

# EUROPE DIPLOMATIC

MAGAZINE

VIKTOR ORBÁN

A clash of  
visions for  
Europe



January 2024

Nº54

3€

BRUSSELS - PARIS - GENEVA - MONACO


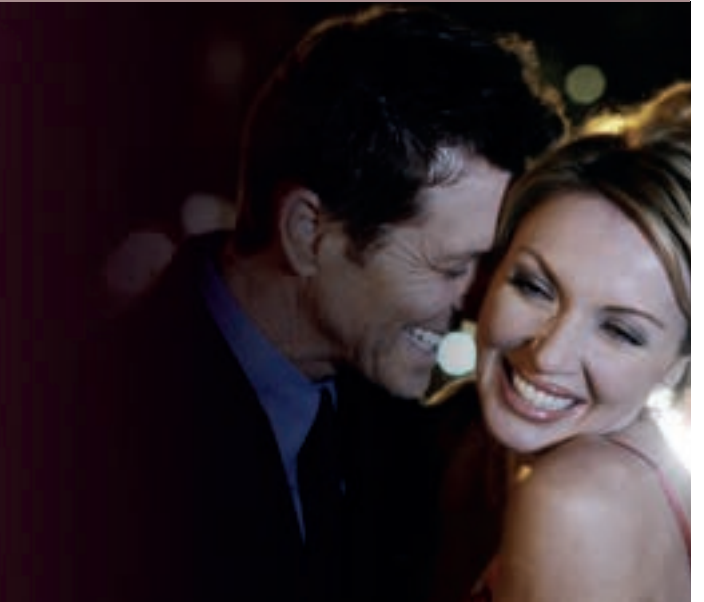


# SAVVIVA

Concierge Services

## EFFICIENT PERSONAL SUPPORT IN BUSY TIMES

- Personal assistance
- Private concierge
- Property management



WE ARE AT YOUR SERVICE, 24/7  
CALL NOW

Experience Belgium's leading  
concierge service

SAVVIVA

[www.savviva.be](http://www.savviva.be) | +32 2 669 07 29 | [concierge@savviva.be](mailto:concierge@savviva.be)

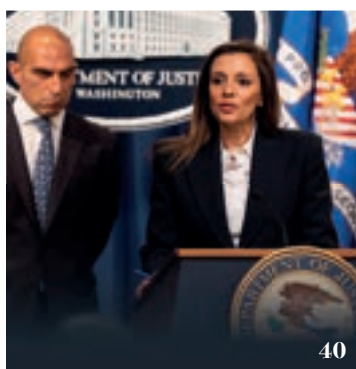
# IN THIS ISSUE

"Europe Diplomatic Magazine" is characterized by a very open editorial line that allows it to capture all the themes that affect directly or indirectly the European political, economic, social and security issues. Whether piracy in the Gulf of Aden and its threats to the global economy, articles about political leaders, geostrategic situations or technological developments affecting our civilization, Europe Diplomatic Magazine strives to work in comparing opinions and providing an objective analysis based on extensive research. For a wide audience composed of both members of the diplomatic corps, lobbyists, international officials or academics, the magazine gives everyone the necessary and useful information about all topics that make up our daily lives. Covering sensitive issues such as nuclear, the rise of Islamism and energy dependence, the magazine opens its pages to recognized specialists who would like to express first order and exclusive information. But Europe Diplomatic Magazine is not only a source of information on recent topics. It is also addressing older facts with deep thought further analysis. Whether it's news, security, diplomacy, technology, energy, terrorism, European affairs, no subject is treated superficially. Europe Diplomatic Magazine is an independent media, conveying balanced ideas of openness and analysis based on almost 30 years of experience in the journalistic world.

Visit our site and please  
give us your comments:  
<https://europe-diplomatic.eu/>  
[europediplomaticmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:europediplomaticmagazine@gmail.com)



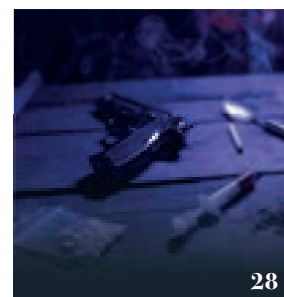
6



40



22



28



42

## 6 VIKTOR ORBÁN

A clash of visions for Europe

## 14 NEWS IN BRIEF:

From around the World

## 22 CHANGING HISTORY

Islam's accelerating takeover of Europe

## 28 DODGING THE TRAFFIC ON THRILL-SEEKERS' HILL

Belgium's port city of Antwerp becomes the centre of Europe's massive cocaine trade

## 35 AN OPEN BOOK, MOROCCO BOUND

A new corruption scandal rocks the European Parliament

## 40 MADOFF VICTIM FUND

A distribution of over \$158.9m to victims of the Ponzi scheme

## 42 TRAINS

The greener side of travel

## 48 BUY YOUR OWN VERSAILLES PALACE

12 million us dollars

## 50 BOOKS



## Bring Your Building To Life.



Assistance — Services — Community — Information —



Your **all-in-one digital service platform** for your building and community.

## Download and Contact Us For a Demo Code

✉ info@asknestor.com

☎ +32 2 669 07 29

🌐 asknestor.com





*Nikola Hendrickx*



# VIKTOR ORBÁN

AND THE UKRAINIAN QUESTION

**A CLASH  
OF VISIONS  
FOR EUROPE**



© KREMLIN.RU

Russian President Vladimir Putin and  
Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán



In the summer of 1998, Viktor Orbán stepped onto the big stage for the first time as Hungarian Prime Minister, his rise shrouded in an air of promise and opportunity. Twenty-five years ago, however, the world had no idea that this one-time champion of liberal ideals and ardent advocate of Hungary's harmonious integration into the European Union would eventually embark on a turbulent journey, transforming himself into a formidable embodiment of the perilous phenomenon known as authoritarian backsliding within the borders of an EU member state.

The long-standing alliance between Russia and Hungary - both described as authoritarian regimes - has gained attention, especially after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. Within the European Union, Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán is increasingly labelled as "Putin's ally" as Budapest has actively obstructed European attempts to impose sanctions against Russia, not supplying arms to Ukraine and even hindering the transit of weapons through Hungarian territory.

In return, Russia continues to supply Hungary with energy resources, contributes to the construction of the new Paks-II nuclear reactor and even supplies spare parts for the Soviet-era Budapest metro system. However, Hungary's most important contribution to Putin's regime is of a symbolic nature. Viktor Orbán and other Hungarian politicians have regularly appeared on Russian state media and been frequently featured in their broadcasts. Within these programs, they have been portrayed as representing the ideal of "true Europe" through their autonomous position regarding the war in Ukraine, implicitly supporting Russia's perspective on the conflict.



Paks Nuclear Power Plant, Paks, Hungary.

## Orbán's political paradox

However, relations between Budapest and Moscow have their own twists and turns, which are anything but innocent. In 2007, Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party were in opposition and became embroiled in a heated political debate revolving around a monument honouring Soviet soldiers who died in World War II. This memorial was located in the prominent Freedom Square in the centre of Budapest and evoked deep emotions and conflicting feelings in Hungary.

Interestingly, Orbán appeared at the time to be in favour of moving the memorial to another location. His stance seemed to

be a symbolic gesture, suggesting that Hungary was turning its back on the Russians, the USSR and even communism as a whole, and seeking a more westernised orientation.

Orbán's bold statements and endeavours to move the monument however, were met with an unexpected and fierce backlash from the Kremlin that effectively prevented any attempt to move the monument, which symbolised the Soviet presence in Hungary.



Soviet Liberation Monument, Budapest.

Orbán's about-turn on the monument issue highlighted the complex dynamics and pressures that exist between Budapest and Moscow, where even symbolic gestures can provoke fierce reactions and thwart attempts to reshape the historical narrative.

In 2008, when he was still in opposition, Viktor Orbán took a courageous stand against Russian aggression against Georgia. He not only condemned their actions in the strongest terms but went one step further by advocating the immediate admission of Georgia and Ukraine to NATO, thereby signalling his support for their security and integration into Western alliances.

Even after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, which strained relations between many countries and Vladimir Putin's regime, Orbán's friendly relationship with Putin remained surprisingly intact. However, a new challenge arose in 2016 when Russian TV presenter and propagandist Dmitry Kiselyov made a controversial statement in which he described the Hungarian uprising of 1956 as the first "Orange



Dmitry Kiselyov.



Revolution” and claimed that Western intelligence services had orchestrated it in the pro-Moscow states.

This put Orbán and his Fidesz party in a dilemma. Previously, like most Hungarian political groups, they had portrayed the events of 1956 as a heroic struggle to liberate Hungary from Soviet control. Kiselyov’s statement challenged this narrative, but surprisingly it did not escalate into a major diplomatic scandal.

The Russian ambassador to Hungary at the time reiterated that Russia’s official position on the 1956 uprising remained unchanged. In 2006, Putin expressed his regret and sense of “moral responsibility” for the suppression of the uprising, and he maintained this stance. Therefore, the issue was treated with caution and tensions were kept relatively low.

Orbán’s political path showed a paradoxical relationship with Russia, in which he displayed both condemnation and support, moved through different historical narratives and maintained a delicate balance between Hungary’s interests and its relations with Moscow.

## | Hungary in the spotlight

Hungary had relatively low visibility in Russian state media until 2022 — less coverage than right-wing or pro-Russian politicians from France, Germany and Italy. Russia perceived these Western countries as representatives of the “true Europe”, which aroused greater media interest in their affairs.

However, a joint data study of Russian and Hungarian journalists revealed a significant shift in 2022. In that year, Russian state online media began to mention Hungary twice as often as in 2021. In the first four months of 2023, mentions increased by almost a third compared to the previous period.

Russia Today (RT) in particular reported extensively on tweets and statements by the Hungarian prime minister. The broadcaster interpreted Orbán’s John Travolta meme as criticism of EU budgets, and generated a story from just two words in a tweet in which Orbán compared the transfer of assets by George Soros to his son to a scene from “The Godfather”.

Although the Russian coverage is aimed at international viewers, some suspect it conveys a more nuanced, pro-Hungarian view. According to the researchers, the increase in mentions by the Russian state warrants a closer look at Hungary’s evolving role in broader geopolitics. As the frequency of mentions increases, observers are taking a closer look at the dynamics between Hungary and its prominent media supporter, Russia.

## | Illusionary ambassador of peace

Russian state media have built a sophisticated narrative around Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, portraying him as Europe’s only “dove of peace” in the midst of the war in Ukraine.

Using distortions and selective narratives, Russian propagandists have portrayed Budapest as the only EU member committed to peace. They emphasise that Hungary abstains from helping Ukraine’s defence while blocking support from others.



Hungarian Parliament Building, Budapest, Hungary.

Whenever proposed ceasefires coincide with Russia’s wishes, Orbán is portrayed in a flood of articles as Europe’s exceptional peacemaker. His support for proposals such as China’s plan is widely reported.

But behind this apparent “peacemaker” façade lies a more sophisticated goal. By championing Orbán, Russia is trying to demonstrate the West’s approval of its demands in Ukraine - including the annexation of parts of the country.

Instead of truly proclaiming peace, the Kremlin has turned Orbán into a helpful messenger to legitimise its war aims against Ukrainian sovereignty. While the prime minister is portrayed as a peace-loving diplomat, Russia’s ultimate script is one of continued conquest.

The Kremlin’s propagandists have found fertile ground by emphasising the supposed cracks in the Western alliance. They have developed clever narratives that play on these rifts.

A frequent focus is disagreement over Ukraine’s NATO aspirations. Every sceptical statement from Hungary is met with a great deal of attention. Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó’s rejection of NATO-Ukraine meetings or Orbán’s rejection of Jens Stoltenberg’s statements of support are prime propaganda fodder.



Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó.

Russia also draws attention to Budapest’s efforts to prevent Sweden from joining the alliance. In these reports, NATO is portrayed as fragmented in its response to the Kremlin’s aggression.

When Hungary speaks out against EU sanctions, questions new collective punishment measures or argues with Brussels about the rule of law, Russia strikes. Such tensions are presented as proof that normal countries are striving for sovereignty, while “bureaucrats” want to isolate Moscow.

Less conspicuously, but still purposefully, Russia’s spinners portray disharmony within the bloc. The aim is clear: to create the impression at home that there are cracks in the opposing alliance and that not all of Europe is on the side of the sanctions. By skilfully staging the division, the Kremlin is fuelling doubts about the unity of the West.

## I The blame game

The Kremlin has created the image of an unwilling warrior who is forced to draw his sword only against stronger enemies.

Russian propaganda eagerly reinforces any statement that shifts the blame away from Moscow. They have found a willing ally in Hungary’s parliamentary speaker László Koevér. His statements suggesting that the US was pulling the strings that triggered the war found a large audience, including President Orbán himself who has supported him by making fun of the current US leadership.

These statements only serve to dilute the question of responsibility as Russia would no longer stand alone as the instigator of this conflict. Instead, an opaque interplay of foreign forces seems to have left Moscow with no choice but to defend itself against the approaching dangers.

The narrative of a reluctant campaign that is only being waged through external manipulation provides the perfect foil. It allows the Kremlin to justify the continuation of hostilities to its population, even if the war drags on and there are no easy victories in sight after almost two years.



Even before the war against Ukraine was unleashed, Russian propagandists were keeping a close eye on Budapest’s attitude towards

Zakarpattia - a crossroads of civilisations in the Carpathians region of western Ukraine.

The region’s mixed heritage included large parts of the Hungarian-speaking population, whose rights, according to Orbán, were often trampled underfoot by Kyiv’s dictates. He called laws that prioritise Ukrainian in schools, shameful discrimination against linguistic minorities.

In the bloody interval since the invasion, references to Zakarpattia’s diverse languages have multiplied in the Russian media, and every news item from Budapest denouncing alleged scandals against speakers of other languages is widely echoed.

With such episodes, the Kremlin has created a convenient pretext to justify the subjugation of Ukraine. It was no longer a matter of aggression, but a noble endeavour to emancipate Russian and other languages suppressed by a monolingual ruler.

By reinforcing the narrative of systemic bigotry against linguistic diversity, the propaganda machine is turning Russia’s violent campaign into a crusade in defence of diversity against the Ukrainian government.

## I All eyes on Orbán

On 13 December, leaders of the European Union gathered in Brussels for a two-day summit where the future of the bloc’s Ukraine policy was to be defined, and momentous decisions to be taken, including the opening of accession talks with Ukraine and Moldova. The summit’s packed agenda included various other topics such as relations with candidate countries Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the conflict between Israel and Hamas, the situation on the Finnish-Russian border, migration and security and defence.



Viktor Orbán Prime Minister of Hungary and Petr Fiala Prime Minister of the Czech Republic at the European Council in December 2023.

But above all, this tense summit underscored the difficulties ahead for the bloc as it plans to let more members join.

As widely expected, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán positioned himself as a central figure at the summit and launched a strong opposition campaign to block the accession talks with Ukraine and prevent the provision of additional financial and military aid. As these decisions require the unanimous consent of the 27-member states, they are vulnerable to national vetoes.

Orbán’s campaign against accession talks with Ukraine and the provision of further financial and military support has



unfolded in theatrical fashion, encompassing impassioned speeches, attention-grabbing posters, captivating social media posts, thought-provoking newspaper interviews and not one but two carefully crafted letters addressed directly to European Council President Charles Michel.



Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis (left); French President Emmanuel Macron (centre) and Viktor Orbán, Hungarian Prime Minister at the European Council, December 2023.

In response to the escalating tensions, Michel spoke out on 13 December, in a moment of diplomatic finesse, emphasising the importance of mutual respect and striving for a united stance. *“Even with differences or divergences,” he explained, “it is crucial to recognise and appreciate each party’s point of view and look for ways to form a formidable common front, because true strength lies in unity”.*

The Hungarian Prime Minister has sharply criticised the European Commission’s assessment of Ukraine’s readiness to join the European Union. The European Commission has, in fact, found that Kyiv has successfully implemented four of the seven required reforms, with efforts continuing in areas such as anti-corruption, de-oligarchisation and minority rights.

Previously, Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, visited Budapest to win the support of the Hungarian head of government. Emmanuel Macron, the French president, received Orbán in Paris, and in a final attempt, Macron and Olaf Scholz, the German Chancellor, were among the high-ranking politicians who held talks with the Hungarian head of state.



