



# The Empire Strikes Back



VII International European Forum  
EUROPE WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE



Editorial team: Magdalena Charkin-Jaszczak,  
Kacper Dziekan, Basil Kerski,  
Szymon Tasiemski






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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	7
<b>Mykola Kniazhytskyi</b>   Post-Soviet space .....	11
<b>Basil Kerski</b>   The circle is closing in. Lessons from past revolutions for new breakthroughs .....	19
<b>Serhii Plokyh</b>   Disintegration of the Soviet Union is still ongoing and it is not peaceful .....	27
<b>Marina Skorikova</b>   From east to west... 30 years of civil society in Russia .....	37
<b>Magdalena Lachowicz</b>   Russian civil society ...	41
<b>Tatsyana Nyadbay</b>   Belarusian solidarity .....	45
<b>Wolfgang Eichwede</b>   1989–2021: A history of contradictions .....	49
<b>Andrii Portnov</b>   Solidarity? A few remarks on 1981, 1991 and the present .....	61
<b>Marek Radziwon</b>   Internal and external threats to civil liberties .....	67
<b>Agnieszka Bryc</b>   Democracy – Putin’s greatest threat .....	71
<b>Edwin Bendyk</b>   Laboratory of the future .....	79
<b>Magdalena Heydel</b>   The foundation of freedom ...	85
<b>Aleksander Kaczorowski</b>   Various dimensions of threats to democracy .....	89
<b>Georges Mink</b>   Europe after 1989 .....	95
<b>Basil Kerski</b>   “For our freedom and yours”. European solidarity in times of war .....	105
Forum agenda EUROPE WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE 2021 ...	112
About the REPORT series .....	115





# Introduction





# Introduction

The invasion of Ukraine by Putin's Russia on 24 February 2022 showed that the civic revolutions of 1989–1991 had not yet achieved their ultimate goal – the establishment of a peaceful European order based on the cooperation of democratic, independent nations of Central and Eastern Europe. By attacking Ukraine and showing support for the bloody suppression of the Belarusian revolution, President Putin is violently opposing democratic movements in order to expand the influence of the authoritarian Russian imperialism. The war in Ukraine drew the attention of Western public opinion to the fate of Eastern Europe. Most Europeans are starting to realise that the future of the democratic community is also being decided in the east of the continent. The Russian dictator is waging war against the entire Ukrainian population precisely because they have stood up for democracy, universal human rights, the ideals of NATO and the European Union.

In retrospect, it can be said that the words of the Lviv-based journalist and parliamentarian Mykola Kniazhytskyi were prophetic. On 1 September 2021, Kniazhytskyi argued at the European Solidarity Centre that: "Moscow's goal is the destruction of the Ukrainian state, the subjugation of Belarus and the Baltic states, the dismantling of the European Union and NATO and the establishment in its place of a new union of powers with their respective spheres of influence and a dominant role of Russia". Mykola Kniazhytskyi was one of the guests at 2021 Forum EUROPE WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE. For 13 years now, Gdańsk has been a meeting place of politicians, analysts, diplomats, scholars, writers, civic activists, artists and journalists to reflect on the challenges that contemporary Europe is facing. Our aim has been to combine local perspectives and competences with global ones, as we believe that a comprehensive debate on Europe is only possible by bringing together different perspectives.

For more than a decade now, two topics have always come up in the discussions during the European Forum at the ECS: the destructive, anti-European force of nationalist populism, as well as Putin's imperialist policies, threatening peace in Europe. These two ideologies

pose a threat to the peaceful integration of Europe, the turning point of which was the civic revolutions of 1989. Selected analyses presented on the forum EUROPE WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE deserve to be documented due to their high quality. We are aware that it is often the case that many of the ideas and opinions expressed require updating after the publication is issued. Nevertheless, we believe in the high quality of our guests' reflections, which we want to preserve. Therefore, the most recent forum also deserves to be documented, even though the war in Ukraine has fundamentally changed the face of European politics. Mykola Kniazhytskyi's far-sighted statement made at the last forum, in which he was warning of a military invasion by Russia, demonstrated that it is worth preserving the high-quality analyses and reflections of our speakers.

In this report we have collected selected speeches from the seventh edition of the forum, held on the 82<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War, on 1 September 2021. During that forum, which took place 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, historical reflections were combined with a contemporary analysis of Russia's actions aimed at destroying the European order that had emerged after the collapse of the Soviet empire. The discourse concerning the future of Europe was determined by the situation in Ukraine, the escalation of hostilities by Russia combined with progressive erosion of civil rights in that country, but also by the first anniversary of the mass protests that swept through Belarus in August 2020 in response to Alexander Lukashenko's falsification of the results of the presidential election.

What happened in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 should come as no surprise – as Mykola Kniazhytskyi's speech at the most recent European Forum at the ECS shows. Decision-makers and observers were warning of Vladimir Putin's growing obsession with Ukraine and the risk of invasion of the country by Russia. Moreover, a number of voices were raised warning of such danger even before Russia annexed Crimea and launched an armed conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014. The events of February 2022 thus proved that over the past several or several dozen years, an important aspect of events had been widely downplayed, which is why the "counter-attack" of the empire caught most of us by surprise.

Without a free and democratic Belarus and Ukraine, the region of Central and Eastern Europe will not be stable and secure. This view is nothing new either. Jerzy Giedroyc, Bohdan Osadczuk and Borys

Lewicki were of a similar opinion long before. Now we know that what is at stake is not just the security of our region but the security of the entire continent.

For this reason, the social and political order after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was by no means the “end of history” or the next belle époque, but rather a time of accumulating problems to be dealt with in the future. Given the above, the need to redefine the directions of European policy is evident. It concerns problems related to the climate crisis, the violation of democratic standards or the growing Eurosceptic movements. It also requires new leaders and strong alliances based on shared values.

What is equally important is defending the principles of democracy against populism, which is a convenient response to the problems faced by Europe and other countries in the democratic world. Fear of the unknown, fear for one’s own security, and social inequalities are used by populist politicians to fuel xenophobic and nationalist sentiments and make Western societies unwilling to cooperate with one another.

This year’s publication summarising the Forum EUROPE WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE is dedicated to all those who are fighting to defend our common European values, to those who are fighting in Ukraine defending freedom, sovereignty and the fundamental right of self-determination vested in all nations, and to those who are dying in the cruel war waged by Putin’s Russia and those who are facing political persecution in Belarus. After the peaceful revolutions of 1989–1991, a new European order emerged, reflected not only in Ukraine and the Baltic States regaining independence and the sovereignty of the Central European states, as demonstrated by their accession to NATO and the European Union, but also by the reunification of Germany. We will not allow the opponents of pluralism and democracy in the Kremlin and in Minsk to destroy the political project of a Europe of free citizens.

Gdańsk, European Solidarity Centre  
April 2023

**1991–2021. The Empire Strikes Back.  
Europe 30 years after the collapse of the USSR**

DEBATE



**Mykola Kniazhytskyi** | Ukrainian journalist. Member of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Chairman of the Committee on Culture and Spirituality, Co-Chairman of the Parliamentary Group on Inter-Parliamentary Relations with the Republic of Poland, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee of the EU-Ukraine Association. Former head of media concerns and TV channels Tonis and STB, UT-1, and Gazeta 24. Former member of the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine. Member of the Austrian International Press Institute.

# Post-Soviet space

Mykola Kniazhytskyi

What is key to the discussion about our region on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union is the frequently used term of “post-Soviet space”. Before addressing it, I want to make three remarks of a more general nature.

First of all, the counter-attack of the Russian state rising from its knees is not directed solely against the countries of the post-Soviet space, but also against Europe, Asia [excluding China], the Americas and Africa, as these have been areas of rivalry for the Soviet empire and later Russia. Contemporary Russia cannot match the potential of the Tsarist empire and the USSR, but the country’s imperialist ambitions have remained. Or, as one should rather say, they have grown. Military strategists define Russia’s actions against Ukraine since the invasion of Crimea in February–March 2014 as hybrid warfare, elements of which, including the combination of conventional military operations with cyber operations, terrorism and criminal activity, have been undertaken by Russia on all continents. Examples of such activities are widely known.

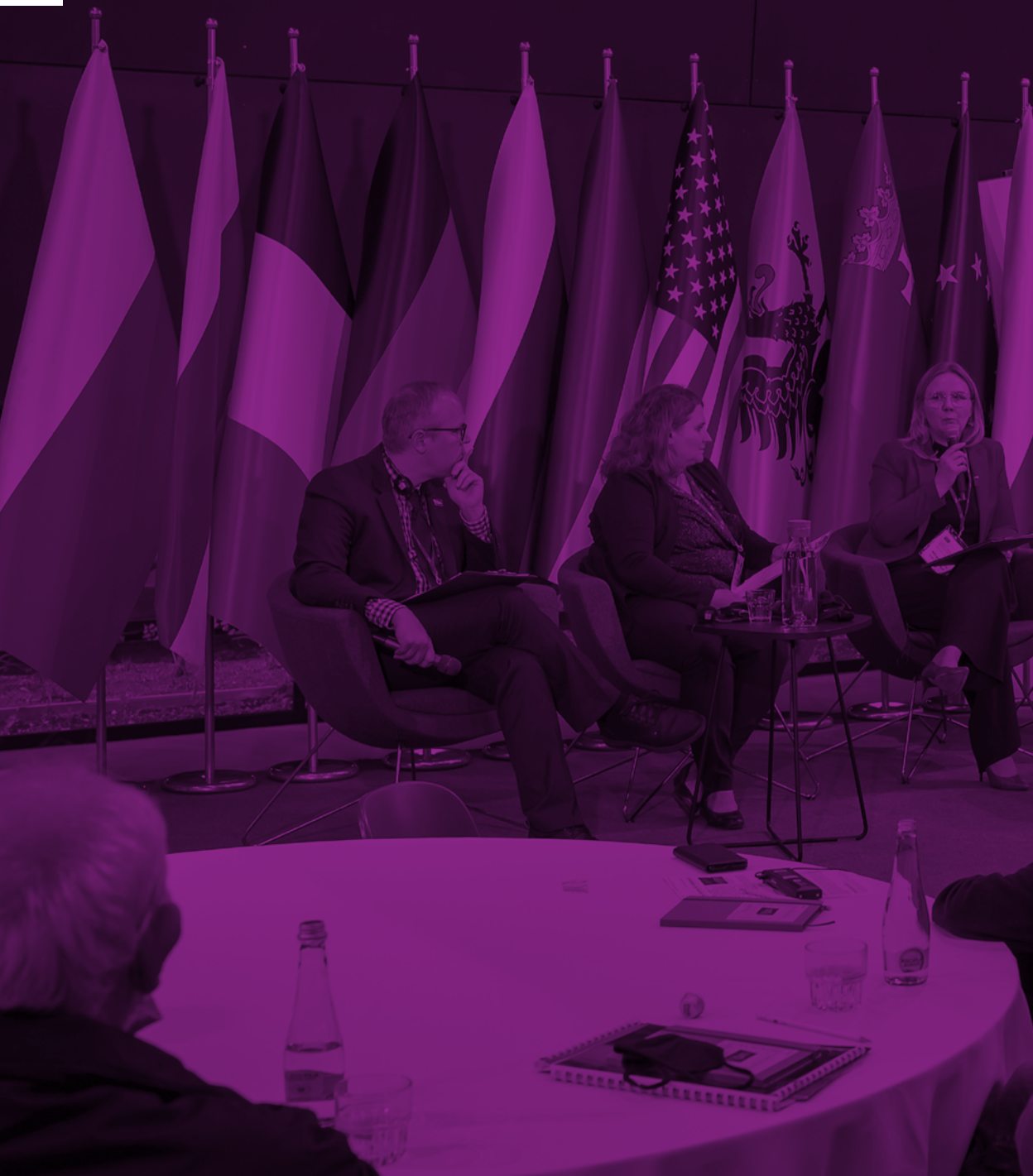
Secondly, it has been eight years since Russia launched its war against Ukraine, so the empire’s counter-attack has been going on long enough to raise the question concerning its end. My answer in this respect is not too optimistic – its end seems nowhere near.

American leaders often repeat that the Russian economy is all about oil and gas production, so in strategic terms there is nothing to worry about. The problem, however, lies in the fact that Russia can still resort to asymmetric means, including operations in cyberspace, social networks, influencing public sentiment and triggering internal crises. In addition, as is evident in the case of Afghanistan, the role of civilizational and cultural issues is not to be underestimated.

Thirdly, in his essay on the mythical unity of the Russian and Ukrainian people, published in the summer of 2021, Vladimir Putin repeated the well-known thesis that there is and cannot be such a thing as the Ukrainian nation<sup>1</sup>, adding that the modern Ukraine was wholly and



**1.**  
The article by V.V. Putin *On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians* was published on the official Kremlin website in three language versions: English, Russian and Ukrainian [English, online], <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181> [1.08.2022]; [Russian, online], <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181> [1.08.2022]; [Ukrainian, online], <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66182> [1.08.2022].





GDANSK

# Święto WIOSNY



2.

*Ibidem.*

3.

T. Snyder,

*The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America, Krakow 2019.*

fully created by Bolshevik Russia, but, in fact, it is part of a “triune Russian nation”<sup>2</sup>. Such a view alludes to the legacy of 19<sup>th</sup> century Slavophiles.

This is by no means coincidental. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 was not celebrated with pomp in Russia. Instead, the event was marked with the presentation of a thesis of a conspiracy of foreign agents against the great Orthodox empire. Efforts were made, however, to preserve the memory of Lenin as a man of good intentions, since his corpse is still on display in the mausoleum in Red Square. As was argued, Lenin’s intentions were, in the end, irrelevant, as he was surrounded by such demons as Lev Trotsky and Alexander Parvus.

Putin’s Russia no longer proclaims that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the Kremlin’s point of view, the real disaster was actually the creation of the Soviet Union, which treated the individual republics as quasi-states, in spite of the old ways of the thousand-year-old Holy Rus. Putin directly claims there was no such thing as Ukraine in the Tsarist Russia, but Malorussia and Novorossiya, as well as Minsk and Grodno Governorates and, for the sake of historical accuracy, the Vistula Land. Russian geopoliticians even add in Alaska before it was sold to the United States.

### **A neo-colonial game**

Some may say this is just propaganda for internal use, as the elation following the seizure of Crimea has already subsided. Nearly eight years of Russia’s war against Ukraine and the presence of a large number of Russian troops along the borders have taught us that this is no propaganda, but the actual goals of aggressive Russian imperialism. Both contemporary and future.

In *The Road to Unfreedom*<sup>3</sup>, the American historian Timothy Snyder notes that Europe’s history and present should be viewed in the context of the colonial heritage of its most important states. This has been corroborated by events of recent years, in particular with regard to Russia. This is an important observation, including in terms of the concept of the “post-Soviet space”. It makes sense in the context of debates concerning the legacy of seventy years of communist rule and the economic, social, political and mental problems it triggered. What is also relevant is the differentiation between the former “inner empire” and “outer empire” states, as well as the impact of the length of time under communist rule on the situation of individual countries.

The most important factor in this regard is membership in institutions, including NATO and the European Union. If Ukraine had been



granted a MAP – Membership Action Plan – in 2003 or 2008, then the aggression against Georgia and Ukraine would not have happened. The impact of the oligarchs on politics, the quality of the elites, social coherence, mentality and geographical location also matter, but I believe these factors are of secondary importance to the institutional ones.

Moscow's goal is the destruction of the Ukrainian state, the subjugation of Belarus and the Baltic states, the dismantling of the European Union and NATO and the establishment in its place of a new union of powers with their respective spheres of influence and a dominant role of Russia – the state with the largest nuclear arsenal and the most numerous army.

Ideology, including radically anti-Western, anti-European and anti-American sentiments, plays a fundamental role in this strategy. The most frequent associations include: “gay-Europe”, the threat of immigrants, multi-culturalism and gender ideology. This is contrasted with a Russia that is supposed to “defend traditional values” and be the “last hope of the white man” and a role model to be followed. Based on authoritarianism, disregard for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Such a policy finds followers across the entire Europe, in particular, in the countries of our region.

From this perspective, the policy of the European Union towards Russia should not only be about maintaining sanctions on Russia for the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbass, or about obtaining the consent of the United States for the completion of Nord Stream 2. It should also be about maintaining the cohesion of the European Union and NATO in the face of the attitude of political elites, or even authorities of individual states, which seem to be drifting closer to Moscow rather than to Brussels or Washington.

The aim of the new US administration on the international stage is to consolidate democratic states in order to resist authoritarian regimes. Washington's current political position is weakened by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and by the renewed confrontation with Islamic terrorism. However, I believe that this will not change the fundamental objective of Washington's policy. Therefore, each country and the leading political authorities will have to decide on which side they stand.

## **Cold war 2.0**

For me personally, this means the return to a system of values and political principles that I know because I grew up surrounded by them and because they have been guiding my political activity. I would like to add that it is in this system that Ukraine, the home of the two democratic



and independence revolutions of the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, fits best. Unlike the period after the 2004 Orange Revolution, after the Revolution of Dignity<sup>4</sup> and the rule of the party to which I had the honour to belong<sup>5</sup>, Ukraine has no sense of lost time and wasted opportunities. The foundations of an independent, democratic, pro-European Ukraine have proven to be quite solid.

The French historian and philosopher Ernest Renan wrote more than 100 years ago that “a nation’s existence is [...] a daily plebiscite”<sup>6</sup>. In Ukraine, this is evident every single day. After all, the eventual outcome of the war depends on whether the majority of Ukrainians agree with Putin’s thesis of a single nation or oppose it. There is no doubt that they are and will be against it.

The same is true of democracy, as we are painfully aware when we look at the situation in the countries to the west of our borders. Despite the significant advancements of the last 30 years, the rule of law is being undermined, as are human rights and even democratic procedures. Nothing is given once and forever. Every day, we must be on guard to ensure that the voice of the empire striking back does not drag anyone to the dark side.

41 years after the formation of the Solidarity movement, which ushered in the collapse of communism, and 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I feel that Ukrainians and Poles are once again faced with a fundamental choice. I also want to assure that everything will be fine, as – together with millions of our compatriots and our Polish friends – we are on the same good side.

[1.09.2021, ECS]

 4.

**Revolution of Dignity,  
30 November 2013  
– February 2014**

 5.

**After Viktor Yanukovych was removed from office, presidential elections won by opposition candidate Petro Poroshenko took place in May 2014, followed by parliamentary elections in October, in which the People’s Front of Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk won. Mykola Kniazhytsky became chairman of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Culture and Spirituality, and co-chairman of the Parliamentary Group on Inter-Parliamentary Contacts with the Republic of Poland.**

 6.

