence community saw missiles as an American "economic weapon", used to defeat the Soviet Union and win the Cold War, although China remains committed to them. Beijing still sees missiles as a delivery system for its warheads. So where do we go from here and do ISBMs have a future in tomorrow's war? Who can tell. They are certainly nasty beasts, capable of killing large numbers of people whilst also wrecking infrastructure and destroying schools, homes and hospitals just as Russia's have been doing in Ukraine, the foremost effect being to encourage other countries to get involved in supplying the victim country with arms and men. Oh, and showing off your latest technological marvel and its ability to kill many, many people indiscriminately. It seems to be based on one of Stalin's sayings: "Death is the solution to all problems: no man, no problem." I would like to think we've moved on a bit since then, but apparently not.

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and Santa Claus**



Aurora Dome, Torassieppi, Harriniva, Lapland

© VISIT FINLAND/ANTTI PIETIKÄINEN/HARRINIVA

According to the 2022 World Happiness Report, Finland has been declared the happiest country on earth for the fifth year in a row.

The Finns, citizens of the northern European country, have no connection to the Norsemen, nor do they have the Nordic heritage that Swedes and Danes have. They are thought to have originated in what is now Turkish territory, and their language, Finnish, is neither a Scandinavian nor a Slavic language, but Uralic and belongs to the Finno-Ugric language family. Finnish is often considered one of the most difficult languages to learn.

If you have ever met a Finn, they have probably mentioned the reserved nature of their compatriots. They can be a little shy and not very talkative at first, but are generally friendly, polite and approachable. Honesty is highly valued in Finnish culture, as are good manners and practicality. They usually do not want to draw too much attention to themselves. Finnish families are usually small, with only one or two children.

When they meet, they shake hands briefly but firmly and make eye contact. There is no additional touching of the shoulder or upper arm, as in other Western cultures.

The dress code in the office usually calls for jackets and trousers in muted or pastel shades for men, while women wear elegant but not too flashy clothes, often trousers.

If you are a guest at a Finn's house, it is nice to bring the host some quality chocolates, a good wine or flowers (but always in odd numbers and never white or yellow, which are reserved for funerals).

When they receive gifts, Finns always open them on the spot. A unique Finnish custom is that the men usually sit on one side of the table and the women on the other, with the host and hostess sitting at opposite ends of the table.

Lunch is usually taken between 11 am and 2 pm, and a typical lunch break at work lasts less than an hour. Tipping is not compulsory in Finland. Evening meals are taken at home around 5-6pm.

Children aged six to sixteen receive a free hot meal every day at school, with Finland leading the way globally. The country also has one of the highest quality education systems in the world, emphasising basics and practical knowledge, without homework or surprise tests, while children have the time and freedom to choose their own interests and pace of learning.

Finland outperforms most countries not only in terms of the well-being and life satisfaction of 15-year-olds, but also in terms of their performance in the OECD Pisa tests. The Finnish system doesn't encourage fierce competition between students, nor does it support coercive measures on the part of teachers.

In the business environment, Finns encourage consensus and usually try to avoid open conflict. Their communication style is direct and honest, and companies tend to have a flat organisational chart with a moderately egalitarian management style. In meetings, a serial style of conversation is used (listening to the speaker, waiting for him to finish and then replying). Interrupting the conversation is considered extremely rude, positive and negative feedback is given openly and in a low-context communication (unlike in many Asian cultures, for example). Trust is earned through

performance and results rather than personal relationships and connections.

Santa's official hometown is believed to be in Rovaniemi on the Arctic Circle in Lapland, Finland. However, if you ask the Finns, they say that Korvatunturi is where Santa's secret workshop is located.

An essential part of Finnish culture is the 'saunakulttuuri Suomessa', the Finnish sauna. It is estimated that there are three million saunas in Finland, out of a population of 5.5 million. Most companies and state institutions have their own saunas. The president himself has an official sauna, as does the prime minister. Unlike the wet sauna, the Finnish sauna uses the power of dry heat.



Uspenski Cathedral

© JONEIK/FI

Humidity is kept below 20 per cent and the temperature is between 80 and 100 degrees Celsius. And watch out: Finns go to the sauna completely naked, even among strangers! Nudity is no big deal. The reason saunas are so popular with Finns is that they fully recognise the health benefits, such as relaxation, stress relief, improved sleep, reduced chronic pain and fatigue, muscle recovery and even improved mental health. For many Finns, the sauna was the most sacred room in the house and the one most closely associated with their well-being.

