

EUROPE DIPLOMATIC

MAGAZINE

President
ANDRZEJ DUDA

**Poland's security
and sovereignty
versus Russia**



September 2023

N°50

3€

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Nikola Hendrickx

PRESIDENT ANDRZEJ DUDA

Poland's security and sovereignty versus Russia



Polish President ANDRZEJ DUDA

Poland, which survived brutal occupation by the Nazis and the Soviets, has emerged as a major force in Eastern Europe over the past two decades, influencing EU strategies towards Ukraine and other former Soviet states. Given the serious threat Russia poses to NATO's eastern flank, it is crucial to understand how Poland's unique historical background, geographical location and geopolitical perspective make it one of the most important allies of the European Union and the United States.

Poland's fate is a tragic story of disappearance and reappearance on the European map. In 1795, it was divided for the third and last time, marking the end of the so-called Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Russian Empire took possession of the eastern part, the Kingdom of Prussia annexed the western part, and the Habsburg Monarchy occupied the southern part. Poland was completely subjugated by these three powers and had no statehood from 1795 to 1918.

In 1939, the country was again crushed, this time by Nazi Germany. It survived as a Soviet puppet in 1945, but paid a heavy price for the twin evils of Nazism and Stalinism. The final liberation came in 1989, and it took some time for the country to regain its voice on the world stage. The living memory of these events has largely shaped Poland's geopolitical strategy today.



Polish President Andrzej DUDA at the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

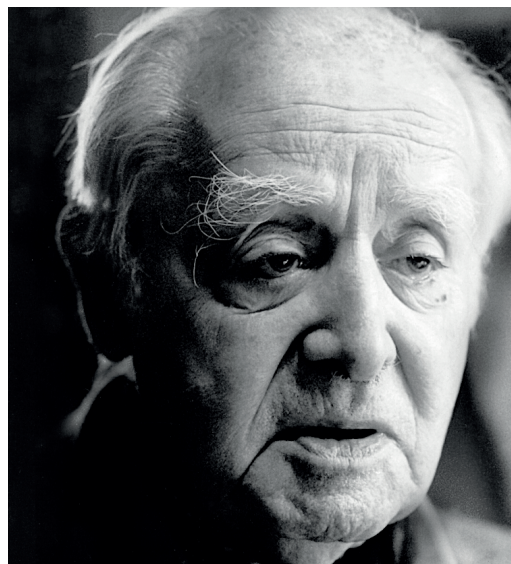
Poland, which lies on the edge of what is called the institutional West, has always faced the threat of Russian aggression. But its key allies have often ignored its concerns. In the past, Poland's geopolitical troubles shaped its unique visions of how Eastern Europe should be organised and what the country's role should be. But since 1989, Poland's strong alliances have given it a new importance in the region, and for the first time in centuries, the country has the opportunity to shape the course of European history.

From Warsaw Pact to Euro-Atlantic integration

In 1989, under strong pressure from the Solidarnosc movement, the communists lost power, leading to the holding of free elections. By 1993, the Red Army had completely withdrawn from the country and Poland regained its independence. Poland's main foreign policy goal in the following decade was "Euro-Atlantic integration", i.e. joining the European Union and NATO. This

goal stemmed from security concerns and a strong desire to symbolically reconnect with Europe after decades of Soviet domination, encouraged by cultural and economic factors.

As in the interwar period, Poland pursued an internal policy of strengthening its position through NATO and EU membership, while externally ensuring that the collapse of the Soviet Union was not reversed, as evidenced in its relations with neighbouring countries such as Ukraine and Belarus. The dissolution of USSR in 1991 led to the creation of 15 independent republics, including Ukraine and Belarus. Overnight, these newly formed sovereign states acted as buffers between Poland and Russia along its eastern border.



Polish writers Juliusz Mieroszewski (top) and Jerzy Giedroyc

Poland pursued an official policy of cultivating friendly relations and, where possible, sought alliances with these neighbouring states. This policy was commonly referred to as the Giedroyc-Mieroszewski Doctrine, named after Jerzy Giedroyc, a prominent Polish writer and political activist who, together with Juliusz Mieroszewski, served as the editor of the highly influential Polish magazine "Kultura", which was based in Paris during the Cold War.

As two of the most influential Polish intellectuals of the 20th century, they played a central role outside Poland. Their geographical distance from Poland enabled them to develop their own political and cultural ideas without censorship.

Russia's intentions, however, were always suspect to Giedroyc and Mieroszewski, as they always saw the country as a latent threat to Central and Eastern Europe, even after 1991. They realised that they had to strengthen the Polish-Ukrainian alliance in order to stop Russia's expansionist policy after the collapse of the Soviet Union, so that both countries could achieve a better geostrategic position and pursue their transatlantic ambitions. Poland managed to join the European Union in 1999, NATO in 2004, but Ukraine remained stuck in 20th century geopolitics and had to endure Putin's revisionist and neo-imperial policies in 2014 and 2022.

Solidarity in the face of Russian aggression

In April 2022, two months after Russia launched its full-scale attack on Ukraine, Polish President Andrzej Duda warned that Vladimir Putin's goal was to rebuild the Soviet Union and called on Europe to unite against Russian aggression. In his appeal, Duda said *'Putin's openly declared plan to restore – in one form or another – the "prison of nations" that was the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence in the countries of the former Easter-bloc. It is dangerous to glorify communism and Stalin, to sow division in the European family of nations and to try to interfere in the democratic procedures of the NATO and EU member states.'*



Polish President Andrzej Duda and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kiev, Ukraine

In his opinion, the fate of Europe is at stake in Ukraine, where an extremely dramatic battle is being waged for the security, freedom, identity and prestige of the continent. He added that the time for talking is over and that Europe must show solidarity and act decisively.

Andrzej Duda is only the second president in modern Poland to be re-elected in 2020, after Aleksander Kwaśniewski. The then 43-year-old devout Catholic was first elected in 2015, replacing incumbent Bronisław Komorowski after Polish voters expressed dissatisfaction despite years of rapid economic growth and unparalleled stability. Duda's victory signalled not only a shift to the right, but also a major political change in Poland. The EU's sixth largest economy was already an influential country in Europe, despite not being a member of the 19-nation Eurozone.

Poland's influence was also evident in the fact that its former Prime Minister Donald Tusk was President of the European Council in Brussels.

Andrzej Duda's victory also points to a generational change in Polish politics. He is the first president too young to have been instrumental in the Solidarnosc protest movement in the 1980s against the communist regime that collapsed in 1989, and he seems to have won a significant share of young voters.

This political shift also meant that Duda's conservative Law and Justice party came back strongly to power in the following parliamentary elections. This, of course, reinforced the shift to the right in Poland and created a new relationship with other European countries.



Former Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski

The Law and Justice Party (PiS) portrays itself as the protector of those who have not benefited from capitalist change and the defender of national interests abroad. It is staunchly pro-American, but occasionally takes a defiant stance towards other European partners, which has led to conflicts with the EU and neighbouring Germany in the past.

President Duda's re-election victory also means that the Law and Justice Party will remain in power at least until the parliamentary elections in October 2023, and will probably herald another period of difficult relations with Brussels. The Law and Justice Party, for example, has regular disagreements with the European Commission over a controversial judicial reform that has put judges under the control of politicians.

From the periphery to the centre

Be that as it may, the Polish president was suddenly thrust from the margins of European politics to the centre after Vladimir Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In April, he said it was "hard to deny" that the atrocities committed by Russian forces in Ukraine amounted to genocide, as evidenced by the gruesome images of slaughtered civilians from

places like Bucha. Russia is using the false claim of “denazification” in Ukraine as a propaganda tool to justify its massacres. *‘The fact that the civilian population of Ukraine is being killed best shows what the aim of the Russian invasion is,’* he said, adding, *‘The aim of this invasion is simply the extermination of the Ukrainian nation’*

He is now at the forefront of European politics as Poland plays a crucial role in supporting Ukraine against Russia, handling large numbers of Ukrainian refugees and pushing for more sanctions against Russia as well as more arms supplies to Ukraine. However, he suspected that Putin’s goal was to sow chaos in Poland and other neighbouring countries by sending a wave of refugees from Ukraine. However, he said he was proud of his countrymen for their kindness and dedication in helping the millions of Ukrainian refugees.

He asked the international community for further help and thanked those who gave it. But he has also admitted that he worries that Poland could be targeted by Russia in the future, given that Russia has invaded Ukraine with full force. As a member, Poland has hosted US and NATO troops sent to bolster the alliance’s eastern flank to deter Russia.

But the Russian threat has made strengthening Poland’s armed forces a key goal of the country’s ruling Law and Justice (PiS) nationalists. On August 16, the government demonstrated its security achievements by displaying a large amount of state-of-the-art military equipment as the country is in the midst of an election campaign.



Polish President Andrzej Duda visiting Polish soldiers serving on the NATO missions in Afghanistan in 2018

It was Poland’s largest military show since the Cold War to commemorate its victory over Soviet forces in 1920. During the Battle of Warsaw 103 years ago, Polish troops halted the advance of Bolshevik forces into Europe.

President Duda, who is also Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, said in his opening speech at the event: *‘Poland’s state interest today is to protect our eastern border, which is also the border*

of the European Union and NATO.’ American-made Abrams tanks, HIMARS mobile artillery systems and Patriot missile systems paraded through the streets of the capital.

F-16 fighter jets, FA-50 fighters and K9 howitzers from South Korea also took part in the parade. A US Air Force F-35 flew over the capital, showing that Poland is also buying these advanced fighter jets. Polish-made equipment such as Krab tracked howitzers and Rosomak armoured personnel carriers also took part in the parade, which was attended by 2,000 soldiers from Poland and other countries, as well as almost 100 aircraft and 200 military vehicles and other equipment.

‘On August 15, we honour the heroes who fought and won the Battle of Warsaw, and we express our gratitude to today’s soldiers who protect our homeland,’ said Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak to the troops and spectators gathered near the Vistula River.

‘This is also an ideal day to demonstrate our might, to show that we have built formidable armed forces that will defend our borders without any hesitation,’ he added.



F-16 fighter jets

The Polish Army now has more than 175,000 soldiers, a significant increase from around 100,000 eight years ago. The country’s defence budget is estimated at a record PLN 137 billion (US\$34 billion) in 2023, equivalent to about 4% of GDP, which is the highest share in all NATO. *‘The goal of this huge modernisation is to equip Poland’s armed forces and create such a defence system that no one ever dares attack us... that Polish soldiers will never need to fight,’* Duda said, while expressing his admiration and respect for the military.

He was also responding to the critics who said Poland, a country of about 37 million people, is borrowing too much money to make the purchases. He said: *‘We cannot afford to be idle. That is why we are strengthening our armed forces here and now.’* He concluded by saying: *‘The security of Poles is invaluable. And that is why the government continues to tell its people, that it needs a strong, effective army.’*

Poland’s conservative government has been focusing on strengthening the armed forces, spending more than \$16 billion on tanks, missile interception systems and fighter jets, many of which were purchased from the US and South Korea, since Russia began the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Other than Ukraine, Poland shares its eastern border with the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, and with Lithuania, which is also a NATO member.

Poland has improved its defence capabilities by modernising its military equipment and replacing some of the old Soviet and Russian-made items it donated to Ukraine during the conflict with Russia. The country is also strengthening its army to become one of the most powerful in Europe and to ward off potential threats. It has deployed around 10,000 soldiers along the border with Belarus and also built a wall there to prevent migrants from entering via this route.

An insidious threat



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Bakhmut (Donetsk region of Ukraine) during the battle for the city

The notorious Wagner Group paramilitary force caused a lot of trouble in Ukraine, especially in Bakhmut. Now they also pose a threat to NATO's eastern flank. The ruthless mercenaries, allied with Putin, relocated to Belarus after their failed attempt to overthrow the government there. They are now boasting that they are ready to attack Poland.

Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 23 in St. Petersburg, and informed him that the Wagner group fighters exiled in Belarus feel the urge to go west. He quoted the mercenaries as saying: 'We should take a trip to Warsaw and Rzeszow.'

Putin had already spoken about the "Polish question" at a meeting of the Russian Security Council on 21 July. He explained his view of things and said that Poland, a member of NATO, intended to take over land in the western parts of Ukraine and thus intervene directly in the conflict there. He said that Poland had similar intentions for Belarus.



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Valery Karbalevich

Lukashenko showed Putin a map during their recorded meeting depicting the movement of Polish troops to the borders of the Union State of Russia and Belarus. He said that 'one Polish brigade is now 40 kilometers from Brest, another is now 100 kilometers from Grodno. [...] Poland has opened a Leopard tank repair facility on its territory. Rzeszow is becoming more active. The Americans are using the airfield there to send equipment and so on.'

The main topic of discussion between the two leaders was how to deal with members of the Wagner group imprisoned in Belarus, according to Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich. He also believes the warnings about Poland were part of a staged show. Karbalevich points out that Lukashenko wanted to say that he personally prevented the Wagner operatives from entering Polish territory, as they allegedly planned.

However, many experts agree that Poland has become the "collective enemy of Russia" because of its support for Ukraine. Poland is not only a supplier of military equipment, but also a vocal advocate of further sanctions against Russia and for Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO.

'Poland borders Belarus and Ukraine. It would be strange to associate the danger posed by the Wagner mercenaries with the US, Germany or France. They are far away, and Lithuania and Latvia are small countries, but Poland is a serious rival,' Karbalevich said. He added that Putin was probably anxious to show the Russian public once again how "skillfully he has trumped everyone."



© NRP

The Suwałki Gap

The Polish military is, of course, much larger than Wagner, so the idea of an attack on Warsaw or even on a major army base is not taken seriously. More worrying, however, is the possibility that they might attack a narrow strip of land called the Suwałki Gap. The Suwałki Gap - also known as the Suwałki Corridor - is a narrow strip of land on the border between Poland and Lithuania, named after the largest city in the area.

The region has been a source of conflict between Poland and Lithuania in the past. Today it belongs to Poland and is the only land connection between mainland Europe and the Baltic States. The area is important for strategic reasons, but it is isolated and crossed only by a railway line and two main roads, one of which has only one lane.

The terrain is mainly hilly, with fields, sparse forests and some small villages. This makes the area difficult to access for any army not already there, and also difficult to protect, as there are few natural barriers or narrow passages.

However, the area - squeezed between Poland, Lithuania and Kaliningrad - is vulnerable to even a small attack that could put NATO in big trouble and possibly trigger a conflict with very serious consequences.

| Would Russia attack?

The Baltic states are vulnerable to a Russian attack, which would pose a major challenge to NATO defend them. The Suwalki Gap is a key strategic point that Russia would likely try to take in the event of an invasion of the Baltics.

NATO has some troops stationed in the region, but they are not enough to prevent a major attack; they are meant to hold off the enemy until more forces can arrive.

However, if Russia cuts off the Suwalki gap, it would be more difficult for NATO to send reinforcements from its main bases in Poland and Germany. It would also be easier for Russia to move its troops between Belarus and Kaliningrad, its heavily armed enclave on the Baltic coast.

Russia is of course aware of this advantage and has practiced closing the Suwalki Gap with Belarusian troops during the Zapad military exercises in 2021.

The Suwalki Gap is so important for any Russian operation in the Baltics that it has been called "the most dangerous place on Earth".

| Wagner, a serious threat?

Military experts have long warned that Wagner could pose a threat to the Suwalki Gap. The mercenary group has about 5,000 fighters in Belarus, but they have few heavy weapons and tanks from Russia.

They are no match for the Polish, Lithuanian and NATO forces, which have over 150,000 soldiers and state-of-the-art military equipment.

Wagner could not take and hold the Suwalki Gap. But that may not be their goal either. Instead of invading and occupying the gap, Wagner could use "armed mercenaries with plausible deniability" to launch "short or limited attacks."

If Wagner were to go confrontational in the area - like the rebels in Russia's Belgorod region - it would make it difficult to use the border. If they damaged the roads or railway lines, this could have the same effect as a complete closure of the border, even if they did not take any land. If Poland invokes Article 5 and asks NATO for help, other Eastern European countries would probably support it.

An attack by Wagner on the Suwalki Gap would also pose challenges to NATO allies, especially France and Germany. They might not want to get involved because of the risk of angering Russia and because Wagner's forces would probably be small.

This could weaken NATO unity, which has already suffered from disagreements over Ukraine, and give Russia more power in Europe. Moreover, an attack by Wagner would raise the question of how to respond. Putin has stated that Russia used to support the group financially, but now claims to have stopped doing so, and would likely deny any involvement in its actions.

Lukashenko, who hosts Wagner in Belarus, probably has no control over the group and would probably distance himself as well. NATO could be seen as attacking either Russia or Belarus, which both countries would use for their propaganda.

It will be a challenge to counter Wagner's aggression without implicating either country - especially if the militants use guerrilla strategies on their own territory.

Moreover, such conflicts could give Russia the



Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin

opportunity to use the gap as a negotiating tool. If NATO opts for violent action, Putin could risk escalation under the pretext of defending Kaliningrad - where it is suspected of storing nuclear weapons. But he could also propose to “mediate” and end a Wagner invasion if NATO helps persuade Ukraine to accept a generous peace deal.