President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky and Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán at the Special European Council in February 2023.

Be that as it may, Orbán described the EU’s assessment as “unfounded and insufficiently prepared”. He has also expressed fears that Hungary would lose billions in agricultural and cohesion funds if Ukraine were to join the EU. As an alternative to EU membership, the prime minister has proposed a “strategic partnership” with Ukraine, although he recognises that full membership could take several years.

On his arrival in Brussels on 14 December, he emphasised that enlargement is not a theoretical matter, but a process based on merit and detailed legal requirements. He explained that there is no possibility to start negotiations if the preconditions are not met. He further explained that the issue can be taken up again at a later stage when Ukraine has fulfilled the preconditions.

The discussion on enlargement could face additional obstacles, as the “Friends of the Western Balkans” group is calling for Bosnia and Herzegovina to be placed on an equal footing with Ukraine and given the opportunity to start accession talks.

However, this appeal by the coalition which includes Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic is met with scepticism by the countries of the North and the West. They are of the opinion that Bosnia is a long way from fulfilling the reforms demanded by the Commission.

## Bargaining and illogical tactics

After hours of talks and hard bargaining, Orbán relented and walked out of the room, leaving the other 26 leaders to agree to start membership negotiations. However, he promptly blocked the proposed Ukraine Facility, which envisages a €33 billion support programme in the form of low-interest loans and €17 billion in the form of non-repayable grants. He claims that the funds would be susceptible to corruption and difficult to trace. The prime minister proposed instead granting Ukraine long-term aid outside the regular framework of the EU budget, thereby exempting his country from the obligation to contribute. *“Short-term funding for Ukraine is already provided for under the EU budget. If we intend to provide larger and longer-term funding, we need to manage this outside the EU budget. We are in favour of supporting it,”* Orbán explained.

The extensive list of grievances led diplomats in Brussels to ponder how to reconcile the conflicting demands and prevent the Hungarian veto from derailing the two-day summit. Officials realised that it was imperative to reach an agreement by the end of the meeting, even if discussions had to be

extended until the following weekend. The need to increase European Union financial support for Ukraine emerged as a “crucial” priority as American aid is blocked in the US Congress with no foreseeable solution, according to Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte. *“We will see how far we get,”* Rutte told reporters in Brussels. *“So far, we have always managed to reach unanimous decisions, even with Viktor Orbán.”*



Mark Rutte, caretaker Prime Minister of the Netherlands.

However, Viktor Orbán’s veto threat is not the only problem; there are other significant obstacles to the implementation of the Ukraine Facility. The €50bn plan is part of a wider €100bn review of the European Union’s multi-annual budget proposed by the Commission to tackle challenges such as irregular migration, high technology and rising interest rates. Brussels is asking member states to contribute €66bn in new funds, but most capitals are strongly opposed to this proposal. Discussions between heads of state and government will



Geert Wilders speaking to reporters.

decide how much money will be allocated and how much will be redistributed from existing programmes within the current EU budget.

The negotiations are expected to be intense and contentious. Southern countries such as Italy and Greece remain resolute to uphold funding for migration-related issues, whereas economically prudent states such as Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden insist on a budget exclusively for Ukraine. The latest compromise proposes to allocate around 22 to 25 billion euros in new funds while reallocating and saving funds from other areas.

Complicating matters even more for the heads of state and government is the fact that the budget negotiations are taking place at a time when there are fears that Orbán is seeking a quid pro quo to regain unrestricted access to Hungary’s cohesion and recovery fund, which was frozen last year due to ongoing rule of law problems. In a move that many critics have described as a bribe, the Commission authorised the release of up to €10.2 billion in cohesion funds, while over €20 billion remains blocked. Budapest has requested that the entire amount be released.

*“I do not want to get involved in some kind of haggling where we swap one for the other. It’s about the security of Ukraine,”* explained Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo. *“We must do everything we can to preserve unity and I am confident that this is possible with a clear mind and good will at the negotiating table.”*

In the event that Orbán insists on the compromise approach, diplomats are already working on alternative plans to create a parallel system supported by 26-member states. This system would provide Ukraine with uninterrupted financial support. Kyiv is facing a budget deficit of around 40 billion euros in 2024 and so far Brussels has only made a single payment. “We have to come to some kind of agreement. We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of delaying or postponing the matter. That would send out a negative signal. We hope that we can reach an agreement on at least some of the most important aspects,” said Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, emphasising the importance of focusing on “Plan A” When asked about her outlook for the upcoming negotiations, Kallas replied: *“Not optimistic, no”*.

## ‘Orbán effect’ energises European nationalists

Since 2010, Viktor Orbán has pursued increasingly nationalist and authoritarian policies that have changed the country’s political landscape. However, he is by no means the only one to pursue this nationalist-populist agenda in Europe. A number of other prominent European leaders share Orbán’s worldview and have pursued similar policies, reflecting a broader trend to the right in some countries’ national politics.

The most recent example is the case of the Dutch nationalist leader Geert Wilders whose recent electoral victory has, according to a number of political analysts, not only drawn inspiration from the Hungarian Fidesz Party, but has even bolstered Viktor Orbán’s policies. Geert Wilders’ Party for Freedom (PVV) won the Dutch elections by a large margin, but it is far from certain that it will come to power.



However, by mandating Wilders, Dutch voters sent a strong message that they are against immigration.



© FACEBOOK  
Geert Wilders.

However, Wilders' anti-establishment positions make it difficult to exert significant political influence without broader alliances. The ongoing coalition talks will determine whether outgoing Mark Rutte returns as prime minister at the head of a centre-right government or whether a different constellation emerges in the politically fragmented landscape.

Be that as it may, there are some important aspects in which Geert Wilders and Viktor Orbán share a number of similarities in their political outlooks.

**Nationalism and opposition to immigration/multiculturalism:** both are strong nationalists who vociferously oppose immigration and multiculturalism and instead favour national and cultural preservation.

**Authoritarian leadership style:** Both Orbán and Wilders are accused of steering their countries in a more authoritarian direction by consolidating power and weakening control of the executive.

**Traditional social values:** Both are in favour of socially conservative policies and have spoken out against issues such as LGBTQ rights and political correctness.

**Euroscepticism:** While neither wants to leave the EU, both are critical of the EU on issues of sovereignty and oppose further European integration.



© GOV.PL  
President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky and Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki in Kiev, Ukraine.

**Populist rhetoric:** Their messages emphasise the representation of the “true people” over the detached elites. They portray themselves as defenders of national culture.

**Alliance against the left:** They position themselves in sharp opposition to left-wing and progressive politics in their countries and in the Western world as a whole.

**Criticising the media/opponents:** Both are accused of curtailing press freedom and cracking down on political dissent or criticism. However, Wilders leads a smaller fringe party in the Netherlands, while Orbán has a supermajority, allowing him to more effectively translate his vision into political change. Overall, however, their nationalist-populist ideology and rhetoric are quite similar.

One of Orbán's most important allies was until recently the Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who led the Law and Justice party. Like Fidesz in Hungary, the Law and Justice party represents a cultural conservatism that goes hand in hand with economic intervention. Under its leadership, Poland has also taken steps to tighten state control over the media and suppress protests. Poland and Hungary formed until recently, a united front against more progressive policies at EU level.

In Italy, prime minister Giorgia Meloni rose rapidly to the top of the nationalist Brothers of Italy party. She openly admires Orbán's model of “illiberal democracy” and advocates strongly anti-immigration policies..Her views are in many respects aligned with Orbán's ultra-nationalist form of right-wing populism.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić has consolidated his power through increasingly authoritarian means and plays on Serbian nationalist sentiments, closely aligning himself with Orbán on issues of EU enlargement and Kosovo. In France, Marine Le Pen continues to represent the protectionist and anti-immigration programme of her Front National party, although she has also toned down some extreme ideas, she remains a fervent nationalist. These examples illustrate how Orbán's brand of illiberal right-wing politics has gained influence across Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in parts of Western Europe.

By portraying himself as a defender of national cultures and traditions, Orbán has led the rise of a new nationalist wave that is challenging the post-war liberal consensus in Europe. Other leading politicians have followed this pattern on their way to prominence, cementing his legacy as the standard-bearer of the new populist right in Europe.

*Hossein Sadre*

[hossein.sadre@europe-diplomatic.eu](mailto:hossein.sadre@europe-diplomatic.eu)

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## AIRBUS FLIGHT ACADEMY EUROPE UPGRADES TRAINING FLEET WITH MORE SUSTAINABLE AIRCRAFT

**Airbus Flight Academy Europe, a 100% subsidiary of Airbus providing civil and military pilot training, has received its first batch of more fuel efficient, quieter Elixir training aircraft as part of its sustainable development strategy.**



The first four aircraft, out of a total of eight to be delivered, are equipped with a cockpit specially designed for the Airbus Flight Academy, including two Electronic Flight Instrument Systems (EFIS), to prepare cadet pilots for the technologies in today's most advanced commercial aircraft.

"We are delighted to announce that, following the delivery of our very first Elixir aircraft, our cadets will now be flying this quieter, more fuel-efficient aircraft during the first flight phases of their training. This is a first step towards the gradual modernisation of the training fleet to reduce the environmental impact of our academy, says Jean Longobardi, Airbus Flight Academy Europe CEO & President"

Airbus Flight Academy Europe was established in 2006 to provide training facilities and services to support the initial, basic and advanced training of civil and military pilots. Airbus Flight Academy Europe has developed its own pilot training capabilities and has been delivering the Airbus Pilot Cadet Training Pme since 2019. Located in Angoulême, south-west France, the training centre offers all the necessary training facilities and assets to provide the best training conditions for our cadets.

The Airbus Pilot Cadet Training Programme is open to high school graduates over 18 years old worldwide. Candidates will undergo online and on-site screening tests before being eligible for training which will include 800+ hours of ground school, and 200 hours of practical (flight

and simulator) training. Around 80 cadets are trained at the Airbus Flight Academy Europe each year.

Airbus Flight Academy Europe owns a fleet of Diamond DA42, Cirrus SR20, Grob 120 A-F and now four Elixir aircraft, all dedicated to the cadet training. In addition, Airbus Flight Academy Europe operates on its site and customer sites a fleet of two FNPT II qualified simulators to offer the best training solutions to student pilots.

## About Elixir aircraft

Elixir Aircraft, a company based in La Rochelle with more than 80 employees, was created in 2015 to meet the challenges of the French light aviation sector. The objective of the French SME: to make safer, more economical, more environment-friendly and more versatile aircraft. Complexity is the current reason why older generation aircraft suffer from failures (technical or human) and are expensive to operate (fuel consumption and maintenance). Elixir Aircraft employs a technology from the world of competitive sailing, the Oneshot Carbon, to simplify the structures. More simplicity means fewer failures, therefore more safety, but also fewer maintenance, and lower costs (estimates of 40€/h of fuel and maintenance). At the end of 2021, Elixir Aircraft opened a new production site in order to internalize the entire production of carbon parts.

## A FORGOTTEN BOTTICELLI PAINTING RECOVERED

**A painting by Sandro Botticelli that was thought to have been lost for almost 50 years has been found at a family house close to Naples.**



Members of the Italian police's cultural heritage team with a painting by Botticelli.

The artwork, which is thought to be worth over €100 million and dates to the 15th century, was first preserved in a church in Santa Maria la Carità. Later, it was given to a local family, who maintained it at a private home for several generations.



The picture, one of the final works, Primavera and The Birth of Venus, by the Italian Renaissance master known for Primavera and The Birth of Venus, for unknown reasons suddenly disappeared from the Italian cultural authority's awareness, leading some to believe it had vanished completely.

Massimiliano Croce, the head of the carabinieri department who oversees the safeguarding of Naples' cultural legacy, told the press that the last time the authorities had looked into the private home where the Botticelli painting was stored was more than 50 years ago.

The artwork that was badly damaged, with several abrasions and chromatic changes brought on by varnish oxidation will be handed over to Italian specialists to be restored.

The authorities must determine if the family who kept the painting for over a century is the owner of the painting. If not, it will become a state's property and eventually put on display in an Italian museum.

A spokesman for the Italian Ministry of Culture told CNN that there is an official decree on file that entrusts the painting to the family, clearing the family from any criminal investigation.

The value of the painting is estimated around €100m.

## HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS FOUND IN MANY CONSUMER PRODUCTS

**An EU-wide enforcement project of the ECHA Forum found excessive levels of hazardous chemicals, such as lead and phthalates, in products that are sold to consumers. In total 18 % of the inspected products breached the EU laws.**



The national enforcement authorities in 26 EU countries checked over 2 400 products, most of them intended for consumers, and found more than 400 of them breaching the EU's chemicals laws.

The most common product types breaching the laws were:

- Electrical devices such as electrical toys, chargers, cables, headphones. 52 % of these products were found non-compliant, mostly due to lead found in solders, phthalates in soft plastic parts, or cadmium in circuit boards.
- Sports equipment like yoga mats, bicycle gloves, balls or rubber handles of sport equipment. 18 % of these

products were found to be non-compliant mostly due to SCCPs and phthalates in soft plastic and PAH in rubber.

- Toys like bathing/aquatic toys, dolls, costumes, play mats, plastic figures, fidget toys, outdoor toys, slime and childcare articles. 16 % of non-electric toys were found to be non-compliant, mostly due to phthalates found in soft plastic parts, but also other restricted substances such as PAHs, nickel, boron or nitrosamines.
- Fashion products such as bags, jewellery, belts, shoes and clothes. 15 % of these products were found non-compliant due to the phthalates, lead and cadmium they contained.
- In cases where non-compliant products were found, inspectors have taken enforcement measures, with most of them resulting in the withdrawal of such products from the market.

The non-compliance rate was higher in products which originated from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) or whose origin was not known.

## Background

This enforcement project checked if different types of products that are sold to consumers and professional users on the EEA market comply with the EU chemical regulations.

The project covered REACH restrictions, duties applicable to substances in articles under REACH, POPs restrictions and restrictions derived from the Toys and the RoHS Directives. The checks were carried out by the national enforcement authorities in 26 countries during 2022.

## COUNCIL AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AGREE ON RULES ON FREEZING AND CONFISCATING CRIMINAL MONEY

Spanish presidency and European Parliament negotiators have reached a political agreement on an EU law on asset recovery and confiscation. The new directive sets out EU-wide minimum rules on the tracing, identification, freezing, confiscation and management of criminal property. It will boost member states' capacities to fight organised crime.

« The gains from criminal activities are staggering. Only if governments have the means to claw back these profits do they stand a chance of fighting organised crime » said Félix Bolaños, Spanish minister of Justice.



Félix Bolaños, Spanish minister of Justice

The directive will apply to a wide range of crimes, such as organised crime, terrorism, trafficking in human beings and drug trafficking. It also comes with obligations for member states to ensure that the authorities involved in tracing, freezing and managing criminal money have qualified staff and appropriate financial, technical and technological resources.

### **Violation of restrictive measures**

The proposed rules will also apply to the violation of sanctions once a still pending directive on the definition of criminal offences and penalties for the violation of EU restrictive measures has been adopted. As a result, people and companies profiting from circumventing sanctions will see their yields being seized in the same way as those of traffickers in human beings or drug cartels.

### **More powerful asset recovery offices**

Member states will be required to reinforce asset recovery offices, whose role will be to facilitate cross-border cooperation in relation to asset tracing investigations.

The asset recovery offices will also be tasked with tracing and identifying criminal money, in support of asset tracing investigations carried out by national authorities and the European Public Prosecutor's Office. They will also carry out tracing and confiscation tasks for proceeds that are the subject of a freezing or confiscation order issued by a body in another member state.

In order to enable the asset recovery offices to perform their tasks, member states' governments will have to make sure to give them access to the relevant national databases and registers. In some cases, access should be immediate and direct.

### **Freezing and confiscation**

According to the text agreed on today, member states need to take measures to enable the freezing of property in order to ensure an eventual confiscation and to ensure, in the event of a final conviction, the confiscation of instrumentalities and proceeds stemming from a criminal offence.

However, member states will not only be obliged to ensure the confiscation of criminal money. They will also have to adopt rules which allow them to confiscate property of a value corresponding to the criminal yield.