Traditionally, saunas were also places for purification rituals before marriage. The bodies of the deceased were washed and prepared for burial on the wooden benches, also in the sauna.

Among the most famous Finns are Formula 1 racing driver Kimi Räikkönen and Sanna Marin, the youngest prime minister in Finnish history and the fourth youngest head of state in the world.

According to a report by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, Finland is the second best place in the world for women. Finnish women are generally thought to be more open-minded and approachable than men, and often speak three or four languages. 46 per cent of the members of the Finnish Parliament are female. 52 per cent of women over 25 have a permanent job. When they give birth, both parents receive 160 days of paid leave each.

Finnish society is egalitarian; men and women equally share responsibility for family, work and state. The Finnish philosophy of life is simple and practical, as one of their famous quotes shows:

'He who asks the way doesn't get lost'.

Alexandra Paucescu



© DASSAULT AVIATION

THE FALCON X10

**The state of the art,
ultra-long range
business jet soon
in the air**



The Falcon X10 jet is an ultra-long-range business jet that promises to revolutionize the private aviation industry with its advanced technology and exceptional performance.

Final assembly will take place during 2023 at the airframer's site in Merignac, near Bordeaux, ahead of a first flight scheduled in 2024.

According to Dassault Aviation the production of Falcon 10X primary parts has been at full speed for many months. Fuselage structures will soon be coming together. Engineers are running test benches for electrical, hydraulic, flight control and other systems, including multi-system benches with all aircraft computers working together. This will achieve a high level of maturity before first flight. In Bordeaux-Mérignac, teams are gearing up to receive large structures in the final assembly hall. With a range of 7,500 nautical miles, the Falcon X10 is capable of flying non-stop from New York to Shanghai or Sydney to Los Angeles.

The aircraft can accommodate up to 16 passengers and has a maximum speed of Mach 0.925, making it one of the fastest and most efficient jets in its class.

The Falcon X10 is equipped with state-of-the-art avionics and a revolutionary new cockpit design that provides pilots with enhanced situational awareness and unprecedented control. The aircraft also features a spacious cabin with customizable interiors, including private bedrooms, showers, and conference rooms, offering a luxurious travel experience.

In terms of environmental impact, the Falcon X10 sets a new standard for sustainable aviation. The aircraft is designed to emit 20% less carbon dioxide than comparable business jets, thanks to its fuel-efficient engines and advanced aerodynamics.



One of the two Rolls-Royce Pearl 10X Engines

Dassault Aviation has a rich history of innovation in aviation, and the Falcon X10 is no exception. The aircraft is the latest addition to the company's popular Falcon family of business jets, which have been the preferred choice of high-end clients for decades.

The Falcon X10's development was influenced by feedback from customers and industry experts, and Dassault Aviation worked tirelessly to incorporate the latest technologies and advancements in the aviation industry to make the aircraft more efficient, comfortable, and environmentally friendly.

The Falcon X10 is set to change the game in the private aviation industry, offering unparalleled performance, luxury, and sustainability. The aircraft has already garnered significant interest from potential buyers, and Dassault Aviation expects it to be a popular choice among business executives, celebrities, and high-net-worth individuals.



The 10X wing—Dassault's largest—is just over 110 feet. The first composite wing for a production Falcon draws on fighter experience yielding an incredibly strong yet light structure with low drag for long-range efficiency

Dassault Aviation is known for its commitment to excellence in engineering and design, and the Falcon X10 is a testament to that legacy. The aircraft represents the pinnacle of private aviation, offering an unparalleled level of comfort, luxury, and performance that is unmatched in the industry.

It has been reported that the expected price range for the Falcon 10X is around \$75 million to \$100 million USD. This is an estimate and the actual price may vary depending on factors such as customization options and market conditions.



The Falcon 10X cockpit



French Air Force Rafale in operation

I Dassault aviation

Dassault Aviation is a French aerospace company that shapes the future by designing and building military aircraft, business jets and space systems.

Leader on the New Generation Fighter developed within the joint European program FCAS (Future Combat Air System).