**E. Renan, *What is a Nation*,  
Paris 1992.**

## EUROPE AFTER 1989

ON THE PAGES OF *DIALOG*<sup>7</sup>



**Basil Kerski** | Cultural manager, political scientist, editor and essayist. Director of the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk. Editor-in-chief of the bilingual journal *DIALOG. Magazyn polsko-niemiecki* [*DIALOG. Polish-German Magazine*]. Editor of *Przegląd Polityczny* [*Political Review*]. Author and editor of numerous publications on historical, political and literary issues. Expert in international politics, cooperating with such institutions as the US-German Aspen Institute in Berlin and the Bundestag. Member of the editorial board of the bimonthly journal *New Eastern Europe*.

# The circle is closing in. Lessons from past revolutions for new breakthroughs

Basil Kerski

Mythmaking and manipulation seem to be on the rise again. The nationalist populism of Kaczyński and Orban is reviving old prejudices against the East in the West. Many point to the centre of Europe as the place where a boundary of liberal democracy runs. Right-wing populists portray European integration as an attack on the nation-state. Kaczyński suspects that the new German government wants to push through its own federalist visions of Europe, and create a fourth Reich. Putin, in turn, has succeeded in convincing many Russians and other Europeans that Russia has been betrayed by NATO and the expansion of the EU to the East. What dominates today is distance, distrust and cold diplomatic relations.

Drawing on the European experience, which brings us together and fosters a sense of cultural closeness, seems not in vogue today. Important European anniversaries have been passing unnoticed in these difficult times of the pandemic, without evoking any reflection. Concern for one's own health and anxiety with regard to the dangerous consequences of the pandemic direct our attention to the present and future, without taking into account the past.

The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of German reunification, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the German-Polish Treaty of Good Neighbourliness, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Solidarity, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of martial law – all these anniversaries important for democracy in Central Europe, have been marked off without too much reflection.

Is there any use of looking back to the past in the face of the current global situation, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, digital information

 7.

Basil Kerski, ‘  
“The circle is closing in.  
Lessons from past  
revolutions for the time  
of new breakthroughs”  
(Polish translation:  
A. Szczepański),  
*DIALOG. Polish-German  
Magazine 2021,*  
iss. 137, pp. 18-19.

overload and the overwhelming need to implement revolutionary climate policies? Currently, a widely discussed topic concerns vaccines and preventive health care. However, a critical look at Europe's past can protect it from the resurgence of nationalism and violence, acting as an anti-populist vaccine.

### **Lessons from European history**

It is not easy to translate historical experience into the future reality, but it can serve as a direction, as the American historian Timothy Snyder points out. But while history does not repeat itself, it does teach us lessons. A proper understanding of these lessons protects our democracies from authoritarian relapses, Snyder argues.

Recently, I have often had the feeling that the circle is closing in. The ignored lessons are returning to confront us with new questions and tasks. One of such circles closed in and reopened 30 years after German reunification, when – despite economic achievements in the former GDR area – the cultural gap between East and West Germany became apparent, especially after the last parliamentary elections. In the West, populists lost, while in the post-communist part of Germany, the AfD party won. While it is true that the vast majority of East Germans are in favour of democracy and a European Federal Republic, one can clearly see a fascination with authoritarian and nationalist ideas among some parts of the former GDR population, where anti-Western sentiments are spreading. One can notice a parallel process in neighbouring Poland, where in early December 2021, the Law and Justice party organised a meeting in Warsaw with European right-wing populists to set up a nationalist, xenophobic international. The close ties of Kaczyński's guests with Putin, including Marine Le Pen and Viktor Orban, is not a problem for the Polish ruling elite. Law and Justice often accuses its opponents of a lack of patriotism. At the same time, the party has for years been pursuing policies that run contrary to the Polish interests and traditions that helped to protect Poland's sovereignty. Patriotic Law and Justice politicians want to reverse European integration, opting instead for the strength of the nation state, which should preferably be ethnically homogenous.

The ruling party's policies are turning Polish traditions upside down. It has to be remembered that Poland became a homogeneous state after 1945 only as a result of war, ethnic cleansing and expulsions. 40 years ago, the anti-communist opposition had a vision of Poland as a political nation. The first Solidarity congress in the autumn of 1981 emphasised the role of national minorities and religious

diversity in Poland's history. This stance was in stark contrast to the nationalism and anti-Semitism of the communist government, which it criticised. The Communists wanted to win people's support with their xenophobic policies, while Solidarity opposed this aggressive strategy by promoting a multi-ethnic and tolerant Poland.

Another important issue for the revolutionaries of Solidarity was the question of securing national sovereignty. The democratic opposition saw the opportunity of its restoration through deeper European integration rather than through purely national means. Wałęsa and his supporters promoted the rapid reunification of Germany within the EEC. The young Polish democracy was to be protected not only by NATO, but also by the EU. Zbigniew Brzeziński emphasised the extent to which Polish-German reconciliation and the establishment of a bilateral community of interests would secure peace in Europe. It is also worth mentioning the political foresight of another legendary Polish patriot, Edward Raczyński, President of the Polish Republic in exile, who served as the Polish Ambassador to Great Britain during the Second World War. Raczyński's biography symbolises the Polish-British alliance. He was extremely critical of the imperialist inclinations of the British. Contemporary Polish supporters of Brexit should definitely familiarise themselves with Raczyński's analyses. A few years before the Brexit referendum, in *DIALOG* iss. 105 (2013), we published Raczyński's autobiographical text about his collaboration with Churchill, which was also a reflection on British foreign policy. It painted a picture full of contradictions, on the one hand, expressing admiration for British prime ministers, while, on the other, a clear distance from British policy with regard to the EU. Raczyński referred to the alliance, not only to that during the wartime, as pragmatic and not worthy of much trust. The Polish President-in-Exile described the alliance with England as "exotic" in the eyes of the British, as Central Europe was treated there exclusively as an area of imperial sphere of influence. According to Raczyński, fundamentally positive changes for the Polish question could be brought exclusively by the "unification of Europe".

The Law and Justice government is ignoring this historical lesson, fearing that the legal regulations of the EU, in particular its control mechanisms, will stand in the way of a nationalist reconstruction of the state. A mental and legal Porexit has begun. The attacks on the legal foundations of the European Union are plainly absurd, as the current Lisbon Treaty was negotiated in 2007 by Jarosław Kaczyński's first government, during the presidency of his brother Lech. Both politicians were already critical of the EU at the time, but seemed to have heeded a fundamental lesson that a sovereign Poland can only exist as part of a strong Europe.

The historical consciousness of the Polish government, which, 40 years after General Jaruzelski imposed martial law, has declared a state of emergency in the eastern part of the country to crack down on migrants, is astounding. Fundamental European human rights are being violated through brutal pushbacks. The possibility to apply for granting asylum is suspended, government propaganda stigmatises immigrants as a threat to national security. Media and humanitarian organisations are not allowed near the border. The government fears the human solidarity of Poles with immigrants. Objective media coverage of the people's plight can promote empathy for the others. For this reason, the government prevents independent media from accessing the areas near the border.

Europe's democratic standards are also threatened by Western politicians, including former German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, who support the Polish pushback strategy on the eastern border. Forty years ago, some Western politicians, including German ones, were also in favour of a policy overriding human rights as a method to ensure peace in Europe. General Jaruzelski presented himself as a defender of peace and a patriot, which impressed some politicians in the West. The public debate in the West was divided on the issue of the introduction of martial law in Poland: concern was voiced for the fate of the 10,000 interned Solidarity activists, gestures of support for Solidarity were shown, but, on the other hand, there was a sigh of relief when the military intervened in Poland. While it is true that Jaruzelski succeeded in breaking up Solidarity, he did not manage to stop the peaceful revolution, people's desire for freedom, the rule of law, democracy and Europe, by means of violence.

### **European revolutions and their implications**

30 years ago, the European revolution of citizens swept through the entire continent, but it did not end in 1989. It continued, leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union, which took place exactly 30 years ago in December 1991. Economic and environmental crises were not the only causes behind the collapse of the Soviet empire. There was a burning desire to break free from Moscow's grip and create sovereign nation states. Old national issues returned, including the creation of the Baltic states. But it was also the communists who saw an opportunity to renew and consolidate their power through national dynamics. Ukraine is a case in point. Leonid Kravchuk, who first fought against the Ukrainian independence movement, emerged as its leader in 1991. He became the first president of Ukraine and, along with Boris Yeltsin, significantly contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.



The support of Ukrainian people for breaking away from Moscow was very strong, as evidenced by the democratic independence referendum held at the end of 1991. Even in the areas where Russians constituted the majority, including Crimea and Donetsk, most people were in favour of an independent Ukrainian state in 1991. As early as the 1990s, eminent experts on Soviet affairs were warning that the separation of Ukraine would become a problem for Russia's national consciousness and for the stable development of Europe. Ukrainian politicians took these concerns seriously and offered a gesture of good will towards Moscow. The Soviet Black Sea Fleet was allowed to be stationed in Crimean ports. Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons. In return, Ukraine was guaranteed the inviolability of its borders. During both Maidan revolutions of 2004 and 2014, the Ukrainian people showed their desire to build a democratic state, cooperating with the West. Important activists of these revolutions included not only ethnic Ukrainians, but also Ukrainian Russians. Ukraine evolved into a political nation, gaining deep respect and acceptance among Russian democrats. The radiating power of Ukrainian democracy started to pose a danger for Putin and Lukashenko. Over the past decade, Putin has transformed from an autocrat flirting with the West to a neo-imperialist ruler. He uses wars (including in Syria and the Republic of Artsakh) or provokes them himself (such as in Ukraine) to secure his power. By destabilising the international order, he seeks to strengthen Russia's position in foreign policy. Through wars, he legitimises his authoritarian policy and the suspension of democratic standards. The resulting perception of Russia as a fortress besieged by enemies promotes national unity. Putin's Russia pretends to be a victim of the West. Imperialism and nostalgia for the great past are intended to distract attention from the economic and social problems in the country, especially the corruption of Russia's ruling elite.

Putin is dangerous not only because of his imperial propaganda but also because he is capable of fulfilling his threats. Before 2014, the invasion of Ukraine seemed as unreal as changing borders in post-communist Europe. However, it became a reality. The situation in the eastern part of the continent is precarious not only due to the violation of the important international arrangement of the post-1991 period. It is dangerous since Putin is trying to break the political unity of the West. His allies oppose deeper European integration. One of the young activists of the German right-wing AfD party, which many right-wing populists in Europe identify with, claimed that "the EU must die so that Europe can live".

The most important task of the new German government will be to stop the disintegration of Europe. Strong historical consciousness



can serve as a reference point to this aim. What aspects might be helpful in this regard? I will mention just a few examples. The sense of cultural proximity between nations must be strengthened. International dialogue must not be reduced to the level of individual governments. While the latter is important, bridges must be built between societies. Contemporary social activists can be future government partners. Polish civil society is an important factor in stopping Polesxit and the destabilisation of Europe. Loyalty in terms of upholding universal human rights strengthens the credibility of democratic politicians, while compromises in this field strengthen authoritarian policies. As Yan Rachinsky, chairman of the Russian human rights organisation, Memorial, stressed a few days ago in Gdańsk, no regime is permanent. Putin will also be gone one day. Russia does not need an aggressive, imperialist policy to develop, strengthen and progress as a nation. Russia does not need new territories, it has enough issues to deal with within the vast area of the Russian Federation, said Russian patriot and civil rights activist Alexei Navalny in an interview with Adam Michnik, during which he expressed his respect for Ukrainian democrats. An independent, democratic Ukraine is the foundation of the post-1991 European peace order.

## EUROPE AFTER 1989

ON THE PAGES OF *DIALOG*<sup>8</sup>



**Serhii Plokhy** | Mykhailo Hrushevsky Professor of Ukrainian History and director of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute. Author of numerous publications, including *The Last Empire. The Final Days of the Soviet Union* [2014, Polish edition 2015]. Winner of the Lionel Gelber Prize for the best book on international relations.



**Adam Reichardt** | Editor-in-chief of the quarterly *New Eastern Europe*. Journalist cooperating with such publications as *Res Publica Nowa*, *Index on Censorship*, *The Atlantic Council* and *Politico*. He was included in the list of the 100 biggest innovators in the region, *New Europe 100*, compiled by Google, the Financial Times and the Res Publica Foundation [2014]. He is interested in disinformation campaigns, international relations and security matters.

# The disintegration of the Soviet Union is still ongoing and it is not peaceful

Serhii Plokyh's conversation with Adam Reichardt

**This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which brought an end to the Cold War and, as Francis Fukuyama puts it, “the end of history”. It also brought social, economic and political instability; triggered the formation of nations and identities; the creation of new states and dividing lines; conflicts and wars between neighbours. But we should start with the positive aspects. Looking back over the last 30 years since the collapse of the USSR, what would you describe as the most important achievements and milestones of that time for the post-Soviet region?**

I would like to start with what at first glance may seem controversial, but in fact is not. The collapse of the Soviet Union marked “the end of history”, but the history I am referring to does not mark the victory of liberal democracy. It was a victory of private property and market economy. In terms of democracy, the assessment is mixed at best, but the late 1980s and early 1990s undoubtedly marked the end of economies not based at least in part on private property and the market. Even China, which has kept its one-party rule and a form of communist ideology, owes its survival to the adoption of a market economy. For this reason, it marks a clear turning point of global importance, as, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this economic model was constantly challenged. If we look at different countries, we can see that the state regulations on private property and market control vary in their scope, as do the control mechanisms, but the fundamental aspects are basically identical everywhere. We need some



8.  
Serhii Plokyh,  
“The collapse of the Soviet Union is still happening and is not peaceful”,  
interviewed by A. Reichardt  
[translated from English into German  
by A.R. Hofmann,  
translated from German into Polish by A. Rduch],  
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form of private property other than state ownership and some form of market in order to survive and thrive.

The collapse of the USSR also signalled another change of global importance – the end of the history of the modern European empires. The disintegration of these empires began with World War I, the Soviet Union being the last of them to fall. However, it can be said that the process of disintegration began much earlier, if one takes into account the gradual collapse of the Ottoman Empire from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, which only emphasises the importance of the collapse of the USSR as the final chapter in this historical process. Naturally, one could argue that empires have never actually disappeared and still exist in a metaphorical sense. Indeed, the key successor states of these empires, a significant share of which have become super-powers, have not disappeared. What is clear, however, is that empires, as an organisational form of a centrally administered multi-ethnic region, did not survive the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most evident sign that this era had come to an end was the collapse of the Soviet Union.

**Can we consider the USSR as a continuation of the Russian Empire in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the sense that it was characterised by a central government and multiple nations coexisting on its territory?**

The most obvious aspect of the continuation becomes apparent when we look at a map. The map of the Russian Empire and that of the Soviet Union overlap to a significant extent. But there are also some differences, not only on the maps. These are due to the fact that political borders were matched to ethnic borders. The Curzon Line is reflected on the map today and was already there before 1991. This means that the Soviet Union was an empire that had integrated and accumulated elements of nationalism and that it had made a number of concessions to keep control over it. The last Soviet state and party leaders, including Mikhail Gorbachev, did not see the end coming until the very last moment, as they were absolutely convinced that the national question had been resolved by the USSR. They believed that they had met the needs of every nationality and guaranteed the continuation of the multi-ethnic state. History proved they could not have been further from the truth.

**It the beginning, I mentioned some of the events that have happened since the collapse of the Soviet Union, some of which have been very negative. What do you think have been the most serious consequences of the collapse of the USSR?**

The most significant consequence is the violence and wars that have been ongoing to this day. For a long time, there has been a myth about

the peaceful disintegration process of the USSR. In my view, this was mainly due to the surprise of Western governments and societies that Central and Eastern Europe was able to leave the Soviet Eastern Bloc without violent conflict. This had an impact on the perception of the events happening within the borders of the Soviet Union before and after its collapse. The exodus of Russians and other Slavic people from the non-Slavic republics was triggered by fear of violence and had already begun before the collapse of the USSR. Fierce ethnic clashes broke out in Baku and a major conflict emerged between Azerbaijan and Armenia. After Fergana massacre in 1989, Muslims had to flee Uzbekistan. Gorbachev's order to use force in Vilnius and the Baltic states was deliberately ignored in the West.

The entire process was also perceived as peaceful due to the fact that Russia did not have the political will or the means to use force at that time. In fact, Boris Yeltsin did send troops to Chechnya in the autumn of 1991. These troops were, however, immediately surrounded by Chechens, so they could not fight and the war was postponed for several years. Both subsequent Chechen wars are in line with the paradigm of the violent disintegration of empires and certainly cannot be described as a peaceful process.

Other examples that contradict the claim of a peaceful disintegration include the suspended conflict in Moldova and the postponed conflicts in the Caucasus, which in some places escalated into violent wars, such as the Russian invasion in Georgia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea are essentially long-term consequences of this disintegration. Therefore, it can be said that the disintegration of the Soviet Union is still going on and it is not peaceful.

**You mentioned the ongoing conflicts and wars. Are there historical precedents if we look at the collapse of other empires, such as the Ottoman Empire and the British Empire? Are there any historical parallels?**

The Soviet Union is disintegrating along ethnic and national borders. Political boundaries are drawn and adjusted on this basis. From this perspective, the USSR is undoubtedly dying a classic imperial death. What is missing, however, or at least not so visible, is the disintegration of the empire in the midst of a major war with other empires or superpowers. This also partly explains the myth of the peaceful dissolution of the USSR. World War I brought the decline of Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. World War II triggered the collapse of the British and French superpowers.

Before that, the war had put an end to the Japanese Empire in the Pacific and the planned German empire in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as parts of Russia. The USSR may have lost the Cold War, but it never lost it in a military confrontation with the United States as, in fact, the collapse of the Soviet empire took place in different circumstances, in the nuclear age. It was an era of nuclear weapons, which made it difficult for any government to accept the fact that there could be another world war and that any country could have a chance of surviving it.

**We talked about the prolonged disintegration and conflicts in the South Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova. When will one be able to say that this trend has come to an end? Is there any specific point when it will be possible to claim that the process of disintegration has finally come to an end?**

Everything comes to an end at some point. If we yet again compare the history of the disintegration of the USSR with the collapse of other empires, we will notice that the authorities make a decision at a certain point that the costs of continuing the conflict are excessively high, and adjust accordingly. In addition, over time, colonies can become more powerful than their former metropolis. The best-known example is, of course, Britain's relationship with the United States. The tensions created by the disintegration of the British Empire persisted in psychological and cultural terms until World War II, when the United States replaced the United Kingdom as the world's maritime power. It was only at that time that nurturing resentments towards Britain's imperialism lost its relevance to the US identity. The circumstances are, therefore, changing. Former colonies or peripheries become new centres of power and the same will happen in the post-Soviet region. It is difficult to say when this will happen, but it will definitely happen. After all, Russia only became an empire after it conquered the Tatar khanates to which it had previously been subordinate.