Where criminal assets or property of equal value are transferred to a third party, it must also be possible to confiscate them, but only if the third party knew or should have known that the purpose of the transfer or acquisition was to avoid confiscation.

In some cases, the confiscation of criminal profits will also become possible where criminal proceedings have been initiated but cannot be continued.

### **Confiscation of unexplained wealth**

In a first for many member states, a new rule on the confiscation of unexplained wealth will, under certain conditions, allow the confiscation of property identified in the context of an investigation in relation to criminal offences, provided that a national court is satisfied that the identified property is derived from criminal activities committed within the framework of a criminal organisation and that those activities give rise to

substantial economic benefit. The agreement pays special attention to procedural safeguards.

### **Asset management**

Member states will be required to designate authorities (asset management offices) to manage the frozen or confiscated property, either through direct management or through the provision of support and expertise to other bodies responsible for the management of frozen and confiscated property. Member states will also be required to enable the sale of frozen property, even before final confiscation, under certain conditions – for instance, if the property is perishable.

## **ECB PUBLISHES STUDY ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF EURO BANKNOTES**

**Environmental footprint of a person's yearly use of euro banknotes equivalent to driving 8 km by car. Eurosystem committed to further reducing environmental impact of banknotes, while ensuring cash is widely available and accepted.**



The European Central Bank (ECB) has published an environmental footprint study of euro banknotes as a payment instrument. It shows that the average environmental footprint for payments with banknotes was 101 micropoints (µPt) per euro area citizen in 2019. This is equivalent to driving a car for 8 km, or 0.01% of the total environmental impact of a European citizen's annual consumption activities.

The study measures the potential environmental impact of all activities in a full cycle of euro banknotes – from raw material acquisition, manufacturing, distribution and circulation, to disposal by euro area national central banks (NCBs). It is based on the European Commission's Product Environmental Footprint methodology and builds on the work begun in the life cycle assessment of the first series of euro banknotes in 2004.

The main factors contributing to the environmental footprint of euro banknotes as a means of payment are the energy consumption of automated teller machines (ATMs) and transportation, followed by processing by



NCBs, paper manufacturing and the authentication of banknotes in shops. The long lifespan of banknotes and the fact that they are used for many payments means that the impact of banknote production is lower than that of transportation and distribution.

“The Eurosystem is committed to making euro banknotes as environmentally friendly as possible, while ensuring cash is widely available and accepted,” said ECB Executive Board member Piero Cipollone.

Since 2004 the Eurosystem has made efforts to reduce the environmental footprint of euro banknotes, for example by using only 100% sustainable cotton and banning the disposal of banknote waste in landfill.

In addition, ATM manufacturers and banks have made progress in reducing the environmental impact of their machines. The study published today shows that improvements in the energy efficiency of ATMs contributed to a 35% decrease in their environmental footprint between 2004 and 2019.

Extensive research and development is being conducted to make future euro banknotes even more environmentally friendly at all stages of their life cycle. For instance, the ECB is exploring alternative waste disposal methods for banknotes, such as recycling and the reusing of waste material, and possible improvements to material and components used in the printing process.

These actions are also part of the ECB's broader commitment to tackling climate change within its mandate and to reducing its own environmental footprint in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the European Union's climate neutrality objectives.

## TRANSPORT: EUR 7 BILLION AVAILABLE FOR INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS ACROSS THE EUROPEAN UNION

**Calls for proposals launched under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for Transport programme make EUR 7 billion available for projects targeting new and improved European transport infrastructure.**



© ECEUROPA/EU

Projects funded under these calls will help to increase the sustainability of the trans-European transport network, putting the EU on track to meet the European Green Deal objective of cutting transport emissions by 90% by 2050.

A sustainable and smart mobility for the future

The calls support the European Commission's vision of a future sustainable transport system, with smart and resilient solutions implemented to interconnect Europe.

The EU needs an efficient and interconnected multimodal transport system for both passengers and freight. This includes an affordable, reliable and performing rail network, an enhanced inland waterways navigation and infrastructure in maritime ports, a balanced interconnection between transport modes and an increased automation and interoperability for greater efficiency and safety of the transport network.

The calls cover the **Core and Comprehensive TEN-T networks** in the following areas:

- railways
- inland waterways
- maritime and inland ports
- road safety
- rail-road terminals
- multimodal logistics platforms
- multimodal passenger hubs
- smart and interoperable applications for transport
- safe and secure mobility
- infrastructure resilience

### Who can apply?

Applications are welcome from:

- One or more Member State;
- International organisations or public or private bodies established in an EU Member State, with the agreement of the Member State(s) concerned.

### Who decides which projects will receive grants?

Proposals will be evaluated by the European Commission/CINEA, assisted by external experts drawn from an independent expert database

Applicants will receive the evaluation results no more than six months after the submission deadline, and grant agreements will be signed within nine months after the submission deadline.

To expand its database of experts, the Commission has launched a call for experts in a range of fields. To be considered as a proposal evaluator, applicants should sign up via the Participant Portal and send an email to [CINEA-CEF-Transport@ec.europa.eu](mailto:CINEA-CEF-Transport@ec.europa.eu).

### Background

The CEF Transport programme is the key EU funding instrument for the development of high performing, sustainable and interconnected Trans-European transport networks, with a focus on the nine Core Network Corridors

The programme co-finances projects that enhance multimodality, improve infrastructure and advance innovation and new technologies.

Under the CEF programme, EUR 25.6 billion is available for grants from the EU's 2021-2027 budget to

co-fund Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) projects in the EU Member States. Since 2014 the CEF programme has supported over 1,300 projects with a total of EUR 29.8 billion in the transport sector.

The call for proposals supports projects under the General and Cohesion envelopes of the CEF Transport programme.

The European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) is managing the promotion and evaluation of the call and supervises the implementation of projects.

## SPAIN DISMANTLES TOP RUSSIAN-SPEAKING ORGANISED CRIME NETWORK THAT HAD INFILTRATED PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

**The large-scale criminal organisation was involved in criminal activities across the globe and laundering the assets in Spain.**



Seized weapons and car by the Policía Nacional.

With Europol's support the Spanish National Police (Policía Nacional) took down a large Russian-speaking high-risk organised crime network involved in corruption and money laundering in Spain. The large-scale criminal network, implicated in a number of other criminal activities including murder, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, trafficking of human beings and extortion was active across Europe, South America and the United States. Given the high hierarchical position of those investigated, this operation, which began in 2013, is the largest against the Russian-speaking top-level organised crime in Spain in the past 10 years.

### The operation led to:

- 23 arrests
- 18 house searches
- 10 weapons seized
- 23 properties, 16 high-end vehicles, diamonds, and virtual wallets seized
- bank accounts and property assets worth millions of euros blocked
- €300 000 and \$35 000 cash seized

The large-scale criminal network managed to infiltrate various Spanish public institutions. One of the main targets was able to carry out philanthropic activities in these public institutions, which allowed the criminal group to penetrate the administration. This

enabled the network to carry out their business with impunity, overcome legal obstacles and receive a series of administrative favours including protection from police and judicial investigations and facilitation of the acquisition of Spanish residence for the clients of the criminal organisation. Among those 'investing' in the group's activities were eastern European criminals of the highest authority in the underworld – known as 'thieves-in-law.' Lawyers, officials, politicians, businesspeople and hackers were connected to the network, increasing their operational capabilities.

### State infiltration and control over the tourism sector

The investigation uncovered how the criminal leaders contacted the investigated individuals to carry out money laundering operations. These activities included various investment projects such as land acquisition to develop luxury real estate projects, and purchasing restaurants, industrial warehouses, plots and boats. To launder the foreign assets the group used a network of bogus companies established in different countries, including South America. The criminals used advanced technologies, such as cryptocurrencies. They were planning to purchase one of the main nightclubs on the island of Ibiza and to take over the nightlife and catering sector, both on the Levantine coast and in the Balearic Islands. This is a clear indication that this dangerous Russian-speaking organised crime network was planning to control key sectors of the Spanish economy, such as the tourism sector, and to infiltrate state institutions.

Europol supported the investigation since its very beginning as a high priority case. Europol facilitated the information exchange and provided analytical support. During the action day, Europol deployed experts on the spot to cross-check operational information in real-time against Europol's databases and to provide technical support with digital forensic capabilities.

Due to the increased threat posed by the high-risk organised crime groups, Europol is strengthening its activity by delivering agile operational support to the EU Member States or third operational parties, building the strong operational coalitions to tackle top-level organised crime actors.

Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, Europol support the 27 EU Member States in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime and other serious and organised forms of crime. Europol also works with many non-EU partner states and international organisations.

## FIFTH POLICY LEARNING FORUM (PLF) ON UPSKILLING PATHWAYS: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE



**Cedefop**  
Service Post  
Europe 123  
570 01 Thermi  
Thessaloniki  
GREECE (+30)2310-490111



In February 2024, Cedefop and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) are organising the fifth Policy Learning Forum on upskilling pathways: a vision for the future.

The event will take place at EESC premises in Brussels, on 06/02/2024 (09.30–17.00 CET) and on 07/02/2024 (09.00–13.00 CET).

Policy Learning Fora (PLF) on upskilling pathways are a series of policy learning events on the topic aimed at providing a platform for countries to come together to learn from one another and explore common challenges in upskilling adults.

The Fifth Policy Learning Forum (PLF) on upskilling pathways is aimed at discussing support to lifelong upskilling pathways for all adults, also by exploring and discussing findings from Cedefop Thematic Country Reviews on Upskilling Pathways.

## A NEW UKRAINE BUILD GAME-CHANGING PUNISHER DRONE BECOMES OPERATIONAL



The Cosmolot Punisher drone.

The Ukrainian company COSMOLOT reported on the transfer of the first 15 Punisher attack UAVs to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Another delivery of 50 drones is expected very soon.

The main feature of the new drones is its innovative technology that is resistant to electronic warfare, allowing them to attack the enemy deep behind the front line.

This new type of small fixed-wing reusable UAV aircraft is able to strike enemy targets at distances as far as 45 km. It has a maximum speed of 198 km/h. The estimated accuracy of hitting from the heights of 200 / 300 / 400 m is - 4 m from the aiming point in ideal wind conditions.

Ukraine had been using various types of drones in its military operations, including domestic and imported drones for reconnaissance, surveillance, and other purposes.

## A STAPLE ON THE EUROPEAN AUCTION CALENDAR

A destination for fashion and the spiritual birthplace of bespoke coachbuilding, Paris is a natural home for an auction that has become a highlight for RM Sotheby's. In 2024, a superior selection of supercars, past and present,

as well as notable examples of modern motorsport, will be offered under the French city's famous lights.



2017 Bugatti Chiron 'La mer argentée' Simon Clay (€2,750,000 - €3,500,000).

For Sotheby's eleventh anniversary Paris sale, RM Sotheby's will return to the Salles du Carrousel in Louvre Palace. A destination venue for clients across Europe and set in the "Golden Triangle" of Paris, steps away from the Place Vendôme, this location is sure to make RM Sotheby's Paris 2024 auction an occasion not to be missed.

With grand hotels and fine dining that define cosmopolitan, Paris presents the ideal background to offer 38 collectors cars for sale.



1929 Packard Deluxe Eight Tom Gidden (€40,000 - €60,000 EUR).

### Auction location

Les Salles du Carrousel  
99 Rue de Rivoli  
75001 Paris  
France

### Parking

"Carrousel du Louvre" car park  
Entrance from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. - no exit closure.  
Other car parks: Parking Saint-Germain, l'Auxerrois car park, Saint-Honoré car park, Vendôme car park.  
Schedule (CET)  
Tuesday, 30 January 2024  
10:00 am - 7:00 pm

### Public preview

Admission is open to the public  
Wednesday, 31 January 2024  
10:00 am - 3:00 pm

3:00 pm - 4:00 pm

## 4:00 pm

## RISING RATES OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS ACROSS EUROPE

A photomicrograph of a tissue section stained with hematoxylin and eosin (H&amp;E). The central feature is a large, multinucleated cell, which is a syncytiotrophoblastic giant cell. It has a pink, eosinophilic cytoplasm and several large, dark purple, round nuclei. Surrounding this cell are other cells with blue, basophilic nuclei and some pink-stained extracellular matrix or other cells. The overall appearance is consistent with a pathological finding in a placental or gestational tissue sample.

The number of reported gonorrhoea cases has continued to increase, as they had done before the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 alone, there were 46 728 confirmed cases of gonorrhoea, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Though the data reveals substantial variations across the EU/EEA, men who have sex with men (MSM) accounted for more than half of reported cases. Amid the rise in cases, concerns about antimicrobial resistance (AMR) are particularly pronounced in the context of gonorrhoea. The European Gonococcal Antimicrobial Surveillance Programme (Euro-GASP) reports increasing resistance to two particular antibiotics, azithromycin

Altogether, these reports signal a critical juncture in the battle against STIs in Europe. Collaborative efforts among public health authorities, healthcare providers, and communities are essential to curb the spread of these infections and mitigate their impact on individuals and public health systems.





Choose the Best Artists for your  
Luxury Private and Corporate Events



Make your high society cocktail reception,  
birthday party or wedding celebration a  
unique and unforgettable happening



More than 20 years of experience worldwide



Our staff has been trained to ensure  
Covid19 compliance outdoor parties



Tel : +33 (0)4 93 20 43 32 - Port : +33 (0)6 22 14 45 60 / +33 (0)6 23 46 79 53  
Email : [contact@noubamusic.com](mailto:contact@noubamusic.com) - Web : [www.noubamusic.com](http://www.noubamusic.com)



Painting by Charles de Steuben, depicting the Battle of Poitiers in 732 A.D., where Charles Martel's victory over Muslim invaders has been considered a determining moment in European history

# CHANGING HISTORY

**Islam's accelerating  
takeover of Europe**

If you wanted to launch a slimming campaign, aimed at encouraging people to lose weight, you might think you need an emblem of some sort, a figure that represents your weight-loss aims. Would you choose Father Christmas (Santa Claus, if you prefer), that jolly fat man in red who allegedly squeezes down chimneys to leave presents for children? Probably not: he's not quite the image you're likely to favour or to ask others to copy, surely. He's the wrong shape. By that token, would you seek to encourage gender equality with a woman who chooses to wear a Muslim veil? Probably not, but it's what has happened in Belgium. It may sound somewhat odd, but we'll come back to that a little later in this article. The lady in question has not suggested that other Muslim women should cast off their veils, either, and nor has she suggested that Muslim men should start wearing them. Why ever not? Surely, she should have done one or the other? Parity, after all, must surely be the aim. There's no doubt that Islam is the fastest-growing religion in Europe. In fact, it has so many adherents that some people are predicting that in Belgium (and not only Belgium) it could, within a human lifespan, become Europe's dominant faith. Those who don't share it, and who remain resolutely Christian or Jewish (or determined Atheists), fear that they and their descendants could soon be a minority, mere outsiders in a Muslim entity.



© JESSE B. AWALT

Former de facto leader of Libya Muammar al-Qaddafi once said: "We have 50 million Muslims in Europe. Allah will grant Islam victory in Europe without swords, without guns, and without conquest and turn it into a Muslim continent within a few decades."

## DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO

Many Muslims may point out that under Shariah law, there is a religious obligation on all followers of the Prophet to grant aid and assistance to anyone seeking asylum, including Christians and Jews. As the United Nations

refugee agency, the UNHCR, points out, using Islamic texts: "It is the duty of Muslims to accept and protect refugees for as long as they seek protection. In comparison to modern refugee law, hijrah offers a broader definition of a refugee, and gives individuals, rather than states, the right to determine asylum." Hijrah, by the way, was the 7th century journey made by Mohammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina to escape persecution. Basically, it means emigrating to a land more favourable to the followers of Islam. That, of course, is all very well, but Europe's traditional population generally don't want to become mere visitors – or even settlers – in a land they've considered theirs for many, many generations. People's perspectives about what is theirs and what they're enjoying as little more than visitors are very different. As the Qur'an says: "Those who believe, and have emigrated, and have struggled in the way of God with their possessions and their lives are greater in degree with God; and those, they are the triumphant. Their Lord gives them good tidings of mercy from Him and beatitude; for them shall be gardens wherein is enduring bliss, therein they shall abide forever." Not everyone in Europe thinks that's a good idea, of course.