Designer and manufacturer of the Rafale multirole fighter, capable of handling all types of missions for both air forces and naval air arms.

Designer of the nEUROn combat drone, built by a European partnership.

Designer and manufacturer of the Falcon family of business jets, recognized

for their handling qualities, operational flexibility, low fuel consumption and innovative solutions.

Designer and manufacturer of special Falcons for maritime surveillance, intelligence or medical evacuation missions.

The hub of a strategic industrial network comprising hundreds of companies in France and international markets.

Core shareholder in Thales.

Expertise in a number of technologies that are key to strategic autonomy.

Pioneer in digital technologies and behind CATIA™, the 3D CAD/CAM system that has become a global standard.

Creator of more than 100 prototypes in the last century, with over 10,000 aircraft delivered to 90 countries.

2,100 Falcon jets in service

1,000 military aircraft in service

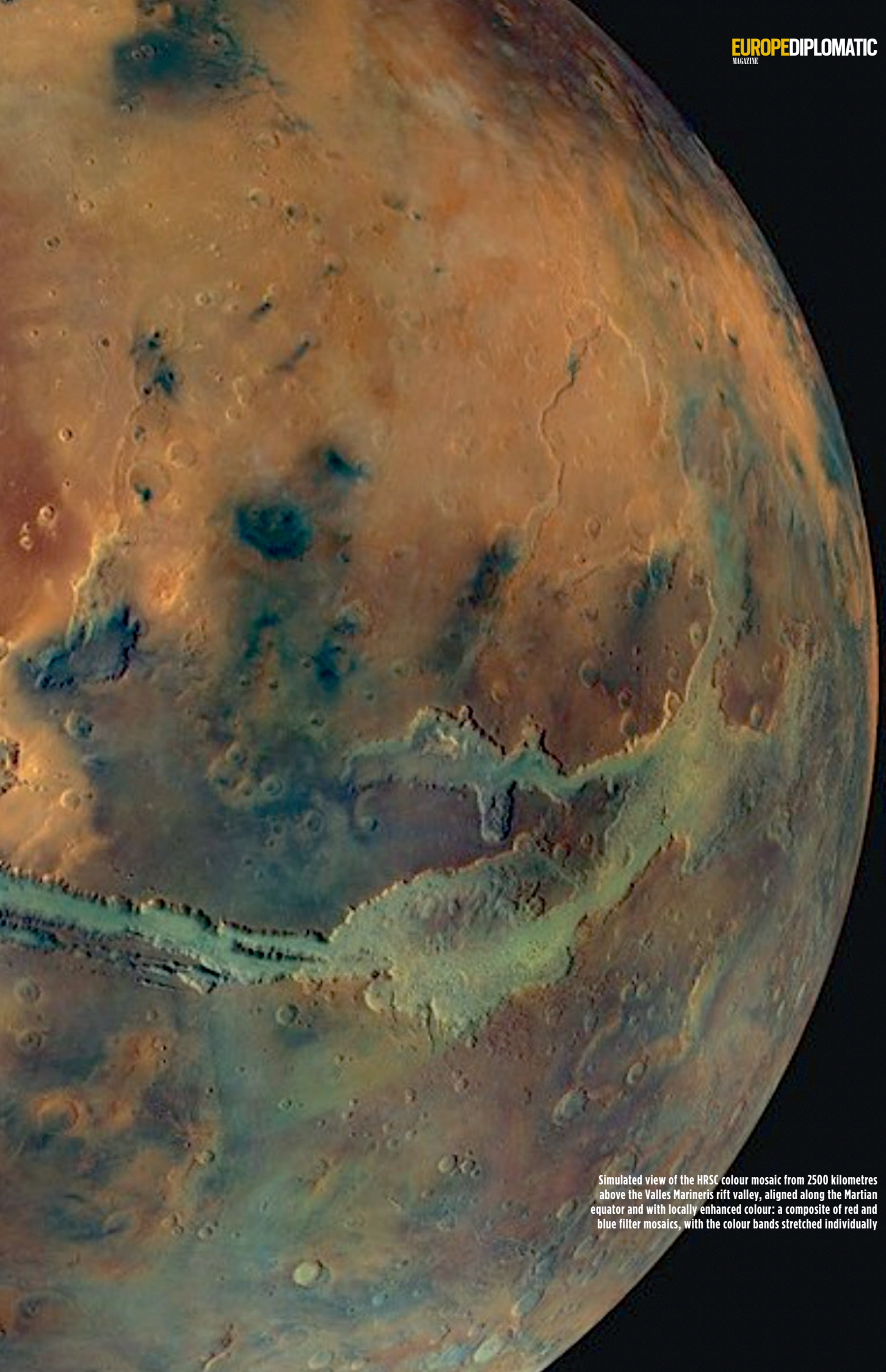
12,371 employees, of which 78% in France