Could it trigger a global conflict?

The short answer: unfortunately, yes.

An armed attack by Wagner on Poland or Lithuania - both members of NATO - would entail a swift military response. The situation could quickly spiral out of control and lead to a direct confrontation between Russia or Belarus and NATO. US President Joe Biden has even described this scenario as a “Third World War”.

British troops would probably be among the first to have to fight in this war, as around 800 of them are stationed in Estonia - one of the Baltic states - and dozens more in Poland.



John R. Deni

NATO would have the upper hand in this conflict, but the destruction and casualties would probably rival the worst wars in history. Especially since both sides have thousands of nuclear weapons. While it seems unlikely that Vladimir Putin would open another front against NATO during the fighting in Ukraine, experts warn that it should not be ruled out.

John R. Deni, research professor of security studies and senior fellow at the Atlantic Council think tank, said in 2022, *‘Some thought it illogical for Putin to order a full-scale invasion of Ukraine....*

The West cannot assume that Russia will not target the Suwalki corridor just because it seems illogical’.

In the current situation, no other ally is more important for the Eastern European countries in NATO and EU than Poland. But it is an ally that, understandably, has its own past, its own interests, and its own view of the world.



Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki inspecting the Polish-Belarusian border: “Today, everyone in the West can see that we, by protecting the Polish-Belarusian border, are protecting NATO’s eastern flank”

Poland, however has become more proactive in countering the Russian threat in Eastern Europe, after being rather passive on issues that did not directly concern it. It has not only increased its own defence spending, but has also provided humanitarian aid and transit for Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion, and built an extensive supply network for military aid to Ukraine.

Poland’s role for the EU and NATO will undoubtedly become more important in the mid-2020s. A possible Russian victory in Ukraine would put the Baltic States and Poland on high alert, fearing they could be next. Many in Europe and the US think this is exaggerated, but given Poland’s history, it is easy to understand why the country is worried. Poles see the situation in Ukraine as an echo of their own troubled past and fear that history could repeat itself.

In the meantime, Poland severely restricted entry from Belarus, and on 10 August, Latvia sent more troops to its border. Latvian Prime Minister Krisjanis Karin said Belarus must understand that his country is serious about protecting its borders for the benefit of its own people and the rest of Europe. Mr Karin said, *‘We are simply increasing our presence and sending a clear message both to our own society and to the Belarusian authorities that this is not a joke.’*

Poland also announced the deployment of 10,000 additional troops to its border with Belarus after Belarusian military helicopters allegedly entered its airspace. According to the Polish government, they are to help repel mercenaries from the Russian Wagner group who have relocated to Belarus after Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki warned that Wagner fighters could disguise themselves as migrants and enter the EU.

For the foreseeable future, however, Poland will probably continue to try to strengthen military ties with the US and other NATO allies to ensure that there is no doubt about Article 5, and both the state and society will do everything in their power to ensure that the country’s eastern neighbours remain free and independent.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

A NEW SOLUTION TO AN OLD PROBLEM: NATURAL DRINKING FOUNTAINS WITH LIFE WATER WAY



© LIFE 16 ENV/ES/000533

Newly installed drinking water fountains along the Camino of Santiago are proving a hit with long-distance hikers whilst dramatically reducing the use of plastic water bottles.

LIFE WATER WAY- a six-year, EUR 761,000 project covering 143 km of the ancient pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela in north-west Spain – provides drinking water from traditional fountains.

Walkers can now refill their reusable bottles at 28 new ‘micro-supply points’ - approximately one every six kilometres - fed by wells and natural springs. The fountains use a specially designed purification system to ensure the supply of water is available for pilgrims walking the ‘English Way’.

‘When you’re short of water, and you see a spring, you don’t know if it’s safe to drink,’ says one thirsty pilgrim interviewed by the project. In the old days, you would drink it anyway, but nowadays, you think twice about it.’

LIFE WATER WAY has become a model of responsible water consumption, involving 18 municipalities and water and health experts who devised a sustainable and cost-efficient treatment system for the water fountains. This new water treatment system is expected to recover 100 m³ (about the volume of a one-car garage) of drinking water each year from natural springs.

Every year, huge numbers of pilgrims walk the popular ‘English Way’. Around 25,000 tread the route in Galicia alone - so it’s not surprising that one of the main achievements of the project has been a striking reduction in the use of disposable bottles. So far, more than one million single-usage disposable half-litre bottles have been saved, preventing 12 tonnes of plastic residues and 841 tonnes of

CO₂.

‘As the mayor of a rural community, I’m pleased to have contributed to the recovery of our natural resources, a treasure without which Galicia would not be as we know it,’ says José Antonio Santiso Miramontes, Mayor of Abegondo and President of the Mariñas Coruñesas e Terras do Mandeo Biosphere Reserve.

‘The Life Water Way is an excellent example of cooperation among different local authorities to offer their citizens a great service,’ agrees Valentín González Formoso, President of the A Coruña Provincial Council.

To mark the end of LIFE WATER WAY in June 2023, the project produced a Good Practice Guide for promoting public drinking fountains and organised a technical conference to share the results. The initiative has already attracted interest from countries all over the world hoping to set up similar schemes.

‘Treated natural springs are the solution for micro-supplying drinking water along routes where it isn’t possible to connect to controlled water supply networks,’ notes Teresa Guiérrez López, Director of Augas de Galicia, a publicly owned water company.

EU COUNTRIES SIGN UP TO EDA'S JOINT PROCUREMENT FOR CBRN AND SOLDIER EQUIPMENT



© EDA

The signing of the project arrangements lay the basis for Member States to buy together CBRN equipment such as masks, filters and suits

Several EU Member States have signed the European Defence Agency (EDA) project arrangements for the collaborative procurement of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) equipment, and for soldier equipment.

The signing of the two project arrangements in late July – by eight EU states in each case – allows them to come into effect. They lay the basis for Member States to buy together such CBRN equipment such as masks, filters and suits, and

also to jointly purchase soldier equipment such as helmets and ballistic vests.

EDA's project arrangements, and Member States' interest, send an important signal to industry about the European Union's commitment to meeting critical military needs. Following competitive tendering, companies or consortia will be able to bid for contracts.

The two new project arrangements follow the signing in March of EDA's arrangement for joint procurement of 155mm ammunition, which was based on the work of the Defence Joint Procurement Task Force – composed of EDA, the European External Action Service, the EU Military Staff, and the European Commission – along with Member States, to identify critical shortfalls.

The procurement process, where EDA will act as the contracting authority, management body and ordering entity in the context of collaborative procurement procedures, should culminate with the first framework contracts with industry, allowing Member States to place orders from then on.

Collaborative procurement is the best option to achieve cost reduction from economies of scale, while allowing Member States to purchase ammunition and military equipment according to their national needs and supporting Ukraine. The arrangements, which are flexible and inclusive in nature, allow all Member States to join the initiatives at a later stage.

EDA'S wider role

EDA supports all EU Member States in improving their defence capabilities through European cooperation. Acting as an enabler and facilitator for Ministries of Defence willing to engage in collaborative capability projects, the Agency has become the hub for European defence cooperation with expertise and networks spanning the whole spectrum of defence capabilities.

Member States use EDA as an intergovernmental expert platform where their collaborative projects are supported, facilitated, and implemented.

EU COUNTRIES SIGN UP TO EDA'S JOINT PROCUREMENT FOR CBRN AND SOLDIER EQUIPMENT



© OF TRANSPORT

The Plovdiv-Burgas railway line

The European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) in Sofia (Bulgaria) carried out searches at numerous locations, in an investigation into two projects for the modernisation of the railway infrastructure, worth over €241 million in EU financing.

More than 100 police officers and agents from Bulgaria's National Police General Directorate (Д А Н С) and Bulgaria's State Agency for National Security (Г Д Н П) participated in the searches, carried out at 28 locations in the districts of Sofia, Burgas, Varna, Stara Zagora, Smolyan and Pazardzhik.

On the radar of the EPPO are two projects for the modernisation of the railway infrastructure. The first concerns the section between the cities of Kostenets and Septemvri of the Sofia-Plovdiv railway line, financed by the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) – previously INEA –, to the amount of more than €130 million. The second involves the modernisation of the railway section between Orizovo and Mihaylovo – part of the second phase of the rehabilitation of the Plovdiv-Burgas railway infrastructure –, financed by the Cohesion Fund, under the Operational Programme Transport and Transport infrastructure, to the amount of over €111 million.

The beneficiary of both projects is the National Railway Infrastructure Company of Bulgaria, and the construction contracts were awarded to two private companies with international participation.

The works on these two sections of railway tracks are still ongoing, but several payments have already been made by the beneficiary to the contractors.

The investigation uncovered facts that could constitute criminal offences, including misuse of EU funds and money laundering. The contractors are suspected of having made, in a short period of time, fictitious money transfers to a chain of hollow companies, which ultimately led to the withdrawal of cash amounts of more than €2.5 million (BGN 5 million) by individuals with criminal records.

During the searches, carried out at the suspects' homes and at the premises of the companies under investigation, two individuals were arrested. In addition, public officials from the National Railway Infrastructure Company will be questioned, regarding the disbursement of EU funds.

The investigation is ongoing, in order to ascertain the nature and extent of the suspected criminal activities.

All persons concerned are presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in the competent Bulgarian courts of law.

The EPPO is the independent public prosecution office of the European Union. It is responsible for investigating, prosecuting and bringing to judgment crimes against the financial interests of the EU.

MERGERS: EU COMMISSION OPENS IN- DEPTH INVESTIGATION INTO THE PROPOSED ACQUISITION OF FIGMA BY ADOBE

The European Commission has opened an in-depth investigation to assess, under the EU Merger Regulation, the proposed acquisition of Figma by Adobe. The Commission is concerned that the transaction may reduce competition in the global markets for the supply of interactive product design software and for digital asset creation tools.



Adobe headquarters in San Jose, California USA

Adobe is a global software company offering, among others, creative design software tools (e.g., Illustrator and Photoshop) and an interactive product design tool (Adobe XD). Figma is a provider of a web-based collaborative tool for interactive product design (Figma Design) as well as a whiteboarding tool.

The Commission's preliminary competition concerns

The Commission's preliminary investigation indicates that the transaction may allow Adobe to restrict competition in the global markets for the:

- Supply of interactive product design tools given: (i) that Figma is the clear market leader and Adobe one of its largest competitors, that Adobe and Figma are close competitors and that the transaction would remove an important competitive force, and (ii) the unlikely timely and credible entry of other players in the market.
- Supply of digital asset creation tools by: eliminating Figma's current constraining influence over Adobe's digital asset creation tools, and preventing Figma's potential growth into an effective competitor to Adobe's asset creation tools, absent the transaction.

Furthermore, the Commission will further investigate whether the transaction may foreclose rival providers of interactive product design tools by bundling Figma with Adobe's Creative Cloud suite.

The Commission will now carry out an in-depth investigation into the effects of the proposed transaction to determine whether its initial competition concerns are confirmed.

The Commission closely cooperated with other competition authorities during the initial investigation and will continue such cooperation during the in-depth investigation.

The proposed transaction was notified to the Commission on 30 June 2023. The Commission now has 90 working days, until 14 December 2023, to take a decision. The opening of an in-depth inquiry does not prejudice the outcome of the investigation.

OLHA KHARLAN, A FOUR-TIME INDIVIDUAL WOMEN'S WORLD SABRE CHAMPION AND A FOUR-TIME OLYMPIC MEDALIST, IS MEMBER OF THE UKRAINE SECRET SERVICE

On July 27, Olga Kharlan defeated a fencer from Russia under neutral status at the start of the individual tournament at the World Fencing Championships. She refused to shake hands with her Russian competitor Anna Smirnova after their match after the fight, holding her sabre out in front of her pointing her sabre toward the Russian.



She was disqualified from the world championships and the International Fencing Federation (FIE) did not allow her to continue in the tournament.

The next day, International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach guaranteed her a spot at the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics. Bach, who is a former fencer, said he thought Kharlan was treated unfairly. The International Fencing Federation (FIE) announced afterwards it was reinstating Emmanuel Katsiadakis, the President of the FIE, said the decision had been taken "after consultation with the International Olympic Committee (IOC)."



Back in Ukraine, Olga Kharlan, proudly revealed to the press that she was a SSU (Ukraine Secret Service employee), in particular the SSU National Academy. "I am proud to be an employee of the Security Service of Ukraine,

in particular the SSU National Academy. I am proud that Russians know that I work for the SSU. Let them be afraid!" said the fencer.

The SSU National Academy Rector Andrii Cherniak presented to Olha the highest award of the institution - the Badge of Honour. "Olha Kharlan has demonstrated the main Ukrainian message on the world sports arena: no handshakes with Russians - only weapons! And only Victory! This is a decent and strong act of a representative of the SSU, for which, Ms Olha, the entire Ukraine is grateful!" Andrii Cherniak said.

HYDIS² CONSORTIUM PROJECT FOR HYPERSONIC DEFENCE INTERCEPTOR PROPOSED FOR FUNDING BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION



A rendering of Aquila by MBDA

In May 2023, the HYDIS² consortium, composed of 19 partners and more than 20 subcontractors across 14 European countries, submitted a proposal for a concept architecture and technology maturation study of an endo-atmospheric interceptor against new high-end emerging threats, in the framework of the European Defence Fund 2023 work programme. On the 12th of July 2023, following a positive evaluation, the European Commission proposed the project for funding.

The consortium, coordinated by MBDA, proposed HYDIS² (HYpersonic Defence Interceptor Study), a project that brings together Defence groups, institutions, SMEs, mid-caps and universities. It gathers the best competences in the domains of missiles from across the European Union. France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands have already confirmed their support and commitment by signing a Letter of Intent and agreeing on Initial Common Requirements.

The objective of HYDIS² is to study various interceptor concepts and bring to maturity the associated critical technologies to deliver the best counter-hypersonic and anti-ballistic interception solution that fulfils the four Member States needs and addresses the needs of the European PESCO TWISTER capability programme. This is a central element of the contribution of European states to the mission of defence of populations and armed forces,

in particular against the emerging hypersonic threats that constitute a radical change from ballistic ones.

The HYDIS² consortium brings together 19 partners and more than 20 subcontractors in 14 European countries. The partners are ArianeGroup, AVIO, Avio Aero, Bayern-Chemie, CIRA, DLR, GKN Fokker, LYNRED, MBDA España, MBDA France, MBDA Germany, MBDA Italia, OHB System AG, ONERA, ROXEL France, THALES LAS France, TDW, THALES Netherlands and TNO.

HYDIS² contributes to the AQUILA interceptor project, proposing the most valuable counter-hypersonic interceptor concepts for European nations, alongside a global area defence portfolio with other MBDA air defence products.

Eric Béranger, CEO of MBDA, said: "This project offers a significant European benefit, contributing to European resilience and technological sovereignty by enhancing co-operation and interoperability between EU countries. This project will also contribute to reinforcing the sovereign missile systems industry in Europe, by sustaining and developing critical expertise, technologies and materials; thus boosting European industrial competitiveness. The technologies in the hypersonic domain are evolving, and it is a priority for MBDA to remain at the forefront of innovation, guiding Europe towards the most efficient solution to counter hypersonic threats."