© WIKICOMMONS

The Islamic Centre in Vienna, Austria.

They may have a point: followers of Islam reject Western models of government and economics, expressing their distaste for both capitalism and Communism. They believe that Muslim society has been corrupted by secularism, consumerism and materialism, which perhaps explains why the more extreme Muslims believe that all women should be covered from head to toe all the time and that they should be denied any form of education. Since we now know that the theory that women stayed at home carrying out domestic chores while "man the hunter" went out to get food is just so much hogwash, so it's very hard to justify such an attitude. Women hunted too, every bit as much as men did. They were often buried with their favourite spears. Extreme Muslims, however, especially in Iran, would deny them their well-earned place in history, even though, as Scientific American reports, "overall, females are metabolically better suited for endurance activities, whereas males excel at short, powerful burst-type activities". And, of course, it's endurance that counts the most when hunting large game. Perhaps ignorance is catching. As the Qur'an puts it in Chapter XVII, "The Night Journey", "If you do good, it is your own souls you do good to, and if you do evil, it is to them likewise." Perhaps Tehran should take note: women have a phenomenal record for brilliance, invention, research



and innovation and it should not be silenced or cast aside because some ill-educated Mullah says so. But Islam does embrace some dangerously extreme views. There has been much criticism of the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, for banning the LGBTQ+ movement that supports gay people. But being homosexual results in a death sentence in a number of Islamic countries. It's not possible to be a gay Muslim, although I'm sure there are some.

They don't face the same difficulties under Roman Catholicism and even the Church of England recommends giving help to people who identify as LGBTQ+, although it still sees homosexuality as "incompatible with scripture". Pope Francis recently said, in answer to a question, "Persons with homosexual tendencies are children of God. God loves them. God



Demonstration against Iran's persecution of gay community.

accompanies them ... condemning a person like this is a sin. Criminalising people with homosexual tendencies is an injustice." Most traditional Islamic leaders would disagree, it seems, which puts them in the same camp as Putin, and that can't be a comfortable place. After all, after the Soviet forces won the Battle of Stalingrad, the Tartars, Ingushi and Azeris suffered terribly at the hands of the Red Army as it took control of the Volga and Azerbaijan regions. In 1941, some two million Ingush people – more than half the total population – were transported to Muslim territories in Soviet central Asia. Looking back, that seems an odd decision by "Comrade" Joseph Stalin.

## FAITHS COMPETE FOR FOLLOWERS

The Qur'an itself is an interesting book, rather like the Christian bible, full of parables to encourage faithful living along with strange stories, some of which may be true, even if



Geert Wilders.

they've been cleaned up to make them more palatable. It has, however, been bitterly attacked by Geert Wilders, the far-right winner of the Dutch election. He likened it to Hitler's Nazi manifesto, but that's a little unfair, I think. It encourages no more violence than the Christian Bible and if Wilders likens that to a Nazi propaganda book he'll be very unpopular with the Pope. He said in one interview: "The Qur'an is the Mein Kampf of a religion that aims to eliminate others ... Ban that dreadful book just as Mein Kampf is banned." He also said: "Islam is not a religion; it's an ideology, the ideology of a retarded culture." A trifle harsh, perhaps? He clearly hasn't read much of the Qur'an, most of which is pretty harmless and even uncontroversial. Much of what Wilders seems to believe would appear to be pretty harsh, in fact, with him describing the Islamic head covering as "a head rag", which he would like to see banned as "a pollution of public space". Wouldn't more moderate language help his cause more? Otherwise, he might provoke violence on our streets, which most of us don't want. More than thirty or so years ago, when I was last in Afghanistan and meeting with the Mujahideen, their womenfolk, whilst walking behind them in some cases, were surprisingly open about removing their head coverings to straighten their hair. Does that mean they'll go to Hell? I cannot believe that; they were very charming people who seemed to get on well with one another.



Muslim worshippers praying in a mosque.



But it's not the doctrine or belief system of Islam that scares people. It's the way that the number of its adherents is growing so rapidly here in Europe, allowing people to predict that Muslims could soon form a majority in several EU countries, with Belgium heading the list. We should remember that the word "Islam" simply means "submission to God's will" while "Jihad" simply means "strive", and we non-Muslims certainly know they do. Islamic activists believe that their faith is integral to every aspect of life: prayer, fasting, politics, law, and society at large. The various conflicts in which Muslim societies have engaged, often with little choice in truth, have served to harden attitudes towards religious extremism. Most Muslims see the current resurgence of Islam as no more than a reassertion of their cultural identity, formal religious practices, family values and even



© EDM

**Muslims have a fertility rate of 2.9 children for each woman, compared with just 2.6 children for Christians.**

morality. But where perfection lies, in the adherents' opinion, would seem very different from the way it appears to the rest of us. And their numbers are certainly growing fast. In 2021, around 2.3-million people moved to the EU from non-EU countries, while 1.4-million moved from one member state to another. The most popular destination in both cases was Germany. At the last count, the world held 2.2-billion Christians and 1.97-billion Muslims. The Muslims, however, have a higher fertility rate, with 2.9 children for each woman, compared with just 2.6 children for Christians. According to Pew research, Islam will become the world's dominant faith by around 2075. It could be sooner. While the fertility rate in Europe as a whole is 1.49 children per woman, it's below the replacement level of 2.1 and as a result Europe's population shrank by 1.1 million in 2020, although the demographics suggest that Muslim births are still on the increase. It's been predicted that by 2085, 13 European countries will have majority Islamic populations. This is the current position, as

seized upon by Geert Wilders; it is factual and it scares those who are concerned about it, perhaps enough to influence the way they vote. The Qur'an certainly makes clear that it considers Islam to be the only true faith. In the chapter called "The House of Imran", it states plainly that: "The true religion with God is Islam."

It also allocates the ownership of land and other property in accordance with the faithfulness of Islam's adherents. In the same chapter, followers are urged to say: "O God, Master of the Kingdom, Thou givest the Kingdom to whom Thou wilt, and seizes the Kingdom from whom Thou wilt." In other words, whoever owns or controls any city or country is all down to God in the end. It's a strong point of view but bears little resemblance to Mein Kampf. We have to remember, of course, that Hitler didn't see himself as political leader. He thought he was Germany's Messiah.

## MURDER FOR MORALITY'S SAKE

Observers of Islamic society are deeply concerned that the war in Gaza may be radicalising some sections of it, just when things were settling down. Some Muslims praise Hamas for drawing attention to the plight of the Palestinians (an understandable concern), but others know only too well that it was their action that brought down a rain of almost biblical hellfire from Israel. Even before it happened, however, life was changing for the 400-million people of the Middle East. Back in the 1980s and 90s, Islamic organisations were participating in political life, forming parties and contesting elections. Some countries tried to stop them, accusing them of trying to "hijack democracy". Iran and Sudan in particular, together with Taliban-led Afghanistan, stand accused of denying the rights of women and minorities. Iran's laws enforcing the wearing of the hijab head covering by all women are especially draconian and may, in the views of some observers, ultimately lead to the current hard line leaders losing power. You may recall the massive protests that erupted over the death of Mahsa Amini in the custody of Iran's so-called "morality police".

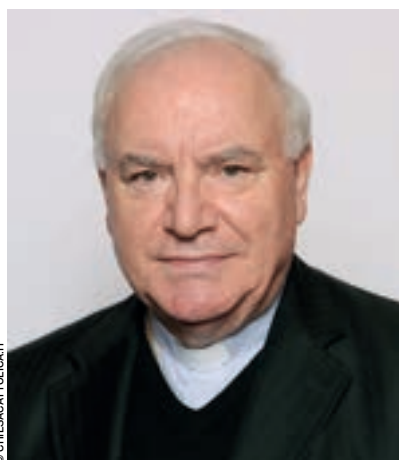


© TWITTER/TABLET MAGAZINE

**Mahsa Amini died in a coma on September 16, 2022.**

It's an odd sort of morality that turns a blind eye to judicial murder but clamps down hard on how a woman dresses. Women are still protesting at the way in which Iran

only recognises men as “real” citizens, but Iran retaliated by killing 500 protestors. A great many innocent women have died for merely trying to show they exist and have views of their own. They refuse to accept the sort of rôle supposedly prescribed by society for them as obedient servants to all men. Al Islam, the Official Website of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, is very clear on the importance of women, quoting a very long (and largely unpunctuated) passage from the Qur’an that I shall not reproduce here. It sums up what it sees as the Islamic view of sex equality like this: “Islam confers on women all the political and social rights, which man enjoys. She is entitled to all the privileges bestowed upon man. Beside worldly matters, women are also equal to men in the spiritual sense.” Clearly Iran’s leader and his ludicrous “morality police” disagree, and the many campaigns they have witnessed demanding fairer treatment for women, as set out in the Qur’an, have been ignored or else have led to extreme violence, perpetrated by men who apparently have contempt or even hatred for women. Despite them and their thuggish brutality, a recent report suggests that around 70% of Iranian women do not abide by their government’s interpretation of hijab regulations under Islamic law,



Italian archbishop, Carlo Liberati has recently declared : « In 10 years, we will all be Muslims because of our stupidity »

Despite this, however, the Middle East is undergoing a kind of religious “revolution”, and the hard liners are driving some Muslims into seeking out other, more tolerant faiths. A Dutch research group have claimed that around half of those who responded to a survey admitted that they have lost or changed their religion, with fewer than a third of them identifying as Shia, the sect that rules Iran. Many had explored alternative religions, such as Zoroastrianism and Baha’i. Christianity appears to be growing in popularity, too. In other developments, Saudi Arabia no longer segregates males and females in its universities, offices and restaurants, while economic necessities, according to The Economist \$ %magazine, have obliged employers to take on women to carry out traditionally male jobs, like herding livestock or driving taxis. The Economist also reports that Egypt has banned the niqab face covering in schools. The magazine suggests that the Gaza war could be “the kiss of life” for the Muslim brotherhood, by also being, of course, the kiss of death. However, it also quotes the Oxford University academic Andrew Hammond, who

said: “The world is dreaming if it thinks the Islamist moment has gone.” It hasn’t, of course, but it could be subject to change, if only Islamic regimes would tackle the region’s socioeconomic ills, upon which extreme and violent Islam feeds.

## A DIFFERENT FUTURE BECKONS (OR DOES IT?)

The concern in Europe, though, is for a possible influx of large numbers of Muslims into a continent that has not hitherto been Islamic. Something similar has happened before, pre-dating Islam and other present-day faiths. It happened some 3,000 years ago, when there was a mass movement onto Europe of people of the Yamnaya culture from the forest-steppe region north of the Black Sea, many of them settling on the islands of the Aegean, where they built the first monumental palaces and urban centres and basically created the Greek civilisation. “In what amounts to one of the most comprehensive movements of people ever recorded,” writes Peter Frankopan in his fascinating and informative book, *The Earth Transformed*, “mitochondrial genome data shows the almost complete replacement of the gene pool of Europe.” That is not about to happen in this case, but it seems almost certain that Muslims will soon outnumber non-Muslims in Europe, whatever Mr. Wilders may say or wish. It’s been predicted that by 2085, thirteen European countries will have majority Muslim populations, with the declining fertility rate among Christian and other non-Muslim peoples contributing to the shift. Perhaps those who would like to prevent that from happening should simply have more babies. Otherwise, expect Muslims by 2085 to outnumber non-Muslims in Cyprus, Sweden, France, Greece, Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Luxembourg, the UK, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ireland, and Lithuania, with Belgium tipped to be the EU’s first, according to Céline Pina, writing in the monthly *Causeur*. Looking around at all the Christmas shops and decorations it seems hard to believe that by the end of this century Europe’s only religious festival will be Ramadan.

*Causeur* argues that the migration agreements with Morocco and Turkey, coupled with the benevolence shown towards the more radical Islamic populations, are “fuelling the political clientelism of the Left in Belgium.” As I wrote at the start of this article, Muslims already hold a number of politically influential positions,

especially on the Left, and in May 2021, Belgian Green politician and State Secretary for Gender Equality, Sarah Schlitz, appointed a veiled woman as her Commissioner for Gender Equality. The woman, Ihsane Haouach, told Belgium's *Le Soir* newspaper that the definition of secularism depends on demographics. "In Islamic parlance," she said, "The Muslim Brotherhood channel, this means that when Muslims are in the majority they will be arbiters of secularism." This sounds rather like the views of Sayyid Qutb, who has influenced the most extreme Islamic movements. More about him in a moment. In fact, people of Arab-Muslim descent are especially numerous in the area around Brussels; the numbers seem to have increased dramatically since I lived there.



Ihsane Haouach

It seems as if the brutal acts carried out by Hamas on 7 October are being overlooked by groups that sympathise with the Palestinians. That sympathy is understandable in as much as it's true that Israel seized the territory, but there seems to be little evidence of a knowledge of history among those who demonstrate on the side of Hamas. Britain's then Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, called the protest demonstration



Sayyid Qutb on trial for plotting the assassination of Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

in London a "hate march" and was heavily criticised for doing so, but she had a point.

One Labour party activist had devised a placard that intertwined the Star of David with a swastika. Clearly they had never visited Auschwitz. They should, and very soon. A senior German politician who was with our party was reduced to tears by what he saw there. Hitler was a terrible human being, but the unspeakable horrors of Auschwitz were largely perpetrated by ordinary people. The place is indescribably horrible and if I was inclined to believe in the supernatural (I'm not) I would say that the place is imbued with the darkest possible evil. The place's nearest town is Oświęcim, but our group of official visitors were entertained after our visit in Krakow, some 60 kilometres west of the death camp. We were offered Polish vodka, which is very good, but we wouldn't have noticed if it been methylated spirits, such is the effect of a visit to Auschwitz. Likening Israel to Hitler's nightmare world is grossly inappropriate and an obscene lie. Even so, supporters of Hamas trot out their anti-capitalist and anti-Western slogans as if they are more than a simple expression of hatred and intolerance. Perhaps Hitler would have understood them; they would sing from the same song sheet, after all. Labour party officials later dismissed the anti-Semitic slogans on some placards as the work of "an extremist fringe". It's true, however, that "Islamist narratives" tend to intersect neatly with some far left-wing views, even if some of the slogans they shout sound as if they came from the 1970s. Their numbers are growing, too. Indeed, they're inclined to conflate anti-Muslim hatred with any sort of criticism of Islam or its followers. It licenses them to hate virtually everybody who doesn't share their extreme views.

All Muslim fundamentalist movements have been deeply influenced by Sayyid Qutb, who was executed on the orders of the former president of Egypt, Gamal al-Nasser, in 1966. Qutb had argued that tolerance of other beliefs could only come after Islam had triumphed, and it hasn't. Not yet, anyway, although it's certainly advancing in Belgium and other European countries. As a result, left-wingers use the freedom of expression inherent in modern Western thinking to support such extremists as the late Osama bin Laden, who urged military jihad against what he used to call the "Zionist Crusader Axis of Evil", which calls for the West's destruction. Using freedom to call for an end to freedom seems rather pointless and self-destructive to me. Sayyid Qutb would never have allowed it if the positions had been reversed.

*T. Kingsley Brooks*

[T.Kingsley.Brooks@europe-diplomatic.eu](mailto:T.Kingsley.Brooks@europe-diplomatic.eu)



Seized drugs, weapons and money in Belgium.

© BELGIAN'S PROSECUTOR OFFICE

# DODGING THE TRAFFIC ON THRILL- SEEKERS' HILL

**Belgium's port  
city of Antwerp  
becomes the centre  
of Europe's massive  
cocaine trade**

My only experience with cocaine was as a child with toothache. Cocaine was my dentist's analgesic of choice when it came to drilling or extracting children's teeth. Dental problems are far from the thoughts of those seeking the welcoming oblivion the drug offers its users today, many of whom could barely function without it. These days, it's viewed as a highly addictive stimulant that works on the central nervous system. Derived from the South American coca plant, it is used medically as a local anaesthetic for some surgeries on the eyes, ears, and throat, as well as in dentistry when I was young. When a person uses cocaine, it causes an increase in dopamine in the brain by attaching to the chemical's transporters and increasing the amount of dopamine in nerve cells (neurons), modifying the way nerve cells communicate with each other. Cocaine can have, and frequently does have, long-lasting or even irreversible effects on the brain. Financially, however, for those involved in transporting it from the farms that grow it to those who sell it on the streets of Europe's cities is an extremely lucrative enterprise. Cocaine is usually seen as a white powder, although it is often diluted by dealers who mix it with flour, baking soda, corn starch, and other substances to increase profits and weaken the potency. After all, for its dealers the aim is always to maximise profits, and if one dose fails to have quite the effect the customer was hoping for, then he or she is likely to buy more. It is, of course, strictly illegal, which ironically may be part of its attraction, especially to the young.