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

MARS IN COLOUR AS NEVER SEEN BEFORE

© ESA/DLR/FU BERLIN (G. MICHAEL)



Simulated view of the HRSC colour mosaic from 2500 kilometres above the Valles Marineris rift valley, aligned along the Martian equator and with locally enhanced colour: a composite of red and blue filter mosaics, with the colour bands stretched individually

- The Mars Express mission, Europe's first interplanetary mission, and all of its experiments continue to function almost perfectly after 20 years of scientific operations.

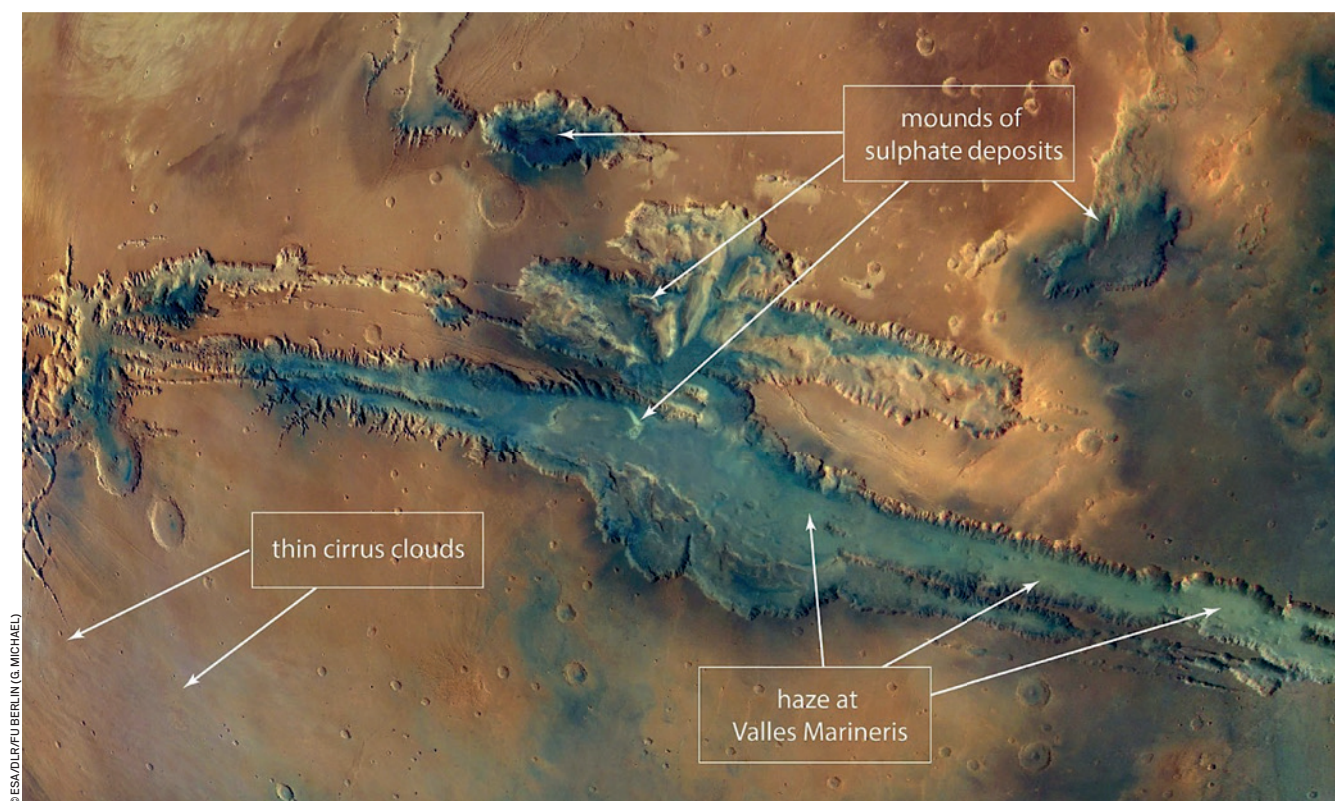
- The High Resolution Stereo Camera (HRSC) camera, built by DLR in collaboration with German industry, has mapped almost the entire surface of Mars in colour and three dimensions at an image resolution of 20 metres per pixel since 2004 and is unprecedented.