**I would now like to turn our attention to Ukraine, one of the integral aspects of your academic interest and a country that celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence in August. Various events that unfolded after the collapse of the Soviet Union played a key role in shaping Ukraine's current socio-political system, characterised by a strong oligarchy and inherent corruption. What, in your view, constitutes a legacy of the Soviet era?**

One of the most important aspects concerning Ukraine over the past few months has been the Nord Stream 2 controversy. An important



consequence of this is that Russia will no longer exploit the old Soviet infrastructure running through Ukraine as much. The Soviet legacy, therefore, still has a very pragmatic dimension today in the form of the gas pipeline. It reaches all the way to Central and Western Europe and is at the centre of international debate. We can view this pipeline as a metaphor for Ukraine's connection to the Soviet legacy. In a sense, it has also contributed to the rise of the oligarchy, which has been making money from gas and oil in one way or another since the early 1990s. Corruption is linked to oil and gas to a large extent. So this is one, but perhaps the most obvious, example of Ukraine being held hostage to the Soviet legacy.

Another important aspect of the Soviet legacy is the creation of a Ukraine defined in cultural terms as a Russian-Ukrainian condominium. World War II, the Holocaust and Stalin's forced relocations and state-controlled ethnic cleansing resulted in Ukraine becoming less multi-ethnic than before the war. It became an exclusively Russian-Ukrainian entity, primarily as a result of industrialisation and labour migration. In the last decades of the Soviet Union, state policy promoted ethnic, linguistic and cultural unity between Russia and Ukraine, with a focus on the latter. All these aspects now are the focal point of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Donbas. They cannot be analysed only in the context of the last 30 years. Their roots go much deeper.

Once again, I would like to refer to the issue of Ukraine's critical infrastructure dating back to the Soviet era. The war in the Donbas is a reminder of another Soviet legacy. It concerns an industry that has long ceased to function and has been unprofitable for decades, namely the coal industry. The fate of the region is reminiscent of other old industrial areas all over the world, where social degradation and general ruin follow as a result. However, Ukraine may possibly be the only case in the world where the collapse of an industrial area is not only associated with social tensions, but also with making war possible by creating suitable conditions for invasion from outside. An important factor in the war in the Donbas is the social problems caused by the collapse of infrastructure dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was still used by the USSR and has become the legacy of independent Ukraine.

**Surely, there is an interesting material aspect. You mentioned Russification during the Soviet era, presented as Russian-Ukrainian unity. What comes to my mind is Vladimir Putin's essay entitled "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians", published in July this year. Putin argues in it that modern Ukraine is entirely**

**a product of the Soviet period and that it was formed predominantly on the territory of historic Russia. Is this still an attempt by the metropolis to continue its imperial narrative? What was your reaction, as a Ukrainian historian, to this publication?**

This question can be analysed at two different levels. One is related to the policy actually pursued, while the other to the argumentation used to justify it. Throughout its history, Russia has combined the notion of national security or imperial expansion with that of creating friendly states on its periphery. No state was sufficiently friendly to evade integration or incorporation into the empire. Then, new candidates for friendly states were found. In this sense, there is no difference between Uzbekistan and Ukraine, for example. On another level, however, there is a considerable difference between the two countries – and this is primarily what Putin's essay is about. For a long time, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians were treated as members of a single Russian nation. Such historical figures as Vladimir I the Great and Bohdan Khmelnytsky were incorporated into Russian history as prominent characters. In contemporary Kyiv, one can find monuments of these persons, now regarded as important figures in Ukrainian history. However, these were established at the order of the Tsarist-Russian authorities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and on the initiative of people who believed in an indivisible Russia.

Putin, in fact, claims that he wants to return to the model of the great Russian nation before 1917. He rejects the Soviet experience and he holds the Soviet policy on nationalities responsible for today's divisions. Of course, Putin rejects the parts of history that do not fit his narrative. The Soviet Union tried to keep the empire together by silencing the already existing national movements. It is a false claim that the Soviet Union was created first and only later did a Ukrainian national movement or the idea of an independent Ukraine emerge. The exact opposite was true, and anyone with even a basic knowledge of the history of the region is aware of this. Otherwise, we would also have to assume that the USSR was responsible for the creation of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists.

**Looking at the political development of Ukraine since the collapse of the Soviet Union, one can notice a fluctuation in the approach between a pro-Western orientation and a step back towards a rather pro-Russian policy. This was probably the case until Petro Poroshenko won the elections after the Revolution of Dignity. I am wondering, however, which category one should classify the success of Volodymyr Zelensky into. He does not seem to fit at all**

### **into this tug-of-war between a pro-Western and pro-Eastern orientation...**

We are actually dealing with two different Ukraines – one from before the war that broke out in 2014, and the other that is being formed now as a result of the war in the Donbas. If we look at the presidential elections before 2014, Ukraine was then divided almost exactly in half. The dividing line ran clearly between eastern and western Ukraine. The election results may have shifted a little here and there, with different presidents winning with votes from one side or the other. But the war changed this, just as it changed the political map of Ukraine. First, the loss of Crimea and parts of the Donbas meant the absence of millions of voters with a post-Soviet identity and a pro-Russian orientation. Another difference was due to the fact that this new Ukraine, controlled from Kyiv, could step up the mobilisation against Russian aggression. Both of these phenomena have therefore led to increased homogenisation of the Ukrainian society and electorate compared to the period before the war. The first signs emerged in 2014, when Petro Poroshenko was elected president with an unprecedented majority. It was not clear at the time whether this was a new trend or not. People were still shocked by the war and a number of unusual things had happened. The election of Volodymyr Zelensky showed that it was indeed a new trend in the country, as he too won by an absolute majority of votes. While Poroshenko lost to some extent in the east, Zelensky did so in the west. However, both presidents were elected with an overwhelming majority of votes. And this is the new reality. The increased homogeneity also contributes to the fact that, for the first time since the Soviet era, one party holds a majority in Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada. This has sometimes led to accusations that the country is developing in an authoritarian direction. This is a new reality, created due to the changes within Ukraine's geography and society that were brought about by the war.

### **The war has certainly played a major role in consolidating Ukrainian society and identity and in Ukraine distancing itself from its Soviet heritage and imperial past...**

Ukraine is distancing itself from Russia to an extent that was unimaginable before 2014. There is an evident discrepancy between what Vladimir Putin is saying about Russian-Ukrainian unity and what his actions actually entail for Russian-Ukrainian relations.

**In the context of our conversation about the implications of the collapse of the Soviet Union, it seems that Belarus does not quite fit in with the overall development of events. On the other hand,**

**with the recent rigged elections and the outbreak of mass protests and demonstrations, something has changed. Is this also part of the trend we have been discussing?**

In many ways, Belarus is catching up with the rest of the region. In 1991 and 1992, there was a movement towards a nationally stronger state, but it was blocked by Alexander Lukashenko, making Belarus a relic of the Soviet era. Neighbouring countries, notably Russia and Ukraine, have made progress in terms of the development of their nations. By rejecting this trend, Belarus became more and more distinct from these countries. The recent events, especially those in the last year or two, are in fact a major step towards building a nation, which has been triggered by two factors. First of all, the society has rejected Lukashenko's authoritarian regime, associated with an "anti-national" stance. The logical consequence, therefore, was that the pre-Soviet Belarusian flag became the flag of protests, symbolising all the values and myths of the Belarusian national project. In terms of the importance of national symbols and components of national culture, this is reminiscent of the developments in Ukraine. In the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ukrainian was hardly heard in Kyiv. But the language then became the language of the revolution, the opposition and the Maidan. Currently, we are witnessing something that could be described as the Belarusian Maidan. Secondly, Russia continues to exert its impact on events in the post-Soviet space. Russian support for the discredited Lukashenko regime has thoroughly disillusioned the part of the Belarusian opposition with a pro-Russian orientation. They were left with no choice but to accept the Belarusian identity. Time will tell whether the current events are just a fleeting moment in history or whether they are also the beginning of something bigger that will put the country on the same trajectory as the rest of the region.

**I would also like to address the issue of terminology and access to the region. It has been 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union. I would like to know what you think of the term "post-Soviet". This is a question I have often asked myself and others... Do you consider this term to be outdated? Is it high time to abandon it?**

We should support this trend of increasingly historicising the term "post-Soviet", like the term "Soviet" before it. Although we still feel the post-Soviet and Soviet heritage, it is losing its meaning as time goes by. It is worth taking a look at the various former Soviet republics, in which different groups are embarking on very different development paths. On the one hand, we have the Baltic states which belong

to the European Union and NATO. They have managed to develop successful democracies and have now even outpaced several countries that used to belong to the Eastern Bloc, such as Poland and Hungary. Then, we have the mostly authoritarian-ruled Central Asia and a colourful mix in the South Caucasus. Ukraine and Moldova are democratic, but are troubled with economic problems. All these countries are linked by the Soviet legacy, although they have embarked on different development paths. For this reason, the notion of a Soviet legacy is not sufficient anymore as the only explanation for the fate of these states. What is obvious is that the history of the pre-Soviet period is becoming increasingly important for explaining what is going on in the region and what decisions are being made there today. Therefore, I would not consider the term incorrect, even though it is becoming increasingly less useful for the interpretation of the current events in the region.

**1991–2021. The Empire strikes back.  
Europe 30 years after the collapse of the USSR**  
DEBATE



**Marina Skorikova** | Russian literary critic, journalist and Russian studies expert. Project coordinator of the Moscow School of Civic Education. Author and moderator of the interactive map of civic and educational activity in Russia – Chronicle of Civic Life. Previously, she worked as a journalist and production editor at a regional television station in Yaroslavl.

# From east to west... 30 years of civil society in Russia

Marina Skorikova

Over the past 30 years, Russian society has experienced a myriad of emotional states, ranging from delight in democratic values to the complete disappearance of institutions defending these values.

In my view, we can divide this process into three periods. In the first one, there was a wave of interest in reforms, international exchange of experience and, ultimately, democratisation. Foundations were established, universities were reorganised and decision-makers were interested in creating a common market to facilitate these processes.

The second period began with Vladimir Putin's rise to power<sup>9</sup>. The explosions in residential buildings and other terrorist acts of the late 1990s marked the beginning of what might be called the hybrid period. It was then that the state and the society clashed with each other. On the one hand, radical state bodies were introducing populist politics of fear. On the other, they played a game of illusions with the citizens. During the period of "thaw" under Medvedev<sup>10</sup>, cautious attempts at liberalisation and international dialogue were made.

The final stage, which marked the beginning of the end of the process in question, was the 2011 parliamentary elections and the pro-democracy demonstrations that followed. The grassroots mass protests must have frightened those in power, as a systemic crackdown on civil society ensued immediately afterwards.

## 9.

**Vladimir Putin's first two terms as president of the Russian Federation were between 2000 and 2008.**

## 10.

**Dmitry Medvedev was president of the Russian Federation from 2008 to 2012.**

By enacting new laws and curbing grassroots democratic initiatives, the Russian state embarked on a political campaign to eradicate all independent NGOs and opposition. This was followed by the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas. We all know or can easily guess the rest of this story.

In this way, in just over 20 years we have witnessed the sunrise and sunset of the Russian civil society. From the allure of democratisation, tempting with the promise of development and a bright future, to the darkness of authoritarianism, in which pro-European activists struggle against the state propaganda machine.

Why has this happened? There are various reasons for that. One has to remember, though, that state power forces, together with public, high-budget institutions, have created a colossal machine for the suppression of citizens' activity. Moreover, Putin's regime is exploiting the advantages of a resource-based economy. Such markets recover much faster than systems based on human factors, making it much easier to maintain and stimulate them with capital injections. Another important factor is official state propaganda, which has created a simulation of civil society based on military attitudes and upbringing. From the perspective of the Russian state apparatus, the country does have a civil society. However, when viewed in the context of democratic standards, it can be described as a military democracy.

It is also worth taking a closer look at the discourse going on in intellectual circles. There are two points of view with regard to the reasons for this state of affairs. Unfortunately, both lead to the Soviet Union.

The first view blames the Russians themselves and the phenomenon referred to as *homo post-sovieticus*, according to which, despite the opportunities offered by democracy, new technologies and capitalism, man is unable to abandon the old paradigm, holding on to the old Soviet ways. This explains the vulnerability of such individuals to neo-imperialist propaganda, which builds on the resentment with respect to the humiliating period of the 1990s.

The second view, more optimistic, puts more blame on the state, but also focuses on the problem of Sovietisation and the retrospective nature of public sentiments. Over the past few years, Russia has become a copy of the Soviet Union, both in terms of patterns of behaviour, as well as institutions and historical policy. Myths from that period are being reinvented and propaganda is replicating the Soviet ideals and fears. In this way, the political elites have constructed a fake illusion of a state that, in fact, no longer exists. In spite of this, people still believe the media narra-



tive of the authorities, which raises an important question. Is it the individual who is weak, or is it the state that is too strong?

[1.09.2021, ECS]



**1991–2021. The Empire strikes back.  
Europe 30 years after the collapse of the USSR**

DEBATE



**Magdalena Lachowicz** | Polish expert on Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies, university lecturer. Assistant Professor in the Department of Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She deals with the sociology of the nation, ethnic relations and regional movements in Eurasia; promotes cooperation of the university with non-governmental organisations, state and international institutions. She has organised study visits integrating young people from Central and Eastern Europe and coordinated the project of cooperation and development of Polish Wikipedia by scholars and students of Adam Mickiewicz University.

# Russian civil society

Magdalena Lachowicz

Who do we want to cooperate with and on what terms? This is a key question we need to ask ourselves when thinking about contemporary civil society in Russia and possible cooperation with Russian activists. First of all, we need to take into account the risks such individuals and organisations are facing. We must also be aware of the procedures to which they are subject. They are struggling with a powerful mechanism of control and repression exercised by the current authorities, which is interfering in the sphere of civil society. Due to changes in the criminal code, individuals who voice opinions that are incorrect from the point of view of the propagandist interpretation of reality can be imprisoned along with their families. Moreover, the transformation of the state administration into an authoritarian one has led to the centralisation of the management and financing of non-governmental institutions. Putin's system favours organisations sympathetic towards the Kremlin's policy, through an inflated propaganda establishment and generous subsidies. These organisations take charge over all forms of international cooperation. Here, we need to go back to the difficult question – who should we cooperate with and how? What has led us to this situation?

The first problem that has emerged over the last 30 years is the extremely low level of trust in Russian society, both at the interpersonal level, as well as with respect to state institutions. This also applies to all NGOs and grassroots initiatives, which require the spirit of community and solidarity, especially at the local level. This is why most initiatives did not succeed in developing into self-organisations of citizens, independent from state structures. Another obstacle has been the mediocre standard of public services which have failed to effectively support the functioning of institutions providing assistance to marginalised groups and supporting the development of a society of active citizens.

When analysing the development of civil society from a chronological perspective, it can be noted that the legal environment conducive



to its development in an institutionalised form emerged relatively late, in 1996, when the basic law on NGOs was passed. It crowned the so-called “open-door policy”, a time when citizens were learning to build structures based on good corporate standards, with support of foreign capital. After taking power, Putin was able to quickly and easily deal with this problem by introducing a law on extremism, external funding and undesirable organisations. It also helped to get Russian citizens used to state violence. When analysing the potential of Russian society, one can notice a certain dissonance. According to official statistics, there are 220,000 NGOs and 140,000 community-oriented institutions in Russia. On the other hand, research shows that one can speak of around 30,000 such entities, of which more than 60 per cent are dormant. They have no political significance, either. What is worth emphasising, however, is that the number of organisations does not necessarily translate into quality of action. The aid provided during the massive wildfires in 2010<sup>11</sup> and the political protests after the parliamentary elections in 2011<sup>12</sup> proved that Russians are able to self-organise and respond to everyday problems despite distrust. This was further confirmed by public participation in the implementation of pro-community projects, especially outside large urban areas. It was at that time that a large number of new grassroots initiatives were started. These, however, were one-off events not based on legal personality. Nor did they have much impact on the reality in the imitation of a state ruled by authoritarian power. Pro-democratic civil society has been losing in the battle for people’s hearts and minds against the Kremlin elites.

[1.09.2021, ECS]

 11.

**The drought-induced forest fires that swept through western and north-eastern areas of Russia from late July to early September. Fifty-four people died and many were injured.**

 12.

**The Duma elections were not as successful for the party in power, United Russia, as previous elections. It lost its constitutional majority. The so-called concessionary opposition – the Communists, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and Fair Russia – strengthened.**

## Democracy in retreat? In defence of civil liberties in Europe

DEBATE



**Tatsyana Nyadbay** | Belarusian translator, poet, cultural manager. Graduate of the Philology Department of the Belarusian State University. Holds a master's degree from the European Humanities University in Vilnius. Formerly president, currently vice-president of the Belarusian PEN Club. Author of the poetry collection *Sirens Sing Jazz* (2014), for which she was awarded the Maksim Bohdanovich Debut Prize, and translator into Belarusian of Ewa Thompson's book *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (2015).

# Belarusian solidarity

Tatsyana Nyadbay

The serious internal conflict in Belarus is not only about the power struggle. The 2020 elections were preceded by a dispute between the social conservatism of the authorities and the increasingly strong pro-European trends in society. On the one hand, there was an outdated government system, with its vertical and hierarchical power structure. On the other, we were dealing with a dynamic development of horizontal ties, growing awareness of the advantages of decentralisation, public initiative and mobility. Alienation was also a growing problem, mainly due to the pandemic and isolation. It showed the government's incompetence at a critical moment for the people and the effectiveness of grassroots horizontal social ties, replacing sluggish official institutions. The success of Belarusian self-mobilisation during the pandemic had a positive impact on people's self-confidence. It prevented social atomisation and mobilised society into action. But it also caused confusion in the state bureaucracy. After the outbreak of the protests<sup>13</sup>, the authorities crushed the power of the collective "we", solidarity and mutual aid, without regard to any principles of decency or basic moral standards, resorting to unprecedented violence, sanctioned by Lukashenko, who would go as far as break the law in order to stay in power.

Currently, there are 653 political prisoners in Belarus. This is just a small proportion of all the people detained on the grounds of their worldview, as there are several thousand such individuals in total. This process has also affected artists. Over the past year, around 50 writers have been subjected to repression. Several of them are behind bars or are not allowed to leave the country. Regarding the PEN Club, at this point two people are in prison and one has been placed under house arrest.

The reason for that is that intellectuals, intelligentsia, writers and social activists have always taken to the streets at critical moments for the country. They used the power of words to defend democratic values

 13.

**The protests of 2020–2021 which covered the entire territory of Belarus. Citizens demanded repeat presidential elections, widely regarded as fraudulent, opposed the policy of the Belarusian authorities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and protested against the decline in living standards.**

## 14.

**This colouring, rooted in the time of the first independent Belarusian state in 1918, is today considered illegal by the authorities. Lukashenko's regime uses a different symbol – it is two horizontal stripes, red at the top, green at the bottom, and a folk ornament in red at the spar on a white background. It is a communist-era flag from which only the sickle and hammer have been removed.**

and human rights. They did not remain silent. This was the case 30 years ago, when the Soviet Union collapsed, and it is the case now, when the regime rigged the elections, granting the uniformed forces licence to use violence. Until then, we had known violence only from books, not aware that the same thing could happen to us, in our own country, from the hands of our security officers. We cannot comprehend how they can use torture against us. After all, they are our neighbours, relatives and citizens of Belarus.