Advertisement in 1885 for pain relief drops for children containing cocaine.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the more you take, the more you need. Your brain gradually becomes desensitised to the drug and so it needs more and more to achieve the same euphoric effects. The people who trade in the stuff, of course, are utterly ruthless and oblivious to suffering. Their only aim, as you would expect, is to make a lot of money. It took the EU's Europol to co-ordinate the actions of the Belgian Federal Police, the Dutch national police, the German regional police and Federal police to bring down one massive operation run by leading criminals, who were importing vast quantities of cocaine. They had the help of the Paraguayan National Antidrug Secretariat in closing one of the avenues into Antwerp and presumably destined for further distribution around Europe. The cooperative action by law enforcement bodies on that April day in 2022 resulted in 35 locations being searched, seventeen people being arrested (5 in Belgium, 11 in Germany and 3 in the Netherlands) as well as the seizures of expensive electronic equipment, documents, four vehicles, several very costly watches and real estate, including four apartments and bank accounts holding a total of €5.5-million. Cocaine smuggling is clearly a lucrative business, however distasteful and downright dangerous it may be for the end users.



A Belgian police boat .



A police helicopter surveilling the port of Antwerp.

It's a very big business and must involve a very large number of operatives, presumably including port workers. In 2022, Belgian authorities seized almost 110 tonnes of cocaine at the port of Antwerp, which was a new record at the time. Back in 2021 they'd seized the previous record amount: a mere 90 tonnes. Just before the 2022 seizure, an 11-year-old girl had been shot dead with no fewer than five bullet wounds. It may have been an accident, the girl having been an innocent bystander who died when the house she was in was sprayed with rapid fire from a Kalashnikov assault rifle, but it's worth noting that she was the niece of a man suspected of being one of Belgium's most important drugs traffickers. It's not just the addicts who get killed in this murderous activity; very often, the gangs exert their evil influence over ordinary people, enforcing their rule by killing children or anyone else who gets in the way of profit. The victim's uncle in this case was Othman el Ballouti, who is suspected of running a huge cocaine smuggling operation through the Port of Antwerp, while he hides away in Dubai, which has shown itself reluctant to arrest or extradite Belgian suspects. Locals lay bunches of flowers at the site of her murder, ironically at the bottom of a garage door with many bullet holes.

Drugs traffickers have found they can do well in Belgium, partly because of the old rivalries between French speakers and Flemish speakers. The port itself is so vast that no more than 2% of the containers unloaded there can be checked, which has led to an extremely lucrative trade in diamonds and gold, as well as easy access to a



large transportation network with links to every part of Europe. Writing in The Parliament Magazine, journalist Mitchell



Prothero says that at least 40% of Europe's cocaine imports pass through Antwerp itself or other nearby ports. Perhaps that's why Antwerp is experiencing a large-scale gang war among rival drug importers and dealers.



170 kg of cocaine were found in the port of Antwerp (Belgium), in a container coming from the port of Callao (Peru). A total of 150 bricks of cocaine were hidden in rucksacks placed inside a container laden with a legal load of frozen vegetables.

## OPEN DOOR POLICY AND LONG DELAYS

One of Belgium's problems is bureaucracy, which slows down everything, including law enforcement. In November 2023, customs officials at Antwerp discovered more than seven tonnes of cocaine hidden in a cargo of bananas from Guayaquil in Ecuador. They also arrested seven adults and two minors who had been hiding in a container. It was the fourth such drugs seizure in just a few weeks. Security at Antwerp, however, wouldn't fool a chimpanzee for long and three crooks were able to reclaim the

impounded powder by surprising two unarmed employees and taking their ID cards to gain access to where the drug was stored, driving away with it unopposed. The criminals were clearly very well aware of the Antwerp port's deplorable security measures. Another problem is that it often takes a long time for the Belgian authorities to destroy seized drugs, partly because of a shortage of incinerators and partly because of the snail's pace bureaucracy involved. In this case, the criminals were able to spend half an hour loading packages of cocaine into their car. What's more, the seized narcotics often remain stored at the port for many days, presenting greater opportunities for theft.



Vincent Van Quickenborne, former Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice.

Indeed, Antwerp is a drug-smuggler's paradise: long periods in store, unguarded, undestroyed and protected by a bureaucracy that has to be experienced to be believed. It's very different from the Netherlands, for instance, where destruction of the seized drugs takes place straight away. There have been official calls for greater incinerator capacity, but it hasn't happened yet. The demand came from the former Belgian Justice Minister, Vincent Van Quickenborne, but he then stepped down after failing to process an extradition request from Tunisia for an Islamist that the authorities considered "dangerous", having murdered two Swedish football fans in Brussels. The theft of the seized cocaine was not the first such incident. Just three weeks before that, a confiscated cargo of cocaine was stolen by a gang from the Netherlands, although on this occasion the Belgian police caught them before they got away. The police have certainly had some success in their war on drugs and drug gangs, despite the problems posed by the gangs' ruthless approach to human life. In one such incident, they dismantled what they called a "drug super-cartel", which controlled a third of Europe's trade in cocaine. They arrested 49 people in several countries, including six "high value suspects" in Dubai. Interpol, the international police organisation set up in 1923 to tackle serious criminality through co-operation among police forces, told the media that those arrested included "an extremely



big fish". The Dutch prosecutors involved said the drugs were coming "mainly from South America" and were being brought into Europe through both Antwerp and Rotterdam. Europol told journalists that this particular operation had netted 30 tonnes of cocaine and led to arrests in France, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands. The cartel, said police, had been created to help in the trafficking operation and controlled one third of the entire cocaine trade in Europe.

## CATCHING BIG FISH IN A BIG NET

"The scale of cocaine importation into Europe under the suspects' control and command was massive," Europol told reporters, adding that two "high value" suspects linked to the Netherlands had been arrested in Dubai, along with two who had links to Spain and two more linked to France. One of the Dutch suspects, Europol told AFP on the condition of anonymity, was an especially important figure in the illicit drugs trade. Altogether, thirteen people were arrested in Spain, six in France and ten in Belgium, while fourteen people were arrested in the Netherlands in 2021 as part of the same operation. One of those seized by police was a 37-year-old man with dual Dutch and Moroccan nationality, picked up for allegedly importing thousands of kilos of cocaine into the Netherlands in 2020 and 2021. Another of those arrested was a 40-year-old Dutch-Bosnian national. Despite these high-profile successes, however, the cocaine keeps arriving and in record amounts. In 2020, for instance, 214 tonnes were seized in the region, which represents an increase of 6% over the previous year. The amount seized in 2022, however, was 300 tonnes.



Antwerp's mayor Bart De Wever.

The situation in Antwerp has become so worrying that the mayor, Bart De Wever, a Flemish conservative, has even suggested deploying soldiers on the site. Belgium's Justice Minister, Paul Van Tigchelt, has refused, however, pointing out that the army does not have the legal power to make arrests. Despite joint police operations sometimes catching large cartels importing drugs, there are also bitter rivalries between various gangs involved in the trade, which are played out on the streets with bombs and bullets. Belgium's new national drugs commissioner, Ine Van Wymersch has warned that the port of Antwerp has become the epicentre for the import of cocaine into Europe. She is arguing that the fight against drugs must be conducted "on a European scale".



Belgium's national drugs commissioner, Ine Van Wymersch.

Recent police successes have led to Belgium now being engaged in one of the biggest drug trafficking trials in its history, with more than 120 suspects in the dock. The massive haul of suspected criminals came about after investigators cracked a large number of encrypted messaging apps. The drug trafficking involved was on a truly massive scale, and those on trial in Brussels come from not only Belgium but also Albania, Colombia and North Africa, with a trial involving so many people that it is being held in a high security courtroom in the former headquarters of NATO. The cartel in this case operated from 2017 to late 2022 and involved a large number of different criminal gangs. To capture those involved meant police raids in Belgium, Germany and Italy and the smuggling operation involved cannabis as well as cocaine, arriving from South America and also from Morocco. According to prosecutors, the drugs arrived in containers before being transported all over Europe. Police report that having cracked the encoded messages on Sky ECC and Encrochat apps, popular with criminals, they were able to look at the planning and operation of the drug smuggling operation. Belgium's Justice Minister, Paul Van Tigchelt, whose decision not to use the army has been proved correct, told AFP that a thousand criminal convictions had been secured using evidence from the encrypted apps. "It is clear that we are dealing very hard blows to organised crime in our country," he said, just before the trial began. The charges the suspects face include drug offences, of course, but also the trafficking of arms and belonging to a criminal organisation.



Paul van Tigchelt, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice in charge of the North Sea.

In total, 124 people are on trial, although a small number of them will be tried 'in absentia' because they are currently on the run. It's claimed that the ringleader was an Albanian citizen, while prosecutors say the operation had what they called "structure and hierarchy" among the various criminal groups involved. The suspects, says AFP, are accused of having jointly operated cocaine processing laboratories in Belgium and final judgments are not expected earlier than the middle of 2024. Defence lawyers have accused the Belgian authorities of "a publicity stunt" for putting all the accused on trial together at the same time. They argue that the case should have been broken up and all the suspects judged separately. As it is, the forces of law enforcement have demonstrated to the criminal gangs that there really isn't safety in numbers.

## A NEW FACE TAKES ON A WORSENING PROBLEM

Ine Van Wymersch is Belgium's national drugs commissioner and it's her task to take the fight to the traffickers. Since she took on the job, there have been record seizures of cocaine at Antwerp but also an increase in gang-related crime tied to the illicit drugs trade, with a growth in the numbers of synthetic drug laboratories and the production of cannabis. Belgium is keen to get to grips with the problem before it takes on the rotating presidency of the EU in the New Year. She must also somehow put an end to the inter-gang violence that has made Antwerp a dangerous city. She has denied to the media that Belgium is now a "narco-state" but she admits that it has become a strategic logistics hub for organised crime, which makes the country vulnerable, despite what she says is a growing awareness on the part of businesses and authorities. The criminal gangs, of course, are not going to go away so the most she can hope to achieve is to make life as difficult as possible for them, with an increased risk of them being arrested.



Seized drugs, money and weapons.

It's never going to be easy. The port of Antwerp is the size of 16,600 football fields and has a yearly throughput of 240,000,000 tonnes of freight of all kinds. That is why it has become the most important point of entry for illicit drugs, among many, many legitimate goods, from motor vehicles to fruit and vegetables. The cocaine is often hidden among such

innocent items and is therefore very hard to spot. Antwerp is also experiencing a greater volume of smuggled drugs than its rival, Rotterdam, as well as more drug-related violence. In Rotterdam, the amount of cocaine detected and seized fell from 73,000 kilos in 2021 (a record year) to less than 47,000 kilos. Antwerp's volume is rising, reaching a peak of almost 110,000 kilos. Customs officers now say that Antwerp is "the top destination for criminals". Controlling the crooks is a hazardous job, too, even for politicians. In 2022, four Dutch people were arrested for allegedly plotting to kidnap Belgium's Justice Minister, Vincent Van Quickenborne, who was forced to go into hiding after grenade attacks linked to Belgian and Dutch criminal gangs. In 2018, 16 cars and 10 houses were damaged in the Belgian town of Deurne by gangsters throwing hand grenades. Antwerp's mayor, Bart de Wever has warned about the risk of collateral damage and murders. He has described the current situation as a "national crisis", with criminal gangs moving their centres of operation from Rotterdam, where security has been strengthened, to Antwerp, largely because the port is so massive and hard to police.

According to Europol, criminal gangs are also using Rotterdam and Hamburg, but it's especially Antwerp they favour for getting the newly-arrived



The port of Antwerp.



Container ship docking in the port of Antwerp, Belgium.



cocaine to the Netherlands, from where it's distributed throughout Europe. "The epicentre of the cocaine market in Europe has shifted northwards," Europol said. The organisation has produced a report on the problem jointly with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in which it's pointed out that the use of illegal drugs cost half a million lives in 2019, while disorders resulting from drug use resulted in the loss of 18-million years of healthy life. Everyone knows using illegal drugs is dangerous, but users (and addicts) persist in pursuing and consuming them. "Serious and often lethal illnesses are more common among drug users," the report points out, "particularly those who inject drugs, many of whom are living with HIV and Hepatitis C already." The very detailed report, which covers the whole world and every type of drug, says: "Despite the proven dangers, drug use persists and in some contexts proliferates." People are often deliberately ignorant (or pretend to be) of the real risks their habit presents. "Over the past year," (the report was published in 2021, so is here referring to 2020) "around 275-million people have used drugs, up by 22% from 2010." The report further predicts that by 2030, "demographic factors project the number of people using drugs to rise by 11% around the world, and as much as 40% in Africa alone." Most people would agree that it's a depressing prediction, while the police are aware that in Europe's case, the Port of Antwerp plays an important and deadly role.



Young junkies on Kensington Avenue, Philadelphia, USA.

Part of the problem is the way we like to fool ourselves; you know the sort of thing: "Oh, one more drink won't hurt," or "I'm sure she won't mind." The UNODC report says that the potency of cannabis and its products has almost quadrupled in recent years, yet most adolescents prefer to go on believing otherwise; the percentage who consider it harmful has dropped by as much as 40% over the same time period. Worried? You should be, according to Europol, UNODC and Interpol, to name but three. The dangers posed by using cocaine are even affecting our sewage. The EU drugs agency, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), together with the



A scanner truck used by the Belgian customs in Antwerp.

SCORE (Sewage analysis CORE group Europe), examined wastewater from some 54-million people in more than a hundred European cities, carefully examining what they had flushed down the toilet. For the scientifically minded, it means the samples were analysed for the main urinary metabolites (substances produced when the body breaks down drugs) of cocaine and cannabis, which are benzoylecgonine (BE) and THC-COOH (11-nor-9-carboxy-delta9-tetrahydrocannabinol). I don't suppose the drugs' users are too concerned. The concentrations were highest on a Monday after the drugs consumers had presumably enjoyed a narcotic-filled weekend. Such traces were found in all the cities tested but Antwerp came out worst, with cocaine use doubling over the last two years. Tests revealed 2,381 milligrams per 1,000 people per day, far ahead on the next biggest consumers, Tarragona in Spain, with 1,610 milligrams, and Amsterdam, with a relatively modest 1,142, according to the EMCDDA. Apart from cocaine, seemingly the narcotic of choice for most users and addicts, at least in and around Antwerp, the research also showed up traces of amphetamine, methamphetamine, MDMA (Ecstasy), ketamine and – surprise, surprise – cannabis. This type of research doesn't help to track the use of heroin: The specific metabolite of heroin: 6-monoacetylmorphine, has been found to be unstable in wastewater. A report prepared by the EMCDDA shows that the technique, however, although originally developed for other public health reasons and very useful during the COVID-19 pandemic, is proving invaluable in keeping tabs on the growing use of cocaine in particular.

After seizing 110 tonnes of cocaine in the port of Antwerp alone in 2022, there are now plans to step up the recruitment of staff and the acquisition of scanning equipment capable of finding the stuff arriving. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) now reckons that some 13.2 million people use hypodermic needles to take narcotics, 18% higher than previous estimates suggested. As a result, the number of people suffering from drug use disorders has soared to 39.5-million, a 45% increase over a single decade. In addition, the growing abuse of drugs leads to environmental damage and human rights abuses on a huge scale, not to mention murder and other crimes. The UNODC wants to see greater efforts at law enforcement, although it's unlikely to stamp out drug abuse. Antwerp, it seems, has become the capital of a huge and deadly criminal underworld, funded and perpetuated by a popular taste for narcotics and a vicious disregard for human life on the part of the traffickers.