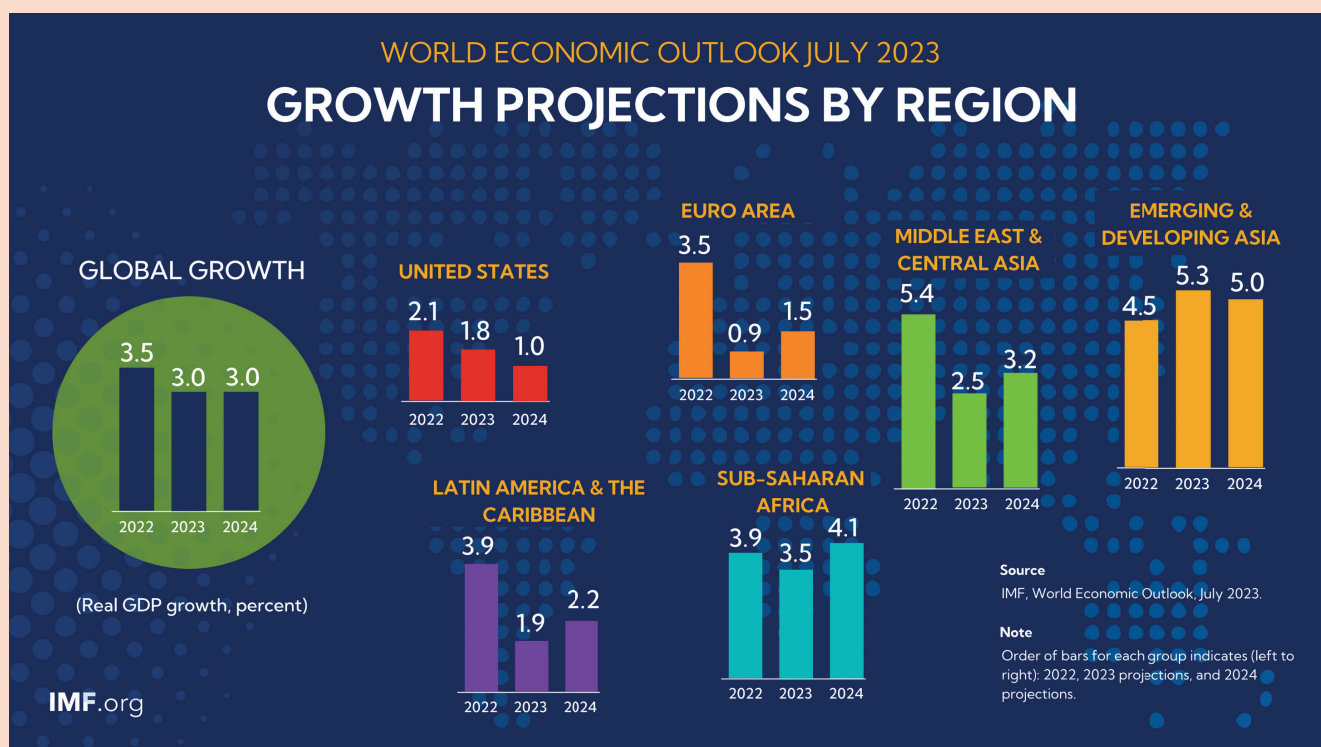
About MBDA

MBDA is a unique multi-national European group, a world-leader in the field of complex weapon systems, playing a key role in keeping nations safe. Created in the spirit of international co-operation, MBDA and its more than 14,000 employees work together to support the national sovereignty of France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK, and other allied countries worldwide. As an accelerator for innovation, MBDA is the only European group capable of designing and manufacturing complex weapons to meet the full range of current and future operational requirements of the three armed forces (land, sea and air). MBDA is owned by Airbus (37.5%), BAE Systems (37.5%) and Leonardo (25%).

IMF : THE GLOBAL RECOVERY IS SLOWING AMID WIDENING DIVERGENCES AMONG ECONOMIC SECTORS AND REGIONS

Global growth is projected to fall from an estimated 3.5 percent in 2022 to 3.0 percent in both 2023 and 2024. While the forecast for 2023 is modestly higher than predicted in the April 2023 World Economic Outlook (WEO), it remains weak by historical standards. The rise in central bank policy rates to fight inflation continues to weigh on economic activity. Global headline inflation is expected to fall from 8.7 percent in 2022 to 6.8 percent in 2023 and 5.2 percent in 2024. Underlying (core) inflation is projected to decline more gradually, and forecasts for inflation in 2024 have been revised upward.

The recent resolution of the US debt ceiling standoff and, earlier this year, strong action by authorities to contain turbulence in US and Swiss banking reduced the immediate risks of financial sector turmoil. This moderated adverse risks to the outlook. However, the balance of risks to global growth remains tilted to the downside. Inflation could



remain high and even rise if further shocks occur, including those from an intensification of the war in Ukraine and extreme weather-related events, triggering more restrictive monetary policy. Financial sector turbulence could resume as markets adjust to further policy tightening by central banks. China's recovery could slow, in part as a result of unresolved real estate problems, with negative cross-border spillovers. Sovereign debt distress could spread to a wider group of economies. On the upside, inflation could fall faster than expected, reducing the need for tight monetary policy, and domestic demand could again prove more resilient.

In most economies, the priority remains achieving sustained disinflation while ensuring financial stability. Therefore, central banks should remain focused on restoring price stability and strengthen financial supervision and risk monitoring. Should market strains materialize, countries should provide liquidity promptly while mitigating the possibility of moral hazard. They should also build fiscal buffers, with the composition of fiscal adjustment ensuring targeted support for the most vulnerable. Improvements to the supply side of the economy would facilitate fiscal consolidation and a smoother decline of inflation toward target levels.

LAMBORGHINI UNVEILS THE LANZADOR : ITS FIRST ELECTRIC MODEL

Lamborghini chose Monterey Car Week to debut its concept car Lanzador, a visionary preview of the future fourth model announced by the company and planned for 2028. As part of the brand's Direzione Cor Tauri strategy, this concept marks a significant step towards the decarbonization and electrification announced in 2021.

With an innovative Gran Turismo 2+2 concept, the

Lanzador stands out for its design that is rebellious and futuristic yet retains Lamborghini's unmistakable DNA, characterized by uncompromising charisma and sportiness, anticipating a truly unique experience aimed at a new generation of technology-forward customers. Stephan Winkelmann, Chairman and CEO of Automobili Lamborghini, remarked: "With this concept, we are ushering in a new car segment, the Ultra GT, which is poised to offer customers a new and unparalleled driving experience, one that's quintessentially Lamborghini, thanks to groundbreaking technologies."



Lamborghini Lanzador

The Lanzador is equipped with two electric motors, one for each axle, providing all-wheel drive and efficiency in all driving conditions, on all surfaces, and in every driving style. The system delivers a peak power that exceeds one megawatt.

The driver can independently adjust the control systems while on the road via controls on the sports steering wheel, actively modifying the car's behavior and creating their own individual profile to best express their driving needs and ensure unimagined emotions.

The new version of the driving dynamics control system, Lamborghini Dinamica Veicolo Integrata (LDVI), will set another benchmark for the House of Sant'Agata Bolognese, in terms of both concept cars and future production cars. This control system gives drivers the utmost freedom of customization, allowing them to modulate the active control systems to best suit their driving needs.

Active Aerodynamics is another key feature of the Lanzador, employed in the front and rear to maximize aerodynamic efficiency in the different driving modes. This technology enables the car to regulate airflow precisely, increasing the range in Urban mode and increasing downforce in Performance mode.

In addition, thanks to its steerable rear axle and air suspension, the Lanzador adapts flawlessly to any surface and to driver-defined settings, which can be adjusted quickly and directly while on the road via steering wheel controls.

With the Lanzador, Lamborghini looks to the future and anticipates upcoming new styling solutions not only on the exterior but also in the interior, offering an entirely new experience in terms of spaciousness and comfort.



Lamborghini Lanzador

The interior is a truly futuristic space, incorporating Lamborghini's *"Feel like a pilot"* approach. The driver and passenger are accommodated in an ergonomic environment, with a light, slim control panel that makes it possible to actively modify the car's behavior while driving. The sustainable materials used for the interior, such as merino wool and regenerated carbon fiber, demonstrate the company's commitment to reducing its environmental impact without sacrificing the luxury and comfort typical of a Lamborghini. Some of the non-visible plastic elements, such as the foam in the sports seats, are made from 3D-printed recycled fibers.

Lanzador represents a true milestone for Lamborghini as the company continues actively working to electrify its entire range of vehicles and to achieve decarbonization. The new concept car is part of a broad strategy to reduce CO2 emissions and embrace a more sustainable vision for the future.

A future of electrification: this is the direction Lamborghini is headed in, while holding firmly to the brand's hallmarks of performance, cutting-edge technologies, exclusive design, and its position as a leader in the luxury automotive sector.

NATO INNOVATION FUND CLOSES ON EUR 1BN FLAGSHIP FUND

Twenty-three NATO Allies have officially become Limited Partners of the NATO Innovation Fund (NIF), which is preparing to make its initial investments later this year. The

Participating Allies¹ have also welcomed Sweden's interest to join the NIF. Sweden's participation will take effect upon its accession to the North Atlantic Treaty.



© NATO

Sweden's contribution will add to the current EUR 1 billion venture capital fund, boosting the investible capital of the NATO Innovation Fund and bolstering innovative capacity across the Alliance.

"As a member of NATO, Sweden will contribute to the strength of the Alliance, not only through our geo-strategic location and military capabilities, but also through a vibrant security and defence industry that promotes innovation and development of cutting-edge technology. This is further enabled through participation in the NATO Innovation Fund," said Pål Jonson, Minister of Defence, Sweden.

Mr. David van Weel, NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges, welcomed Sweden's future participation, "This year's Summit set Sweden further on track to becoming the 32nd country to join our Alliance, and this historic step will make way for Sweden to participate in the NATO Innovation Fund and to contribute to its important mission."

The NATO Innovation Fund is the world's first multi-sovereign venture capital fund and will invest in start-ups developing cutting-edge technological solutions, leveraging the potential for commercial innovation to address critical defence and security challenges. The Fund's Limited Partners include 23 NATO Allies at the highest levels of government, venture capital, innovation and defence. The Fund will make direct investments into start-ups located in any of the 23 participating Allied nations, as well as indirect investments into deep tech funds with a trans-Atlantic impact. It will provide patient capital to meet the needs and timelines of deep tech innovators and to secure an enduring future for the Alliance's 1 billion citizens.

THIS AUTUMN, SOTHEBY'S NYC WILL SELL A 1962 FERRARI GTO OWNED BY CAR FANATIC JIM FOR AN ESTIMATED \$60 MILLION

One of only 34 specimens ever produced, a 1962 250 Ferrari GTO will be auctioned off by Sotheby's in New York this autumn for an estimated \$60 million.

¹ Participating NATO Allies: Belgium; Bulgaria; Czechia; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Iceland; Italy; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Slovakia; Spain; Türkiye; United Kingdom



1962 Ferrari GTO

Jim Jaeger, 75, of Ohio purchased it in 1985 for about \$500,000 (about \$1.4 million today).

The car, with an estimated \$60 million price tag, was first sold in 1964 for \$6,000, or roughly \$59,000 today.

The most expensive vehicle ever sold at auction was a 1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR coupe, which Sotheby's sold last May for \$142 million.

This is the only factory-owned Series I GTO raced by the Scuderia Ferrari

- Class win and 2nd overall finish at the 1962 Nürburgring 1,000 KM
- Driven by Mike Parkes and Lorenzo Bandini for the Scuderia Ferrari at the 1962 24 Hours of Le Mans
- 1965 Sicilian Hillclimb Championship runner-up
- Formerly owned by a chairman of the Ferrari Club of America
- Benefits from 38 years of fastidious care under current ownership
- Winner of an FCA Platinum Award and the Coppa Bella Macchina at the Cavallino Classic • 2nd in the GTO class at the 2011 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, among 23 total GTOs • Best of Show at the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance
- Blue Ribbon winner at the Meadow Brook Concours d'Elegance



1962 Ferrari GTO

WHATSAAPP HACKING VIA VOICEMAIL

The Swiss National Cyber Security Centre NCSC has published a warning

about Cybercriminals targeting WhatsApp accounts.

Attackers are pulling out all the stops to obtain the PIN code for resetting an account and they particularly appreciate having the code read out over the phone. If this is done at night, the code usually ends up being sent to voicemail, which is then hacked to obtain the information. The NCSC is currently receiving a lot of reports of hacked WhatsApp accounts.

Two years ago, the NCSC already reported on the possibility of WhatsApp accounts being taken over through a hacked voicemail account. The NCSC is again receiving an increasing number of reports of this kind.

The victims all report that many different calls were received overnight, and that access to WhatsApp was then blocked. Their friends report strange profile pictures on the hacked account, and unknown numbers appear in group chats. WhatsApp also reports that the account owner has violated the terms of use. The hackers also set up two-factor authentication to prevent the account from being "recaptured" by the actual owner.



NCSC's own tests showed how the hackers proceeded. In a first step, the hacker passed off the number to be attacked as his own on his WhatsApp. A code was then sent to the email address stored on the account to check its authenticity. If this method does not work, it is possible to be called and have the code read out. This is also done if the call goes to voicemail. Many voicemail accounts still have a password that has not been changed since it was set up. This means that the default password, e.g. the last four digits of the telephone number, is still valid. Hackers take advantage of this and use it to access the message with the saved password reset.

After the hackers have taken over the WhatsApp account, they immediately activate two-factor authentication to prevent the victim from easily recovering their account. Afterwards, the hackers often try to attack accounts from the friends list as well.

The NCSC is giving the following advice:

- **Change all default passwords as quickly as possible. Do not choose trivial combinations that are easy to guess.**
- **Use two-factor authentication whenever possible.**
- **If you receive suspicious messages from your telephone provider, you should report the incident to them as soon as possible.**
- **As a general rule, PIN codes should be treated in the same way as passwords. Under no circumstances should such information be passed on to third parties or entered on insecure websites.**



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PAIN FREE?

**A new narcotic begins
its march across Europe**

It's been described as being 50 to 80 times stronger than morphine. You will not be surprised to learn that Fentanyl (it has several alternative names) is quickly becoming the narcotic of choice for those seeking a big hit quickly. Its molecular structure is $C_{22}H_{28}N_2O$ and for the police forces of the United States, that spells trouble. What's more, it's already arriving in Europe and it has the police over here feeling nervous. It's not just fentanyl: there are quite a few derivatives, such as alfentanil, sufentanil, Remifentanil and carfentanil, but by the time you're reading this there will almost certainly be several more. The stuff is fast proliferating. After all, anything that strong is bound to prove popular and that means more money for the dealers. Who among them is going to resist that? The various derivatives were developed for the legitimate pharmaceutical industry, mainly by modifying its potency by tinkering with its substituents (and in case that word puzzles you as it did me, this is how Wikipedia explains it: "In organic chemistry, a substituent is one or a group of atoms that replaces atoms, thereby becoming a moiety in the resultant molecule.")

In any case, the resulting narcotic is very much on the rise in Europe and the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, has issued a warning about it. She told the media that an increasing number of new narcotics are reaching Europe and that there is a risk of poisonings and deaths because of their high potency. According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), "An analysis of the supply-related indicators available on all the commonly used illicit drugs in the European Union suggests that availability remains high across all substance types." That is from the annual report for 2023, which also lists the range of narcotics currently available in Europe. It's a worryingly long list and it's not getting any shorter. The United States is already seeing the consequences of the spread of fentanyl and its derivatives.



Ylva Johansson

Ms. Johansson told a meeting of the EMCDDA they must ensure that "America's present does not become Europe's future." "A few weeks ago in Antwerp," she told her audience, "I met with Anne Milgram, the administrator of the DEA (Drugs Enforcement Agency)." The story she had to tell, it seems, is not a cheery one. "She told me that last year in the United States, 107,000 died after taking synthetic drugs – 70% of those by taking fentanyl." What's more, she said the drug, along with other synthetic opioids, "is easy to make and does not need to be smuggled across continents." She also told Johansson that small quantities are enough for thousands of doses, (and) can be easily transported. "They are extremely potent," she said, describing them as "dangerous and deadly." Alexis Goosdeel, the Director of the EMCDDA, warned that: "Drugs are everywhere today in Europe, there were never so many drugs and substances available in such a high purity or potency and also at stable low prices." Her words almost read like an advertising campaign, although they're far from being that, of course. The EMCDDA report shows growing concern over the "scale and complexity" of Europe's illicit drugs output, with users being exposed to an ever-wider range of psychoactive substances from which to choose. Regular users of illicit narcotics must be rubbing their hands with glee. Inevitably, health issues have been raised. The EMCDDA believes more services are needed to police the problem and that there should be more "harm reduction practices" in use.



At the DEA Museum in Washington, D.C. a permanent memorial displays the faces of lives lost due to fentanyl overdose. Hundreds of these photos line the walls

If you want to see what the social effects of fentanyl look like, you should pay a visit to San Francisco's Tenderloin area, a place famed for homelessness, crime and drug abuse. I have not been there personally, but it's reported that you will find fentanyl users out in the streets, lying on park benches and grassy banks and sidewalks. This may be a slight media exaggeration, but between January and March 2023 it's believed that some 159 deaths in the United States (out of a total of around 200) were caused by fentanyl, the powerful synthetic opioid that's been killing Americans in fairly large numbers. Fentanyl is said to be similar to morphine in many ways but quite a lot more potent. Some experts are now saying fentanyl, which can be fatal even in tiny doses, is becoming the deadliest narcotic in American history.

It's on track to repeat the trick in Europe if we're not careful. Activist Darren Stallcup, who has lived in the Tenderloin area all his life and who posts videos of life there, told Euronews that he has seen so many people dying of an overdose in his neighbourhood that he feels "absolutely traumatised". After spending a short holiday in London recently, Stallcup said: "The

most important thing is to make sure fentanyl doesn't find its way into the UK or Europe." It's a bit late for that: the drug has already claimed victims on this side of the Atlantic. According to the EMCDDA, Europe saw an estimated 5,800 deaths from drug overdose in 2020, and that is said to be an underestimate. Some 75% of the deaths involved opioids of one sort or another but of those, fentanyl accounted for a couple of hundred of the fatalities.

I New and deadly



In 2022, the DEA seized more than 58.3 million fentanyl-laced fake pills and more than 13 000 pounds (5 900 Kg) of fentanyl powder. The 2022 seizures are equivalent to more than 387.9 million lethal doses of fentanyl. The 2023 fentanyl seizures represent over 204 million deadly doses.