Exactly 20 years ago, on 2 June 2003, the Mars Express spacecraft, the first European mission to explore another planet in the Solar System, launched on a Soyuz launch vehicle from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. A Fregat upper stage delivered the mission on a transfer orbit to Mars, which the spacecraft reached on 25 December of the same year. The High Resolution Stereo Camera (HRSC), developed at the German Aerospace Center (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt; DLR) and operated by the DLR Institute of Planetary Research, is one of seven experiments on board. The mission was originally only supposed to last one martian year (approximately two Earth years), but the success of the instruments, which continue to work flawlessly, has prompted the European

Space Agency (ESA) to extend the mission again and again, most recently until the end of 2026. On 19 October 2023, Mars Express will have orbited Mars 25,000 times in its elliptical orbit. To mark the 20th anniversary of the launch, a celebration will take place today, 2 June, at ESA's European Space Operations Centre (ESOC) in Darmstadt at the end of a scientific and technical symposium.

To acquire its usual surface images, the HRSC normally photographs Mars from an altitude of approximately 300 kilometres, at roughly the point in its elliptical orbit at which the Mars Express spacecraft is closest to the planet. The resulting views of the martian surface have a spatial resolution of up to 12.5 meters per pixel and cover areas approximately 50 kilometres wide. Thanks to its four colour channels (red, green, blue, infrared) and five panchromatic nadir, stereo and photometric channels, the stereo camera can visualise Mars in three dimensions and also in colour.

For the global data product presented here, however, 90 individual images were used, taken from higher altitudes (between roughly 4000 and 10,000 kilometres) above the martian surface and thus covering areas approximately 2500 kilometres wide on average and at lower spatial resolution (between 200 and 800 metres per pixel). Such large-scale images are typically acquired to observe weather patterns on Mars. But if no clouds or other atmospheric phenomena are visible on the images, they are excellent for creating global views of the martian surface.



Close-up of the HRSC colour mosaic showing the Valles Marineris canyon system, with annotated surface details: sulphate deposits, haze and thin cloud veneers. This tectonic graben structure stretches more than 4000 kilometres east-west and up to 700 kilometres north-south



© ESA/DLR/FU BERLIN (G. MICHAEL)

View of the HRSC colour mosaic from 2500 kilometres above Valles Marineris (visible in the centre of the image), natural colour: a composite of red, green and blue filter mosaics, with the colour band values in their original proportions. This is closer to the visual impression one would experience when flying over the surface of Mars

A more diverse colour view

The ever-changing transparency of the martian atmosphere makes it difficult to determine accurate surface colours from orbit. The scattering and reflection of light off of atmospheric dust causes colour shifts between images. As a result, a mosaic that combines many such images may suffer from a patchwork of colours. Until now, suppressing this effect through image processing has had the consequence of diminishing colour variations over greater distances. Here, a new high-altitude observation campaign was used to construct a global colour model, which was then used to colour-reference each image of the mosaic, enabling long range colour variations to be maintained and revealing a more diverse colour view of the planet than has ever been seen before.

Each colour a different material

The global view of Mars shown here has a spatial resolution of two kilometres per pixel, although higher resolution global HRSC mosaics are possible and are already in development. Since its commissioning in January 2004, the HRSC has imaged almost the entire planet – an area of almost 150 million square kilometres – at image resolutions of between 50 and 20 metres per pixel. Many areas have been imaged at the instrument's highest possible resolution of 12.5 metres per pixel. This contrast-enhanced mosaic (image 1), with a resolution one hundredth of this maximum, reveals an unprecedented variety and detail of colours across the martian surface, which also provide information about its composition.