*James Lookwood*  
james.lookwood@europe-diplomatic.eu

# EPIONE

CABINET ELISABETH THURAT

YOUR TRUSTED PODIATRY AND MEDICAL PEDICURE CLINIC IN BRUSSELS



## PLANTAR REFLEXOLOGY LASER THERAPY TARGETED AROMATHERAPY



- Uses APIVITA natural French products
- Proposes various treatments using organic essential oils
- Uses the unique Low Level Laser Therapy (manufactured by Erchonia, a US company and world leader in the field of Low Level Laser Therapy)
- Bespoke treatment programs and state-of-the-art equipment
- Spotless hygiene

### We provide the best care possible

ELISABETH THURAT CLINIC offers a wide range of care specifically tailored for young children, teenagers, adults, athletes, and people with disabilities.

## AT EPIONE CLINIC, YOUR FEET ARE IN GOOD HANDS !

[www.cabinet-thurat.be](http://www.cabinet-thurat.be) • +32 4 94 04 84 24

Avenue Brugmann 292 • 1180 Uccle • Belgium

Consultations only by appointment • From 8am to 8pm • Monday to Saturday





© ESAMIA / EL PEDOUSSAUT

## AN OPEN BOOK, MOROCCO BOUND

**A new corruption  
scandal rocks  
the European  
Parliament**

Bob Hope and Bing Crosby sang about being “off on the road to Morocco”, but we must remember that roads can go in a variety of directions. It seems as if money passed along the road from Morocco into the pockets of certain members of the European Parliament and votes have subsequently gone Morocco’s way. Why? Well, it seems that certain MEPs were found to have accepted money in return for “promoting the Kingdom’s interests”. That means voting in favour of things Rabat thinks would be helpful to the Kingdom and voting against those things it doesn’t like. It’s nothing new; this is politics and there is no need for a James Bond-type figure, merely an accountant. As *The Conversation* puts it in their on-line entry: “Corruption has existed since the Egyptian dynasty and still persists in almost every country around the globe.” People have been corrupt since at least the very first people evolved. Their ape-like ancestors may have been willing to trade influence (or violence) for a bunch of bananas, too. And just in case you think it’s a new idea, try this for size, also from *The Conversation*: “Corruption is as old as human history. The First Dynasty (3100–2700 BC) of ancient Egypt noted corruption in its judiciary.” Who would have thought it, eh? Corrupt and corruptible judges and lawyers? Whatever next? Some things, it seems, never change.



**King Mohammed VI awarding the Order of the Throne to Pier Antonio Panzeri and Abderrahim Atmoun. This state decoration is given in recognition of services rendered to the Kingdom of Morocco.**

In the Morocco corruption saga, the great motivation is cash, as it so often is. It’s amazing what some people (dare I say most people?) will do for a little pecuniary advantage. You want a couple or more politicians to vote in a particular way you simply tell them which way to vote and slip them a little “persuasion” in the form of non-consecutively numbered bank notes. That, very often, is all you need to do, although if it’s a big favour you’re asking, it may involve something more impressive, like a yachting holiday somewhere warm, as well. Money was certainly the motivation in this case. The result, of course, can be made to look less criminal or suspicious with a clever bit of spin. Julius Caesar used his propaganda machine to make himself look good and it worked for

some two thousand years. As the saying goes, there’s nothing new under the sun, and that includes political corruption (and killing for cash). As a result, the vast wealth Caesar amassed in his conquering of Gaul and most of Britain was obtained through trickery. Amazingly, the people back in Rome would even believe his claim that his massacre of civilians from the Germanic nations of the Usipetes and Tencteri was really an example of mass suicide, not brutal military defeat and the subsequent killing of prisoners (which it undoubtedly was). Caesar claimed they had simply lost all hope of getting away, so chose to end it all. He, on the other hand, had gained the hope of vast wealth. It makes Cassius look like a good man doing a good job, rather than a man with “a lean and hungry look”, who “thinks too much”, although in Caesar’s case he was undoubtedly dangerous.



**Pier Antonio Panzeri (left) and Abderrahim Atmoun during the 7th EU-Morocco Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting.**

The latest scandal has been labelled “Qatargate” by the media. It’s always “something gate” these days, ever since the Watergate scandal. In this case, arrest warrants are being issued and then rescinded a week or so later, which makes no sense. Among those targeted by law enforcement services is Pier Antonio Panzeri, who was expecting to see in the 2022-23 New Year in a very posh (and expensive) hotel in Marrakesh, provided for himself, his wife and their daughter, free of charge. Instead, having been identified as central to the corruption scandal, he and his wife and daughter spent New Year under arrest. It cannot have come as much of a surprise, given that Belgian police had raided the European Parliament and seized more than €1.5-million in cash at the houses of Panzeri and two other suspects. Police suspect that Qatar used Panzeri’s corrupt network to buff up its image ahead of the World Cup, although there were other potential motives, too. At the age of 67, Panzeri is a well-practised recipient of corrupt funds, having received bribes and gifts from Moroccan officials for more than a decade in return for influencing EU policy.

Panzeri failed to get re-elected in 2019, but was known for speaking out on human rights issues. According to transcripts of conversations that officials had wire-tapped, the Panzeri family had discussed gifts from Morocco’s ambassador to Poland, Abderrahim Atmoun, and were also looking forward to a week’s holiday (including New Year, of course) at the luxurious Marrakesh resort of Mamounia, all paid for by Rabat. Panzeri had a long record of voting in ways that favoured Morocco. In July 2022 Belgian intelligence officials planted video cameras in Panzeri’s Brussels home after finding €700,000 in cash hidden there. Panzeri was reported to have repeatedly sought ways to water down any criticism of Morocco, whilst also – somewhat ironically, perhaps – launching an organisation to encourage accountability



for human rights abuses, under the title “Fight Impunity”.

Meanwhile the investigative judge in France has asked French authorities to seize all Atmoun’s assets in the country, although



© BELGIAN FEDERAL POLICE  
**Money seized by the Belgian anti corruption police.**

Atmoun himself, who is also a citizen of France, had already disappeared, probably back to Morocco. The strange thing is that nobody seems to be going after Atmoun’s employers in Morocco’s government and secret services. It’s clear that Rabat masterminded this corruption operation over a number of years, but no European leader has openly condemned Rabat and cooperation between Morocco and the EU continues.

## CHANGING HABITS AND RULES

But you can’t easily fight something that’s been a virtual way of life for decades. It has even been suggested by one cynic that the reason why no government has been strongly critical of Morocco is that every government does it, at one level or another. No-one is going to utter or write a strong criticism if the response could justifiably be “but you do it, too”. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote that the Alcmaeonid family bribed the priestess at the Oracle of Delphi, one of the most supposedly powerful mystical forces of ancient Greece. As far back as 1400 BC, people from all over ancient Greece and beyond came to get Pythia, the High Priestess of the god Apollo, to answer their questions about life, love and whatever fortune lay in store for them. The wealthy Alcmaeonid family offered to rebuild the Temple of Apollo in a grand scale and with Parian marble following its destruction in an earthquake. In return, Pythia convinced the nation-state Sparta to help the family to conquer and rule Athens. Since it appeared to work, Aristotle decided that even gods can be bribed. They were a naughty lot in the pantheon of gods the Greeks worshipped, it seems, disreputable and susceptible to bribery and coercion. A bit like rather too many of today’s politicians.

It’s interesting to look at why this particular example of “influence peddling”, as it’s known, arose. It’s not all simply to do with Morocco either. These sorts of things are usually more complex than they appear to be at first. It begins to look as if one of the aims of the various agents involved was to harm the interests of Algeria, although it seems to have been primarily aimed at preventing the EU from adopting any measures critical of human rights in Morocco. According to Politico magazine, Panzeri and his pals played an active part in influencing votes aimed at turning members against Moroccan human rights campaigners who had

been nominated for the European Parliament’s important Sakharov Prize for human rights. Morocco, for its part, has condemned what it calls “media attacks” and “legal harassment”, as you would expect.

In case you’re interested (and people should be) the 2023 Sakharov Prize went to the late Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran, and very deservedly so, in my opinion. Jina Mahsa Amini died in custody at the age of just 22 for supposedly violating Iran’s strict hijab rules. Her family tried to get to Strasbourg to collect her prize but her parents and brother were stopped at the airport, banned from travelling, and they had their passports confiscated. Just what exactly is the government of Iran afraid of? Witnesses say that Jina Mahsa Amini was beaten while in prison (presumably by the so-called “morality police”) but the official version is that she suffered “heart failure”, despite having been a healthy 22-year-old woman.



© DAFESH  
**The grave of Mahsa Amini at the cemetery of Aychi in Saqez.**

We must assume that Iran’s leaders expect the world to believe that, despite its obvious falsehood. I have read the Qur’an, and it bears little resemblance to the way it’s interpreted in Iran and I think the people of that country deserve better.

But to get back to our story, the MEPs are demonstrating a growing concern at the way foreign governments try to influence their decisions. In a way, it reflects how important the EU is in world affairs and exactly how much its decisions matter these days. It’s not only Morocco that has been accused of attempted bribery and corruption, the accusatory finger has also been pointed at Qatar, China, Russia and the United Arab Emirates over how they conduct their “lobbying” (or, more accurately, arm-twisting) activities in Brussels and Strasbourg. As a Parliament spokesperson put it: “Attempts to interfere with democracy are a widespread phenomenon that must be countered as vigorously as possible.” That view stems from the recommendations agreed by MEPs for the reform of the Parliament’s rules on transparency, integrity, accountability and anti-corruption. The

members strongly condemned the three MEPs, one former MEP and a parliamentary assistant for participating in corruption, money laundering and aiding a criminal organisation. They also voted overwhelmingly to call for “a Code (that) should protect whistle-blowers more effectively and strengthen rules on conflicts of interest, asset declarations and disclosure of side income, as well as banning paid side work for entities covered by the Transparency Register.” In the subsequent press release, the MEPs said: “countries such as Qatar, Morocco, but also China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Serbia and Turkey have invested heavily in lobbying efforts in Brussels”. Foreign interference, MEPs agreed: “must not remain without consequences”, calling for all legislative and non-legislative proposals on cooperation with state authorities attempting to interfere, including EU funding, to be suspended. Funds for civil society organisations and independent media as well as humanitarian assistance should be preserved. It’s the toughest line they have taken yet against corrupt practices and attempted interference in the European democratic process.

## KEEPING THIRD COUNTRIES IN LINE

“The reform proposals adopted today,” said European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, “will offer long-term solutions to help reinforce



Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament.

our capacity to prevent external actors from interfering with our work. They will form our line of defence against autocratic third countries trying to subdue European decision-making and they will help us to protect our open and free societies. They will complement all the immediate measures already put in place to increase integrity.” The co-rapporteur, EPP member Vladimír Bilčík from Slovakia said: “Parliament must remain an open institution, while defending itself against corruption and malign foreign interference. To achieve this, we propose that staff dealing with

sensitive issues should get security clearance, we need more public openness about meetings with third parties and political relations with third countries should be conducted only via established parliamentary channels.” A third co-rapporteur, Nathalie Loiseau of France’s Renew party, said: “Today’s vote sends a strong message. Our recommendations shows Parliament’s determination to improve its transparency, fight corruption and better combat malign foreign interference.” She also reminded colleagues of the Parliament’s “previous positions in favour of a strong European Ethics Body that would improve both transparency and accountability towards our citizens.” We shall have to wait and see if that comes to pass, but there’s quite a lot of enthusiasm for the idea.



Vladimír Bilčík, Slovak MEP.

Meanwhile, in the vote taken in December 2022 it was agreed that the new EU ethics body should monitor former MEPs to check that they are complying with the six-month cooling-off period and the current Parliament agreed that former members’ access to the Parliament should be revoked if they lobby on behalf of what are seen as “high risk” countries or entities. The European Commission came in for criticism for taking such a long time to come up with a proposal that MEPs see as being disappointingly weak anyway. MEPs want more than just an instruction to members to stick to the rules; they also want a set of sanctions to apply if anyone steps out of line. It’s what used to be called in the UK the “carrot and stick” approach. You lead the donkey on with the promise of the carrot but if it steps out of line you hit it with the stick. That always struck me as rather cruel. As part of this approach, members want protection for whistle-blowers and they want to see rules on possible conflicts of interest tightened up. They’re afraid that at present there are still too many loopholes in the integrity and transparency rules. But at least no-one is suggesting Europe should follow Iran’s lead. Incidentally, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has said he will not negotiate with the United States, thus proving yet again that the Iranians prefer killing to talking.

Maíra Martini, the recognised expert on corrupt money flows at Transparency International, said: “The need to enhance the EU anti-money laundering package gained new importance after the EU’s highest court struck down public access to company-beneficial ownership registers late last year.” She also told reporters: “We commend the European Parliament for responding to the current challenges and proposing provisions which, if adopted, will prevent the EU from sliding back into the corporate secrecy era.” Transparency International seems pleased with the direction matters are taking, although their principle concern is with corporate-type corruption and wrongful dealing at boardroom level, rather than political influence-peddling. The basic idea is



much the same, however: whoever has and is willing to part with the greatest amount of money ends up getting the sorts of votes they want when the debate is over.

Sadly, quite a lot of governments or governmental bodies appear to have a tendency towards corrupt practices. There have even been suggestions that vote buying and vote rigging has taken place in US elections, although I'm not inclined to attach much credibility in that case. The media, watching hawk-eyed and keen for a shocking story, would never have allowed that to happen. Those who make such allegations have never watched a count, I think; I have, and I don't see how it could happen without it being spotted by a credible witness or by one of the many clerks and official observers in attendance. The vote in the European Parliament in favour of the report calling for greater transparency, integrity, and accountability was won with 441 votes in favour, 70 against (who were they, I wonder?) and 71 abstentions. It was a very clear outcome that leaves no doubt, despite the large sums spent by such countries as Qatar, Morocco, China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Serbia and Turkey on "persuasion". Foreign interference, they said, "must not remain without consequences" and they're calling for all legislative and non-legislative proposals on cooperating with state authorities that are trying to influence the outcome by buying support to lead to consequences. Attempted bribery must have a cost that goes beyond how much is being paid, with suspension being threatened against those seeking to game the system.

This should hardly come as a surprise: the European Parliament, European Commission and the Council agreed back in 2020 to the creation of a reinforced "Transparency Register", which must apply to all three institutions whilst opening the facility up to other EU institutions and bodies if they want to join. The Permanent Representations of all the member states will also take part through the use of unilateral voluntary measures. The vast majority of MEPs want to see President Metsola's 14-point plan to reform Parliament's rules put into force without delay. The agreed terms bring in conditionality and complementary transparency measures for the signatory institutions which are also thus committed to ensuring that their respective measures will be consistent with the common objectives identified in the agreement concerned and that they will "deliver an equivalent effect across the board." Furthermore, since 2011, the Parliament and the Commission have jointly operated a public register for those representing particular interests. It has taken some long while to achieve such ambitious agreement to make EU decision-making more transparent and accountable. The agreement reached in 2020 came at the end of what was the seventh political meeting on the subject and the fourth since the 9th Parliamentary term began. It took a long time to get there, but they did.



© OMBUDSMAN EUROPEA EU

Emily O'Reilly.

The changes to Parliament's Rules of Procedure were adopted in the Parliament with an overwhelming majority of 505 votes in favour to 93 against with just 52 abstentions. By doing so, MEPs adopted a reinforced ban on all MEP activities that would constitute lobbying, along with an obligation for MEPs to submit declarations of input on ideas or suggestions received from external actors to be annexed to all reports and opinions, and harsher penalties for breaches of the code of conduct. There are notable improvements, such as a more detailed definition of conflict of interest and an obligation on Members to publish the details of all meetings organised with registered lobbyists and with diplomatic representatives from outside the EU. Even so, there remain fears about the measures' effectiveness. The European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly agrees that it represents progress, but she still has concerns over implementation and enforcement. As she has pointed out, for a new ethics framework to be credible it requires adequate resources and rigorous enforcement, and O'Reilly fears that is not yet the case. She wants the European Parliament to put everything in place before next June's European elections. She wants to see clear information on exactly how the Parliament will monitor and enforce the new rules, including a post-mandate cooling-off period for MEPs. She also fears that the duties of the committee that monitors MEPs' compliance remain unclear, despite its more proactive rôle where the activities of MEPs are concerned.