Deaths from fentanyl are on the rise in Europe. So, what is it, exactly? This is the BBC's explanation: "Fentanyl is an extremely strong painkiller, prescribed for severe chronic pain, or breakthrough pain which does not respond to regular painkillers." I think we knew that already, but what sets it apart? Here's the BBC again: "It is an opioid painkiller which means it works by mimicking the body's natural painkillers, called endorphins, which block pain messages to the brain." It all sounds very innocent, not to mention useful. But it has its dark side: "The risk of harm is higher if the wrong dose or strength is used. Typical symptoms of a fentanyl overdose include slow and difficult breathing, nausea and vomiting, dizziness and increased blood pressure." The UK's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) said the government should introduce controls to tackle the "emerging threat" the painkiller poses. The ACMD said a rise in the number of deaths in the UK is being driven by fentanyl being added to heroin. Much of the drug is entering a country through ordinary mail.

Heroin, of course, is produced from poppies, and in the case of the United States, it mainly enters across the southern border with Mexico, but the new opioids are being produced in Chinese laboratories and, being so strong, are fairly easy to transport by international surface mail. The material is light and comes in small packages. Last autumn police in Columbus, Ohio, seized more than 10 kilos of fentanyl, which would have been sufficient to wipe out the entire population of the state, although one assumes that was not the dealers' intention. As it is, every single day people there are dying because of it. Originally fuelled by prescription drugs, then by opioids, the tendency towards addiction has moved on from heroin to fentanyl. According to Science Direct: "The United States is

in the midst of the worst drug-related crisis in its history. Over 52,000 Americans were killed by drug overdose in 2015, an increase of more than 300% since the turn of the century. Driven primarily by opioids that kill an average of nearly 100 Americans every day (according to Rudd, Puja, Felicita, & Scholl, 2016), the grim toll of overdose-related death and disability has reached levels of devastation unseen since the height of the AIDS epidemic. In fact, it's being compared with the problems that arose from prohibition, a century ago.

So, prohibition strikes again. That was then and this is now, and the picture seems no rosier. Opioid dependence unfortunately cannot be dissipated by switching to ineffective replacements or by using what are called "abuse deterrent" drugs. Instead, addicts switch to black market alternatives that may be even more dangerous, including heroin itself. It has encouraged the use of drugs delivered by injection, complete with the risks of infectious diseases that entails. Something that is not to be encouraged, naturally. Al Capone may be gone but there is no shortage of crooks eager to take his place. In October 2014, American border police seized 10.7 kilos of fentanyl that were being smuggled across the border from Mexico. Move forward eight years and the amount seized by police had reached 8,400 kilos. There is clearly a big demand for the stuff. According to Reuters, fentanyl seizures by weight more than tripled in the last quarter of 2022 compared with a year earlier. 20% of the volume seized was taken from ordinary people in the street, so in part at least it would seem that smuggling is still a cottage industry.



“The global production potential for fentanyl is just astronomical,” said Bryce Pardo, a research officer at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, “as long as precursor chemicals are available, the supply of the finished drug is ‘virtually endless’” he said. Good news of sorts for addicts and drug dealers, maybe not so good for the rest of us. A clamp-down, then, as a solution? “Interdiction is typically thought to stop just 5% to 10% of the total quantity of illicit drugs trafficked across the border, U.S. government officials say,” according to Reuters. It packs up small, too: one kilo could provide more than 50,000 doses.



U.S. authorities say that China remains the primary source of the precursor chemicals, which are then processed and manufactured into synthetic opioids by Mexican drug cartels to bring into the United States and in other countries

Nobody would choose to phase it out completely, either.

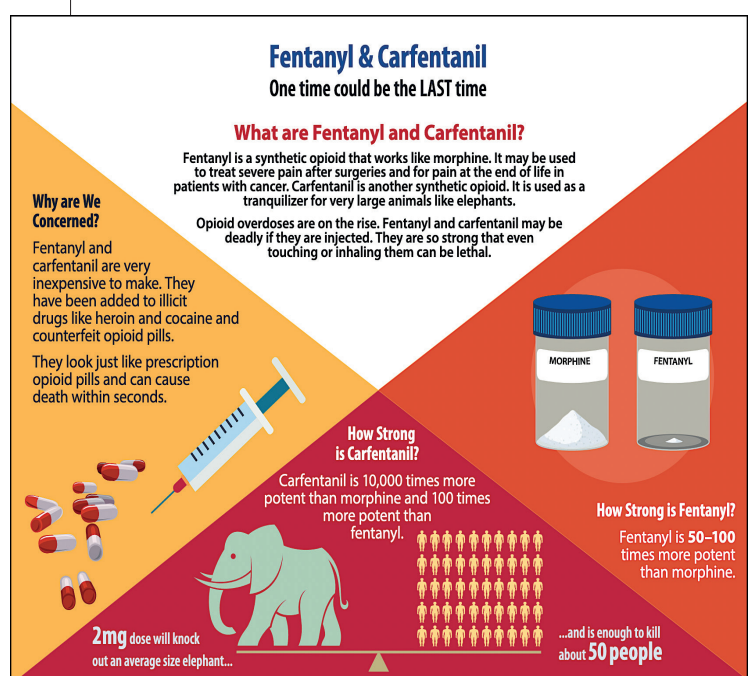
As the UK's National Health Service (NHS) explains: “Fentanyl is a strong opioid painkiller. It's used to treat severe pain, for example during or after an operation or a serious injury, or pain from cancer.” Like other types of pain killer, fentanyl can cause constipation, but that would seem little more than an inconvenience after a period of prolonged pain. After all, morphine can have the same effect, as can codeine. And, as you know, Fentanyl is said to be quite a lot more powerful than heroin (there's no agreement, it seems, on exactly how much more powerful). Meanwhile, Britain's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) said the government should introduce controls to tackle the “emerging threat” the painkiller poses. The ACMD said a rise in the number of deaths in the UK is being driven by fentanyl being added to heroin. There's nothing like increasing one's own dose when required. Not very wise, though, given the drugs potency. Typical symptoms of a fentanyl overdose include slow and difficult breathing, nausea and vomiting, dizziness and increased blood pressure. And, of course, death.

Like other analgesics, fentanyl works by blocking the pain signals between the brain and

the rest of the body, and by reducing pain levels it also has the effect of lowering anxiety. It can take the form of patches that are placed on the skin, or as lozenges that dissolve in the mouth. It can even come as a nasal spray, although injections, which are generally the fastest-acting form of delivery, are only given in a hospital, as a rule. It's very hard to know the strength of the fentanyl you plan to use, which explains why, according to the CDC, (the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention) man-made opioids like fentanyl are fuelling the majority of overdose deaths in the United States. For most users, the drug's extreme strength comes as a bit of a shock (possibly for some users quite a pleasant one, albeit it quite brief). The estimated fatal dose of fentanyl in the majority of humans is thought to be around a mere 2 mg, which is not far beyond the recommended dose for its use as an analgesic.

Strong, silent and deadly?

According to the EMCDDA, Animal tests conducted by the Janssen Pharmaceutical research group showed that the analgesic potency of fentanyl was 470 times that of morphine, while alpha-methylfentanyl was 600 times more potent. However the cis(+) form of 3-methyl fentanyl was 6,684 times more potent and the trans(±) form approximately 500 times more potent than morphine in the same tests. Certainly a bit more than you'd want for a mild headache. Research shows that a lot of the deaths associated with fentanyl came as a result of it being used to lace a dose of heroin. They shouldn't be used together (or at all, except with medical supervision). It seems there are even stronger versions in circulation, too. For instance, the cis(+) form of 3-methyl fentanyl (that's how it is shown on the EMCDDA website) was 6,684 times more potent and the trans(±) form (whatever that it) approximately 500 times more potent than morphine in the same tests. Carfentanil is said to be 10,000 times more potent than morphine. Its popularity is not hard to understand, but nor is the trail of death it leaves behind it. Most of the variations that exist have no medical use whatever, apart



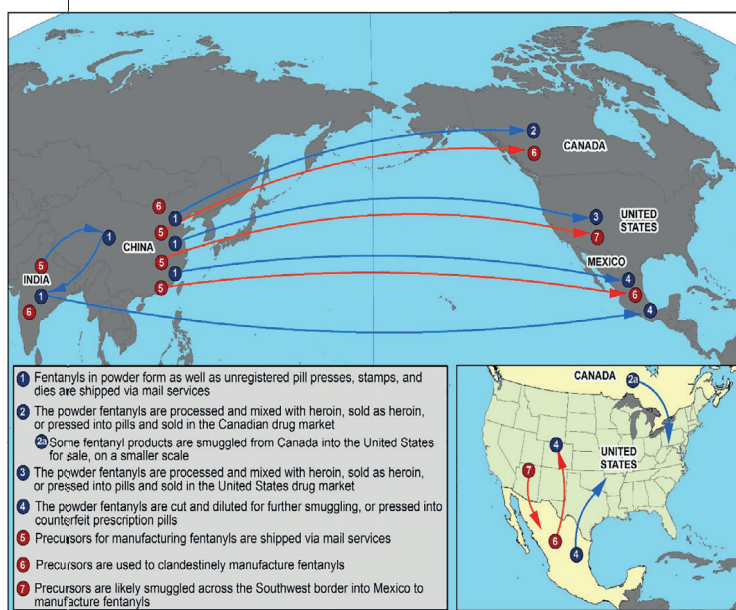
from alfentanil (a surgical anaesthetic), sufentanil (another surgical anaesthetic), and remifentanyl (a short-acting anaesthetic for use only during surgery). If anyone ever offers you carfentanyl, don't take it; it's for immobilising large animals prior to veterinary surgery and probably wouldn't help you unless you're a sick elephant. Most of the fentanyl in (illegal) circulation is made in Belgium or the United States. The White House has now asked Congress for an extra \$800-million to fight addiction and overdoses, which killed more than 100,000 people in the US, according to provisional figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The people behind the manufacture and sale of illicit narcotics are not interested in the death toll, merely in the profit to be made.

According to Dr. Rahul Gupta, the director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, someone in the U.S. dies every five minutes from an overdose, "so the urgency could never be more important at this point in time," he stressed.

Meanwhile, the presence of Xylazine, an animal tranquilizer, in fentanyl products is said to be on the increase. Yahoo News reports that the monthly percentage of deaths from illicitly manufactured fentanyl products, including xylazine spiked from 2.9% in January 2019 to 10.9% in June 2022 in 20 states and Washington, D.C., according to a study. It's being claimed that the United States is now experiencing its worst-ever drug-related crisis. Part of that problem is still heroin, of course, but increasingly it's fentanyl that is part of the problem. In America's case, part of the problem is over-prescription of opioids, usually in good faith but probably unwise. The fact is that if a patient is clearly in pain and a doctor knows that a strong analgesic will help to ease it, it's tempting for a doctor to use what's easily to hand. Doctors are aware of the dangers, but even so more than 52,000 Americans died through drug overdoses in 2015 alone.

The main reason is that the drug is so strong, and people are not used to that. This is especially true, of course, if the drug is bought on the street or over the Internet. As the very useful website, Drugs.com, points out: "Even though an online pill identifier might show that a pill bought on the street looks like a legitimate prescription pill because it has the same colour, shape or imprint code, this is most likely NOT true. Illegal drug manufacturers create fake opioid pills to look exactly like the real ones. The fake pills may also contain fentanyl, or only contain fentanyl. You cannot tell if a pill, powder, nasal spray or injection bought off of the street contains a deadly dose of any drug just by looking at it." I'm inclined to think that anyone buying a drug of any kind from someone hawking them on a street corner or else from an uncertain on-line source must surely expect trouble? My mother used to tell me not to put anything in my mouth if I didn't know where

it came from. It was sound advice then and it still is (despite her tendency to rely on aspirin).



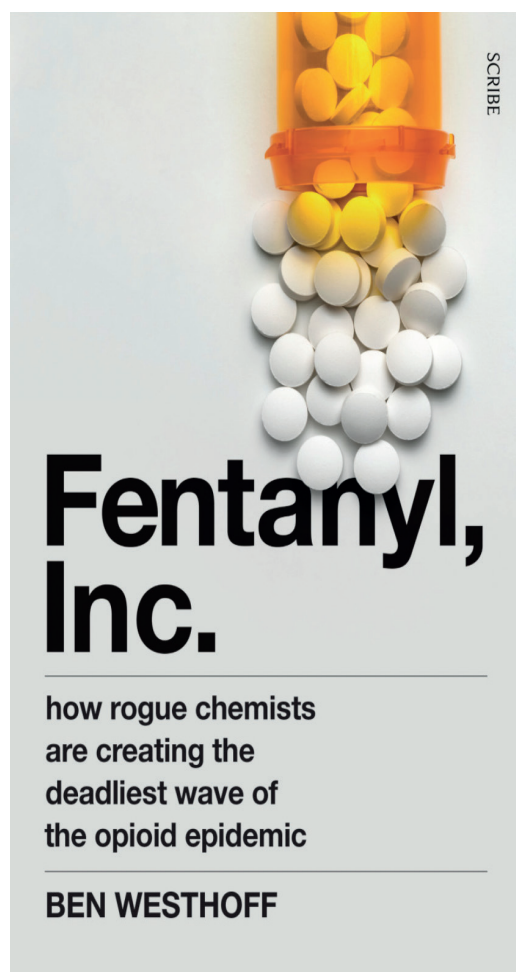
Fentanyl Flow to the United States. Currently, China remains the primary source of fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances trafficked through international mail and express consignment operations environment, as well as the main source for all fentanyl-related substances trafficked into the United States. Seizures of fentanyl sourced from China average less than one kilogram in weight, and often test above 90 percent concentration of pure fentanyl

Opioids were involved in 68,630 overdose deaths in the United States in 2020. That's 74.8% of all drug overdose deaths. In 2020 there were 56,000 deaths in the US linked to synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. That's a 56% rise when compared with 2019 and accounted for 82% of all opioid deaths. Because it's so powerful and cheap for dealers to obtain, it has been being mixed with other drugs, such as heroin, methamphetamine, crack cocaine and other substances, creating what has proved to be a fatal cocktail. A lot of fentanyl entering the United States originates in Mexico, China and – according to the DEA – and increasingly from India. It kills some people by suppressing breathing and heart rate, although probably not if you were prescribed the drug by a medical professional who knows your case and you, and if you follow professional advice. If you are using it as a tablet, a skin patch, tongue spray or whatever you should not switch to another form of consumption. It's dangerous stuff and patients must be aware of the risks. It's probably true to say that any form of chemical "medicine" (drug) that can be bought from a street vendor is almost certainly unsafe and should be avoided.

Joining the family

One website points out that fentanyl is not one drug, but a generic name for a family of synthetic opioids that count as "related drugs". They're all part of a family known as "fentanyl analogues". They include carfentanyl, but it might be best to avoid it if it's offered to you, because, as I mentioned earlier, as it is really a tranquilizer for elephants and other large animals. Goodnight, Jumbo, sleep well. Incidentally, it's legal if used in that context. In the United States, fentanyl has so saturated the domestic narcotics market that "sweeping new public-health

initiatives, including treatment programs and campaigns to educate everyone, from users and medical providers to teachers and police, about the drugs' dangers," will be needed. Unless you have a wakeful elephant to deal with. As the strangely-named "Pain News Network puts it, "there is a vast gulf between pharmaceutical fentanyl and illicitly manufactured fentanyl. The former is a tightly controlled Schedule II prescription medication, approved for use in hospitals and to treat breakthrough cancer pain. The latter is an illegal substance cooked up in illicit labs that is often added to heroin or used to make counterfeit pills, which are then sold on the street or online." You might be best advised to emulate my old mother and stick to aspirin after all. Fentanyl has even inspired a book, called "Fentanyl Inc", written by Ben Westhoff, which looks into the history and development of this "drug of choice" for those seeking a chemical solution to their problems. Westhoff blames the drugs explosion onto Western markets on China. "There is little doubt that China is undercutting its publicity stated goal of stopping the export of dangerous drugs for illicit use," he writes, "That's because the country actively encourages the export of fentanyl and fentanyl precursors—and even synthetic cannabinoids—through its tax code and high-tech subsidies."



Fentanyl was developed in the 1960s, and for very good reasons as a surgical anaesthetic. As Westhoff notes, "Without this compound and its analogue, sufentanil, open-heart surgery would not be possible." No-one is seriously seeking to ban it: it's far too useful. A measure of control, though, is clearly desirable. Needless to say, large amounts of fentanyl and its analogues are being made and sold illegally. Certainly, opioid drugs had been over-subscribed in the United States, although the authorities there have, in the years since, sought to crack down on unscrupulous providers, imposing (or trying to impose) prescription limits, because it looks as if, although prescriptions were issued in good faith, mainly through a genuine attempt to control pain, large volumes of opioids were dispensed without a proper regard to patients' actual medical need.