The Belarusian PEN Club and the Belarusian Association of Journalists have been liquidated. Next in line are the Belarusian Language Association, the independent Union of Belarusian Writers, the World Association of Belarusians “Bačkaŭščyna” and other organisations, each of them facing purportedly legitimate allegations. The courts do not listen to any arguments, carrying out the political will of the authorities, as the regime sees a threat to its existence in culture and artists.

The rebirth of the nation and the emergence of a new Belarus in terms of people's identity have resulted in a surge of interest in historical national symbols, namely the coat of arms with the Pahonia and the white-red-white flag<sup>14</sup>. Until a year and a half ago, these symbols were hardly visible in the public space. After the elections and the terrible violence against peaceful demonstrators, cases of deaths and tortures, Minsk took to the streets, with hundreds of thousands of people carrying flags. I still cannot comprehend how people managed to find so many of them in such a short time. Perhaps they were sewing them at night?

Today, the historic white-red-white flag and the Pahonia coat of arms are practically banned. My friend and musician Maksim Subach spent 15 days in a crowded cell for having a sticker with this coat of arms on his car. Without a mattress, bedding or personal hygiene products. At the same time, the same symbol is the official coat of arms of the Vitebsk region. It is completely absurd. Even writing letters to political prisoners, as a demonstration of solidarity, is now considered a crime. The authorities call us extremists, but it is obvious that today they are the ones threatening national security. What we have also witnessed is the elevation of the status of the Belarusian language, as well as a growing interest in it and respect for it. In response, when detaining people, security officers have started to mark the clothes of the individuals speaking Belarusian with paint in order to later treat them more harshly. We have witnessed how the strengthening of national self-consciousness was accompanied by the development of social consciousness, growing awareness of civil liberties and democratic standards.



An interesting example is the process that took place in the typical block of flats where I live. Neighbours, previously strangers to one another, have suddenly become a community. We have set up our own chat room on Telegram<sup>15</sup>, have taken part in marches together, have rescued one another from the police and picked up those of us released from jail. We have even written letters together to political prisoners, one of whom is our neighbour, detained for taking part in a strike at the university...

This explosion of horizontal ties and true human solidarity, has not only strengthened our self-esteem, but has created a new moral quality, which, I think, will be the basis for the emergence of local self-governments in the future. If we are able to unite in a time of violence, if Lukashenko has not succeeded in destroying our civic community, then how much can this newborn community achieve in a time of peace, during the formation of democracy in the new Belarus? This is proof of a colossal social potential and a reason to believe in a better future.

Until the present, all attempts at democratisation have been blocked by the state apparatus. What has emerged, however, is an aphorism: "A Belarussian [is] a Belarussian [to] a Belarussian" (Belarus Belarusa Belarus), which represents a new sense of solidarity and national self-respect, renouncement of dictatorship, and standing for dignity and the right to live in a democratic society. However, we still need support and help in our struggle. It is worth noting that the Belarus issue is not just a Belarussian problem – it is a security issue for the entire region and for Europe in general. It is part of not only the Belarussian but also the European reality. Prisoners are beaten and tortured – this is no longer just a violation of human rights, but a crime against humanity. For this reason, if we lose, Europe will lose. If we win, our victory will be our common success.

[1.09.2021, ECS]

 15.

**Telegram is a communication platform that originated in Russia as a tool that prioritises user anonymity and encrypts transmitted data. For this reason, it is immensely popular among anti-authoritarian opposition circles.**

**1991–2021. The Empire strikes back.  
Europe 30 years after the collapse of the USSR**  
DEBATE



**Wolfgang Eichwede** | German historian dealing with the relations between Germany and the countries of Eastern Europe. Founder of the Centre for East European Studies in Bremen. During the period of the Iron Curtain, he worked to support the cultural, intellectual and social independence of the citizens of communist countries. Today, he conducts research on the societies and cultures of Central and Eastern Europe and boasts the largest collection of more than 100,000 underground publications of the Eastern Bloc states.

# 1989-2021: a history of contradictions

Wolfgang Eichwede

On New Year's Eve of 1989, I stood on Wenceslas Square in Prague among hundreds of thousands of people celebrating their newly gained freedom, chanting "Havel na hrad", or "Vaclav Havel to the castle".

Just four years earlier, I had been arrested in Czechoslovakia for my ties with civil rights activists and expelled from the country. In Poland, I kneeled at the grave of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, murdered by the Communist security services. In 1988 and 1989, I lived for months in Moscow during the period of perestroika. In the heart of the Soviet empire, I witnessed the incredible freedom movement in all countries of the Warsaw Pact. As early as December 1988, in Riga and Tallinn, I secretly met female activists fighting for the independence of their respective republics. The demonised and condemned Andrei Sakharov challenged the omnipotence of the CPSU. In Poland, the civil opposition forced the Round Table talks, which led to the gradual but almost instantaneous resignation of the communist authorities. Some time later, Adam Michnik, a Polish journalist and oppositionist, told me that at the time it was easier to imagine the Archangel Gabriel descending from heaven and driving the Soviets out of Poland with a sword in hand. But a miracle happened – the USSR simply yielded. Another breakthrough point was the elections in Poland in June 1989. A few months later, the Berlin Wall fell. My children picked out little pebbles from it, which I have kept to this day.

## **Revolution without the guillotine**

Thanks to Eastern Europe, the entire continent is changing its face. Nations and communities hitherto considered powerless are showing immense strength against regimes hitherto considered omnipotent. The balance of power is being upturned. The drama of the events is contrasted with the self-discipline of the participants, inspired

by the political philosophy of the civil rights and dissident movements of previous decades and the icons of peaceful revolution – Larisa Bogoraz and Andrei Sakharov in Moscow, Lech Wałęsa and Solidarity, the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka and the Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller, to name but a few. Violence was replaced by the strategies of “evolutionism” [Adam Michnik], “anti-politics” [Gyorgy Konrad], “power of the powerless” [Vaclav Havel] and “self-limiting revolution” [Jadwiga Staniszkis], which were to define the world history.

The revolutionaries of 1989 did not know the guillotine. Their only weapon was words. Thus, they gave the term “revolution” a civil and peaceful dimension. While the great French philosopher François Furet argued that exactly 200 years after the French Revolution, events in Central and Eastern Europe still carried the message of the European Enlightenment, other sociologists spoke of a new pattern of thought in history – the negotiation revolution. Witnessing these transformations and speaking with many of their creators were the most beautiful and exciting moments in my professional life.

However, when analysing the historical revolutions of those years, with their almost inexhaustible social creativity, one cannot lose sight of the breakthrough at the centre of power of the Soviet empire. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU. In his own words, he wanted to reform and even democratise the power of his Communist Party from scratch, albeit within the framework of the Soviet system. In order to achieve that, it was necessary to give some free space to a society that had been silenced for decades, and to give it freedom of speech in the hope that bottom-up criticism would put pressure on the ossified and degenerate apparatus of power, leading to reform and opening up new possibilities. This concept of the systemic self-correction of socialism failed utterly. The societies and peoples started to take advantage of this unexpected freedom as they saw fit, rather than as planned by the General Secretary, while the latter remained trapped in his own power structures. Desperate, Gorbachev attempted to concentrate more and more formal power in his hands, but in fact he was losing grip on it. Although he aspired to be an initiator of change, in the end he became a rather pathetic intermediary between two worlds he was unable to bring together.

### **New order**

Gorbachev managed to achieve more in the international arena. Moscow took the initiative in world politics. Gorbachev managed to stop the deadly arms race between the East and the West. In 1990, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, fifteen years after Andrei Sakharov

and seven years after Lech Wałęsa. But, above all, he recognised that the peoples of Eastern Europe, which had for almost half a century been treated as “satellites” of his state, had the right to self-determination and freedom of choice. With the end of Soviet support, the communist regimes there were forced to step down. Fifty years after the outbreak of the Second World War and the beginning of foreign domination, Central Europe was finally able to take its fate into its own hands. In Germany, the Berlin Wall fell.

But something else happened, as well. The USSR, despite having been a heavily armed superpower, collapsed. In his own empire, Gorbachev had no idea how to solve the national question. His project of reforms failed due to the forces that he wanted to rebuild and from which he had failed to free himself. Nevertheless, he set in motion movements that pursued other goals than the one he had envisioned. The chance of regaining freedom was more tempting than the promise of reforming socialism, which, naturally, could not be reformed. Gorbachev’s historical importance lies not only in what he started, but – even more so – in what he did not do. Despite the bloody events in Tbilisi and Vilnius, for which the Soviet military was responsible, Gorbachev ultimately chose not to fight against the history that was to wipe him out.

The Cold War came to an end. In 1990, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe laid the foundations for a new order in Europe, with no division between East and West. With the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1990, many new states came into being, which, together with the old ones, started to form a network, in line with the idea of one world. My generation, growing up in the Federal Republic of Germany in the period of the Iron Curtain and ignorance about the eastern half of the continent, had to reorganise things in their heads.

However, this euphoria was short lived. Politicians in the old West were too eager to celebrate the victory of freedom in the East as their own. Speaking of victory in the Cold War, the Westerners appropriated, in a way, the success of those who had risked everything, nations characterised by their historically unique mix of the desire for freedom and self-discipline.

At the same time, certain shifts were observable. To the legacy of the old order, with its high costs, came the costs of building a new order. After the beginning of 1992, daily life was no longer dominated by ideals of freedom, but by principles of economics, shock therapy, flooding the market with cheaper Western products and the emergence of new oligarchies. The bloody wars in the Balkans revealed the frightening violence and the equally frightening powerlessness of the new order.

GDAŃSK



SAMORZĄD  
WOJEWÓDZTWA POMORSKIEGO

europa  
centrum

Mykoła  
Kniażycki

1989-2021: a history of contradictions





### **Neighbourhood network of connections**

Through their cooperation with NATO, the Central European countries represented the pro-American perspective, while through their cooperation with the European Union, the pro-European perspective, with its worthwhile or indispensable goals bringing in the promise of security, influence and considerable economic benefits. On the other hand, shortly after Poland's admission to the European Union, I met with opinions in Warsaw that Brussels might negatively affect the country's newly regained sovereignty. In this way, Europe and Polish national pride reached a state of tension that continues to this day. Given the economic dominance of a united Germany, historical resentments were easily rekindled. In spite of the fact that the neighbourhood network of connections between the two countries had never before been as dense. In general, along with its enlargement, the European Union has lost its homogeneity and charisma. In its internal stratification and state of rivalry, it has lost its external attractiveness and impact. The limitation of universal human rights, especially women's rights, as well as the partial abolition of the separation of powers in the individual Member States, threatens the very core of the European project, which harks back to the tradition of the Enlightenment. Poland and Hungary, the societies that led the revolution of 1989, are now hindering the development of a Europe of tolerance and openness. Their governments and government-controlled supreme courts are questioning the foundations of a united Europe. Some of the founding states of 1957, including the Federal Republic, have also lost part of their unconditional pro-European orientation after German reunification. It is yet to be seen whether the European Union will regain its momentum.

### **Imperialist nature of Russian policy**

Another significant contemporary problem is Russia, which, although not part of the European Union, is part of Europe. While the Soviet Union under Gorbachev significantly contributed to peaceful changes around the world and even initiated them in the high politics, Putin's Russia is now focused on power also in military terms. The presidential monopoly on power is being expanded, the instruments of repression against oppositionists are being tightened and the West is being re-created as an ideological enemy. In terms of foreign policy, the country is increasingly ready to resort to means of war to pursue its own interests, justifying it with the claim that the country is besieged. In fact, Russia is facing devastating repercussions of Soviet policy. By oppressing the neighbouring states for decades, it pushed them into seeking the protection of either the US or their former adversary.



Who has the right to oppose the voice of the Central European nations when it comes to their security? The enlargement of NATO was not a strategy of the West plotted against Russia, but reflected the will of the peoples of the region, stemming from their bitter experiences with the former Soviet Union and, before that time, the Tsarist empire. It was not the first time in history that a price for imperial inclinations had to be paid for later in time.

The two Chechen wars in 1994–1996 and 1999–2009, both initiated by Boris Yeltsin, seriously damaged the image of a reforming Russia in the world. NATO's war against Serbia in 1999 challenged the Western alliance's peaceful intentions. From 2000 onwards, however, it seemed as if Putin's new Russia could get along with the West in terms of foreign relations, gradually building an autocracy within the country. The key word was "modernisation".

The situation changed with the public protests in 2011<sup>16</sup>. Vladimir Putin stabilised his regime by increasing repression, and – above all – by inciting Russian nationalist sentiments to neutralise any possible civil society resistance against him. And he succeeded in doing so. The annexation of Crimea ensured Putin's high approval ratings<sup>17</sup>. The new and old imperial features of Russia's policy, which are incompatible with the Paris Charter, have become apparent in the covert war with Ukraine and in the support of Lukashenko's terror against his own people. The use of force as a "legitimate means" in Moscow's policy calls into question the principles of any détente policy. Economically weak Russia boasts its military strength and seeks to influence the international sphere through the use of violence, reminiscent of the Soviet patterns. This is evidenced by the bombings of hospitals and the use of mercenary troops in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean. The hunt for Alexei Navalny and members of the opposition in the country underline the danger of a presidential dictatorship.

So, how can this difficult situation 30 years after the peaceful revolution be dealt with?

### **Germany's policy of détente**

Germany stresses the need for dialogue in the spirit of Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik, which he proposed half a century ago. The Soviet Union was not a democratic state at the time either, but the policy of détente<sup>18</sup> contributed significantly to the changes in Eastern Europe from 1989 onwards. In 1972, as a 30-year-old young academic, I was enthusiastically in favour of Willy Brandt's policies, but using completely different argumentation than that used today. Willy Brandt, an émigré who had been an active member of the resistance movement against Hitler, and Chancellor of West Germany at the time – this was

#### 16.

**On 23 January, rallies in solidarity with arrested opposition activist Alexei Navalny were held in more than 120 Russian cities. They gathered 110,000-160,000 participants and are considered one of the largest protest actions in the country's post-Soviet history.**

#### 17.

**The Russian Federation's illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory through the use of armed force began in February 2014. The military took the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, located on the Crimean Peninsula.**

#### 18.

**The easing of tensions between the Cold War parties in the 1970s.**

tantamount to liberation. His opening up to the East was a continuation of Adenauer's compromise with the West: For the first time, we Germans acknowledged our guilt towards the peoples of Poland and the Soviet Union in historical terms and declared our readiness to pay for it.

Brandt's foreign policy revolutionised German domestic policy – it liberated us and gave us a new perspective on our history. By signalling to the countries of the Warsaw Pact that the Federal Republic was no longer making any territorial claims and was seeking an agreement aware of Germany's crimes, it increased the freedom of action of Warsaw, Prague and Budapest vis-à-vis Moscow. Even under Soviet domination, it weakened the bloc's discipline. Ostpolitik, in the spirit of the old policy of détente, provided a liberating impulse, both internally and externally. During my conversations with Willy Brandt, I understood that he had always supported the fight for civil rights and freedom in communist-ruled countries. He also remembered his own resistance to the National Socialist dictatorship. The beginning of this dual strategy of change: increased cooperation between states and an internal opening up, a widening of the space of freedom within those states, found expression in the Helsinki Conference in 1975.

However, I do not want to idealise politics. It had its hard facts and interests. In economic terms, the West was far superior and far more attractive in terms of the lifestyle it offered, while the East was still grappling with its crises. From an economic point of view, reforms were necessary, but were not undertaken due to the political risks they entailed. The Prague Spring of 1968 was seen as a warning. The import of capital and technologies from the opposing camp was to replace what the local system was unable to provide. On the other hand, the West – especially the Federal Republic – was looking for new markets. The policy of détente, therefore, came about under the influence of a considerable imbalance of power. Willy Brandt enforced the opening up of German post-war thinking, emphasising at the same time the superiority of Western economic power. He also declared the need for an absolute renunciation of violence in both international and domestic relations.

In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, changes took place in the politics again. The arms race intensified. The USSR invaded Afghanistan. Civil rights movements in Eastern Europe challenged the exclusive right of representation held by their dictatorial governments. In Poland, Solidarity was established as an opposition democratic movement. German politics lost sight of the social dimension of détente as a strategy for change. What had originally been a concept of a politics of openness turned into an extended policy to maintain the status

quo. At that time, I often visited Prague and Warsaw, Budapest and Moscow. What emerged in intellectual and opposition circles there, searching for political alternatives, was not reflected in German foreign policy. In their thoughtless adherence to the status quo established by the state, the authorities failed to take into account the reality of the opening up of Eastern Europe. Even as late as the autumn of 1988, the leading Social Democratic delegation refused to meet dissidents and independent perestroika leaders in Moscow, who had been invited by the Central Committee of the CPSU. No, the revolution in Eastern Europe was not the result of Western diplomacy, but the work of the people there. Timothy Garton Ash was right to criticise foreign policy, in particular the German one, in this respect.

### **Existential questions for Europe**

Repeatedly invoked dialogue is not a solution. However, engaging in it is important. A key element of any partnership is the complete renunciation of violence. Russia's policy towards Ukraine poses an existential question for Europe. A state that uses violence to pursue its own interests is not a difficult partner, as diplomats like to put it, but rather questions the partnership or ceases to be a partner. We may not like this, but we must not ignore the reality. In this context, Nord Stream 2 was a mistake.

Although the European Union has achieved a lot in its almost 65 years of its history, its internal divisions are significant. Common European values are not only being violated by individual governments, but also openly questioned. In the European Council of Heads of Government, individual interests of member states often dominate. As a young man, I was deeply convinced that I would one day live in a European country. In my love of French and Russian literature, of cities like Prague, Kraków and Venice, I dreamt of Europe as a larger nation. This is only a utopia today. The intricacies of the Brussels bureaucracy fuel anxiety, although it is working tirelessly to solve the problem. How can we overcome this unfavourable situation?

The European Parliament is an anchor of hope, but it is too weak in its institutional structure. For this reason, the main task in the coming decades may be to create a European public opinion of societies based on the values of Enlightenment. We still have 27 communities that define themselves predominantly through their own national frameworks. We need a joint movement of citizens of all the nations on the continent, which will participate in what is happening beyond the borders of its own state and show mutual support in the struggle for self-determination, for example, in the case of women in Poland. Where were the solidarity actions in Germany or France?



In 1968, Vaclav Havel was walking hand in hand with Martin Luther King in New York, in defence of the rights of black members of the civil rights movement. Where were we seen last summer on the streets of Warsaw? Scepticism is inherent in my work as a historian. I know that we have to think from a long-term perspective. But we can learn from the experience of Solidarity in Poland in the 1980s, or from Charter 77 in Prague. When the oppositionists of the time were fighting for their rights without resorting to violence, no one gave them a chance. But they did succeed in rewriting history. Our task is all of Europe. We can learn a lot from the women in Belarus and from Memorial in Moscow.