Her final worry is what she sees as the "inadequate transparency" of the reform process, especially with regard to decisions adopted by the all-powerful Bureau. She believes that the public at large should be able to scrutinise internal decisions that are of significant interest. "The Qatargate scandal undermined the reputation of the European Parliament in the eyes of many EU citizens," the Ombudsman warned. "Ahead of the European elections next year, the Parliament must now show that it is doing everything in its power to protect its integrity and credibility." She told the media that the stronger rules on ethics are a good starting point but can only ever be as effective as their implementation and enforcement.

Democratic bodies with powers to change things will always attract the attention of those who want to corrupt it all in order to boost a particular cause; the trick is to spot it going on and to stop it in its tracks. The ancient Egyptians and the Romans never quite managed it, but with today's tools helping to scrutinise what's going on, the European Parliament has the wherewithal to succeed where the ancients failed, especially with European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly keeping a careful watch on proceedings.

*Jim Gibbons*

[Jim.Gibbons@europe-diplomatic.eu](mailto:Jim.Gibbons@europe-diplomatic.eu)

Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri

© US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

# MADOFF

**A distribution of over  
\$158.9m to nearly  
25,000 victims of  
the Madoff Ponzi  
scheme**



The US Justice Department has announced that the Madoff Victim Fund (MVF) began its ninth distribution of over \$158.9 million in funds forfeited to the U.S. government in connection with the Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities LLC (BLMIS) fraud scheme.

In this distribution, payments will be sent to 24,875 victims across the globe, bringing their total recoveries to 91% of their fraud losses. Through its nine distributions, MVF has paid over \$4.22 billion to 40,843 victims as compensation for losses they suffered from the collapse of BLMIS.

"The department's Madoff Victim Fund has exceeded expectations in the level of recovery provided to victims of the fraud committed by Bernard Madoff, which devastated thousands of lives," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "To date, the Madoff Victim Fund has assisted more than 40,800 individual victims in recovering over 90% of victim losses. The department continues to prioritize the use of civil asset forfeiture to ensure compensation is available for victims of fraud."

"In 2009, when the Southern District of New York charged Bernie Madoff for his \$64 billion securities fraud 'Ponzi' scheme, it was one of the most prolific financial crimes in American history. Among Madoff's many victims were not only wealthy and institutional investors, but charities and pension funds alike — some of which invested money with Madoff on behalf of individuals working paycheck-to-paycheck who were relying on their pension accounts for their retirements," said U.S. Attorney Damian Williams for the Southern District of New York. "The financial toll on those who entrusted their money with Madoff was devastating, and this office's unprecedented efforts to return money to Madoff's victims has now resulted in clawbacks of 91% of fraud losses to their rightful owners. I commend the career prosecutors of this office for today's distribution of over \$158 million and for their relentless pursuit of justice for victims of Wall Street fraudsters, like Bernie Madoff."



Damian Williams, Attorney for the Southern District of New York, USA.

According to court documents and information presented in related proceedings, for decades, Bernard L. Madoff used his position as chairman of BLMIS, the investment advisory business he founded in 1960, to steal billions of dollars from his clients. On March 12, 2009, Madoff pleaded guilty to 11 federal felonies, admitting that he had turned his wealth management business into the world's largest Ponzi scheme, benefitting himself, his family, and select members of his inner circle.

On June 29, 2009, Madoff was sentenced to 150 years in prison for running the largest fraudulent scheme in history. Of the over \$4 billion that has been made available to victims, approximately \$2.2 billion was collected as part of the historic civil forfeiture recovery from the estate of deceased Madoff investor, Jeffrey Picower.



Bernard Madoff

An additional \$1.7 billion was collected as part of a deferred prosecution agreement with JPMorgan Chase Bank N.A. and civilly forfeited in a parallel action. The remaining funds were collected through a civil forfeiture action against investor Carl Shapiro and his family, and from civil and criminal forfeiture actions against Madoff, Peter B. Madoff, and their co-conspirators.

The MVF's payouts would not have been possible without the extraordinary efforts of the Criminal Division's Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section, U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, and FBI in the prosecution of Madoff's crimes and the recovery of assets supporting the forfeiture in the case.

The MVF is overseen by Richard Breeden, former chairman of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, who serves as Special Master appointed by the Justice Department to assist in connection with the victim remission proceedings. Breeden and his team at MVF provided essential assistance to evaluate over 68,000 remission petitions involving billions in cash flows, and to compute each victim's fraud losses to enable payments to be made.



Special Master Richard Breeden with MVF checks prepared for distribution



© NRG

'Life is a train, not a station' (Paulo Coelho)

# TRAINS

## THE GREENER SIDE OF TRAVEL



The forerunner of today's trains can be traced back to around 2200 BC in antiquity, during the Babylonian era. During this period, wheeled wagons traversed stone paths, serving as precursors to modern-day rails. Over time, more efficient methods of transporting materials from mines were developed, particularly in Austria around 1500. In the late 1700s, the introduction of robust iron rails further revolutionised transport.

In the 17th century, the first real railways were built in England to minimise friction when transporting heavily loaded wheeled vehicles. On the American continent, the first railway line was built in 1764 for military purposes at the Niagara Port in Lewiston, New York. At the beginning of the 19th century, in the midst of the industrial revolution in Europe, the first functioning steam railway locomotive was built in the United Kingdom. Richard Trevithick, a British engineer from Cornwall, is regarded as the inventor of the high-pressure steam locomotive.



**Puffing Billy being readied for a day's work on the Pockerley Waggonway at the Beamish Museum, County Durham, England.**

'Puffing Billy', the oldest surviving steam locomotive, which can still be seen in the Science Museum in London, was built between 1813 and 1814 for Wylam Colliery near Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Initially intended for the transport of coal and other goods, the trains were eventually also used for passenger transport. The first steam-powered passenger line was established between Manchester and Liverpool in 1830. The first electric locomotive was built in 1837 by the chemist Robert Davidson from Aberdeen, who a few years later, built a larger, battery-powered locomotive called the Galvani. It was exhibited at the Royal Scottish Society of Arts Exhibition in 1841.

During the reign of Queen Victoria, the railway network in Great Britain experienced considerable growth, which then spread to the whole of Europe. Around 1860, the switch from iron to steel rails began, which offered greater strength and reliability. In 1912, the first diesel locomotive was put into operation in Switzerland, and on 3 July 1938, a class A4 locomotive, the Mallard, broke the world speed record for steam locomotives at 203 km/h - a record that still stands today. However, following World War II, the majority of trains in Europe shifted to Diesel or electric-powered engines.



**The Tokaido Shinkansen train on its last run.**

The first high-speed railway system, the Tōkaidō Shinkansen, was put into operation in Japan between Tokyo and Osaka in 1964. Due to the aerodynamic shape of the locomotive, it was soon nicknamed the 'bullet train'. Since 1964, high-speed trains travelling at speeds of over 300 km/h have been built in many European countries as an alternative to air travel. Among the high-speed trains, the French TGV seems to be the best known, perhaps because it set the speed record at 575 km/h.

In the meantime, the Japanese set a new world record (603 km/h) in 2015 with a new prototype that uses state-of-the-art magnetic levitation technology (Maglev). The new Tokyo-Nagoya railway line, which is currently under construction, will cut travel time by around 50 per cent compared to the current Tokaido-Shinkansen line, and the entire journey to Osaka will take just 67 minutes. The trains will travel at a maximum speed of 505 km/h.

Germany briefly introduced a train system powered by hydrogen fuel cells, but this was cancelled just one year after its introduction. The German Ministry of Economic Affairs, Transport, construction and Digitalisation has indicated that a transition to cheaper battery-powered electric systems is planned in the coming years.

In the mid-20th century, air travel experienced a remarkable surge in popularity, undergoing exponential growth. Over time, it became increasingly accessible and began to be perceived as a convenient and comfortable mode of transportation, no longer limited to the elite.



**German Trans Europe Express (TEE), used until 1972.**

Consequently, rail transport seemed to lose some of its allure and promotion compared to the booming aviation industry. With the introduction of larger and more modern aircraft, airlines expanded their fleets, allowing them to traverse vast distances across the skies. Moreover, since the 1990s, flying has been heavily marketed as the safest method of travel, a well-known cliché that has permeated public consciousness.

In recent years, however, investment and significant technological advances have seen the European railway network expand considerably, connecting major cities with smaller towns and even villages, offering commuters new opportunities and greater mobility. The most popular routes are usually served by several trains per hour, so you can get to your destination on time and avoid other, more polluting modes of transport.

In recent decades, the practise of living in one place and working in another has become a common way of life for many people (apart from the recent increase in remote working). At the end of 2022, the total length of railway networks in the European Union was more than 200,000 km, with Germany and France leading the way in this extensive infrastructure. As highlighted in a recent report, Switzerland's national railway system has been recognised as the highest quality in Europe.

According to a comparative study, Sweden's high-speed trains are ranked among the least punctual. The same source, (thelocal.se) indicates that German DB (Deutsche Bahn) doesn't fare much better. The German newspaper 'Zeit' reported that Deutsche Bahn paid over 92 million euros in compensation to passengers due to delays in 2022. The article also states that only around 65 percent of Germany's long-distance trains arrived at their destinations on time. Notably, there was a significant increase in compensation applications, with approximately 3.8 million processed last year, representing a surge of 2.2 million cases compared to 2021.

However, the German government is massively encouraging the population to use the train as their main means of transport, even though distances in Germany are quite long. the 'Deutschland-Ticket' is a concept introduced by DB that costs 49 euros per month. The holder of such a ticket can travel anywhere in Germany and by all means of transport, including rail (with the exception of ICE express trains). The concept builds on the success of the €9 ticket, which was offered as a special measure in the summer months of 2022 to relieve people in the face of the sudden rise in the cost of living and inflation following the Covid pandemic. This initiative also benefited the environment and boosted domestic tourism. Today, the single monthly



The three TGVs having held the world rail speed record, lined up at Villeneuve Saint-Georges (France), for the 40th anniversary of the launch of the TGV services . •TGV Sud-Est n° 16 (380 km/h in 1981) • TGV Atlantique n° 325 (515,3 km/h in 1990) ;• TGV POS n° 4402 (574,8 km/h in 2007).

rate of 49 euros simplifies things considerably and obviously encourages people to replace their own cars with public, more environmentally friendly means of transport.

The French TGV network (Train à Grande Vitesse) offers extensive connections to over 200 cities in France and around 30 cities throughout Europe. The TGV 'OUIGO' offers a low-cost alternative with speeds of up to 300 km/h. Prices for the 'OUIGO' start at just 10 euros for adults and 8 euros for children.

'Summer is almost here... What are your plans for the holidays?' That's how SNCB (The Belgian National Railway Company) promotes its train deals. 'More trains and more kilometers covered' is the goal of the SNCB expansion plan starting December 2023. This ambitious rail project aims to boost the number of train passengers by 30 percent by 2032. Between 2023 and 2026, the kilometers covered by trains are expected to grow by 7.4 percent, making this the most



B-europe.com is the website where you can book and manage your international train bookings on one central platform. You can get tickets for Eurostar, TGV INOUI or ICE fast trains connecting major capitals and cities on the continent. Many of these companies offer integrated tickets and corporate fares with additional connecting flights to make travelling even more convenient and easier.

ambitious railway plan ever in Belgium. By the end of the period, there should be an extra 2,000 trains running each week. But for now, the expansions are somewhat limited by staff shortages.

At EU level, DiscoverEU is an action of the Erasmus+ programme that offers everyone turning 18 this year the opportunity to explore the diversity of Europe, mainly by train. Europeans between the ages of 12 and 27 can also benefit from the Eurail Youth Pass, which offers up to 25 percent off normal adult fares for all train journeys, whether they are students, backpackers or simply want to travel around Europe. After purchasing a Youth Pass, you have up to 11 months to travel.

At the same time, a large bus transport network has developed in Europe, which is still much cheaper than the



train, albeit not as fast. For years, especially after the fall of the Iron Curtain, migration between Eastern and Western Europe was mainly carried out using minibuses and coaches. We all have the legendary American Greyhound in mind when we talk about public buses. Eurolines or Flixbus are just a few examples of companies that currently offer coach travel at discounted prices (from just 5 euros) to thousands of destinations in Europe.



Railway companies are constantly investing in their infrastructure to enhance safety and they often adopt latest technologies. Also, trains are usually safer because they are less affected by severe weather conditions than other means of transportation.

One of the main obstacles to the further development of the integrated European railway system is that there is still a significant gap between Eastern and Western Europe in terms of infrastructure, capacity and standards of railway transport. At the same time, there are also cultural and mental differences that sometimes hinder the rapid transition to a green transport system. However, trains are one of the safest modes of transport with relatively few incidents compared to other popular modes of transport such as private cars or public buses, even if they are not as safe as airplanes. The UK has the safest railway transportation in Europe.

A report on railway safety and interoperability in the EU, published by the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA) in 2022, states: "European railways remain among the safest in the world, with serious accidents (with five or more fatalities) becoming increasingly rare and major accidents decreasing in recent years. The safety level recorded for 2020 is the highest in history. The risk of a train passenger having a fatal accident is around a quarter of the risk for a bus passenger and is similar to the risk for a passenger on a commercial aircraft. The use of individual means of



A new railway bridge being built on the Czechowice-Dziedzice – Goczałkowice Zdrój line in Poland.

transport, such as a car, carries a much higher risk of death: the probability of a car passenger dying is almost 50 times higher than that of a train passenger travelling the same distance. The risk of death for an average train passenger is currently around 0.058 deaths per billion passenger kilometres, making the train the safest means of land transport in the EU by comparison".

However, when a train accident occurs, it usually attracts a great deal of attention and is eagerly exploited by the media. The worst railway accident occurred in Germany (Eschede) in 1998, when a high-speed train derailed due to a crack in a wheel and crashed onto an overpass above the railway line. The bridge then collapsed onto the Hanover-Hamburg train, killing 101 people and injuring 88 others.

The aforementioned ERA report states that "rail is the most sustainable, affordable and effective mode of transport to achieve the goal of decarbonisation and that it could be the backbone of European transport".

In the meantime, however, many commercial short-haul flights are still relatively cheap (although air fares have risen significantly after the pandemic) and also much shorter than the alternative train routes, so in many cases there is no real and strong incentive to take the train.

Another issue that cannot be ignored in recent years is the fairly frequent strikes by railway workers in various European countries. As in local public transport, where a strike disrupts all urban transport and causes chaos, strikes in rail transport also cause serious problems that can undermine people's confidence in the reliability and predictability of rail transport.

2021 was the European Year of Rail, which emphasised how trains can help the EU achieve its climate target of becoming climate neutral by 2050. The year 2021 ended with a European Rail Summit on the margins of the informal meeting of transport ministers and also marked the official launch of the Joint European Railway Undertaking, the new EU partnership for railway research and innovation, which aims to make European railways more efficient, accessible and user-friendly.

European Commissioner for Transport, Adina Vălean, said: "2021 has truly been a European Year of Rail, with many initiatives that put rail at the centre of attention across Europe. But more importantly, we have had a first glimpse of the rail renaissance we are working towards by opening or announcing new rail links."

When asked how the European Union can directly promote the change of travel habits of the continent's inhabitants, taking into account the great cultural and mental differences between countries in terms of transport, Mrs Vălean said: "First of all, I would like to make it clear that I do



Recent calls for proposals launched under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for Transport programme have made €7 billion available for projects targeting new and improved European transport infrastructure.

not believe in forcing people to change their habits. However, I want to make sure that everyone has a full overview of their options – including the impact of those options – so that they can make an informed decision.

CountEmissionsEU will help. This proposal, which I presented this summer, foresees a common methodology that companies can use to calculate their greenhouse gas emissions if they choose to publish this information, or if they are asked to share it for contractual reasons. Reliable data on door-to-door emissions will enable operators to benchmark their services, and allow consumers to make informed choices on transport and delivery options.



Adina-Ioana Valean.

I also believe that mobility habits depend as much on the attractiveness of transport services as much as any cultural differences, if not more so. If certain services are attractive, demand will follow.

This is why we are investing time and money in supporting the more sustainable transport modes in their efforts to become more attractive for passengers and shippers. In 2014-2020, we spent 16.6 billion euros under the Connecting Europe Facility on modernizing rail infrastructure. For rail, I equate attractiveness with shorter journey times, greater reliability and lower ticket prices.