European Drug Report 2023's presentation by EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel

Europe, while facing a slightly lower risk level, is by no means immune. The European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, has issued a warning about the growing range of narcotics available in Europe, especially fentanyl. Speaking at a press conference following the release of a new EU study, which warns about the growing number of new drugs available in Europe, Johansson sounded a grim warning about the growing risk of poisonings and deaths from what she called "high potency and more novel substances", or drugs with which we're unfamiliar, in other words. Johansson was launching the EU's latest report. Ms Johansson and Alexis Goosdeel, Director of the EMCDDA, warned the audience over the rise in use of fentanyl. Irish broadcaster RTE pointed out that potential consumers of drugs have never before been exposed to such a wide choice. Control is becoming more difficult. Goosdeel told the broadcaster that: "Drugs are everywhere today in Europe, there were never so many drugs and substances available in such a high purity or potency and also at stable or low prices." Fentanyl, needless to say, is right at the heart of it.

As we all found out back in the 1960s, parting young people who are having fun from the chemical substances that are helping to provide it won't be easy. Or even possible. The problem with the sorts of things young people like most is that – by and large – they're illegal or at least under strict control. In the case of Fentanyl they certainly need to be. I remember the 1960s: great music, terrible (but enjoyable) fashions, girls in miniskirts...but I remember it all quite well I think, so I can't have over-indulged too much, can I? Would you pass me that elephant, please?

T. Kingsley Brooks

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DATA BREACH

EUROPE DIPLOMATIC
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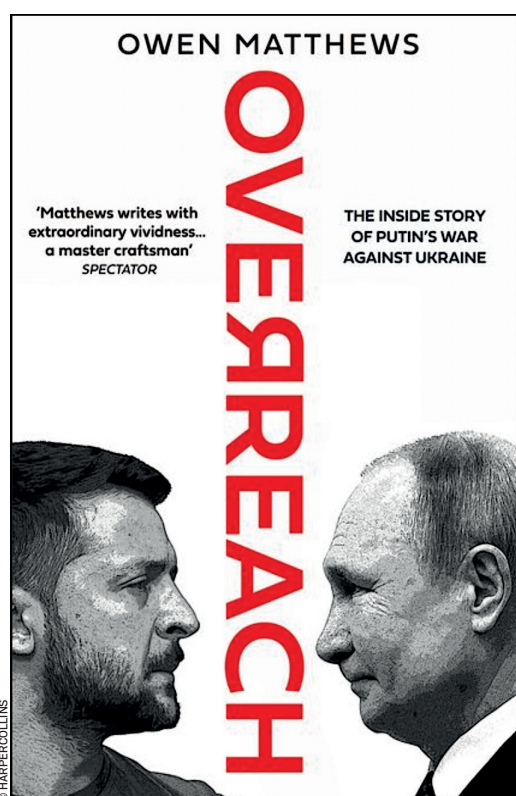
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DATA BREACH

I SPY - BUT
WHAT FOR?

Is espionage profitable?

Russia's various outrages against the West go on and on, even if their motivation is hard to fathom. Today's spies seem to spend their time with fraudulent paper: fake IDs, fake documents, fake letters, and reports. With so much paper involved it seems that it's not so much James Bond as Basildon Bond. Now it has emerged that in February 2023 the UK arrested three Bulgarians on charges of holding false documents, although they had lived in Britain for several years. The Police found forged press cards and special clothing for surveillance operations (does that mean with built-in binoculars or a pocket for sandwiches?), while the suspects were also carrying fake passports and identity documents, not only for the UK but also for France, Italy, Spain, Croatia, Slovenia, Greece, and the Czech Republic. They mixed with ordinary people, exchanging views with their neighbours, one of whom pointed out that it meant they'd be able to inform Putin when there's a special offer on at the local supermarket. Ready-made borscht in a packet? He'll be thrilled.



The BBC report that they had been carrying out surveillance operations not only in London but also in Germany and Montenegro, although at the time of writing, they have yet to enter pleas, but they will soon be returned to court to answer the charges. Why? Well, in his book "Overreach", Owen Matthews quotes the Russian writer Zakhar Prilepin who wrote of his fellow-Russians: "War is our national ideology". He believed the country should be endlessly at war, which is a view

seemingly shared by Vladimir Putin. Zakhar even founded his own political party, devoted to the idea of a belligerent Russia whose destiny it was to purge the world of decadence through war. How such a corrupt country was meant to achieve that is not immediately apparent. Clearly, he was mad. The Russian Duma has passed laws against "foreigners" and these who may have been influenced by foreign ideas (like peace, perhaps?). People stopped talking to each other in public, as the country sank into paranoia. I recommend Matthews' book as one way that may help the rest of the world to understand Putin's insane and warlike Russia. It's very well-written and compelling, if scary. Matthews writes that: "The Ukraine war is the final bloody act of the collapse of the Soviet Union."

Putin has opened the door to twisting the advances in technology to his deadly and seemingly pointless purposes, using means that may at least advance the cause of science. One problem for Russia is the fact that its opportunities for espionage have dwindled. During the first three months of Russia's war in Ukraine, no fewer than 450 diplomats were expelled from embassies, most of them based in Europe. Russia's carelessness in having many of the false identity papers issued from the same office and with similar serial numbers has laid open its technique for setting up spy networks. Russians have become increasingly uncertain about Putin's new fear-filled Russia, with the daughter of a leading oil magnate asking to move tables twice in a Moscow restaurant because she didn't like the look of the people at the next table and feared they could be eavesdropping.

It's getting harder and harder to tell real from computer-generated fake. It's something we're going to have to get used to, possibly without having any certain means to differentiate between the two. In security terms, systems exist to exclude (in theory and probably only partially) serious hackers from government websites. Sadly, the spying technology is advancing fast enough to make it very hard indeed to keep up. Artificial intelligence, once the stuff of science fiction, is now in the realm of espionage. It's not a new thing; ancient enemies spied upon each other, although they didn't always act upon the information their spies uncovered. The Romans often boasted of not needing intelligence services because they could always win on the battlefield without such things. However, shortly before his assassination a list of the conspirators intending his death, along with details of their plot, was thrust into Julius Caesar's hand. He failed to read it, perhaps because of his known over-confidence. If he had, he might have stayed alive, and history would have been different. It would probably also mean that one of the finest works of the Elizabethan theatre



would never have been written, too. After all, the Romans were a formidable force in battle and more people are believed to have died on the end of a Roman gladius short sword (a Spanish design used by the legionaries) than by any other means, prior to the invention of explosives and projectile weapons.

These days, of course, technology makes espionage much easier, if not necessarily more useful from a tactical point of view. According to Matthews, Putin simply got things wrong; he has made the world less safe. “The Ukraine war made the world a far more dangerous place,” Matthews writes, “as Putin and his propagandists brought the idea of battlefield or even strategic use of nuclear weapons from the realm of the theoretical firmly into the realm of the possible.”

Espionage was probably more dangerous back in the days of Sun Tzu, a Chinese military theorist during the 4th century BC. He wrote about it, setting out his theories in a book, “The Art of War”, that is still read today. His advice was: “One who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements.” I don’t think I’d bet on that, although his advice that all combatants should understand themselves and their enemies seems sensible. It is, after all, basic military intelligence. What we are seeing today seems to be as much about embarrassing one’s enemies as actually discovering anything new or useful.

Now it’s emerged that the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been the target of what the BBC called a “serious cyber-security incident”, involving hackers from both Russia and China. They were able to read private emails of staff, so



The Foreign & Commonwealth Office's main building in Whitehall

they should know who exactly had lunch or dinner with whom and perhaps glimpse their holiday photos. Will it overthrow a dynasty? Probably not, on balance. But it reveals a worrying trend, even if we always knew that political rivals like to know what each other are up to. The Russian agency that succeeded to the job of the old KGB, of “James Bond” fame, is, according to the UK government, engaged in an historic global campaign “targeting critical national infrastructure.” The UK government has a long list of Russia’s cyber-operations, such as in the UK energy sector, US aviation and, oddly, a Russian dissident in the UK, using sophisticated hacking and what’s called “spear-phishing”. No, I don’t know what that is, either. Former UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss also sanctioned a Russian defence body for conducting what is called “malicious cyber activity” on a Saudi-owned petrochemical plant, deliberately and dangerously overriding safety override controls. She named a Russian defence ministry subsidiary, the Central Scientific Research Institute of Chemistry and Mechanics (TsNIIKhm), for putting lives at risk.



The Lubyanka building in Moscow is home to the Lubyanka prison, the headquarters of the Border Guard Service, a KGB museum, and a subsection of the FSB

Earlier this year, the UK and US government agencies, together with other allies, exposed historic malign cyber activity by Russia's Federal Security Service (successor to the KGB). The purpose of the cyber campaign became clear when Vladimir Putin launched his unprovoked war against Ukraine. It had been simple preparation, and it seems to be continuing. Putin seems to have set his sights on various intelligence targets, the choice seemingly displaying relatively little intelligence. According to the UK government counter-espionage services: "The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) assess it is almost certain that the FSB's Centre 16 are also known by their hacker group pseudonyms of 'Energetic Bear', 'Berserk Bear' and 'Crouching Yeti', and conducted a malign programme of cyber activity, targeting critical IT systems and national infrastructure in Europe, the Americas and Asia." It strikes outside observers as more like simple nosiness than useful espionage, but Putin's motives have never been very clear to anyone apart from himself.

The hacker groups themselves, despite their silly names, have been indicted by the FBI for targeting the various safety systems at the Wolf Creek nuclear power plant in Kansas. They were behind an attempted attack in 2017 that appears to have had little or no effect. The Foreign Secretary of the time, Liz Truss, said: Russia's targeting of critical national infrastructure is calculated to be dangerous. It shows Putin is prepared to risk lives to sow division and confusion among allies." I don't imagine that his willingness to put lives over here at risk will come as much of a surprise. "We are sending a clear message to the Kremlin," Truss told the media, "By sanctioning those who target people, businesses, and infrastructure. We will not tolerate it. We will continue to work together with our allies to turn the ratchet and starve Putin's war machine of its funding and resources." Of course, Western agencies have also been accused of espionage. In our complicated political world, it's inevitable, and perhaps even necessary, on occasion, even though it's a dirty and unpleasant business.

Stopping the rot?

The FSB's long raft of malign cyber activity includes the targeting of UK energy companies, the sustained and long-running scanning of networks engaged with the US aviation sector, together with other important US targets as well as the UK's energy sector. It even involves posing as part of the Russian Federal Tax Service to facilitate so-called "spear-phishing" attacks against Russian nationals who are not in full and compliant agreement with Putin's apparent wish to take over the world. Russia has also tried to "spear-phish" the press secretary of Mikhail Khordorkovskiy, the exiled Russian businessman, oligarch, and

opposition activist, now residing in London and a long-term critic of Putin. The FSB agents have also been monitoring the website Khordorkovskiy set up to expose corruption within the Russian government. There is, of course, quite a lot; Putin is not an honest man; he's an ambitious crook who will stop at nothing to prevent any form of criticism.



Mikhail Khordorkovskiy

Inevitably, Western nations are reacting to Putin's dreams of empire by trying to turn them into nightmares instead. Current UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, for instance, has announced 25 new sanctions aimed at blocking the supply of foreign military equipment to Putin's forces. The latest list includes businesses and individuals in Turkey, Dubai, Slovakia and Switzerland who have been helping Russia's illegal military operations. The UK is also taking on Iranian and Belarussian support for the Kremlin's war machine. The sanctions list includes three Russian companies that have been importing vital electronic equipment, as well as 22 individuals and businesses. Among those on the sanctions list are two companies based in Turkey – Turkik Union and Azu International – which have been exporting microelectronics to Russia of a kind seen as essential to Russian military aggression in Ukraine. Dubai-based Aeromotus Unmanned Aerial Vehicles Trading LLC is listed as supplying Russia with drones and their components. Slovakian individual Ashot Mkrtychev is named for attempting to set up an arms deal between Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), as well as Anselm Oskar Schmucki, a Swiss national working in the financial services sector, including as Chief of the Moscow Office of DuLac Capital Limited. The UK has also issued sanctions against three Russian companies operating in the electronics sector for helping to procure UK-sanctioned western microelectronics that Russia needs to maintain its aggressive actions against Ukraine.

Cleverly told the media that his "landmark action" will further diminish Russia's ability to pursue its war. From the UK's perspective, this is the biggest-ever sanctions action on military supplies and third countries. When she was Home Secretary, Liz Truss told the media: "Russia's targeting of critical national infrastructure is calculated and dangerous. It shows Putin is prepared to risk lives to sow division and confusion among allies." This may not come as much of a surprise to anyone.



Former Home Secretary and Prime Minister, Liz Truss

Putin and decent behaviour never did go together, somehow. Truss set out the UK's position as Putin continues to seek ways to wage war: "We are sending a clear message to the Kremlin by sanctioning those who target people, businesses and infrastructure. We will not tolerate it. We will continue to work together with our allies to turn the ratchet and starve Putin's war machine of its funding and resources." We should remember, however, that he still has some very wealthy and totally immoral friends.

Russia's access to what sounds like a lot of very dull and uninteresting email exchanges seems to have come from a staff member accidentally downloading a piece of malware. The Foreign Office didn't tell the world straight away, nervous that dangerous information may have been divulged, but it seems that it hadn't been. In fact, the malware in question failed to give the Russian hackers access to anything sensitive. They have, however, been able to access correspondence from ambassadors or diplomats positioned abroad as long as it was not marked as "classified". So, not much danger it seems, although any such breach is embarrassing, of course. It's possible, however, that data on millions of voters may have been revealed, even if that in itself shouldn't be too big a worry. For instance, it's not believed that the release of such data could in any way influence the outcome of an election.

It looks as if Russia wasn't alone in hacking into UK government websites: the Chinese have been at it, too, which means that a lot of UK companies have been compromised. Reports suggest that Chinese hackers have also accessed Japanese websites. In fact, it's now thought that Chinese hacking has enabled Beijing to keep an eye on Tokyo for several years. Former British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab reacted quite quickly to the affair: "The attack was highly likely to enable large-scale espionage, including acquiring personally identifiable information and intellectual property."

At the time of the attack, the UK quickly provided advice and recommended actions to those affected and Microsoft said that in just a few months some 92% of customers had successfully installed patches against the vulnerability. A lot of research is currently going into how best to protect satellite systems from hackers with evil intent. Five teams of hackers were encouraged to make a concerted attempt to gain access to a satellite with the aim of tightening up security. It's serious stuff: it's known that China is developing capabilities to "deny, exploit or hijack" enemy satellites, according to a classified intelligence report among the dozens leaked this spring by an Air guardsman and reviewed by the Financial Times. The U.S. military also uses data from satellites to guide many of their munitions, to position mobile troops and to gather intelligence.



These 3 teams just hacked a US Air Force satellite in space. Hack-A-Sat 4 winning team 'mHACKeroni' displays their banner and shows off their award

Feeling hacked off?

Russia seems very keen to find ways to take over networks and to control various communications. It infiltrated an American satellite system and took control of some 45,000 modems as soon as it launched its invasion of Ukraine. The company involved says it still doesn't know how it was done, but it expected them to come back for more. Now the people behind a competition, organised by the telecommunications company Viasat, seeks to find out who are the best hackers and how they achieve their ends. The competition is called "Hack-a-Sat", of course.