**1991–2021. The Empire strikes back.**  
**Europe 30 years after the collapse of the USSR**  
DEBATE



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# Solidarity? A few remarks on 1981, 1991 and the present

Andrii Portnov

Forty years ago, when I was two years old, in my hometown in the south of Ukraine – formerly Dnipropetrovsk, now Dnipro – the young artist Artur Fredekind did something extraordinary, something he himself described as a happening. Along with his friend, he produced several leaflets with just one word and a question mark: “Solidarity?”. This was a clear allusion to the Polish socio-political movement started in Gdańsk. Artur put some leaflets into the mailboxes of the blocks of flats in the vicinity. This was happening in a closed Soviet rocket town, far from the Polish border. A town that was under special surveillance of the KGB. Despite that fact, the approved press titles from socialist Poland were available there. And served as a window to... the West. Artur was shortly thereafter arrested and convicted on charges of defaming the communist state.

During that time, West Germany was watching the Solidarity movement. Not with admiration, but rather with fear and disapproval. Leading politicians, journalists and writers spoke of a “Polish crisis”, complaining of “Poland distancing itself from reality” [German: eine sehr polnische Realitätsferne]. They perceived Solidarity as a threat to Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik and the development of peaceful relations with Moscow. In this context, Poland was denied full historical subjectivity or at least was subordinated to strategic relations with the Soviet Union.

## **A sense of impasse**

In 1985, Timothy Garton Ash concluded his essay “Which Way Will Germany Go?”<sup>19</sup> with the observation: “Anyone can see that the road to an eventual European reunification must lead via Germany. We must be serious about overcoming the division of Germany.

 19.

T. Garton Ash, “Which Way Will Germany Go?”, *The New York Review*, 1985, vol. 32, iss. 1.

## 20.

**A. Amalrik,**  
*Prosuszczestvujet*  
*li Sovetskij Sojuz do 1984*  
*goda?, Amsterdam 1970.*

But how?" It is interesting that, as early as 1969, the Russian dissident Andrei Amalrik approached the issue from a different perspective. In his provocative essay "Will the Soviet Union survive until 1984?"<sup>20</sup>, he predicted in an astonishing way the reunification of Germany and the inevitable desovietisation of the socialist bloc, and accurately diagnosed the growing passive dissatisfaction of Soviet citizens with the regime and the regime resorting to the great Russian nationalism. Amalrik predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union as a result of war with China, the outbreak of which he estimated between 1980 and 1985.

As we know today, the Soviet Union became involved in another war, the one in Afghanistan in 1979. The brutal and senseless experience of war, which went on until 1989, along with the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986 and growing economic problems significantly contributed to the loss of legitimacy of the USSR and the transformation of popular discontent into an increasingly strong opposition to the authorities.

How could Amalrik predict the great and tragic events that were to follow with such great accuracy? Perhaps he closely watched Soviet films. From the late 1960s onwards, a discerning observer, when watching the best of them, could feel a vague sense of impasse. It is no coincidence that in the extremely sad "A Long Happy Life" [1966] by Gennady Shpalikov, the main motif was the theatrical staging of "The Cherry Orchard". It was Chekhov's screen adaptations that were particularly successful in post-Soviet cinema, as they seemed to reflect the current mood of hopelessness. Anton Chekhov's "The Seagull" was the basis for the psychological drama "Success" [1984], starring the outstanding Leonid Filatov. Filatov's character, an experimental theatre director, claims that it is Chekhov whose writings can be related to the present with "strikingly accuracy". One might add that it is Chekhov who, like no one else, subtly described the crisis of Russian society on the eve of the 1905 Revolution. A revolution that the playwright did not believe in and did not witness...

Nor did Andrei Amalrik live to see most of his bold predictions about the collapse of the Soviet Union come true. He died in a car crash in Spain in 1980. In 1985, newly appointed General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev announced the reconstruction of Soviet society based on socialist values, combined with a self-sufficient and competitive economy, limited political pluralism and a peaceful foreign policy. The word *perestroika* was soon to become a widely recognised term around the world.

### **A creaking empire**

For many analysts, the nationality problem in the Soviet Union, which was – at least in formal terms – organised as a federation



of quasi-national states, seemed to be non-existent. It was not as much wishful thinking as blindness, despite the massive, successful protests in Georgia in April 1978, for the preservation of Georgian as the only official language of the republic. In 1983, former KGB chief Yuri Andropov, who succeeded Leonid Brezhnev as leader of the Soviet state, confessed: "We hardly know the society in which we live and work."<sup>21</sup> Andropov seemed to be aware of the numerous failures and internal contradictions of the Soviet system. One of Andropov's unfulfilled ideas was an administrative rearrangement of the country, in particular the division of Ukraine into two republics along the Dnieper.

In December 1986, there was an outbreak of youth protests in Kazakhstan against the attempt to appoint an ethnic Russian, with no ties to the republic, as first secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. In August 1987, the first demonstrations condemning the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the secret protocol which made possible the Soviet annexation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, took place in the three Baltic republics. In February 1988, an Armenian pogrom took place in Sumgait, Azerbaijan. How could this have happened in a country that proudly proclaimed that it had resolved the national question and established friendship between people of all nations?

Researchers who study the collapse of the Soviet Union agree that it was the Ukrainian elite's insistence on the independence of their republic and the Russian elite's inability to offer an attractive alternative to Moscow's total domination that led to the collapse of the last European empire.

One should not forget the important, if not decisive, role played by the Russian elite centred around the first president, Boris Yeltsin, in the collapse of the USSR. The Supreme Council of the Russian Federation adopted a declaration of state sovereignty on 12 June 1990. Earlier than Ukraine! Sovereignty from whom? From the Soviet centre, which was and still is often equated with Russia itself. But the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was one of the fifteen formally equal republics. At the same time, it differed from the rest of them. The RSFSR was a federation within a federation. This key point explains the logic behind the Chechen wars, when a significant part of the local elites claimed that Chechnya would like to enjoy the same independence as Estonia or Tajikistan. As the American historian Yuri Slezkine put it, the Soviet Union resembled a communal flat, where Russia did not have a room of its own. One might add that this flat has often been equated with Russia itself to this day.

 21.

**Speech by Yuri Andropov to the plenum of the Soviet Union Communist Party Central Committee held on 15 June 1983.**



## **People as the architects of history**

It is often forgotten that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the miners of the Donbas, an industrial region in eastern Ukraine, were among the most vocal protesters against central planning and centralised Soviet economic policy. Up to 500,000 miners took part in the strikes in July 1989, and the protest leaders were on rather good terms with the national movement. Future economic prosperity was perceived as closely linked to Ukraine's sovereignty and independence from Moscow's planned economy.

The myth of immediate economic prosperity, promoted by the National Democrats, proved to be one of the main pitfalls in the early development of post-Soviet Ukraine. Instead of catching up with West Germany, as promised by the supporters of independence, Ukraine experienced a demodernisation of the economy and infrastructure, gradual depopulation and a decline in national income. Another pitfall was due to the fact that the creation of an independent Ukraine was made possible by a compromise between the national democrats and a large part of the "nomenklatura" [Communist Party bureaucracy]. This compromise prevented a complete replacement of elites, but contributed to the peaceful nature of the post-Soviet transition. We never know exactly how to change history. We should try and take risks. Because history is very unpredictable, it surprises us and constantly shows us its irony, times in a bitter and even cruel way... But there is also good news – history never ends, no matter how much some eminent philosophers would like it to.

In 1981, the existence of something like the European University Viadrina, with buildings on the Polish and German sides of the Oder, was unthinkable. Even back in 2001, when I came to Warsaw to complete my second master's degree, it was hard for me to imagine that I would become a professor of Ukrainian history at a German university and have an office in Poland at the same time. I cannot stop thinking about a similar, or even better university on the Polish-Ukrainian border, which will be as easy to cross as our bridge in Frankfurt/Oder. In the creation of this future, the term "solidarity" still has profound meaning...

[1.09.2021, ECS]

## Democracy in retreat? In defence of civil liberties in Europe

DEBATE



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# Internal and external threats to civil liberties

Marek Radziwon

One of the fundamental threats to civil liberties and human freedoms is the currently popular belief that values and institutions do not need to be cherished and were given to us once and for all time in 1989 in the case of Poland, or in 1991, if we look more broadly at the entire region of the collapsed Soviet Union. We used to think values and institutions will last forever. It seems to me that it has just started to dawn on us that this view was false. Although it may sound like a trivial observation, disputes and fights are currently common. Every time a new text is published in a newspaper, a battle for freedom of speech is taking place.

There is also a belief – some would say a neo-market or a libertarian one – that proclaims the primacy of clientelistic relations between citizen and state, where the state as a community is not a sphere of values. This way of thinking, although quite widespread, seems dangerous to me. It perceives the state as a business established to make profits and limit losses. In the simplest definition of realism – following Thomas Hobbes – this means that people pay taxes and the state defends them and takes care of their health.

When it comes to the third issue, reference should be made to a specific incident. In 1968, Andrei Sakharov published “Thoughts on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom” abroad. This paper, similar to several other theses that are still interesting and relevant today, proposes to tax the rich North, mainly North America and Western Europe, with a 30% tax for the benefit of the poor South.

This postulate invites a pitying smile. It is a naive view that cannot be taken seriously. However, it is worth pointing out the following issues. One of the greatest dangers we pose to ourselves is the belief – fed by populists – that we can make the world better in our own backyard. We need to wall ourselves off from the problems of others, beyond our borders, literally and figuratively, and they will cease to exist. Well, in fact they will not. We are still slaves to such way of thinking. Numerous examples prove that being local, national egoists, we generate our own problems and misfortunes.

Finally, I would like to address the most serious and controversial issue: the conviction that innate values beyond our control, such as land and blood ties or the concept of nation, are superior to acquired values. Three years ago, Sergey Kovalev received the Doctor Honoris Causa honorary title from the University of Warsaw. During his lecture, he said something that caused controversy or even scandal. Kovalev spoke about the concept of patriotism. He claimed that patriotism is a social scourge, as it breeds enmity and causes bloodshed in the world. According to him, patriotism is a phenomenon to a certain extent typical of all living organisms and can be reduced to one simple principle – stick to your own people, fear strangers, and if an opportunity arises, devour them. Kovalev's way of thinking is fundamentally Tolstoyan, as it is derived from Tolstoy's essays "Christianity and Patriotism" and "The Superstition of the State", which still do not have their Polish translations. I mentioned this fragment in order to raise awareness that one of the greatest dangers we face today is the superstitions to which we ourselves succumb.

One gets the impression that the Polish party-state in which we live at the moment is getting stronger as an apparatus of coercion against citizens. What is weak is our civic and social practice and culture of freedom. I see three main areas of social opposition today. The first is that human rights movements are becoming more radicalised. They are more active than before and there are more of them. They are also characterised by greater specialisation, especially in Poland, but one can name a dozen or so NGOs or even dozens of Russian ones, which did not exist a few years ago. This is a sad observation, as these movements arise in the face of state oppression. However, they do exist and operate efficiently in various areas of life, not only when it comes to human rights in the direct and physical sense, helping people imprisoned in detention centres, prisons or gulags, as in Russia, but also in other spheres, such as the humanities and science. Secondly, there is a new conviction, also in Poland, that certain spheres of public life,

which have always been the domain of institutional and parliamentary politics, can be extended beyond the cabinets into the sphere of direct social influence. Thirdly, human rights are addressed in the public debate much more frequently and in a much more thought-out way than a few years ago. Naturally, in the case of Poland, we can see a significant regression in this respect at the moment. However, I think that never since the UN Universal Declaration of December 1948 have human rights been on the daily agenda in Europe as prominently as they are today.

Although by nature I am a moderate pessimist, I would say, a little against myself, that all these anti-democratic tendencies we are witnessing in such countries as Poland resemble a pendulum swinging a few or a dozen years back. As a matter of fact, the issues of human rights and civil liberties – no matter how much we would like to keep quiet about them and cover them up – are among the most important matters, without which there can be no politics at all. We are currently witnessing a growing number of non-governmental organisations dealing with human rights. It should be stressed again that it is not societies that deserve credit for that. Ironically, it is a sad achievement of the oppressive power. An action provokes a reaction.

Unfortunately, I must conclude my speech on a pessimistic note. We are gathered today at the European Solidarity Centre, but – forgive me these overly grandiose words – in fact today the European solidarity centre should be in Usnarz and near Białystok. This is where solidarity should be shown. We have been witnessing the unlawful actions of Frontex and the Polish Border Guard in Brześć for many years, we have been tolerating violations of the Geneva Convention. I would like to stress, with no satisfaction, that it is not today that we found ourselves where we are.

[1.09.2021, ECS]

**Europe and the world.**  
**New deal, new leaders, new alliances**  
DEBATE



**Agnieszka Bryc** | Polish political scientist and university lecturer. Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Member of the Council of the Centre for Eastern Studies. Editor-in-chief of the scientific journal “The Copernicus Journal of Political Science”. Author of numerous publications on the foreign policy of the Russian Federation and post-Soviet states. She often speaks in the media and organises debates.



# Democracy - Putin's greatest threat

Agnieszka Bryc

In terms of European solidarity, we are mostly quite sceptical with respect to what we do and how we act. Here in Poland, it may be the case that soon we will need to learn again how to fight for democracy from our friends in Belarus and Ukraine, who are showing us that we have moved on rather quickly from 1989, underestimating what we have gained. At the time, the pro-Western choice was motivated by the spirit of the time; but it went too easy for us. Today, having come full circle, aware of the consequences and the high price, we will have to make an important choice again. Do we slide back into authoritarianism or will we take seriously what the West is offering us in terms of democratic values? Believing in the end of history, we seem to have somewhat forgotten about them. It seemed to us that 1989, and later 2004, was basically the end of history and all would go well from that point on.

## **YouTube society**

Russians are on a similar path as a society [or more precisely a civil society], which is being born and fighting for its existence and survival. Activists in Russia are officially outlawed and considered extremist elements. We all know what happened to Navalny and his staff, who had been listed, like other institutions defending civil rights and democratic freedoms, as extremists and terrorists right alongside the Taliban, ISIS, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Although this fact sounds ridiculous, it is, in fact, dramatic. In the case of Russia, some optimism can be seen in the young generation, in the long run. When I look at politics from the perspective of an academic and expert, my doubts as to whether things can get better in Russia are mixed with long-term optimism. Experts tend to be very pessimistic.

When we look at current events, we can see that President Putin is effectively tightening the screws, not only preventing the emergence of a real opposition, but even preventing civil society from having the will to be an opposition in the first place. Let us recall the last time Russians took to the streets in a mass protest in defence of Navalny. Regulations have been introduced that effectively discourage citizens from such actions, as people fear, just like in Belarus, what price they and their families would ultimately have to pay for that. There is no doubt that the results of the elections to be held in Russia in a short time will be a success for one party.

This is a pessimistic outlook. However, there is also some optimism when we think in broader terms and notice the processes that are not yet as visible, but are slowly bringing about social and political transformations in Russia. The people behind these transformations is the younger generation. This voice is suppressed today, and people may not be willing to take part in mass protests, but they will ultimately find methods of expressing their opinions and establishing circles striving for changes towards democratic goals. What we can see is a generation that we colloquially call the YouTube society. Russian authorities keep to the trend of shaping the political attitudes of Russians through conventional methods of communication, such as television and other media. In contrast, members of the opposition and the young generation are searching for information and shaping their political and civic attitudes using methods that are alien to Putin. I do not want to be mean, but I think it is an accurate comparison. Putin is an analogue president. On the other side, we have the youth, who have not yet entered the political mainstream, but will do so in a short while. This generation does not watch channel one of Russian television, but instead opts for YouTube and information that is not spread by the authorities and propaganda. It will grow stronger and demand Western standards from the Russian authorities, which are facing major economic problems.

The Russian Glubinka – the deep province born in Soviet times – still recalls with nostalgia the protection, especially social protection, the Soviet state offered and has the same expectations of President Putin. The state has become militarised to a large extent and a large part of its expenditure is spent on hypersonic weapons to scare the West. We should, however, remember that the Russian regime also makes mistakes. It has missed the time of modernisation. Russia remains a resource-based state, not to say obsolete, and in a world that is moving towards renewable energy, it will still use energy from fossil fuels.

### **The calm before the storm**

In Europe, we are focused on our problems, but President Putin's regime is also facing their own. It is tightening the screws at this point, but that does not mean that changes will not take place. In my research, analyses and forecasts, I assume that if we do not see these changes in a year or two, they will certainly occur within a decade, when the contemporary youth will have greater political representation. Provided they are not seduced by their older colleagues from United Russia or other parties that toe the Kremlin line.

In Poland, international affairs are not a priority, but they should be. In Russia, one can also see the fine cracks heralding changes in the major party institutions. We have witnessed the great ferment in the Communist Party before, as the so-called bottom did not like the leadership [the top brass is linked to the Kremlin, while the bottom are people in their 30s to 40s]. The younger generation has a different vision and their leftist orientation, despite their membership in the Russian communist party, is more modern and progressive. We do not see these changes in Poland today, but they are beginning to ferment in both the Russian political environment and society. We are currently witnessing the calm before the storm and it is important not to abandon the NGOs and our colleagues from Russia, for whom it is very difficult today, for example, to visit a Polish university. If we pay them to come, they will likely be considered foreign agents. This greatly restricts academic freedom, but we are still in touch.

We should remember that the issue of democratisation is not only our problem. It is a broader issue, which also concerns those countries that are paying dearly for their democratic transition, such as Ukraine. Belarusians, in turn, are now paying the price for losing their struggle. The revolution will eventually happen, but not today. Polish people, on the other hand, may pay for their abandonment of civic attitudes. The contemporary crisis will be a test in this regard. What is happening in the East reminds us that civic values need to be nurtured, and we need to take greater care of civic education among the younger generations.

### **Analogue president**

By calling Putin an analogue president, I am referring to a man who avoids using tablets despite having an army of internet trolls. But we should not focus on that aspect. Vladimir is an analogue president because he prefers the old ways of governance and conventional methods of communication. This is evidenced by his annual grand conferences, which are broadcast exclusively on television.

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## 22.

The US-Russia summit held in Switzerland in mid-June 2021.

And while footage of these events has started to be uploaded by Russians to social media, it is still rare.

So why does one get the impression that Putin is not an analogue president? We perceive Russia's actions on the international arena in the context of its cyber capabilities. The country is a cyber-power, or at least it wants to portray itself as such, and that is how it wants to be perceived by the West. This area has been recognised by NATO as a new dimension of international security and this is great news. Russians are not doing bad in this respect, but they are not the best. I have the impression that we more often hear about on-line activity by Russians than about the activities of other countries, which do not boast too much about their attacks on others, although President Putin, at a meeting in Geneva, lamented that most of the digital aggression against Russia was carried out from US territory.<sup>22</sup> By carrying out operations in the sphere of cyberspace, the Kremlin is compensating for its weaknesses in other areas, such as its economy and army, which, although large, would not stand much chance in a confrontation with the West's military. If it were the case, Russia would not need to go out of its way to ceremonially demonstrate its strength. Often, such displays are meant to give the impression of power that, in fact, does not exist.