It is well known that most of Mars is reddish in colour, due to the high amount of oxidised iron in the dust on its surface, earning it the nickname the 'Red Planet'. But it is also immediately noticeable that a considerable region of Mars is rather dark, appearing bluish in colour in image 1. These regions represent greyish-blackish-bluish sands, which are volcanic in origin and form large, dark sand layers on Mars. They were primarily piled up by the wind to form imposing sand dunes or enormous dune fields on the floor of impact craters. These unweathered sands consist of dark, basaltic minerals, of which volcanic lava on Earth is also composed. Basalt is the most widespread volcanic rock on Earth – and in the Solar System. Earth's ocean floor is made of basalt, as are the extinct volcanoes of the Eifel, Mount Etna in Sicily and volcanoes of the Hawaiian archipelago.

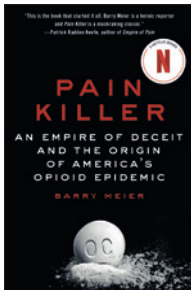
Volcanic material on Mars that has been weathered by water, on the other hand, tends to take on lighter shades over time. For example, clay and sulphate minerals – the two most common minerals on Mars formed through the contact of cooled lava and water – appear particularly bright on such colour composites and are relatively easy to recognise on closer inspection. One of the largest clay mineral deposits on Mars, located around the former outflow channel Mawrth Vallis, is not shown in this view but was also previously imaged using the HRSC. It attests to the former long-term presence of water on Mars, with the original, basaltic source rock having weathered to clay minerals at neutral pH and relatively warm temperatures.

Large deposits of similarly light-coloured sulphate minerals such as gypsum (calcium sulphate) or kieserite (magnesium sulphate) can be seen in this mosaic within the Valles Marineris canyon system – a vast rift valley over 4000 kilometres long and stretching along the martian equator. Here, they are covered by a thin veneer of dark sand and thus only reveal their impressive colour variations on closer inspection made using the HRSC. Sulphate minerals indicate environmental conditions at low, acidic pH values, which are less accommodating to life.

The faint, bright and light blue areas depict clouds in the atmosphere. Images containing clouds could not be entirely avoided in the creation of this first version of the global Mars mosaic. The depths of Valles Marineris are also overlaid with atmospheric phenomena. However, these represent fog and haze, which often form within depressions at certain times of the day and year.

The development of the colour model method and processing of the mosaic was performed by Greg Michael, who is part of the HRSC team at Freie Universität Berlin. The planning and acquisition of the high-altitude images were the responsibility of the camera operations team at the German Aerospace Center (DLR) at Berlin-Adlershof.

BOOKS



| Pain Killer

An Empire of Deceit and the Origin of America's Opioid Epidemic

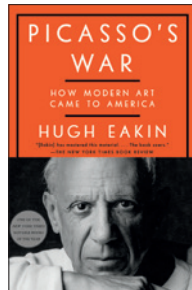
By Barry Meier

Between 1999 and 2017, an estimated 250,000 Americans died from overdoses involving prescription painkillers, a plague ignited by Purdue Pharma's aggressive marketing of OxyContin. Families, working class and wealthy, have been torn apart, businesses destroyed, and public officials pushed to the brink. Meanwhile, the drugmaker's owners, Raymond and Mortimer Sackler, whose names adorn museums worldwide, made enormous fortunes from the commercial success of OxyContin.

In *Pain Killer*, Barry Meier tells the story of how Purdue turned OxyContin into a billion-dollar blockbuster. Powerful narcotic painkillers, or opioids, were once used as drugs of last resort for pain sufferers. But Purdue launched an unprecedented marketing campaign claiming that the drug's long-acting formulation made it safer to use than traditional painkillers for many types of pain. That illusion was quickly shattered as drug abusers learned that crushing an Oxy could release its narcotic payload all at once. Even in its prescribed form, Oxy proved fiercely addictive. As OxyContin's use and abuse grew, Purdue concealed what it knew from regulators, doctors, and patients.

Here are the people who profited from the crisis and those who paid the price, those who plotted in boardrooms and those who tried to sound alarm bells. A country doctor in rural Virginia, Art Van Zee, took on Purdue and warned officials about OxyContin abuse. An ebullient high school cheerleader, Lindsey Myers, was reduced to stealing from her parents to feed her escalating Oxy habit. A hard-charging DEA official, Laura Nagel, tried to hold Purdue executives to account.