The idea is to tap the brains of those who really have the skills required. It's going on all the time, according to the AP news service. Suspected state-backed Chinese hackers used a security hole in a popular email security appliance to break into the networks of hundreds of public and private sector organizations globally, nearly a third of them government agencies, including foreign ministries, according to the cybersecurity firm Mandiant. "This is the broadest cyber espionage campaign known to be conducted by a China-nexus threat actor since the mass exploitation of Microsoft Exchange in early 2021," said Charles Carmakal, Mandiant's chief technical officer. Mariusz Kamiński, Minister of the Interior and Administration of Poland, told the media that the ABW (ISA – Internal Security Agency) together with the police identified and detained two Russians who were distributing propaganda materials on behalf of the Wagner Group in Kraków and Warsaw. It's not the only instance of

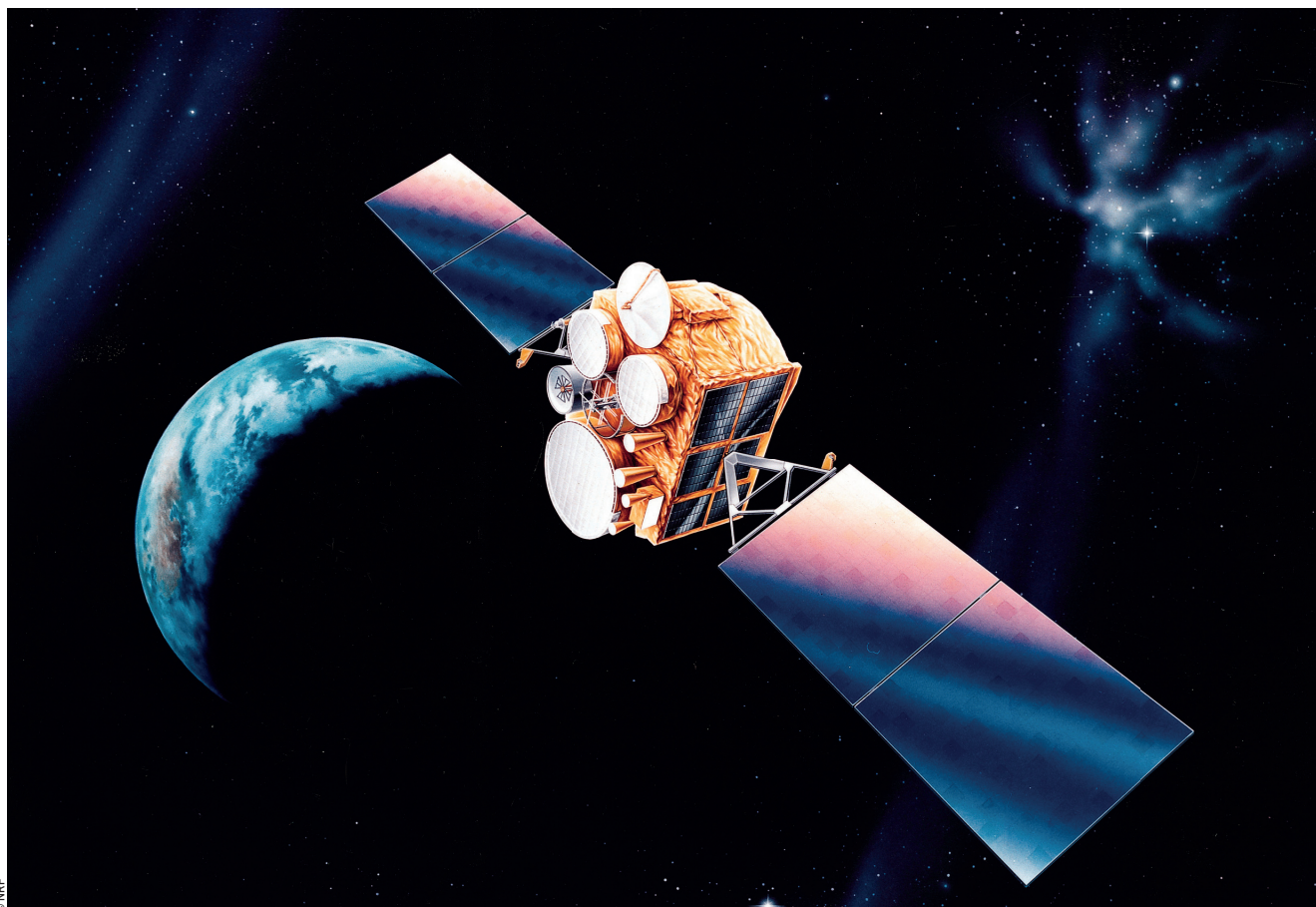


Illustration of the Defense Satellite Communications System that can be targeted by Russian hackers

pro-Russian activities; in June a Russian hockey player was arrested in Poland for spying and later a Belarussian was also held for conducting acts of espionage on Russia's behalf.



James Sullivan, Director of Cyber Research at the Royal United Services Institute

The UK has similarly come under attack. It was reported in August that a cyber attack potentially affecting millions of British voters had been detected and that it could be part of what it called "a major espionage operation", in

which hackers had accessed UK voting registers. The attack had been made in August 2021 but wasn't discovered until October 2022 (which is not very reassuring for those of us who live in the UK). It means the hackers could have accessed the names and addresses of anyone who was registered to vote in the UK between 2014 and 2022, including those registered to vote overseas. James Sullivan, the Director of Cyber Research at the Royal United Services Institute, said that in view of the way in which the attack took place over such a long period and that the information thus garnered was not financially sensitive suggests it was perpetrated by a state actor.

According to The Times newspaper, the ten-month long inquiry into the hack showed evidence of Russian involvement. Sullivan told the "I" newspaper: "All states spy and this seems like a major espionage operation, and that impacts on the mere fact that they are interested in our electoral processes, they are willing to interfere – they are sitting in this network looking for other opportunities to move laterally into other networks." Why any country, however hostile, would think it worthwhile to set up such an elaborate network remains a bit of a puzzle. Sullivan believes it's intended to shake public confidence, because of the way that such information can assist in criminal activity. He believes it could facilitate fraudulent contacts by people who apparently know a lot about whoever they're calling and that this could aid in the pursuit of crime. If somebody telephones you and seems to know a lot about your immediate circumstances, you may be more inclined to reveal personal data or to buy from that person. Anything that shakes public confidence in their government's ability

to deter criminality serves the interests of that country's enemies. As Sullivan explained: "the more information you know about somebody, the more confidence you could get from that person." The Electoral Commission has been accused of waiting too long before admitting the hack. Its excuses, such as "having to go through the right procedures" look a bit limp. The identity of the hackers is not currently known, although the finger of suspicion points towards Moscow.

What may puzzle many in the UK is why a British Embassy security guard in Berlin, David Smith, developed such a profound hatred for his own country that he volunteered to spy for Russia, having developed an enormous admiration for Putin. At his trial at the Old Bailey, it was alleged that he received substantial amounts of money from Russia, which he has always denied, claiming it was a form of "revenge" against his employer, whom he did not like. Certainly, he admired Putin, publicly stating his hatred for NATO, the EU, Britain and the United States and having posters of Putin in his locker, one of them showing a cartoon drawing of Putin, armed with a bayonet, dragging Angela Merkel by the hair. He was jailed for thirteen years. It seems possible that his admiration for Putin's Russia had more to do with Smith's Ukrainian wife deserting him than the region's politics. His flat contained a Russian flag and also Second World War NAZI uniforms. A sting operation by British security revealed that he had stored photographs of staff and security measures at the British embassy with the aim of passing them on to Russia. According to The Guardian newspaper: "A draft letter addressed to a military attaché at the Russian embassy, dated May 2020, was also found in which Smith appeared to offer Moscow a book classified as 'sensitive' while requesting anonymity, the court heard." His 13 year prison sentence was inevitable.



The UK Embassy, Berlin, Germany

There has been considerable criticism of the UK's lax attitude towards Moscow's assets, with one of them having used the government's scheme aimed at helping Ukrainians to set up home – luxuriously, in this case – in the British capital. Posing as a Ukrainian businessman, the man – who has not been named so far – is suspected by the FBI of being an agent for Russia's FSB spy network. He fled to London from Ukraine early in February last year and his family has since been able to join him. It's becoming clearer that Russian spy networks have been able to utilise UK banking services to launder dirty money. The house being used by the FSB agent also provides a home for other pro-FSB agents (one of whom denies knowing him at all). The UK government is aware of the dirty dealings and the chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Conservative Alicia Kearns has said: "The Home Office should by now have completed an investigation into the suspected FSB agent and taken action." She added: "Europe is at war financed by Russian kleptocrats. If not now, then when are we going to clear out 'Londongrad'?"



The FSB is also using infiltration agents like this man arrested in Ukraine for leaking the positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to the Russians and recruiting new informants

The suspected FSB agent is a Ukrainian businessman who made his fortune through various Russia-based businesses. He is suspected of large-scale financial crimes. Since the start of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, the UK points out that it has sanctioned more than 1,600 entities and individuals, including 29 banks with assets worth £1-trillion (£1.16-trillion), 129 oligarchs with a combined net worth of more than £145-billion (£168.5-billion) and more than £20-billion (£23.24-billion) in UK-Russia trade.

It's very clear that Russia still sees espionage as a legitimate form of warfare, along with financial criminality. It's quite probable that other countries hold similar attitudes. "It is only the enlightened ruler and the wise general who will use the highest intelligence of the army for the purposes of spying, and thereby they achieve great results," wrote Sun Tzu, who lived during the Eastern Zhou period of 771 to 256 BCE. Some things take a very long time to change, if they ever do.

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The rise of China's electric vehicle industry
and its bold marketing campaign

DRIVING RIVALS OFF THE ROAD

China's electric vehicle industry has the power to go all the way. Can anyone catch them?

“Social wealth is created by the worker, the peasant, and the educated,” wrote Mao Zedong back in the days of his struggle for power; a struggle which, of course, he won. In his case, despite his famous quote, power didn’t really come, as he had proposed, “from the barrel of a gun”, but from the ingenuity of his people, and a very ingenious lot they were back then and still are, too. Today’s Chinese leaders, though, should remain conscious of another of the many salient points Mao made: “There is a serious tendency towards capitalism among the well-to-do peasants”, he warned. Chinese ingenuity may help to make China’s people rich, but it could also turn them into capitalists. Perish the thought! Mao would not have liked that. Probably. He would certainly have spared a smile, though, for the global 2022 Auto Express Affordable Electric Car of the Year prize being awarded to Chinese-owned MG for its ZS EV, one of many Chinese designed and manufactured electric vehicles that are taking on the world and winning. MG used to be, famously, a British manufacturer, the letters standing for “Morris Garages” once upon a distant time. They might as well stand for “Maoism gains” today. I owned an MG car once and liked it, long before it became the pride of Beijing although my local garage loved the string of repairs it required. The manufacturer’s latest incarnation, however, as a maker of electric-powered vehicles, would seem to be enjoying considerable success globally.



The MG Cyberster

Apart from MG there are quite a number of other companies that have entered the automotive market with competitive products that are drawing praise from around the world. Electric vehicles are gaining a lot of attention, especially since cutting their prices to overcome buyer resistance (no-one buys things that seem to be overpriced because they’re more than the budget can bear, or simply ‘too dear’). According to Britain’s Daily Telegraph newspaper: “Figures from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) revealed an 88pc year-on-year increase in the sale of battery-powered vehicles last month, as deliveries hit 23,000.” Another point in their favour across Europe is that the former Communist bloc countries don’t share the aversion to China that still affects some sales in the West. Their attitude towards China is “more pragmatic”, in the words of the Director of the Institute of European Studies of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Feng Zhongping. Eastern and Central European countries especially have been displaying a more open approach, none more so than Hungary. Chinese investment in Europe overall has shown a big increase, but none more so than among former Eastern bloc countries.



An internet anti-Chinese car campaign by NoChinesecars.com which claims that even though MG was founded in Great Britain, the brand is no longer British and now belongs to the State-owned Chinese car manufacturer SAIC Motor Corporation Limited

The EU’s interest in greener solutions for travel is an obvious boost for battery power and it has led to China’s direct investments in former Eastern Bloc countries, which rose by 148%, year-on-year, in the first quarter of 2023. Even so, China’s overall investments in the EU as a whole rose by 21% to just over €10-billion, mainly focused on energy, vehicles, machinery, and plant. Now Europe’s long-held lead in producing private vehicles is shrinking fast. Europe’s battle to stay on top hasn’t been helped by the UK government failing to meet its target of buying “ultra-low emission” vehicles for its non-military “white fleet” of civilian vehicles. It was supposed to comprise battery and rechargeable cars, vans, and trucks, but only one electric vehicle in 39 was built in the UK, despite government promises to source its new vehicles from UK manufacturers, wherever possible. The UK’s inability to meet the Ministry’s demand may be partly due to the fact that the UK government diverted £136-million (£157.43 million) away from its planned electric vehicle supply chain towards Britain’s main nuclear reactor project, Sizewell C. Out of the project’s supposed budget of £191-million (£221-million), only £7-million (£8.1-million) was spent on electric vehicle development, with 76% of the total going to help build Britain’s first new nuclear power station for 30 years. Splitting the atom, it seems, involves splitting the funding, too, as well as parts of the government.

According to the German research body, the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), Europe is now the top destination for China’s exports of EVs, and not because people are clamouring to buy a Chinese product. The real reason is that Europe’s car-makers are increasingly moving production to China. China has become (and is increasingly doing so) the main manufacturer for Europe, producing quality vehicles at prices that European manufacturers cannot match. That is, one imagines, why more than 50% of the 850,000 electric vehicles Europe imported in 2022 came from China. In the race to make more of the world’s electric passenger vehicles, China has a clear lead. By 2025, it’s been estimated, some 13% of China’s road-going vehicles are likely to be fully electric or at least hybrid.



Britain's main nuclear reactor project, Sizewell C

Who pays the piper?



The Nio EP9 is a battery-powered, two-seat sports car manufactured by Chinese electric car company Nio



The founder of NIO, William Li ringing the ceremonial bell as NIO's stock begins trading on the New York Stock Exchange, is called "The Godfather of Chinese electric car industry" and the "Elon Musk of China". He has invested in more than 30 companies in the transportation sector

Beijing has now brought to an end its programme of subsidies that had been in place for a decade to aid its electric vehicle industry, but Beijing still demanded that the firms compete with one another on a fair basis, obliging them to sign a pledge to that effect. The government in Beijing has backed the manufacturers with a range of tax breaks, pouring some 152-billion yuan (€19.10-billion) into allowances for the industry, leading to falls in the retail price of up to 15% in some cases. Of course, European carmakers are also producing EV cars and vans, but they tend to be more expensive than their Chinese equivalents. Don't believe that a switch to EVs will eliminate all the dust and other pollutants associated with driving: it won't. Quite apart from exhaust fumes, pollution also comes from tiny particles of brake dust, tyre and road surface cast-offs released by wear and tear, and in that regard, electric cars are like traditional petrol or diesel ones, although pollution from brake dust is much lower because of the ways in which EVs work. They use regenerative braking to recharge their batteries. When you take your foot off the accelerator, the electric motor or motors act as generators, which are of course, turned by the road wheels. The generator turns mechanical energy into electrical energy and in doing so, slows the vehicle down. You'll find that you don't need to use the brakes as much, especially in stop-start city driving.

Stellantis, a group mainly linked on-line with the common purpose of facilitating easier electric charging and other green links to transport, describes itself as being "a constellation of 14 iconic automotive brands and two mobility arms that are about more than transportation: they're about moving people and making connections, claiming that "they're about moving people

and making connections”. Right now, though, the group’s CEO, Carlos Tavares says that the European auto industry “is at a crossroads in competition with its Chinese rivals. If politicians do not find an answer to the push into Europe by China’s automakers, there will be a ‘terrible fight’,” he told the leading German auto magazine, *Automobilwoche*. The industry has set itself a target of being “climate neutral”, according to publisher and Editor-in-Chief Burkhard Riering. It sounds like a splendid idea, but like most great leaps forward, it comes with a price tag and it’s not very clear who will be asked to pay it (nor exactly how much it’s likely to cost). Regulations in Europe make vehicles produced here more expensive by about 40%, when compared with those produced in China. That may be one reason why China is already the second largest automobile exporter in the world and likely to take over the top spot by the end of 2023. What can I write except “小心驾驶”? It means drive carefully, I’m informed, but please don’t ask me how to pronounce it. I get very confused over this. As it is, however, Chinese companies are expanding into Europe, aiding their advance with the built-in complexity. It’s interesting to use the quotes that are mentioned in Chinese, however confused were non-Chinese readers.



Stellantis group CEO Carlos Tavares

The Stellantis group CEO Carlos Tavares has identified the disagreement over the meanings of China’s automobile makers and Europe’s commentators. The European vehicle industry has talked about China’s shrinking production capacity, with the purchasing power of Europe regarding Chinese-made car products noticeably shrinking. Europe’s automobile industry could be obliged to reduce its production output considerably, while the purchasing power of European customers has also been contracting. Carlos Tavares has predicted a nasty conflict, with Europe’s auto industry being obliged to

fight China over Chinese exports heading this way. (Please don’t ask me to hold their coats during the fisticuffs). It’s being predicted that China is likely to dominate the UK market for petrol and diesel vehicles with Chinese electric vehicles outselling their UK equivalents and even facing possible quotas for zero emission vehicle sales.



In the middle of October, Stellantis, the third-largest automaker in the world by revenue, will debut its first electric vehicle. According to Citroen, the new e-C3 model would be able to “fast charge” in 57 minutes and have a 320-kilometer range. Pre-bookings could be possible, according to the business, by the end of this year, with deliveries beginning in the second quarter of 2024

That may not be the worst things they’ll face, either. Some UK ministers have claimed that Chinese-built electric cars will allow Beijing to spy on British citizens. UK “experts” claim the Chinese vehicles could allow China to gather vast quantities of data, such as location of the car user, as well as audio and video recordings. (How about: “I’m parked outside the pub; I’ll stop at the supermarket on the way home”?) Fascinating in most cases, I’m sure! However, according to *The Sunday Telegraph*, a senior government source told the newspaper: “If it is manufactured in a country like China, how certain can you be that it won’t be a vehicle for collecting intel and data?” (if it’s anything like what I’ve suggested I don’t think we have much to fear). If you have electric vehicles manufactured by countries who are already using technology to spy, why would they not do the same here?” Ministers and officials have admitted feeling nervous about possible surveillance and interference. You may think you can choose more traditionally-powered vehicles instead, but they may not remain available for very long. What’s more, there are fears in UK circles that – according to sources close to the heart of the UK government – China’s new petrol and diesel vehicles are also likely to dominate the British market. The concern is so great, it seems, that there has been talk of watering down Britain’s proposed laws on low emissions; we’re not as clean as they are, it seems. Some have even expressed a fear that Britain’s motor industry could be driven to the point of extinction. Achieving “net zero” emissions was never going to be easy but the idea was never aimed at closing down the UK’s car industry and handing the business in its entirety to China.