### Digital war

Russia's cyber instruments are important, but too often they are overestimated. The Israelis have long argued that the Russians are not that bad, but the rest of the world, including the West, are just as good. The former act in two ways. They attack various institutions, including email boxes. But, above all it is worth stressing Russia's disinformation capabilities. These are much more dangerous. If we educate capable IT specialists, we will be able to resist the Kremlin's threats. Especially if we can recognise them. Russia is gaining the upper hand in the information network. Trolls, after all, are not just individuals who send hundreds of tweets in a single shift. In their battle in cyberspace, Russians employ specialists who are underestimated, including in Poland. They know that in order to defeat the West, one does not need little green men or armies, but can launch an attack from the inside by attacking the adversary's values. Around 2014, Russia invested heavily in think tanks and research institutes. Currently, there are more than 300 of them. Forecasting and modulation is not only the task of economists in Russia, but also of a whole army of humanists, cultural scientists and philologists. Their goal is to exert influence on specific social groups and to find the so-called network code of the nation, understood as a set of features related

to its identity, strengths and weaknesses. If the Russians know about the outbreak of the yellow vests protests in France, they will try to fuel it, as they do in the case of other conflicts, disputes and weaknesses of given nations.

Military spending alone cannot be an appropriate response to that threat. What also needs to be strengthened are the humanist components. Democracy is our strength, but in Poland we still tend to think in a Soviet way: "We are weak because we belong to the democratic world". If that were the case, Russia would not want to break up the European Union from within. This means that the West, with its values, attractive development model and civil liberties, is a threat to the Kremlin. Hence we are seeing increased activity of internet trolls and attacks at the heart of the Western world, on the pillars and mechanisms of democracy.

[1.09.2021, ECS]

**Europe and the world.**  
**New deal, new leaders, new alliances**  
DEBATE



**Edwin Bendyk** | Polish journalist, columnist, President of the Board of the Stefan Batory Foundation and university teacher. He deals with issues of civilisation and the impact of technology on social life. He lectures at Collegium Civitas, where he heads the Future Research Centre, and at the Social Science Centre of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He regularly publishes in the *Polityka* weekly, as well as in *Computerworld*, *Res Publica Nowa*, *Przegląd Polityczny*, *Mobile Internet*, *Krytyka Polityczna* and *Dziennik Opinii*.



# Laboratory of the future

Edwin Bendyk

When talking about the new balance of power in the world and in Europe, it is worth recalling the fall of Kabul, which provides a necessary context for this topic. When it was discussed on 15 August 2021, two photographs were frequently juxtaposed: an American helicopter departing the Afghan capital with another one leaving Saigon in Vietnam in 1975. However, hardly anyone noticed that another interesting historical event occurred on 15 August. The British press recalled the moment when Richard Nixon freed the dollar from the gold standard. Immanuel Wallerstein called this an event that ended American hegemony in the world. We forgot the consequences of losing the war in Vietnam and the crisis of capitalism. We believed that history ended in 1989 and it was the beginning of the belle époque, but, unfortunately, we were wrong. Freeing the dollar from the gold standard made it possible at the time to give a false answer to the problem, which was brilliantly described a year later in the Club of Rome's report "Limits to Growth". This extremely important study showed that the civilisational model which provided the West's success after the Second World War had run out of steam. In economic and social terms, this happened due to fundamental reasons, such as the natural and human resources held. The message of this document, however, has been completely ignored. The opening up of new markets and the influx of cheap labour in 1989 saved capitalism from the deep crisis it had been suffering since the 1970s. But capitalism was living on credit. On the one hand, in financial terms, by pumping money without backing. This continues to this day – in response to the pandemic, billions of dollars and euros were pumped into the economy. On the other hand, there was an ecological aspect, accurately diagnosed back in the 1970s, which was also completely ignored. Today, we have started to pay not only the interest from that credit, but also the principal. This is what the recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted. We have started some processes that are impossible to stop. Global sea levels will continue to rise

for hundreds of years, even if we respond adequately to such processes as climate change. Even if we succeeded in preventing the average temperatures from rising more than one and a half degrees Celsius, as the Paris Agreement dictates, it will not change the fact that sea and ocean levels will continue to rise for the next few hundred years. This is just one of multiple problems. We need to be aware of that.

This is the situation in which we find ourselves. We are sailing in uncharted waters.

But I would also like to point out a positive aspect, as so far I have been telling a story about how we wasted 50 years, despite having the necessary knowledge to avoid the problem, but instead ending up making it worse. We are on a path of no return, but we do not necessarily have to follow a path that leads towards disaster. Every reform is an attempt to overcome a crisis. Europe is a great example of undertaking a systemic struggle for a more certain and secure future.

### **The populist threat**

The European Green Deal project is an attempt to redefine the approach to a problem faced by all Europeans – climate change. One should mention here that only two years ago, this notion was simply absent from the climate summit and seemed impossible to accept from the political perspective. In January 2019, half a year before the elections to the European Parliament, we feared a brown wave that could have completely changed the shape of Europe and ended the project of a united EU. Instead, what came was a green wave. One year earlier, a remarkable process had been set in motion, which enabled the Union to redefine its goals in a way that a decade ago would have been beyond comprehension. At that time, reducing carbon emissions by 40% seemed unrealistic, whereas now we have adopted a target of 55% by 2030 and 100% by 2050. This is what our community is proposing and implementing in practice. If we are successful, we will most likely become the first climate-neutral continent. But, unfortunately, this is where the most serious challenge lies. The “Fit for 55” programme, which plans to achieve a 55 per cent reduction in emissions over the next nine years, is a recipe for a planned revolution, unlike any we have ever seen in history. The industrialisation projects in Bierut’s times were not as demanding in terms of their objectives as those we now want to methodically impose on ourselves in democratic societies. This means a radical change in the structure of the economy, and consequently in the lifestyle of people. We intend to implement it within a decade, but, fortunately, there have already been studies warning of the risks associated with this challenge.

The most serious of them is related to the question of how to carry out the process of the necessary and profound transformation without giving fodder to populist groups? In Poland, we can already see an example of this on a micro scale. If we look at the actions of Minister Ziobro's<sup>23</sup> faction in the government coalition, we can see that he is playing this card. Once the project is approved by the European Commission and negotiated with the governments of the individual countries, it can easily be used for the wrong purpose. So, on the one hand, we have a very concrete and positive response from the European Union, which proposes a way out of deep crisis. On the other hand, however, the process that is being set in motion poses numerous political risks that could turn everything upside down. For this reason, it requires great political wisdom to protect the decisions currently undertaken, first of all, on the part of the politicians, but also on the part of all those creating the environment of public debate, which also means citizens in general. In order to understand the gravity of the situation, we can recall another anniversary. A decade ago, civil war broke out in Syria. Despite the local scope of the military operations, this was the first large-scale global conflict whose political process was mainly triggered by climate change.<sup>24</sup> In a sense, the situation in this country is a kind of laboratory of the future, which shows us what happens when the future is mismanaged.

### **Sociological vacuum**

What should be done to make Poland a strong participant in the debate on the shape of contemporary Europe again? The answer to this question is a round table of social organisations engaged in what we have called citizen diplomacy. When analysed in a pessimistic way, it was a firework of optimism, showing concrete actions of various institutions engaged in building relations with partners from all sides of Europe. It is happening, so this answer is offered every day. Importantly, we are managing to show that these organisations and people are not a piece of decoration and companies performing social services for the state on the cheap. What they are instead is a source of knowledge and solutions that are highly relevant to politics, whether at the local, state or international level. Harnessing the potential of civil society is an opportunity to find answers to today's problems more quickly.

As we are now at the ECS, I would, naturally, like to recall August '80. Just a year earlier, in 1979, Polish sociologists developed the concept of a "sociological vacuum". Research at the time indicated that Poles were a community which valued the family and the nation as a state. What was missing was something in between. Consequently,

 23.

**Zbigniew Ziobro, lawyer, co-founder and president of Solidarna Polska, Minister of Justice and the Public Prosecutor General in Beata Szydło and Mateusz Morawiecki cabinets. He has been called the "destroyer of free courts" by the opposition and is blamed for the consecutive changes in the Polish judiciary and fomenting anti-EU sentiments.**

 24.

**The civil war in Syria might not have happened if not for climate change. Before the war broke out, there was a drought the likes of which had not been recorded for at least 900 years. One and a half million people fled to the cities, famine ensued and this sparked protests, according to Marcin Popkiewicz – a physicist, megatrends analyst and author of books including *World at the Crossroads* and *The Energy Revolution*. But what for? [online], [https://serwis.gazetaprawna.pl/ekologia/artykuly/1439981\\_globalne-ocieplenie\\_zmianaklimatu-popkiewiczsusza-syria-wojnomowa-co2.html](https://serwis.gazetaprawna.pl/ekologia/artykuly/1439981_globalne-ocieplenie_zmianaklimatu-popkiewiczsusza-syria-wojnomowa-co2.html).**



# W Święto



there was no bond, and so, according to the research, an event like August '80 could not have happened. It seemed that the researchers had missed something. We are currently complaining about anomie and the breakdown of civil society, but the story suggests that we might be dealing with a similar scenario. Most likely, what we fail to notice is new forms of forming bonds. At the European level, Greta Thunberg<sup>25</sup> set this process in motion. She was not the one who triggered the movement, but the one who activated the energy stored in millions of young people, claiming the right to a safe future. There are many more similar reservoirs of energy, especially in the young generation. We just need new leaders who know what buttons to push to unlock them.

[1.09.2021, ECS]

 25.

**Greta Thunberg (born 2003) is a Swedish climate activist who has launched a global youth movement. At just 15 years old, she single-handedly started a protest in front of the Swedish Parliament against man-made climate change. She was *Time* magazine's 2019 Person of the Year and has been nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize.**

## Democracy in retreat? In defence of civil liberties in Europe

DEBATE



**Magdalena Heydel** | Polish scholar and translator, philologist, university teacher at Jagiellonian University. She deals with literary theory, particularly translation studies and comparative literature. Editor-in-chief of *Przekładaniec* and regular contributor to *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Member of the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies IATIS. Curator of the “Found in Translation”. Gdansk Literary Meetings”. Honorary member of the Association of Literary Translators.

# The foundation of Freedom

Magdalena Heydel

I will address the problem of threats to civil liberties in a rather local and limited scope, referring to areas of my own work. I am a researcher and translator of literature. I have no doubt that my translation and literary activity has a clearly political aspect. This is not due to the fact that I use it instrumentally as a weapon in some political dispute or that I want anyone to treat it as such. Literature, and in my case particularly translated literature, is an area of exercising freedom, and this is where its political significance lies. I recently had the opportunity to give a speech in Gdansk on the translation of poetry as a space of freedom, and this dimension of literary work is very important to me. I would like to address here the issue of freedom in the domain of academic work. This issue perhaps seems a little less impressive, but the foundations of anything are hardly ever spectacular. And I strongly believe that the freedom of academic debate, currently facing various threats, is precisely one of the foundations of civil liberties. Universities are places where freedom of speech, freedom of thought and freedom of scholarly inquiry are practised, and while there are virtually no formal rules to describe this, academic debates are superior to debates in many other public spaces precisely due to the fact that the freedom of exchanging ideas is practised there.

I will briefly talk about an immediate threat to the academic culture of free conversation that I am sure most of you are aware of. I am referring to the so-called Freedom Package<sup>26</sup>, prepared by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in our country. The package is supposed to strengthen freedom of speech, teaching and academic research, as well as the freedom of academic debate, yet its provisions contain rules on criminal prosecution for expressing religious and philosophical beliefs. The academic freedom package is thus ostensibly meant as a guarantee of non-prosecution for exercising the right to freedom of academic expression. It creates the impression that this celebrated academic culture does not guarantee freedom of debate at all, but, on the contrary, is a threat to it. Hence, one might think that the package is a step in the right direction. At the same time, however, its wording introduces a discreet shift. The

 26.

**The Academic Freedom Package, which is an amendment bill to the Law on Higher Education and Science concerning disciplinary responsibility of academic teachers [online], <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/pakietwolnosci-akademickiej> [accessed: 26.07.2021].**





document does not talk about freedom of intellectual debate, but about the public expression of religious, philosophical and worldview beliefs. This is a significant shift: academic freedom of speech is equated here with the freedom of beliefs, even if they are unverifiable and not subject to rational analysis. Therefore, the freedom package in effect serves as an exemption from responsibility for the beliefs [not hypotheses!] expressed in academic circles, while suggesting that criticism of false or harmful views is an attack on the fundamental civil liberty of freedom of expression.

An academic debate is not about expressing beliefs, but about clashing rationales and boldly transcending the existing horizon of understanding of the world and human beings. This may be accompanied by an emotionally charged atmosphere, but the purpose of debate is to rethink one's views, not to fossilise them. Plus ratio quam vis. The document in question proposes tools that may harm the freedom of academic debate, and it does so under the elaborate guise of a freedom rhetoric. Two aspects are mixed here: it is one thing to promote freedom of beliefs, but another to consent to their dissemination as academic knowledge.

University is a place that guarantees true freedom of debate and opinion precisely due to the fact that when formulating judgements, one must identify sources and present a research methodology. And the basis of any conviction is argumentation, not faith. As long as universities exist, we have a space for debate that allows us to verify our views on the basis of rational reasoning, available data and methods. When it comes to expressing one's beliefs, I strongly believe that the value of the freedom of academic debate will never disappear. If freedom of scholarly inquiry is undermined, the very foundation of social discourse will be compromised. I am not so naïve to claim that universities are ideal environments, but I am convinced that it is vital to preserve their autonomy so that they can develop as centres for seeking the truth through the reliable exchange of arguments, in an atmosphere of respect for mutual views, but with the right to challenge them.

One should also remember that the ministry headed by Minister Czarnek<sup>27</sup>, which wants to impose a freedom package on universities, also distributes funds for education, and, consequently, the implementation of various ideological programmes. This is yet another tool, in practical terms much more effective than the freedom package, for restricting academic freedom. For me, the university, and especially its humanistic dimension, is a fundamental and yet fragile space of freedom of thought and expression that needs to be taken care of. Any threat to it becomes a threat to the entire sphere of civil liberties.

[1.09.2021, ECS]

 27.

**Przemysław Czarnek,**  
**Doctor of Laws, member**  
**of the Law and Justice**  
**party, Minister of Education**  
**and Science in Mateusz**  
**Morawiecki cabinet.**

**Democracy in retreat?  
In defence of civil liberties in Europe**

DEBATE



**Aleksander Kaczorowski** | Polish translator of Czech literature, essayist and journalist. Editor-in-chief of the quarterly *Aspen Review Central Europe*. Winner of the Ambassador of New Europe 2015 award for his book *Havel. Zemsta bezsilnych* [*Havel. The Revenge of the Powerless*]. Author of the volume of conversations *Europa z płaskostopiem* [*Flat-footed Europe*] [2006], the biography of Bohumil Hrabal *Gra w życie* [*Game of Life*] [2004] and the essays *Praski elementarz* [*A Prague Primer*] [2001]. He worked for *Gazeta Wyborcza* and was deputy editor-in-chief of the weekly *Newsweek Polska*.

# Various dimensions of threats to democracy

Aleksander Kaczorowski

What are the threats to democracy in Central Europe or Central-Eastern Europe? First of all, my attitude towards both terms is ambivalent. First of all, because they treat as a whole very different societies and states struggling with different kinds of problems.

This can be best explained using the example of the Czech Republic, a country that I probably know better than Poland. In any case, I do not consider myself to be a good enough specialist to describe the political situation in our country. We are actually dealing with totally opposite phenomena in Poland and the Czech Republic. The threats to freedom in the Czech Republic are of a different nature than those we are facing here. This does not mean that we cannot find points of similarity, but the basic diagnosis is as follows... The contemporary Czech Republic with its problems is something we could only wish for in our wildest dreams. First and foremost, it is a country in which the backbone of the political parties has been broken. It is a country that is not governed by politicians or political cliques. It is a country where, 10 years or so ago, an unnoticed revolution took place which caused the political class formed after 1989 to virtually cease to exist. Their remnants are still there. There are still political parties which date back to 1989 or 1990, but in fact it would be difficult to identify a political party in the Czech Republic that meets the criteria for such institutions. This means a membership base, supported leadership, historical continuity, a programme that is being implemented and experience in governance. And while there are a few parties that have existed for a very long time, such as the Social Democratic Party with more than 100 years of history, it is unlikely that it will make it to the next parliament because support for it has fallen below the 5 per cent threshold, and elections will take place as early as October.

This begs the question: Who then, if not politicians and party leaders, governs the Czech Republic? One could defend the thesis that it is the civil society that governs the country, exercising power with the hands of the richest Czechs elected. Among the few people who have taken advantage of the last 30 years to amass billion-dollar fortunes and build giant corporations with global reach is one of the richest men, the current Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Andrej Babiš. But he is not the only multi-billionaire, or to use Central-Eastern European terminology, oligarch, ruling the Czech Republic. Another very important actor in the business and political world was, until his recent death in an accident in Alaska, Petr Kellner, the richest Czech, one of the 100 richest people in the world. He built a financial empire through expansion into the Russian and then Chinese markets. This has had an effect on the orientation of Czech politics. Analysts asking themselves why Czech foreign policy over the past decade has been so pro-Russian, or why President Miloš Zeman has been to Beijing so often, should have paid attention to whose jet he was using when returning home.

### **Who cares about writers?**

In Central Europe, we have countries such as Poland and Hungary where, as a result of democratic elections, political groups have seized power and then completely subjugated the institutional and financial resources of their countries, monopolising power with no intention of sharing or giving it away. This gives rise to various threats that we are all well aware of. We discuss them behind the scenes when they affect our daily lives. However, this is not the only pattern of threats. The Czech Republic is no exception in this regard. I would even say that it is quite typical of Western Europe. In this case, the threats stem not from the political class, but from big businesses, pursuing their own objectives, subordinating state institutions, deforming or significantly influencing the policy of these countries, including foreign policy. But I want to conclude this thread on an optimistic note. What does this mean for writers?

No one cares about writers anymore. There are often discussions concerning repressions various circles are facing, for example in contemporary Russia. Note that not a word is said about Russian writers. What is mentioned is the shaping of historical politics or politics of symbolism, as it is called in Russia. The subject of books is usually completely ignored. In that country, all literature is based telling the history created in opposition to the official Soviet iconography. The most prominent Soviet writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Vasil Bykaŭ of Belarus, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Vladimir Tendryakov,

and others, wrote about the real history of Belarus, Russia, the Soviet Union, and so on. Are these books banned today in Putin's Russia? Are they burnt at the stake, removed from libraries? No, everyone can read them, but nobody actually does. This is a good question, why does nobody want to read these books?