In *Pain Killer*, Barry Meier breaks new ground in his decades-long investigation into the opioid epidemic. He takes readers inside Purdue to show how long the company withheld information about the abuse of OxyContin and gives a shocking account of the Justice Department's failure to alter the trajectory of the opioid epidemic and protect thousands of lives. Equal parts crime thriller, medical detective story, and business exposé, *Pain Killer* is a hard-hitting look at how a supposed wonder drug became the gateway drug to a national tragedy.



| Picasso's War

How Modern Art Came to America

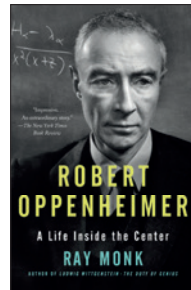
By Hugh Eakin

In January 1939, Pablo Picasso was renowned in Europe but disdained by many in the United States. One year later, Americans across the country were clamoring to see his art. How did the controversial leader of the Paris avant-garde break through to the heart of American culture?

The answer begins a generation earlier, when a renegade Irish American lawyer named John Quinn set out to build the greatest collection of Picassos in existence. His dream of a museum to house them died with him, until it was rediscovered by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., a cultural visionary who, at the age of twenty-seven, became the director of New York's new Museum of Modern Art.

Barr and Quinn's shared goal would be thwarted in the years to come—by popular hostility, by the Depression, by Parisian intrigues, and by Picasso himself. It would take Hitler's campaign against Jews and modern art, and Barr's fraught alliance with Paul Rosenberg, Picasso's persecuted dealer, to get Picasso's most important paintings out of Europe. Mounted in the shadow of war, the groundbreaking exhibition *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art* would launch Picasso in America, define MoMA as we know it, and shift the focus of the art world from Paris to New York.

Picasso's War is the never-before-told story about how a single exhibition, a decade in the making, irrevocably changed American taste, and in doing so saved dozens of the twentieth century's most enduring artworks from the Nazis. Through a deft combination of new scholarship and vivid storytelling, Hugh Eakin shows how two men and their obsession with Picasso changed the art world forever.



| Robert Oppenheimer

A Life Inside the Center

By Ray Monk

An unforgettable story of discovery and unimaginable destruction and a major biography of one of America's most brilliant—and most divisive—scientists, *Robert Oppenheimer: A Life Inside the Center* vividly illuminates the man who would go down in history as “the father of the atomic bomb.” Oppenheimer's talent and drive secured him a place in the pantheon of great physicists and carried him to the laboratories where the secrets of the universe revealed themselves. But they also led him to contribute to the development of the deadliest weapon on earth, a discovery he soon came to fear. His attempts to resist the escalation of the Cold War arms race—coupled with political leanings at odds with post-war America—led many to question his loyalties, and brought down upon him the full force of McCarthyite anti-communism. Digging deeply into Oppenheimer's past to solve the enigma of his motivations and his complex personality, Ray Monk uncovers the extraordinary, charming, tortured man—and the remarkable mind—who fundamentally reshaped the world.



| George VI and Elizabeth

The Marriage That Saved the Monarchy

By Sally Bedell Smith

Granted special access by Queen Elizabeth II to her parents' letters and diaries and to the papers of their close friends and family, Sally Bedell Smith brings the love story of this iconic royal couple to vibrant life. This deeply researched and revealing book shows how a loving and devoted marriage helped the King and Queen meet the challenges of World War II, lead a nation, solidify the public's faith in the monarchy, and raise their daughters, Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret.

When King Edward VIII abdicated the throne in 1936, shattering the Crown's reputation, his younger brother, known as Bertie, assumed his father's name and became King George VI. Shy, sensitive, and afflicted with a stutter, George VI had never imagined that he would become King. His wife, Elizabeth, a pretty, confident, and outgoing woman who became known later in life as “the Queen Mum,” strengthened and advised her husband. With his wife's support, guidance, and love, George VI was able to overcome his insecurities and become an exceptional leader, navigating the country through World War II, establishing a relationship with Winston Churchill, visiting Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt in Washington and in Hyde Park, and inspiring the British people with his courage and compassion during the Blitz. Simultaneously, George VI and Elizabeth trained their daughter Princess Elizabeth from an early age to be a highly successful monarch, and she would reign for an unprecedented seventy years.

Sally Bedell Smith gives us an inside view of the lives, struggles, hopes, and triumphs of King George VI and Elizabeth during a dramatic time in history.



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