It’s well-known that China leads the field in terms of manufacturing and fitting cellular modules that can not only relay data but can even be used to interfere with the way a vehicle runs, causing it to have accidents. Imagine the scene: “I’m sorry officer, but it wasn’t me. The car was being steered by a Chinese chap in Beijing”.



Workers operating a power battery production line in Hefei, China

Progress accelerates

The growth in sales of Chinese electric vehicles is causing concern in Germany, whose own automotive industry is now under pressure. The sales figures for German vehicles looked quite promising in early 2022, with higher profits from increased revenue, but increasing inflation and the desired transition to electric power is proving problematic. German order books are getting thinner, although the figures for the first part of 2023 looked promising for some of the big-name manufacturers, all with increased turnover and a boost to profits. What's more, however, interest in electric-powered vehicles has been declining in Germany. China, however, has a clear lead in the electric vehicle race: across the world China manufactures every second electric vehicle current in use, comfortably overtaking the previous world leader, Tesla.

It's worth taking a look at China's giant car manufacturing body, BYD. Headquartered in Shaanxi province it's a publicly listed company which claims its initials in English stand for "Build Your Dreams", which is, I suspect, a mere coincidence, although I'd be happy to hear a counter-argument. It was set up in 2003 and apart from cars it also makes buses, trucks, other commercial vehicles and rechargeable batteries, too. It only stopped producing internal combustion engines in March 2022. BYD (whatever it really stands for) is wiping the floor with VW in China, selling almost 20 times as many vehicles

there. As a result, VW has formed a partnership with another Chinese carmaker start-up, Xpeng. It's proving more difficult to launch in the UK because it lacks a provision (briefly, I imagine) for positioning the steering wheel on the right. It should do well in the United States and the rest of Europe, though. According to the New York Times, "Exports from China, which has the world's second-largest economy after the United States, have now declined for three months in a row while imports have fallen for five consecutive months." That should be a concern for any economy, even one as vast as China's.



BYD's Han EV

"The numbers reflect declining demand for Chinese-made products, falling domestic demand, a real estate crisis and geopolitical tensions, including the war in Ukraine," writes The Times. According to the NYT: "Officials in Beijing have been trying to foster a rebound from an economic slump after nearly three years of pandemic restrictions. After China ended its lockdowns last December, many expected the economy to bounce back, but recovery has been halting." Indeed, domestic demand has been



BYD Headquarters in Shenzhen, China. BYD has more than 30 industrial parks across 6 continents

falling, as has the population size (although it's still huge, of course). It was Mao, of course, who wrote: "The people and the people alone are the motive force in the making of world history." Well, he should know. The International Business Times has warned that China has become "the most important bearish factor weighing on oil prices recently, with July export-import data showing the Asian country's economy is struggling to outgrow its post-COVID woes". Furthermore, "Overseas exports of Chinese goods recorded the worst month-on-month decline since February 2020 last month, down 14.5% in dollar terms, with weak consumer spending and investment growth aggravating the outlook." As IBT reports: "China's population is likely to fall below 800 million by the end of the century, and this trend could spell trouble for the country's economic future. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the population dropped to 1.411 billion in 2022, down some 850,000 people from 2021. That is the first reduction in population numbers since 1961. That decline proved temporary and was reversed, but the current situation is different, expected to "deepen for the foreseeable future," according to a report from the research and consultancy firm, Terry Group.

All of this is, of course, good news for the Chinese economy. Its current direction is not. China's exports fell by 14.5% in July, its fastest drop since February 2020. In June it also fell, but only by 12.4%. China is not to blame for this drop, however, apparently; it's the global decline in demand that lies behind it. Beijing needn't panic just yet; China's total trade surplus was US\$80.6 billion (€73.27-billion) in July compared to US\$70.62 billion (€64.2-billion) in June, so it's not about to go under any time soon, although there's no room for complacency, which is why Beijing is trying to boost domestic demand.

Global Motor Vehicle Sales By Country

China is the world's leading vehicle sales country. As of 2021, China's motor vehicle sales were 26.3 million units, accounting for 32.34% of global sales. The top five countries account for 65.07% of it. Total global vehicle sales are expected to reach 81.2 million units in 2021.

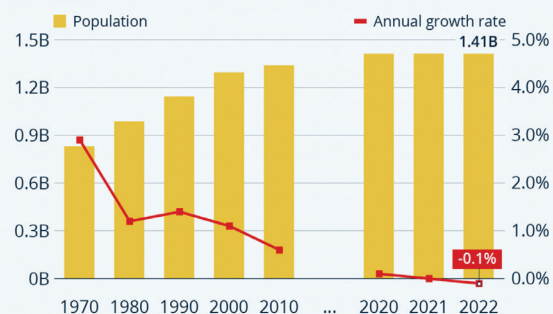
*(in units)

China	26,274,820	Malaysia	508,911
USA	15,408,565	South Africa	464,493
Japan	4,448,340	Belgium	462,536
India	3,759,398	Taiwan	422,000
Germany	2,973,319	Chile	415,582
France	2,142,284	Netherlands	405,061
Brazil	2,119,851	Argentina	370,283
United Kingdom	2,044,091	Sweden	343,880
Russia	1,741,965	Austria	306,176
South Korea	1,734,581	Israel	306,012
Canada	1,704,850	Philippines	286,734
Italy	1,664,483	Egypt	277,805
Australia	1,049,831	Switzerland	272,249
Mexico	1,046,705	Vietnam	260,850
Spain	1,034,063	Pakistan	237,424
Indonesia	887,205	Czech Republic	236,221
Türkiye	772,722	Colombia	229,493
Thailand	748,580	Denmark	221,937
Saudi Arabia	556,559	Norway	217,572
Poland	554,613	UAE	188,844

SOURCE: International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers RankingRoyals
www.rankingroyals.com

Chinese Population Shrinks After Decades of Growth

Total population and annual population growth rate in China*



* Excluding Hong Kong & Macau, at year-end
Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China



statista

According to the South China Morning Post, it's not all going swimmingly, however: "Exports to the European Union, meanwhile, declined by 20.62 per cent. year on year, while shipments to the United States dropped for the 12th consecutive month after falling by 23.12 per cent in July." Mao famously described the United States, of course, as "the most respected enemy", although that was back in the 1940s. Things have changed as consumerism takes control, and China certainly needs to have profitable trade with the United States, as it does with the European Union. Follow the money! Mao and President Richard Nixon got on better than either of them had expected when they finally met in 1972, shaking hands for a full minute, according to observers. It was described at the time as "the week that changed the world". Was it for the better? You decide!

Fighting a (trade) war in a car showroom

According to the analysts at Capital Economics, quoted in the South China Morning Post, "Chinese exports contracted in July by the greatest percentage since the start of the pandemic. But the recent declines mostly reflect lower prices rather than volumes, which are still well above their pre-pandemic trend." It seems likely that the problems will have to be addressed in the months ahead, but that shouldn't dent China's growing lead in the manufacture of battery-powered vehicles. China has to be fully aware, naturally, of certain doubts about its probity in military issues: India, for instance, has banned its own domestic manufacturers of

military drones from using components acquired from China, fearing security risks. India doesn't fancy Chinese drones overseeing its highways. Even so, the current trend must be worrying Beijing, with the overall population expected to drop to below 800-million by the end of this century, with the current trend expected to continue and to deepen further, which would place a drag on economic growth.



The Mercedes 2022 EQS



The BMW i4

Marvie Basilan, writing in Politics World, points out that the country's "stunning" economic ascent, as she puts it, is down to China's demographics, so the current decline in population numbers is likely to have consequences. China's National Bureau of Statistics admits that last year, the country saw its largest drop in population since 1961. The decline back then was reversed but that is not expected to happen this time, with some experts predicting a continuing fall. The current situation is thought to have been caused by the country's "one-child policy", which ended in 2015. It will take years for that situation to correct itself. The UN believes that with the Chinese population ageing fast, by 2050 China will have twice as many old people as children, while it will have lost an average of 12-million working-age adults by the same time. In fact, it has been suggested by economic experts the Terry Group that: "China's deteriorating demographics pose formidable obstacles to its continued economic rise," while Beijing is taking policy decisions aimed at helping young people to fall in love and have children, although the results (if there are any) are unlikely to appear on the production lines for a little while yet. It's clear that China is aware of its problem, although it seems a little uncertain at present as to how best to address it. It's clear that China needs more people, but that's not the sort of

shortfall that can be quickly put right. The Chief Economist for Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa at the Mastercard Economics Institute, David Mann, told CNBC's "Squark Box" programme that there is an extra challenge: an insufficiency of people to meet production targets.

Getting back to the issue of battery-powered electric vehicles, however, Deutsche Welle has pointed out that Germany has now fallen far behind China in terms of automotive output. Order books are looking thinner, it warned, and rising inflation continues to eat into consumer purchasing power.

As mentioned earlier, the figures for such companies as Volkswagen, Mercedes Benz and BMW for the first half of 2023 looked promising enough, with increased revenues and higher profits, but there's not much optimism for the rest of the year and into the slightly longer-term future. Inflation and rising interest rates are having an effect. According to Hildegard Müller, President of the German Association of the Automotive Industry, sales remain more than 20% lower than they were before the pandemic struck. When it comes to electrically-powered vehicles, however, China has a clear lead. As I mentioned earlier, currently every other electric vehicle across the world is being driven in China. In Germany, demand for battery-powered vehicles is declining, falling to only 60% of the previous year's volumes. Indeed, China has been described as "overtaking in the fast lane" when in competition with Germany's quality brands. The plain fact is that Chinese manufacturers now include such digital systems as advanced assistance and infotainment systems. China's roads are notoriously congested, which makes having something to listen to very important. You don't hear much moaning about quality, either: China's manufacturers can take on all-comers, it seems. And beat them. That would seem to be why Chinese carmakers will continue to pile pressure on their European equivalents. That is, as long as the population figures hold up.

As it is, China's demographics problems have been self-inflicted, with policies such as its rigid household registration scheme, which threatens to leave rural migrants to the cities in permanent poverty. China is also seeing a slowdown in economic growth. Some Western observers blame that the Chinese economy has seen a fall in productivity. Beijing should encourage the private sector to grow, they argue, but it's by no means certain that it will happen. As it is, China is said to have reached its peak population size and numbers are now dropping. India is taking over, predicted to have a population 2.9-million larger than China's very shortly. But they don't build electric cars, it seems. Not yet, anyway.

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European Union Foreign Affairs Spouses Associations

EUFASA
AISBL

**EUROPEAN
DIPLOMACY
IN THE 21ST
CENTURY**

**A family-centric
approach**

European countries have arguably the most developed social security systems in the world, and social rights are carefully defined and protected by EU treaties.

Equal opportunities and access to the labour market for all citizens, fair working conditions, social protection and inclusion for the most vulnerable are just some of the rights established. Despite the common values, their maintenance and improvement is in most cases the responsibility of individual Member States.

Similarly, diplomatic families are a fairly small group within the population, but they also need attention and special protection. The guardians of the welfare of these families are usually the family departments of the foreign ministries (if they exist) and, at EU level, the EU Family Office of the EEAS.

In addition, the European Union Foreign Affairs Spouses, Partners and Families Association (EUFASA), an international non-profit association (AISBL) under Belgian law, is a network of 22 independent national associations that for almost 40 years has sought to bring together the associations of diplomats' spouses in Europe and to support their concerns and rights at a unified level. EUFASA's activities began in 1985 when the Italian spouses' association ACDMAE organised the first symposium in Rome.

I recently had a very interesting meeting with Ms. Ginette KELA, Family Officer at the European External Action Service (EEAS) and responsible for family policy, and Mrs. Carolina Gallardo Di Girolamo, wife of an EU Ambassador, member of the European Union Family Network (EUFN) and participant in EUFASA conferences.



Carolina Gallardo Di Girolamo - EU Delegation Madagascar

Both stressed the need for more action and support as the Foreign Service is under increasing pressure at both national and EU level. Diplomats are a narrow group of people who rarely receive serious support at trade union level, as they are mostly seen as a privileged group with a luxurious life full of benefits. However, the reality is far from that and the stereotypes that have been spread over time are not favourable to this category of civil servants.

However, we are in the 21st century, where we have long left behind the 'traditional' family model, where the man has to take care of the family and the woman is the one who takes care of the children and the household. The younger generations want equality, a career and an independent life, which is often no longer possible when couples go on diplomatic missions abroad. Diplomatic partners need to be protected, integrated and supported to maintain their professional relevance abroad.

Pension contributions and future earnings are an important factor when considering a foreign posting. The minimum number of years of contributions required to get pension rights varies widely from country to country (from one year to 35 years in Europe), but clearly, diplomatic partners' social insurance schemes are regularly interrupted by their assignments abroad, so that the minimum contribution level is usually not reached. The international mobility experienced by most diplomats' spouses leads to long-term interruptions in their careers and years of work, and their pension rights will also suffer, unless otherwise provided for.



The meeting of the European Union Family Association in Madrid (EUFASA)

According to a survey conducted by EUFASA, the vast majority of diplomatic partners are highly qualified professionals with at least a bachelor's degree. The same survey also found that most diplomatic partners want to pursue their careers and be financially independent of foreign ministry officials. The opportunity to work is one of the most important desires expressed when moving abroad. A job during a posting is an important part of their identity, and having their own income is important for their sense of independence and security.

However, this can only be achieved if there are bilateral agreements allowing for a working status. Currently, the EU has only two such bilateral agreements, with Honduras and New Zealand.

Within the EU, spouses can work if they are EU citizens, but they will most likely have to give up their diplomatic status if they are hired. All this makes the situation quite complicated, and today there are more and more diplomats who do not want to move or go abroad unaccompanied. Women and men do not want to be perceived as just 'tag-along spouses', which is mostly meant pejoratively, and are increasingly concerned about their future. They want to continue to contribute to society and maintain their independence.

Today, there are significantly more women in the diplomatic service, so the number of male diplomatic spouses is increasing, although men are even less willing to give up their independence and take on the role of supporting partner.



ESCP Business School, London Campus

Another EUFASA survey found that 40 per cent of diplomats would leave the foreign office if their work negatively affected their family, with more men confirming that their wives would do so. A study of the German Foreign Service found that the frequent moves diplomats face take a higher toll on the private lives of female diplomats, who are more likely to remain single or get divorced than their male counterparts.

Only a very small proportion of diplomatic partners reported having been assisted by their foreign ministry in finding work during the assignment. Some foreign ministries give priority to local employment of diplomatic partners in embassies or consulates, but usually these jobs are below the level of their academic training and tend to be poorly paid.

One model that is gaining momentum these days is the 'Dual Career' model, where both partners consider the possibility of pursuing a career and engaging in activities they find meaningful and fulfilling while living a diplomatic life. In some cases they are both diplomats (in the same country or in another), in other cases the spouse has managed to secure a job abroad (which is increasingly possible, especially after the pandemic years). The interest in mobile careers and jobs that can be done from anywhere in the world seems to be in vogue today, and for spouses of diplomats this is like a breath of fresh air and a real opportunity for a different and much better professional reality.

Recently, the British Foreign Office collaborated with ESCP Business School London, King's College London, Loughborough University and Aarhus University on a recent study that examined how dual-career diplomatic couples manage the difficulties of frequent relocation. The study shed light on how gender roles and career identities are expressed, challenged and resolved within the institutional framework.

The study concluded that equality is a crucial value and objective for dual-career diplomatic couples, based on interviews with 27 couples where one partner is a British diplomat. The study found that the most desirable situation is when both partners are actively employed.

Some countries have recognised the toll that this nomadic diplomatic life takes on all involved and have taken effective measures to minimise the challenges and impact on their lifestyle. In very few cases, they successfully offer some kind of protection and support (mostly in Scandinavian countries). The Belgian Diplomatic Family Association (BeFamily) has contacted a number of legal experts on Belgian pension law to provide a comprehensive overview of the options available for the pension rights of diplomats and their partners under the Belgian legal system. Monitoring the developments of this case and its possible outcome would be interesting, since it concerns one of Europe's foreign ministries that does not offer any kind of pension contribution to diplomatic spouses.

In most cases today, diplomats still have full control over the partnership-related remuneration they receive in their own names and bank accounts. For this reason, the total financial dependence on the MFA official and the lack of pension entitlements have been one of the main concerns of partners in recent decades.

The EUFASA survey found that most diplomatic partners cited finding a job abroad and losing pension and social security rights as some of the most worrying aspects of diplomatic life abroad. Experience from European countries shows that progress in introducing pension schemes for diplomatic partners is often a difficult and lengthy process that depends on political will or requires unanimous agreement of member states at the EU level.

Besides paying attention to work permit regulations or pension entitlements, health insurance and psychological counselling are also important, as Ms. Kela said at our meeting.

The Family Office she heads, which is responsible for more than 5,000 EU staff (including EEAS



staff in Brussels and in Delegations, as well as EU Commission staff in Delegations), tries to provide solutions and support for diplomatic families. It now offers a comprehensive guide for spouses and partners. Same-sex partners are treated by the EU institutions as fully equal to married couples and enjoy the same rights and benefits (if married or registered as a stable non-marital partnership if marriage is not possible).