### **In defence of the media**

I am also going to address the subject of the media. I have been involved with the media for half of my life. I no longer am, which I sometimes regret. I felt very comfortable working as a journalist and had a lot of fun pursuing this profession. However, I cannot imagine that I could still do it. The situation in our country, where the public media have been completely taken over by one ruling party and the private media are being harassed in all sorts of ways, is not just a problem of Poland. A similar process has taken place, in a far more advanced way, in Hungary. Similar things are also happening in other countries, not only in Central and Eastern Europe. At the moment, analogous efforts are being undertaken in Slovenia under the leadership of Janez Janša, who resembles to a great extent Viktor Orban. Bulgaria and Greece are also facing such problems. The media there are completely controlled by groups of oligarchs.

In connection with that, I wanted to talk about a very interesting initiative that was born in Prague. Next week, the main European media will publish an appeal signed by a group of editors-in-chief and journalists from various European countries and, above all, from our part of the Old Continent. The appeal is addressed to the Vice-President of the European Commission, Věra Jourova, who visited the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk yesterday. The appeal calls on the European Commission to act in support of the freedom of media and to take specific legal steps to protect it, since, as one can see, political actions on the part of the European Commission have no effect and impact on the national governments of European Union Member States. What would these legal regulations consist of? Using the analogy of pharmaceutical companies, in order for a medicine or new vaccine to be approved, introduced and used, the companies in question must meet the standards prescribed by law and undergo a process of verification. They are operating within a certain legal framework, and if they do not want to comply with it, they are not allowed to operate in the European market. This was the case with Chinese and Russian vaccines. So there is a fundamental question, why do such regulations not apply to the media in the European Union? Let us note that we are using the terms Union and Brussels increasingly less often when discussing the threats to freedom. After all, this was the



symbol through which the West and Europe used to be portrayed – “they will help us”, “they will save us”. And now what the West says is completely irrelevant. We have stopped thinking that someone will do something for us. And maybe that is a good thing.

### **Strong, but abiding by the rule of law**

The aforementioned phenomenon has been significantly influenced by the fact that the state as a unit of organisation of life is becoming increasingly stronger. This also applies to countries struggling with populism. Moreover, it is the result of social demand. The origins of this phenomenon in America and Western Europe are different. The economic crisis of 2008 was a catastrophic experience, during which all the flaws of liberalism were exposed. As a result, the existing democratic states saw a demand for greater state interference and a greater sense of security. The same thing happened in Central and Eastern Europe, with the transformation experience of the 1990s and the migration crisis of 2015<sup>28</sup>. People were simply afraid and demanded that their leaders provide protection and close the borders. In Hungary, this played a huge role in the consolidation of power by Orbán, as he provided what the citizens demanded. If Poland at that moment was not ruled by the Law and Justice party but by the Civic Platform and Hungary was ruled by someone else, then perhaps the responses would have been similar, as that was the spirit of the times. It seems to me that the states will keep getting stronger and that does not necessarily mean anything bad. They just have to abide by the rule of law.

[1.09.2021, ECS]

 28.

**Following the Arab Spring and the intensification of hostilities in Syria, millions of people headed for Europe. Several hundred boats a day reached Italian and Greek islands, and many migrants stood no chance of surviving their escape.**

## EUROPE AFTER 1989

ON THE PAGES OF *DIALOG*<sup>29</sup>



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# Europe after 1989

Łukasz Gadzała's interview  
with Georges Mink

**You have been observing Europe for many years: through the Cold War, then the transformation of the Central European countries and their march towards the West, up to the changes that are taking place now. What do you find the most interesting in this evolution from a divided to a united Europe?**

Before 1989, the idea of Europe – apart from certain general aspects – did not play an overly large role in my perception of the world. I focused my attention on what was happening within individual countries: Poland, the countries of Central Europe and the Soviet bloc, rather than on a vision of a potentially united Europe. However, when the events culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall began, some kind of a transnational project encompassing the entire Europe became necessary. At the time, the focus was obviously on the transplantation of a well-functioning democracy and market economy to the countries of the Eastern Bloc – the model was the idea of a common Europe. That is why in the early 1990s, when the idea of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary signing EU association agreements came up, I decided to get involved in the process. It fascinated me and I was convinced that the philosophy underlying the European community was the only way to prevent the resurgence of ethnic and national conflicts in Europe, and that it was a guarantee of a long-lasting peaceful and democratic system.

I was never an advocate of excessive transatlanticism. I felt first and foremost a European. I travelled all over Europe, I knew Europeans from the “old” and the “new” Europe. I met people who thought in a similar way to a certain Piedmontese prime minister who remarked after the reunification of Italy: “We have created Italy, now we must create Italians”. In an analogous way, Bronisław Geremek, with whom I worked for years, used to say that we have created Europe, now we must create Europeans. This way of thinking was also close to me due to my European background: I was born in France to a family of Polish

 29.

Georges Mink,  
“The Western civilisation  
is stronger than other  
systems”, interviewed  
by Ł. Gadzała, *DIALOG*.  
*Polish-German Magazine*  
2021, iss. 137, pp. 65-69.

Jewish communists. When I was 4 years old, we moved to Poland. I lived there for 16 years and returned to France. So my commitment to the European cause has always been there, just waiting to be activated.

### **When did it happen?**

After the signing of the association agreements, a race started between first three and then four Central European countries [after the break-up of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia on 31.12.1992. – Editor’s note], which of them would be the first to enter the European Union. It seemed to me at the time – as it did to the politicians in Brussels – that this was absurd. Western Europe wanted all these countries to join the Community at the same time.

The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, therefore, asked a senior official and myself to establish structures to clarify the misunderstandings between these countries. We were given a lot of resources for this purpose, so we created a platform for these countries and called it the Central European Forum. As part of this structure, we often organised meetings and conferences for people involved in the EU integration process to hold talks and clarify potential differences.

It was a high-profile endeavour, which was quickly joined by Germany as well. Geremek became President, the General Assembly was chaired by the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, and the person in charge of the Executive Committee was the former French Prime Minister Raymond Barre, who had a Hungarian wife and was therefore sensitive to Central European affairs. Poland was also well represented with the then Mayor of Warsaw Marcin Świącicki, the Minister of Finance and later Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrzej Olechowski and the economist Danuta Hubner, who participated in the works of the forum. The meetings were also often attended by negotiators of EU membership – Jan Kułakowski and Jan Truszczyński from the Polish side. This represented commitment at the highest level.

That is why I perceived the European Union at that time as a warm, empathetic institution that wants to attract Central European countries. However, there were signs even at that time – above all sent by Germany – that the enlarged Europe would be a Europe of several speeds. This issue was a taboo topic and the Central European states were extremely indignant at such ideas.

**Over the years, this trend has been reversed. Now it is rather the French who are promoting the idea of a multi-speed Europe, and the Germans are not keen on accelerating integration in a smaller group at the expense of some countries...**

The case is different now because what used to be pure ideas is now a reality. After all, we are already living in a multi-speed Europe – we have the Eurozone, the Schengen Area and also various smaller co-operation formats between three or four countries. Macron's France holds the view that a common Europe needs to be kept alive because it has been in bad shape. The states that want to get involved in this process should cooperate, for example in the field of defence, while those that do not want to should not be forced.

Macron is an exceptionally pro-European president. He represents a noble, anti-totalitarian intellectual tradition, and was educated in the spirit of Catholic personalism. He also worked for the journal "L'Esprit" and was an associate of Paul Ricoeur for some time. In addition, he understands the current geopolitical situation perfectly. Of course, he puts France first, but he also wants to build a strong collective European actor, the EU. And this was the leitmotif of his first term in office. This is in line with the French political tradition, known for example from the time of President Francois Mitterrand [1981–1995]. It is about pooling potentials, bridging European divides and differences in order to create a community.

**A merger in this spirit took place in 2004, with the biggest enlargement of the EU and a symbolic break with the divide between the East and the West...**

Yes, but it was also a difficult time for the European Convention, which was to draw up a constitution for the European Union. I was in Prague at the time, running a research centre for social sciences [CEFRES] under the auspices of the French foreign ministry. From there I was observing the struggle of the various state coalitions not over the Constitutional Treaty itself, but over the idea binding it together, mainly the preamble. After the ultra-leftist French idea and the ultra-Catholic proposal were rejected, a compromise was worked out which, as is the case with compromises, was not satisfactory to anyone.

For me, the most unpleasant moment was when France voted against the constitution, to some extent under the influence of people I had hitherto considered Pan-European or even federalist. For example, Laurent Fabius, one of the main activists in the Socialist Party at the time, shifted his party closer to Euroscepticism. He believed that the prospect of EU enlargement should be dismissed until Western Europe was sufficiently consolidated. Otherwise, it would let people into Europe who would only cause trouble later. Besides, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who chaired the Convention and was a flesh-and-blood Pan-European, also advocated deep Community integration rather

than enlargement. Unfortunately, with hindsight it turned out that they were both quite right.

**In the beginning, however, the Central European countries adapted well to the new conditions.**

At the time, I saw Europe as an organism that I wanted to be part of. At the same time, I felt a certain dissatisfaction, perhaps even frustration, that the European narrative was limited to Western Europe. It seemed to me that the whole legitimacy of the European Union was based on the experience of the West, as if the specific historical experience of Central Europe did not exist at all.

What was extremely interesting from this point of view was the rivalry – not only within the EU, but also within the Council of Europe – over historical memory. There was a growing mutual misunderstanding: The West did not understand the struggle of the Central European states to classify Sovietism as a totalitarian system equal to Nazism, while the East did not understand why there was so much talk about the Holocaust and the crimes committed in the eastern part of Europe. Eventually, it was decided that 23 August would be a day dedicated to the memory of the victims of both totalitarian regimes.

Moreover, this was a time when Central European countries, after years of aspirations to adopt the Western model, were also starting to discover their own, sometimes deeply hidden historical experiences.

**Central European societies were slowly getting bored with imitating the Western model, as Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes recently wrote in their controversial book “The Light That Failed”.**

Indeed, there was a blind infatuation with the liberal model, which was considered the best and the only possible model in the “end of history” period. For this reason, the generalisation made by Krastev and Holmes is, in my opinion, the key to understanding what happened.

On the other hand, however, their approach has one fundamental flaw: it disregards micro-history. When we take a closer look at the people who introduced liberalism in Central Europe, it becomes clear that these were not doctrinaires at all. I knew Geremek very well and I can say that he was extremely sensitive to social issues and to history. And there were more people of his kind with social sensitivity, creating this new, liberal reality. After all, a large part of the democratic opposition in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia identified with the social democratic trend. Perhaps the problem lied in the fact that, although they saw the ineptitude of the liberal system, they underestimated the importance of the national narrative, which soon began to go hand in hand with a criticism of liberal democracy...

**...which, for a long time, made the paths of the European East and West once again diverge.**

To tell you the truth, the phase we are experiencing now was probably inevitable. It is an evolutionary phase for the countries of Central Europe, which has resulted in the imposition of liberal development patterns on them. The problem arose when the liberals stopped to read the mood of the society. The increasing living standards that had been taking place for years had two major drawbacks. First of all, with economic growth and the general improvement of the condition of the state, half of society was forgotten. The liberals – and all other ideological factions ruling in these countries after 1989 – fell into the pitfall of a strict economic policy and were unable to build a welfare state. The second drawback was an insufficient narrative. In the process of entering the European Union, what was disregarded was the fact that these countries had their own political systems and historical experiences, which suddenly started to be pushed out by the Western model. Nobody at the time imagined that economic frustrations would combine with historical and narrative-related frustrations and produce such an effect. All it took was for a new leader who could read the public mood and exploit the situation. And, according to sociology, if people believe in certain things, those things materialise in consequence. In Hungary, this was used by Orban, while in Poland by Kaczyński.

In short, we are witnessing a competition between national sovereigntism and an integration-oriented approach. The former is dangerous, as it represents a shift away from the European Union; in this understanding, the EU would cease to be a Community where everyone is pursuing common goals. It would simply be an institution used to make as much profit as possible by everyone. One could call it mercantile sovereigntism.

This approach is best characterised by a meeting at the 2015 Economic Forum in Krynica, during which Orban received the Man of the Year award, and then took part in a panel discussion together with Kaczyński. At one point, he remarked, referring to the Law and Justice president, that – admittedly – they sometimes disagreed, but they were friends. And friends are people you can steal horses with, as the saying goes. Kaczyński replied: true, and by the way, we know where the stable marked the EU is.

**This only serves to reinforce the opinion, already widespread in the West, that the countries of Central Europe have not yet become mature enough for democracy, and that all that matters to them is money.**

This opinion is very strong, although it is largely a matter of narrative. Let us look at France. Michel Barnier, who was fighting for Europe to emerge from Brexit as integrated as possible and has always been a very pro-integration politician, now speaks with almost the same voice as Kaczyński. Namely: The French must be put first and the external threat must be faced.

This is a broader trend that is influenced by the new geopolitical arrangements. All these sovereigntist tendencies were triggered by external threats, which to some extent were real. Politics started to become increasingly based on scaremongering. The electoral struggle became less and less routinised and entered more and more into a revolutionary framework, with charismatic leaders who built a community around themselves based on a fear of others. Besides, they have found fertile ground, since when one speaks in Poland about the Iskanders in Kaliningrad, certain anti-Russian atavisms immediately return, regardless of the political option. That is why national sovereigntism has gained so much popularity. But this is not the end of the world. Just as there was no “end of history”, the national sovereigntism will not last forever. It too is experiencing its “mimetic”, imitative moment. Kaczyński followed Orbán’s example: at first because it was effective, but then because he started to believe in what he was doing. And when the moment of blindness comes – as it did with liberalism – it is the beginning of the end. That is why I believe we are now at the peak of national sovereigntism.

**At this point, 30–40 per cent of voters in Poland and Hungary vote for parties that have national sovereigntism on their banners.**

Fortunately, the contemporary authoritarianism is different from the previous one – it has a hybrid nature. The sovereigntists come to power through democratic mechanisms and then dismantle those mechanisms. However, their geopolitical position forces them to pretend. They belong to the European Union, so they cannot, for example, completely abolish elections. For this reason, I am convinced that in these countries, there is a good chance that the sovereigntists who won through democracy will also lose through democracy. Provided, of course, that the public is mobilised and that the elections are monitored, which Donald Tusk recently proposed.

Changes are also taking place thanks to demographics. Young people are entering the political scene. Although they do not have a deep historical memory and cannot put certain events in a historical context, they react to any blow that concerns their particular emotional experiences. And the social map is drawn on the basis of the experiences of people. And I am not only referring to now, because it was

also the case with those who voted for the sovereignists – it was their experiences that made them vote the way they did. Meanwhile the new generation feels affected by many issues: attacks on their peers of a different orientation and the introduction of repressive abortion laws. Just 10 years ago, young people were liberal-oriented start-ups, the generation of open Europe and Erasmus. Paradoxically, this did not create a sense of European citizenship and had little impact on elections. But things will be somewhat different now.

**But don't you think disputes between sovereignists and Brussels, for example over EU funds or minority rights, will rather increase support for the former, and politicians in individual countries will be able to convince the population that their identity is under external threat?**

A great deal depends on how the politicians explain this. If, for example, they receive signals from Brussels that a change of approach will make the money flow in, then the situation may change. Then this group, resentful of Europe, which thinks it can do everything by its own means, will gradually dwindle.

And there will be room for change. Why do revolutions happen? Because at a certain point, the authorities take a step back and allow a certain margin of tolerance. The number of people ready to take to the streets increases and the symbolic legitimacy of power, which causes people to stay at home rather than protest, shrinks. And when the voices of discontent of many different groups are brought to the fore and combine, a bigger change is born.

**The conflict between sovereignists and supporters of integration means that Europe is constantly functioning in crisis mode. After all this, does Europe still have any power to attract?**

I think it does, but on a completely different level than it used to. Previously, we were dealing with a more general concept combining aspects of solidarity, community and geopolitics. Now this concept is more concrete. Naturally, on the one hand, we have EU bureaucracy, which is attacked; on the other, there are tangible benefits, such as the expansion of the Erasmus programme and the efforts to introduce a single type of charger for all smartphones and other electronic devices. These are issues that can easily be translated into simple, everyday language.

A common defence policy, on the other hand, is more difficult to explain. If we have specific examples, such as European countries jointly sending a mission to evacuate an airport more professionally than the Americans, we will have something concrete to refer to. In addition,

some of the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon are a step in the right direction, such as the increased role of the European Parliament, the citizens' initiative and the appointment of an EU foreign policy representative.

**Exactly, perhaps a reform of EU foreign policy would improve not only its effectiveness, but also its perception among Europeans?**

It definitely would. I believe that the veto power is the most destructive element of the European Union. If we assume that the Union is a collection of states that want to pursue common policies, then the veto is very destructive. After all, there will always be a country that will not see a given policy fit. That is why the Union is based on the principles of solidarity, to regulate such issues.

Besides, the veto power can stymie useful initiatives. For example, within the EU there is a dispute over providing aid to the Donbas and Crimea, as there will always be countries that put business with Russia first.

**So has Europe had any achievements with respect to the East in recent years?**

Ukraine is a success story for Europe.

**But there is a war going on there and there is no prospect of Ukraine becoming a member of the Western institutions any time soon. Is this really a success story?**

It is. What is the attitude of public opinion there? They want to join the Union. After all, Euromaidan is a success for Europe, as are a whole series of revolutions. In 2004, during the Orange Revolution, Western Europe, and above all Poland, provided Ukraine with a model for leaving the pro-Soviet system. Thanks to all these efforts, Ukraine is more pro-European today than it was 30 years ago.

In addition, where Russia loses, it makes concessions. If they knew in the Kremlin that they would win, Ukraine would have been Russian long ago. This, by the way, would be in line with Putin's historical concept according to which Ukrainians are not a separate nation, but Russians. But it is not the case. In the Donbas, no one believes that it will be possible to take all of Ukraine and so the separatists are destabilising a certain part of the country, making it a leverage in the negotiations.

From a geopolitical point of view, this situation can go on, as it is convenient for the Russians. On the other hand, they already know that they will not take Kyiv. And on top of that, they are making a fatal mistake, as the identity of the Ukrainian people is being forged in the Donbas.



The longer the conflict goes on, the more people get involved and die there, the more important it becomes for the Ukrainian people. Of course, it can be argued that an agreement should be made, making Ukraine de facto dependent on Russia, so life can go on there one way or another. But this is not the direction things are going. When talking to Ukrainian students, including those from the Donbas, I can see the opposite trend. As early as 30–40 years ago, Ukrainianness used to be cultivated mainly in intellectual circles. Now we are dealing with the Ukrainian people.