For shorter journey times, we need greater interoperability. We are also working towards the completion of our TEN-T network – the grid of railway lines, ports, inland waterways and roads connecting the EU's key cities. Once the network is complete, it will cut train travel times: from 4.5 hours to 2.5 hours between Copenhagen and Hamburg, for example.

On price, I often hear comparisons between rail and aviation. Lower ticket prices for flights are the result of 30 years of market liberalization and fierce competition between companies. On average, three carriers compete on the same route. Since the fourth railway package of 2016, we are beginning to see more market opening for rail, and all the advantages that this brings. Ticket prices are down on all routes with new entrants – between Madrid and Barcelona, for example.

When it is not possible to change habits, we can still reduce the impact of these habits! Some trips can only be made by road. Using an electric vehicle will significantly reduce the emissions associated with these journeys. But electric vehicles need charging! The recently agreed Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation sets



targets for the roll-out of this infrastructure so that we can all drive electric vehicles with confidence.

For shorter distances, particularly in an urban context, we need to do more to make public transport and active mobility attractive – by making it easier to switch between the two, for example, and providing safe infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists.

In October I presented a Cycling Declaration – a set of principles to boost cycling across the Union. We are already seeing a huge increase in the number of bikes on our roads, even if this is not yet the case everywhere. But I am optimistic. If you haven't seen photos of Amsterdam in the 1980s, check them out. The city had just as much congestion then as would associate with Milan or Bucharest today. Today, bikes rule. Change can happen, and it will for mobility". (The European Commissioner for Transport, Adina Vălean)

The EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy and its Action Plan with 82 initiatives is a comprehensive and ambitious guide for the coming years to create a greener and more efficient digital transport system in Europe that is more resilient to future crises. As set out in the European Green Deal, "the result will be a 90 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050, achieved through a smart, competitive, safe, accessible and affordable transport system." (Source: transport.ec.europa.eu)

According to the EU's plans, high-speed transport should double across Europe by 2030, while journeys by public transport that are shorter than 500 km should be climate-neutral. Innovation and digitalisation are tools with which the European Union is trying to influence the way passengers will travel in the future.

Today, only 7 per cent of all kilometres travelled by train in Europe are cross-border journeys. One of the aims is therefore to support and improve networked and automated multimodal mobility – for example, by enabling passengers to buy tickets for multimodal journeys and switch effortlessly between different modes of transport.

A special project was launched as part of the European Year of Rail: Connecting Europe Express, a special EU train that travelled across the continent from 2 September to 7



The 'Connecting Europe Express' in Portugal in 2021.

October 2021, visiting more than 100 cities in 26 countries, starting in Lisbon and ending in Paris. The aim of this

project was to promote travelling between European countries by train as a practical and convenient way to travel.

But we cannot ignore the still wide gap between the different EU Member States when it comes to railway infrastructure. On this subject, Mrs Vălean said: "The infrastructure is different in many EU Member States and this is frustrating in many ways: economically, environmentally, safety-wise and simply for convenience. Take the three different track gauges used in the EU. These clearly hinder the smooth passage of trains across the continent. We therefore propose that the European standard gauge be used for all new railway lines. Member States should also consider which existing railway lines should be converted to European standard gauge. The long-term goal is to connect all Member States on the continent to the European standard gauge.

Through our legislation on the TEN-T, we are moving towards key parts of our infrastructure meeting the same minimum criteria. We are also supporting the investment that is needed to get to that point. Those EU Member States with a lower GDP are eligible for EU funding to cover 85 percent of the costs of rail infrastructure projects. I would encourage these countries to make the most of this opportunity. This year we also proposed revisions to the EU's Technical Specifications for Interoperability to move towards common specifications for rolling stock, infrastructure and signaling, as well as operating rules for trains.

It is important that we also look beyond our borders. We have already proposed extending our European transport corridors to Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkans. This will bring their infrastructure closer to the European standard.

Some of the Central and Eastern European Member States that joined the EU this century initially prioritized developing their road infrastructure. Now that these roads are generally of a high standard, it is time to focus on rail. Ultimately, I want trains to be able to cross Europe with the same ease as cars can." (The European Commissioner for Transport, Adina Vălean)

Other than cultural and local particularities, the general public doesn't seem to have a strong preference for one means of transport or another, as Mrs Vălean also pointed out. In most cases, it is the quality of a journey, the speed and the price of this service that determine the choice of travellers. It's up to the authorities and transport companies to position themselves on the market and to offer services that can contribute to and shape a greener, cleaner and more sustainable European future.

Alexandra Paucescu

alexandra.paucescu@europe-diplomatic.eu





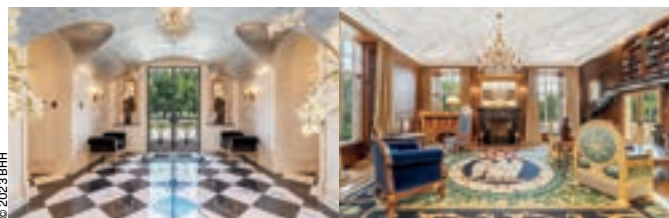
# VERSAILLES PALACE

**Buy your own  
Versailles Palace  
in the USA for  
12 million US dollars**



A rare opportunity awaits to own this magnificent sprawling French Chateau estate, designed by renowned architect F.L. Bissinger. Gracing over 7 quiet and private acres in prestigious Gladwyne, this regal compound is surrounded by gardens, manicured grounds, and towering trees.

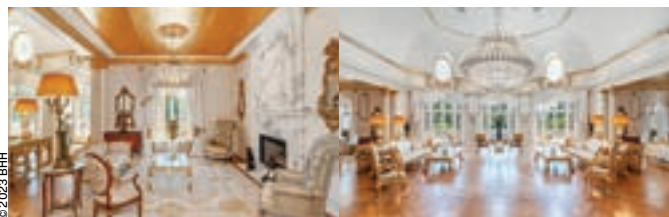
Reminiscent of a castle, this masterpiece combines superior design and refined craftsmanship with bespoke finishes and the latest smart home technology. Created with lavish detail and overflowing with every modern amenity imaginable, this spectacular estate was built with dramatic architectural details, including tiered limestone terraces and arches, turrets, and elaborate chimneys.



A grand gate opens to a tree lined drive punctuated with stunning fountains on the approach to this awe inspiring chateau. Designed for hosting grand or intimate parties, the floor plan flows seamlessly from room-to-room, overflowing to the outdoor tiered limestone terraces with dramatic views of the traditional French Jardin aux roses and fountains.

Interior living space in this breathtaking home was thoughtfully designed for everyday comforts. The opulent grand hall designed for entertaining is at the axial of the home, highlighted with soaring ceilings and windows, fluted pilasters, and imported and hand carved dual staircase. The grand hall is open to the living room embellished with a hand carved marble fireplace imported from Spain, and the piano room, all adorned with glass French doors opening to the terraces.

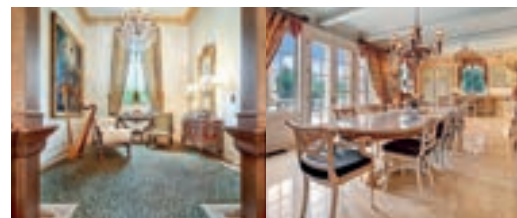
Magnificent First floor spaces continue with an Italian inspired wine tasting room punctuated with gas lamps opening to the formal dining room.



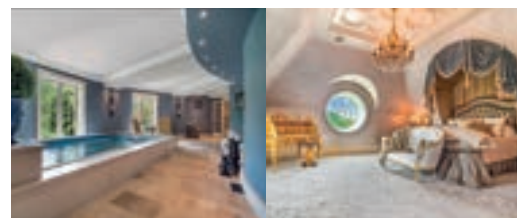
Down the adorned hallway enter the Newly redesigned designer kitchen featuring a marble topped seated island, onyx backsplash and cozy fireplace sitting area with walls of windows overlooking the grounds. The sunlit breakfast room has French doors to a private terraced dining area.

The breakfast room is open to the family room with 20+ft ceilings, accented with hand carved beams, gorgeous marble fireplace, saltwater aquarium and wet bar. The exquisite primary suite offers a private haven, a sitting room with

gas fireplace and gracefully designed window seat, an elegant breakfast bar, a balcony for two, two luxurious baths with sitting rooms and walk-in closets, a magnificent bedroom with vaulted ceiling adorned with intricate moldings, and an adjacent powder room.



A long list of luxurious amenities are available throughout the home, including a formal library, sun room with a graceful fountain and picturesque views, an automated movie theater, 2 table massage room, sauna, gym, indoor endless pool, salon/barber shop, 2-lane bowling alley, first floor luxuriously appointed in-law suite, and a 3 stop elevator, just to name a few of the estate's special features.

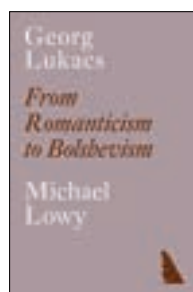


The lower terrace has an infinity waterfall edge swimming pool, with poolside portico lounge, full outdoor gourmet kitchen, and cozy fireplace, all overlooking the gardens, Bellagio fountains, and lighted tennis court, an unrivaled luxury oasis. Three additional carriage homes include guest houses, and car enthusiasts will be thrilled with the 9 car garages and motor court.

Gladwyne is known as one of the richest zip codes in the US, in award winning lower merion school district, just 20 minutes from Philadelphia, a quick jaunt to the airports, or speed into Manhattan in just 67 minutes. Close to world-class golf courses, fine dining, high-end retail, as well as other prestigious private schools in the area. Prepare to be amazed, and inspired.

**This estate is offered for sale by Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Fox & Roach PA 841 Merion square rd, Gladwyne PA 19035, USA.**

## BOOKS



## From Romanticism to Bolshevism

By Michael Löwy

On the 100th anniversary of the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*, a new edition of this indispensable guide to Lukács's thought and politics.

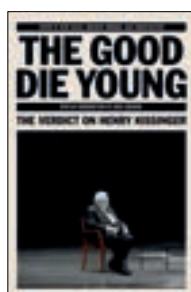
The philosophical and political development that converted Georg Lukács from a distinguished representative of Central European aesthetic vitalism into a major Marxist theorist and Communist militant has long remained an enigma.

In this this now classic study, Michael Löwy for the first time traced and explained the extraordinary mutation that occurred in Lukács's thought between 1909 and 1929. Utilizing many as yet unpublished sources, Löwy meticulously reconstructed the complex itinerary of Lukács's thinking as he gradually moved towards his decisive encounter with Bolshevism.

The religious convictions of the early Lukács, the peculiar spell exercised on him and on Max Weber by Dostoyevskyan images of pre-revolutionary Russia, the nature of his friendships with Ernst Bloch and Thomas Mann, were amongst the discoveries of the book.

Then, in a fascinating case-study in the sociology of ideas, Löwy showed how the same philosophical problematic of *Lebensphilosophie* dominated the intelligentsias of both Germany and Hungary in the pre-war period, yet how the different configurations of social forces in each country bent its political destiny into opposite directions. The famous works produced by Lukács during and after the Hungarian Commune—*Tactics and Ethics*, *History and Class Consciousness* and *Lenin*—were analysed and assessed. A concluding chapter discussed Lukács's eventual ambiguous settlement with Stalinism in the thirties, and its coda of renewed radicalism in the final years of his life.

In this new edition, Löwy has added a substantial new introduction which reassess the nature of Lukács's thought in the light of newly published texts and debates.



## The Good Die Young

The verdict on Henry Kissinger  
Introduction by Greg Grandin

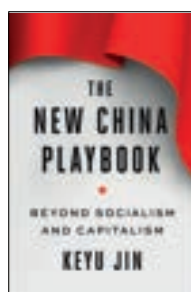
Edited by Bhaskar Sunkara, René Rojas and Jonah Walter  
Kissinger is dead but his blood-soaked legacy endures.

If the American foreign policy establishment is a grand citadel, then Henry Kissinger is the ghoulish haunting its hallways. For half a century, he was an omnipresent figure in war rooms and at press briefings, dutifully shepherding the American empire through successive rounds of growing pains. For multiple generations of anti-war activists, Kissinger personified the depravity of the American war machine.

The world Kissinger wrought is the world we live in, where ideal investment conditions are generated from the barrel of a gun. Today, global capitalism and United States hegemony are underwritten by the most powerful military ever devised. Any political vision worth fighting for must promise an end to the cycle of never-ending wars afflicting the world in the twenty-first century. And breaking that cycle means placing the twin evils of capitalism and imperialism in our crosshairs.

In this book, Jacobin follows Kissinger's fiery trajectory around the world—not because he was evil incarnate, but because he, more than any other public figure, illustrates the links between capitalism, empire, and the feedback loop of endless war-making that still plagues us today.

**"The collection strikes a blackly comic but erudite tone."**  
—Sophia Nguyen,  
*The Washington Post*



## The New China Playbook

Beyond Socialism and Capitalism  
By Keyu Jin

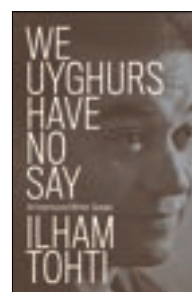
A myth-dispelling, comprehensive guide to the Chinese economy and its path to ascendancy.

China's economy has been booming for decades now. A formidable and emerging power on the world stage, the China that most Americans picture is only a rough sketch, based on American news coverage, policy, and ways of understanding.

Enter Keyu Jin: a world-renowned economist who was born in China, educated in the U.S., and is now a tenured professor at the London School of Economics. A person fluent in both Eastern and Western cultures, and a voice of the new generation of Chinese who represent a radical break from the past, Jin is uniquely poised to explain how China became the most successful economic story of our time, as it has shifted from primarily state-owned enterprise to an economy that is thriving in entrepreneurship, and participation in the global economy.

China's economic realm is colorful and lively, filled with paradoxes and conundrums, and Jin believes that by understanding the Chinese model, the people, the culture and history in its true perspective, one can reconcile what may appear to be contradictions to the Western eye.

What follows is an illuminating account of a burgeoning world power, its past, and its potential future.



## We Uyghurs Have No Say

An Imprisoned Writer Speaks  
By Ilham Tohti

Translated by Yaxue Cao, Cindy Carter and Matthew Robertson  
The words of China's most famous political prisoner.

In Xinjiang, the large northwest region of China, the government has imprisoned more than a million Uyghurs in reeducation camps. One of the incarcerated—whose sentence, unlike most others, has no end date—is Ilham Tohti, an intellectual and economist, a prolific writer, and formerly the host of a website, *Uyghur Online*. In 2014, Tohti was arrested; accused of advocating separatism, violence, and the overthrow of the Chinese government; subjected to a two-day trial; and sentenced to life. Nothing has been heard from him since.

Here are Tohti's own words, a collection of his plain-spoken calls for justice, scholarly explanations of the history of Xinjiang, and poignant personal reflections. While his courage and outspokenness about the plight of China's Muslim minorities is extraordinary, these essays sound a measured insistence on peace and just treatment for the Uyghurs.

Winner of the PEN/Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award and the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought while imprisoned, this book is the only way to hear from a man who has been called "a Uyghur Mandela."



# EUROPE *Diplomatic* magazine

YOUR ESSENTIAL MONTHLY  
NEWSMAGAZINE



Offer a printed edition subscription to a friend  
Contact us : [europediplomaticmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:europediplomaticmagazine@gmail.com)

# BY YOUR SIDE IN MONACO FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS

---

Discover our solutions in Private Banking,  
Retail Banking and Corporate Banking.

[privatebanking.societegenerale.mc](http://privatebanking.societegenerale.mc)

**THE FUTURE  
IS YOU**



**SOCIETE  
GENERALE**

The present document has been distributed in Monaco by Societe Generale Private Banking (Monaco) S.A.M., located 13/15, bd. des Moulins – 98000 Monaco – Principality of Monaco, governed by the *Autorité de Contrôle Prudentiel et de Résolution* and the *Commission de Contrôle des Activités Financières*. The financial products marketed in Monaco can be reserved for qualified investors in accordance with the Law No. 1339 of 07/09/2007 and Sovereign Ordinance No 1.285 of 10/09/2007. Further details are available upon request or on [www.privatebanking.societegenerale.mc](http://www.privatebanking.societegenerale.mc). © Getty Images.