In addition, a psychologist is available for counselling and there are officers on duty around the clock in all EU Delegations. The EEAS Family Office is relatively new (since 2020), but it aims to improve the lives of diplomatic families.

Every spring, before the diplomatic rotation, training and seminars are offered so that families and spouses are better prepared and have realistic expectations of their lives when they are posted. Ms Kela gives advice and some general guidelines necessary for a successful and fulfilling life abroad. She points out how important it is for diplomatic couples to stay together, the importance of psychological support and the importance of school integration for diplomatic children.

According to a EUFASA survey, 30% of all respondents had tried or considered seeking counselling during their service because they were under constant pressure, felt lonely, had failed professionally and had lost their sense of purpose. These feelings were significantly heightened during the years of the pandemic, when the situation worsened for many families.

Between December 2020 and April 2022, EUFASA's research department conducted two online surveys to investigate resilience, personal burnout and organisational support during the Covid-19 pandemic. Of the approximately 400 respondents, mostly partners of diplomats representing a European country or the EU (EEAS), most were women (around 75%). The survey found that the resilience of diplomatic partners was low in the first year of the pandemic and improved slightly by 2022. People often experienced personal burnout, which was many times higher than in many stressful professions, such as hospital doctors and nurses or social workers.

Among the stressors, 55 per cent mentioned home education, while others added separation from family members or working from home. Almost all said that organisational support and communication from the MFA were inadequate during the pandemic. At the end of 2020 - beginning of 2021, 26 per cent of respondents did not know at all about the support they had received from their MFA, and only a quarter felt they had received enough support and information. It would be important to provide spouses with timely and trustworthy information through a family office. Often spouses are not even aware of most of the benefits they could claim. Both the risks and benefits of emergency

relocation should be carefully weighed before separating family members. Separation from loved ones can often have a negative impact on the mental health of workers and their family members. Adequate housing, for example, with enough space to work remotely, should also be high on the agenda.

Studies have shown that diplomatic families, and especially the partners of diplomats, have developed various coping mechanisms over time to manage these times of great stress. Strong social support, keeping busy with work, staying active, encouraging new hobbies or volunteering were among the strategies mentioned.

At the 2021 Annual EUFASA Conference in Lisbon, members formally adopted the 'Declaration of the Rights of Families in Foreign Service', a legally non-binding document that aims to align and harmonise the different practises and standards in the various national foreign ministries regarding families in foreign service. The document, which has been signed by all member associations except Finland, includes 22 articles relating to various aspects of daily life, from travel reimbursement, health care and education to spouses' rights and special support situations.

The well-being and mental health of diplomatic partners, and children in particular, were the focus of the 39th Annual General Conference in Madrid (June 2023), as Ms. Gallardo mentioned.



In her capacity as an EU spouse, she experienced first-hand situations where spouses found themselves in unimaginable situations, forced to leave their home and children behind, or mentally or physically abused by their husbands with no one to turn to and very little support.

This is one reason why she is now actively campaigning for more rights and safety for spouses, especially with divorce, when the accompanying partner is almost completely unprotected. EUFASA, with the help of hundreds of volunteers, lawyers, researchers and other professionals, is trying to establish and promote a set of rules of conduct to improve living conditions for diplomatic partners.

Mrs. Milena Padula, wife of the Italian Consul General in Ho Chi Minh City and EUFASA delegate for the Italian Spouses Association (ACDMAE), told me in a recent conversation, *"In Madrid, the family officers of some European countries were invited to the conference in order to facilitate communication between the associations and the HR departments. Some interactive sessions were organised between the family officers and the conference participants to discuss certain aspects related to diplomatic families, such as divorce, health insurance, psychological support and third culture kids."*



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Milena Padula

Mrs Padula mentioned that remote working was also an important topic discussed at the conference, *“participants in the working group called ‘Working Online’, looked at the implications of teleworking for spouses, examining the challenges and benefits, and pointing out the problems associated with this type of activity, particularly in relation to the tax system, which varies from country to country and brings additional difficulties such as double taxation. This topic will also be addressed at next year’s EUFASA conference in Brussels, as remote working is becoming more and more prevalent worldwide. The issue of working abroad is becoming more and more important as the new generation of spouses want to pursue their own careers while accompanying their diplomatic partner abroad.”*

To facilitate the job search, EUFASA plans to set up a platform where all affiliated national members can advertise available positions at embassies and EU delegations. Indeed, the Netherlands has already introduced something



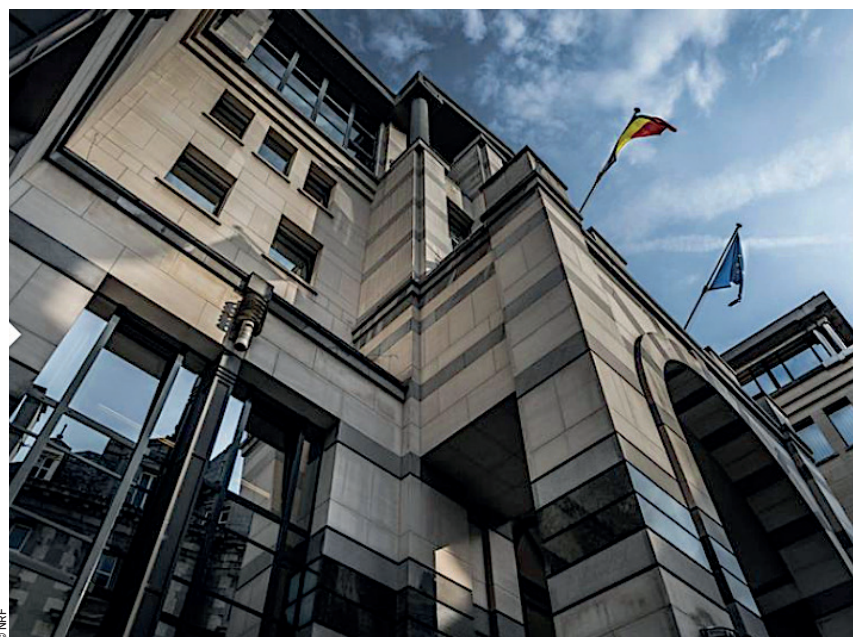
© EEAS

EEAS Headquarters, Brussels

similar for its own diplomatic spouses, and the EEAS Family Office has a pilot programme in Washington DC, which aims to improve cooperation between EU missions locally. The aim is to set up an online platform in the future with all local jobs available at EU delegations. In addition, the EEAS is focusing on equipping the spouses in Brussels, at headquarters, with their expertise for training and workshops. However, the procedures are very complicated.

Divorce is becoming a major issue within the diplomatic community; unwillingness to move is also a problem. It is predicted that in the not too distant future, foreign assignments will become mandatory in the career of an EEAS diplomat.

There is already talk of finding new ways to adapt to current demands and social trends, perhaps with shorter missions, longer leave and attractive working arrangements for spouses as well. This may be a costly but necessary strategy to attract good and competent people to the job.



© NMF

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brussels

The annual EUFASA conference raises the most pressing issues and tries to find solutions accepted by ministries to improve the situation of diplomatic families. Proposals are made, alternatives are discussed, and it is hoped that at least some conclusions can be implemented by the member states. Next year, Belgium will chair EUFASA and organise the annual conference in Brussels. It is the 40th edition, so expectations are quite high. It remains to be seen what the results will be.

At least one idea is clear: foreign ministries and the EEAS should take the careers of diplomats and their accompanying spouses more seriously and come up with better and more complex ways to interest them. Seamless social security, reliable and satisfactory pension schemes, comprehensive health insurance, supportive initiatives in applying for work permits and other incentives should be implemented. After all, this is a small price to pay if we want good employees to represent us abroad.

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TIMELESS CHIC

STANDOUT FASHION AND BEAUTY TRENDS

THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

Whether we like it or not, summer is coming to an end. To go through this transition without too much nostalgia, let's discover this autumn's six most stylish beauty and fashion trends.

1. Pink is in

Barbie continues to exert considerable influence not only on fashion, but also on beauty trends. Recently her impact on the industry has been confirmed, particularly in the field of make-up. The characteristic pink hue of Barbie's world is in high demand*, from soft blushes to bolder lipsticks and eyeshadows.



© DIOR

Rosy Glow (Dior) - The iconic blush is reinvented in a clean formula that blends seamlessly with the skin to flush the cheeks with an immediate healthy glow effect (dior.com)



Rouge Volupté - Candy Glaze Lip Gloss Stick "Pink Satisfaction" (Yves Saint Laurent) : the shine of a gloss with the nourishment of a balm (yslbeautyus.com)



© YVES SAINT LAURENT

(*) On Pinterest, a favourite platform for searches for makeup inspiration, searches for pink makeup increased by 90% in the US alone (Source : stylight.com)

2. Silver pants

Among the '80s-inspired trends, we were delighted to see "metallic everything" make a comeback and hit the runways this year. Yes, the light-reflecting fabric that dominated fashion decades ago has returned, with silver pants especially taking centre stage. They are a trend we'll want to try out as soon as possible, since they have the surprising ability to blend in with our autumn outfits.

Here's the indisputable proof...times three !



© INSTAGRAM @CAITLINAGUSTINA @MALLORY_ELIDA @EVELY_STYLE



© ZADIG & VOLTAIRE

Our fixation: these Zadig & Voltaire silver-toned, metallic, leather, straight-cut trousers (zadig-et-voltaire.com)



© ZIMMERMAN

One-shoulder, knit midi dress
(Zimmerman, spotted on
mytheresa.com)



© MACH & MACH

Cut-out, ribbed mini dress
(Mach & Mach, spotted on
farfetch.com)



© ALEXANDER MC QUEEN

Asymmetrical mini dress
(Alexander Mc Queen,
spotted on yoox.com)

3. “LBD” (with a twist !)

Who said the “Little Black Dress” was boring or too basic? Certainly not this autumn’s trends, which have elevated it to the status of a fashion statement, with graphic declinations such as those seen on the Fall/Winter runways of Alexander McQueen, Loewe and Louis Vuitton.



© INSTAGRAM @PERNILLETEISBAEK

4. Biker boots

While the cowboy boot trend is still going strong, the biker boot has entered the fashion scene at Paris Fashion Week for Miu Miu’s Womenswear Fall/Winter 2022-2023 show. And since then, its popularity has grown.

The hottest versions are mid-calf or knee high, and are characterised by a square toe and buckle details on the side.



© MIU MIU

5. “Bag” to school

Say goodbye to your straw bags; they’re sure to be on-trend next summer, and a spacious, practical tote bag will get you back to work in style.

The trend for 2023? Luxury leather bags like the Marcie model by Chloé (1), Ferragamo’s bag with removable interior pouch (2), or the triple compartment tote bag by Tory Burch (3).
(all spotted on bloomingdales.com)



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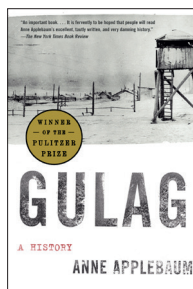


© FERRAGAMO



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BOOKS



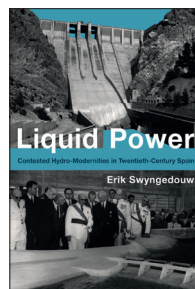
| Gulag

By Anne Applebaum

PULITZER PRIZE WINNER
• This magisterial and acclaimed history offers the first fully documented portrait of the Gulag, from its origins in the Russian Revolution, through its expansion under Stalin, to its collapse in the era of glasnost.

“A tragic testimony to how evil ideologically inspired dictatorships can be.” —*The New York Times*

The Gulag—a vast array of Soviet concentration camps that held millions of political and criminal prisoners—was a system of repression and punishment that terrorized the entire society, embodying the worst tendencies of Soviet communism. Applebaum intimately re-creates what life was like in the camps and links them to the larger history of the Soviet Union. Immediately recognized as a landmark and long-overdue work of scholarship, *Gulag* is an essential book for anyone who wishes to understand the history of the twentieth century.



| Liquid Power

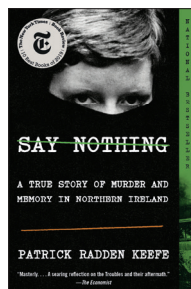
By Erik Swyngedouw

An examination of the central role of water politics and engineering in Spain's modernization, illustrating water's part in forging, maintaining, and transforming social power

In this book, Erik Swyngedouw explores how water becomes part of the tumultuous processes of modernization and development. Using the experience of Spain as a lens to view the interplay of modernity and environmental transformation, Swyngedouw shows that every political project is also an environmental project.

In 1898, Spain lost its last overseas colony, triggering a period of post-imperialist turmoil still referred to as *El Desastre*. Turning inward, the nation embarked on “regeneration” and modernization. Water played a central role in this; during a turbulent period from the twentieth century into the twenty-first—through the Franco years and into the new era of liberal democracy—Spain's waterscapes were completely transformed, with large-scale projects that ranged from dam construction to irrigation to desalinization. Swyngedouw describes the contested political-ecological process that marked this transformation, showing that the Spain's diverse and contested paths to modernization were predicated on particular trajectories of environmental transformation.

After laying out his theoretical perspectives, Swyngedouw analyzes three periods of Spain's political-ecological modernization: the aspirations and stalled modernization of the early twentieth century; the accelerated efforts under the authoritarian Franco regime—which included six hundred dams, expanded hydroelectricity, and massive irrigation; and the changing hydro-social landscape under social democracy. Offering an innovative perspective on the relationship of nature and society, *Liquid Power* illuminates the political nature of nature.



| Say Nothing

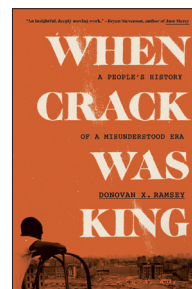
By Patrick Radden Keefe

“Masked intruders dragged Jean McConville, a 38-year-old widow and mother of 10, from her Belfast home in 1972. In this meticulously reported book—as finely paced as a novel—Keefe uses McConville's murder as a prism to tell the history of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Interviewing people on both sides of the conflict, he transforms the tragic damage and waste of the era into a searing, utterly gripping saga.” —*New York Times Book Review*

Jean McConville's abduction was one of the most notorious episodes of the vicious conflict known as The Troubles. Everyone in the neighborhood knew the I.R.A. was responsible. But in a climate of fear and paranoia, no one would speak of it. In 2003, five years after an accord brought an uneasy peace to Northern Ireland, a set of human bones was discovered on a beach. McConville's children knew it was their mother when they were told a blue safety pin was attached to the dress—with so many kids, she had always kept it handy for diapers or ripped clothes.

Patrick Radden Keefe's mesmerizing book on the bitter conflict in Northern Ireland and its aftermath uses the McConville case as a starting point for the tale of a society wracked by a violent guerrilla war, a war whose consequences have never been reckoned with. The brutal violence seared not only people like the McConville children, but also I.R.A. members embittered by a peace that fell far short of the goal of a united Ireland, and left them wondering whether the killings they committed were not justified acts of war, but simple murders.

From radical and impetuous I.R.A. terrorists such as Dolours Price, who, when she was barely out of her teens, was already planting bombs in London and targeting informers for execution, to the ferocious I.R.A. mastermind known as The Dark, to the spy games and dirty schemes of the British Army, to Gerry Adams, who negotiated the peace but betrayed his hardcore comrades by denying his I.R.A. past—*Say Nothing* conjures a world of passion, betrayal, vengeance, and anguish.



| When Crack Was King

By Donovan X. Ramsey

A “vivid and frank” (NPR) account of the crack cocaine era and a community's ultimate resilience, told through a cast of characters whose lives illuminate the dramatic rise and fall of the epidemic

“A poignant and compelling re-examination of a tragic era in America history . . . insightful . . . and deeply moving.”—Bryan Stevenson, author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Just Mercy*

The crack epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s is arguably the least examined crisis in American history. Beginning with the myths inspired by Reagan's war on drugs, journalist Donovan X. Ramsey's exacting analysis traces the path from the last triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement to the devastating realities we live with today: a racist criminal justice system, continued mass incarceration and gentrification, and increased police brutality.

When Crack Was King follows four individuals to give us a startling portrait of crack's destruction and devastating legacy: Elgin Swift, an archetype of American industry and ambition and the son of a crack-addicted father who turned their home into a “crack house”; Lennie Woodley, a former crack addict and sex worker; Kurt Schmoke, the longtime mayor of Baltimore and an early advocate of decriminalization; and Shawn McCray, community activist, basketball prodigy, and a founding member of the Zoo Crew, Newark's most legendary group of drug traffickers.

Weaving together riveting research with the voices of survivors, *When Crack Was King* is a crucial reevaluation of the era and a powerful argument for providing historically violated communities with the resources they deserve.



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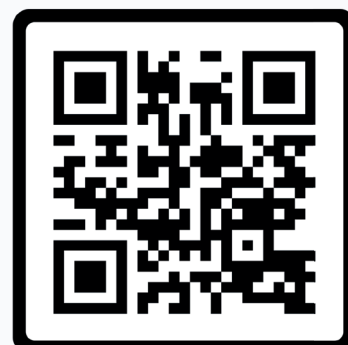
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