### **Are the Ukrainians relying mainly on themselves in their fight, or are they still hoping for help from Europe?**

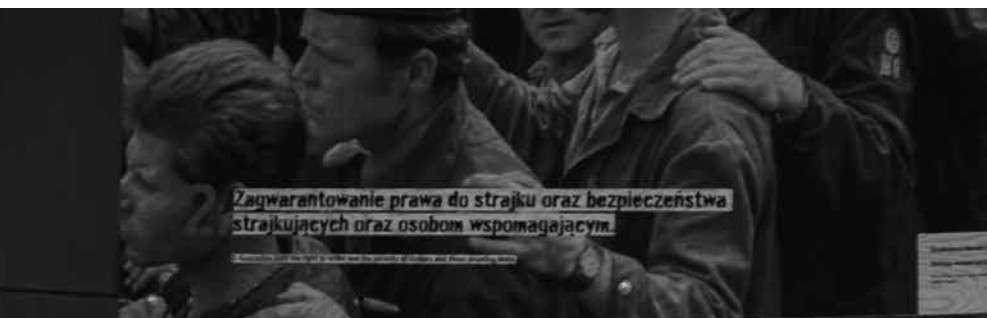
Because of the things that have happened – namely, Euromaidan and the conflict which is causing so many deaths – I think Ukrainians consider themselves masters of their own fate. Although America and Europe have been helping at certain points, Ukraine has also been disappointed with them. In the future, much will depend on the actions of the Western powers – whether they make a deal without involving the Ukrainians or, on the contrary, consider Ukraine as the hope for curbing Russia’s imperial ambitions.

There is also hope due to the fact that it is even in Russia’s interest to end the conflict. If the war in eastern Ukraine ends, the Russophile tendencies there will be re-legitimised. Today, even in Kharkiv, speaking Russian is not well received by the “new” Ukrainians.

### **So how should Europe deal with Russia today?**

We should wait for Putin to step down as a result of an internal reshuffle, but without exaggerated optimism. We all know how such autocracies can defend themselves. However, there is always some kind of change, and this change must be supported. Of course, we have Navalny, although it is clear that he too has chauvinistic views. There are other democrats as well. It is necessary to conduct double diplomacy, as was done before the fall of the Iron Curtain. Politicians visiting Poland would meet with Jaruzelski, but also with Geremek, Mazowiecki and Kuroń.

I am not a fatalist. Every political system collapses at some point, and is replaced with something new. I am convinced that Western civilisation – not in the sense of cocky liberalism, but democratic axiology – is stronger than other systems.



Zagwarantowanie prawa do strajku oraz bezpieczeństwa strajkujących oraz osobom wspomagającym.



Święto  
wolności

# "For our freedom and yours". European solidarity in times of war

Basil Kerski

**The war in Ukraine has reminded us that the civic revolutions of 1989–1991 are not over. Today, Putin is trying to stop the human rights revolution and reverse its momentum. He is also the co-creator of a new nationalist populism in Europe and the United States. The main idea of this trend is to destroy the solidarity of civil societies.**

When we ask Europeans what they associate the idea of solidarity with, the answer will be different today than before 24 February 2022. Many will probably say that they associate the idea of solidarity with the collective support of a democratic Ukrainian society, a nation that has been attacked by Putin's dictatorship. There are voices speaking, rightly so, about the fascist Russian system. The war in Ukraine is the next stage in the authoritarian radicalisation of Putin's Russia, and the intensifying violence not only against its neighbours but also against its own people. All voices of dissent are being brutally suppressed. From our perspective today, we can also see how the elimination of critical voices against the Kremlin's imperial and authoritarian policy, including the murder of Boris Nemtsov, the poisoning and imprisonment of Alexei Navalny and the delegalisation of Memorial or the editorial board of "Novaya Gazeta", was an important part of the preparations for the invasion.

Solidarity is today an idea that reflects multiple needs and dimensions of the human experience. What is, naturally, of key importance is solidarity in the immediate dimension of everyday life, with people we know, our family, friends, neighbours. The second, public dimension is solidarity embedded in nation states, the expression of

which is a well-functioning state with a political system that provides security, universal education, a well-functioning health system, social justice, environmental protection, and freedom of religion and opinion. There can, therefore, be no nation state solidarity without democratic pluralism, the rule of law and respect for minority rights. Solidarity cannot be a privilege of the majority in a nation state. And solidarity as a privilege of a selected group [ethnic or religious] or authority is a dangerous promise of nationalist populists.

### **European integration as an expression of solidarity**

Solidarity without an international dimension is an incomplete, weak concept. There can be no peace on the continent and no good conditions for human development, no possibility of prospering for European societies without international, European solidarity, without a form of solidarity that opposes nationalism and authoritarian ideas. The European experience of solidarity also includes the awareness that egoisms, xenophobia, racism, religious fanaticism, nationalism and authoritarianism have always led to wars. This is why the response to the two world wars was European integration, an attempt to extend the idea of solidarity to many dimensions of public life: from the lowest local and regional level through nation states to the inter-state dimension. Solidarity in the form of European integration is an attempt to build a society open in all its dimensions. In terms of integration and cooperation, this phenomenon had two waves and two sources. Western European integration was an expression of the reconciliation of West Germans with the French, Italians, Benelux nations and the British in the first decades after the war. The democratisation of southern Europe strengthened the western community of democratic states in the 1970s. The continent was then consolidated by the young democracies of the Iberian Peninsula and Greece, which freed itself from military dictatorship. The second key element of European integration was the Polish Solidarity revolution, as well as other civic revolutions of Central and Eastern Europe, which led to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the Warsaw Pact between 1989 and 1991. One should not forget about the revolutions of the peoples who had been the prisoners of the Soviet Union, and who not only fought for their independence but also for human rights and the democratic nature of their states.

Ukrainian society, through as many as three revolutions – Revolution on Granite of 1990, the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity on Euromaidan in 2014 – perfectly fit into the tradition of European solidarity. From the very beginning, Ukraine wanted to be one of the actors in the great space of democratic nation states

in Europe, open borders and opposition to old and new traditions of authoritarianism, rather than a satellite state of Moscow. The independence and democratisation of Ukraine has for years been a key element in the dynamics of European integration. For this reason, today it is our duty as Europeans to defend the independence of Ukraine and to stand in solidarity with our democratic sisters and brothers from across the eastern border of Poland.

The dynamics of European integration has its external and internal enemies. The latter include the political forces supporting the simple and false thesis that European integration is directed against the sovereignty of European nations. The project is something quite different – it is the work of Polish, French and German patriots who understood that nation states are too weak to face global challenges. European integration is a very difficult attempt to maintain a balance between the greatest possible national sovereignty and the shared competences of Europeans in order to strengthen the positive dynamics of the development of nations and the continent. No one in France or Germany is thinking of abolishing nation states, yet both countries have been driving the deepening of international cooperation. France lost its position as a colonial empire after the war. Thanks to integration, it retained its considerable influence in European and world politics. Germany would not have united and gained support for this process without European integration. The European Union on the one hand became a form of control over the united Germany and, on the other, provided the country with a possibility to prosper and exert political influence. The reunification of Germany within the integrating Europe was also the vision of the Polish democratic opposition of the 1980s. This idea of a solution to the post-war problem of the divided Germany was also to become a trigger for a geopolitical revolution that would open the way for Poland back to the West. So, we too owe our full sovereignty and the consolidation of the nation-state to European integration, which we can see especially today – as a neutral state we would be in the same situation as Ukraine, under the direct influence of Moscow's neo-imperialist policy.

### **Democracy the greatest threat to autocrats**

Today, we can clearly see that Putin is not only afraid to cross the borders of NATO – although he may do so by triggering a conflict with the Baltic states – but he also has a mental barrier when it comes to crossing the borders of the European Union states. The current challenge in terms of security is not only to defend the territories of nation states. The democratic Europe must be an economically and techno-

logically strong community in order to stand up to China and other economically competitive and technologically innovative authoritarian states. Only a strong European Union can guarantee Europeans protection against Chinese imperialism, which supports the Russian invasion of Ukraine and which fights all democratic dynamics in Asia and Africa by supporting a model of economic modernisation combined with authoritarian forms of politics. The vision of the European Union as an anti-authoritarian global force should be more strongly emphasised in the Polish perception of security policy. NATO alone would not be enough in this conflict.

Democratic European or NATO states should rethink their actions in terms of economic and technological aspects. We need to make our technology development independent of China. We made exactly the same mistake with both Russia and China – we came to believe that these countries were our strong partners and, as raw material or technological bases, contributed to our prosperity and, in a sense, to our security. This was an illusion.

The notion of solidarity as an idea for the defence of universal human rights, our community of democratic states and societies, should also be directed towards limiting China's influence. This should be solidarity with the civil movement in Hong Kong, as well as with Taiwan, a democratic state of Chinese people that has not been recognised by the EU.

The democratisation of Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s was combined with the wave of democratisation of South Africa, Central and South America, South Korea and Taiwan. These processes are interconnected. In the spring of 1989, we witnessed a peaceful revolution in China bloodily suppressed by the Communist Party on 4 June 1989, the day of the victory of Solidarity in the Polish elections. The Chinese transformation in 1989 was halted, but its ideas are an important element in the political life of Hong Kong, Taiwan and other Asian countries.

When referring to the term "solidarity", we must have in mind multiple interacting levels, as there is no one-dimensional solidarity. When we talk about Poland and its functioning as a state, we also refer to the local, regional, national and European dimensions. Solidarity must be an idea that is alive and that organises our lives in every dimension – just as in 1980, the Solidarity revolution entailed the revival of every area of functioning of society, both at the level of self-government and the challenges faced by the Polish nation.

### **The social foundations of solidarity**

The war in Ukraine has reinforced awareness of the European dimension of solidarity. The challenge we are facing is whether we are able

to transform this solidarity, manifested in many European societies today, into a systematic policy for the whole of Eastern Europe, especially those countries outside the European Union. This not only concerns Ukraine, but also the future of Belarus and the integration of the Caucasus and Balkan states. The question is also how long will we maintain our positive emotional bond with the Ukrainian people? I am afraid that many Europeans will get used to the war, lose their sensitivity and empathy, and will want to divert attention from the Ukrainian victims of the war. Perhaps I am wrong. The brutal war imposed by Russia on Ukrainian society has triggered a spiral of violence on the Russian side that leads to unimaginable crimes against civilians every single day. These crimes attract the attention of the Western public opinion and reinforce our solidarity with the Ukrainians.

Emotions are key to politics and solidarity. However, it is important that they are accompanied by cultural competence, and knowledge of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian imperial tradition. There is a big gap to be filled in European culture when it comes to the level of knowledge about Central and Eastern Europe. We have a very long process ahead of us in terms of education in this regard. It is essential in order to oppose Moscow's brutal neo-colonialism. Only in this way can we build a lasting order based on peace and democratisation in this part of Europe. We are obliged to do even more than before. We must not only send weapons to Ukraine, but also accept and assist refugees. We must start thinking about a plan for the reconstruction of Ukraine and its financing, but also about a long-term cultural and political education in the entire Europe that will free us from the power of old imperialisms. The new Europe will become strong in solidarity if its citizens know as much as possible about each other. We should remember that all historical breakthroughs have been linked with cultural competence and with broadening the horizons of knowledge. There could have been no Polish independence following the First World War if it had not been for the awareness that Poland is an important European nation, not only in terms of language but in terms of national culture and political traditions, with embedded freedom and anti-imperialist attitudes. What the Americans and President Wilson wanted was not merely rebuilding of the Polish state after the First World War. The aim was to build a modern state to serve as a counter-model to Tsarist, then Bolshevik Russia, but also to authoritarian Germany and Austria-Hungary. A democratic Poland was also to serve as an important element of the post-war democratic European order. The restoration of the Polish state to the map of Europe after 1918 was possible thanks to an international lobby that was well aware of the history of Central Europe.

This was also the case in 1989. Poland's breaking free from Moscow's imperial influence had the support of the political elites of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Germany, who saw Poles, Polish culture and political thought as part of the democratic European tradition. Apart from emotions, culture and knowledge is a very important element in building civic awareness. In order for the idea of solidarity to be strong, it must be reflected in systemic solutions. Its culmination will be European efforts to rebuild Ukraine. We already know that the scale of devastation is enormous, hence the talks of a new Marshall Plan. It is important to keep in mind that the original Marshall Plan was the result of a broader way of thinking about the region; it was never aimed at a single country. Also, aid to Ukraine alone will not be enough. We need a policy and a concept for the whole region on what to do next with Belarus, but also Moldova, for example, which, through its solidarity with Ukraine, has, in a positive way, attracted the attention of the world public opinion.

### **For our freedom and yours**

The war in Ukraine has reminded us that the civic revolutions of 1989–1991 are not over. Dictator Putin is a political actor whose biography shows how interconnected these events are. In the 1980s, Putin served as a KGB officer in Dresden, East Germany, and his role was to work against civil revolutions. His boss, General Kryuchkov, initiated an authoritarian putsch against Gorbachev in August 1991. Kryuchkov and his officer Putin were among those who wanted to stop not only the civic revolutions of Europe, but also the shift of the Soviet Union towards the space of democratic states. Today, Putin, who knows his time is biologically limited, is again trying to stop the human rights revolution and reverse its dynamics. He has done this before in many countries and many places, inside the Russian Federation, for example by invading Georgia in 2008, Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014. He was also partly responsible for the bloody suppression of the Belarusian revolution and for the new nationalist, anti-solidarity wave of populism in Europe and the United States.

The main idea of this new populism is to destroy the solidarity of civil societies, whether at the level of NATO or the European Union. When it comes to the European Union, Putin has been investing in all the major anti-EU parties. The Maastricht Treaty of 1993 prepared the ground for the deepening of the Union, for the introduction of a common currency and the enlargement of the Union to the East. By supporting nationalist populists within the European community, Putin is not only fighting with European solidarity, but also the positive effects of the civic revolutions of 1989.



Putin has reminded us that the revolutions of 1989–1991 are not yet over. The contemporary generation of young Europeans, born after the fall of the Iron Curtain, must face up to the fact that they are defending a legacy of times before their birth. The idea of the Solidarity Revolution and other civic revolutions is very simple – there can be no common prosperity, no economic and technological development, no security and no ecological balance without democracy. Only a fully democratic state and an open society can protect pro-environmental attitudes and cares for economic prosperity that is not reserved for a select group of oligarchs. This way of thinking is against all tyrannies, like Putin’s Russia, but also Orban’s Hungary with its one-party monopoly.

In August 2022, the European Solidarity Centre (ECS) in Gdańsk was visited by the new US ambassador to Poland, Mark Brzeziński. After seeing a permanent exhibition on Solidarity and other anti-communist revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe, he left the following simple message, referring to the best traditions of the international fight for freedom: “For our freedom and yours”. There can be no Polish, American, French, German or Ukrainian independence without being part of a community of democratic nations.

# Forum agenda

## EUROPE WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE 2021

### 1 September | Wednesday

#### ■ Opening of the Forum

- / Basil Kerski, European Solidarity Centre
- / David Gregosz, Konrad Adenauer Foundation
- / Edwin Bendyk, Stefan Batory Foundation

#### 10.00–11.45

ECS, temporary exhibition room

#### ■ Panel I

#### 1991–2021. THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK. EUROPE 30 YEARS AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR

The balance of events in the post-Soviet space.  
How is Europe building a relationship with Russia?  
Can we still speak of the “post-Soviet space”  
when referring to the region in question?

#### Introduction

- / Andrij Portnow, European University Viadrina

#### Panellists

- / Laurynas Vaičiūnas, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe
- / Marina Skorikova, Moscow School of Civic Education
- / Magdalena Lachowicz, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
- / Mykola Kniazhytskyi, Verkhovna Rada
- / Wolfgang Eichwede, Centre for East European Studies, Bremen

#### Hosts

- / Iwona Reichardt, New Eastern Europe
- / Adam Reichardt, New Eastern Europe

#### 14.00–15.30

ECS, temporary exhibition room

#### ■ Panel II

#### DEMOCRACY IN RETREAT? IN DEFENCE OF CIVIL LIBERTIES IN EUROPE

What are the threats to freedom,  
pluralism and democracy?  
How to defend universal human rights?

## **Introduction**

/ Tatsyana Nyadbay, Belarusian PEN Club

## **Panellists**

/ Aleksander Kaczorowski, Aspen Review Central Europe

/ Marek Radziwon, Polish PEN Club

/ Mykola Riabchuk, Ukrainian PEN Club

/ Magdalena Heydel, Jagiellonian University

/ Georges Mink, Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique in Paris

## **Hosts**

/ Jacek Kołtan, European Solidarity Centre

## **16.00–18.00**

ECS, temporary exhibition room

### **■ Seminar**

EUROPE OF CITIZENS. CITIZEN DIPLOMACY IN  
CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

About the need for citizen diplomacy and the revitalisation of democracy in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. What are the possible forms of cooperation?

## **Panellists**

/ Adam Balcer, College of Eastern Europe

/ Anna Dąbrowska, Homo Faber

/ Karolina Drozdowska, University of Gdańsk

/ Lila Kalinowska, artist and activist from Przemysł

/ Anna Fedas, Active Citizens Programme, Stefan Batory Foundation

/ Łukasz Galusek, International Cultural Centre

/ David Gregosz, Konrad Adenauer Foundation

/ Magdalena Jakubowska, Res Publica Foundation

/ Myroslawa Keryk, Nasz Wybór Foundation

/ Anna Kieturakis, City Council of Gdańsk

/ Małgorzata Kopka-Piątek, Institute of Public Affairs

/ Marta Siciarek, Marshal's Office of the Pomorskie Voivodeship

/ Joanna Wowrzeczka, Świetlica Krytyki Politycznej in Cieszyn  
and the University of Silesia

## **Hosts**

/ Szymon Ananicz, Stefan Batory Foundation

/ Kacper Dziekan, European Solidarity Centre

## **18.00–19.30**

ECS, temporary exhibition room

### **■ Panel III**

EUROPE AND THE WORLD. NEW DEAL, NEW LEADERS, NEW ALLIANCES  
What impact does Joe Biden's assumption of the US presidency have on geopolitics? Will the elections in Germany and France redefine Europe?

### **Introduction**

/ Paweł Kowal, Sejm of the Republic of Poland

### **Panellists**

/ Hans-Gert Pottering, Konrad Adenauer Foundation

/ Agnieszka Bryc, Centre for Eastern Studies

/ Edwin Bendyk, Stefan Batory Foundation

/ Bernard Guetta, European Parliament

### **Hosts**

/ Basil Kerski, European Solidarity Centre

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### About the Report series

The aim of the REPORT series is to interpret contemporary aspects of civil society and to diagnose transformations of political culture, and international cooperation in Poland and Europe. We wish to reflect upon changes that are taking place right before our eyes and interpret the transformations processes in the last decades that have influenced the formation of democracy in the region. The series presents outcomes of public debates and research projects initiated and implemented by the European Solidarity Centre in cooperation with partner institutions. It is our intention that the Reports published under free licenses should serve a wide circle of readers and inspire them to shape a new culture of solidarity.

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