YOUNG NETWORK TRANSEUROPE

RECLAIMING EUROPE
A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

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TRANSEUROPE

Berlin-Brandenburgische
AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN

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The cover motifs for the magazine sections on freedom, democracy and
prosperity are collages created by Lia Dostlieva, a member of YNT, in colla-
boration with Andrii Dostliev, reflecting their perspectives on these themes.

All other photographs, if not otherwise indicated, were taken by
Monika Krzeminska during the opening event of the workshop
"Reclaiming Europe" in Gdańsk that took place on the 13th of October
2024 at the 100cznia event space located at the former Gdańsk Shipyard.
Stephan Frucht conducted the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra.

Die Beauftragte
der Bundesregierung
für Ostdeutschland

Preface

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 deeply shocked many people in Europe. The members of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities were not only deeply shocked, but also felt particularly compelled to send a signal of European solidarity because of Germany's criminal actions towards Ukraine during the Second World War, in which the Academy was also involved. The central regions, wrongly referred to as "Eastern Europe", and their fate concern all people in Europe. That is why the Academy, in cooperation with many partner institutions, has founded the *Young Network TransEurope*. Its task is to forge new connections in Europe and disseminate relevant knowledge. The ceremonial appointment of the seventeen founding members of this network in the presence of so many people who were forced to flee their homes due to a brutal war – and who continue to hope that they will be able to return and rebuild their lives – was a moving moment.

The appointment took place during the opening event of the *Reclaiming Europe* conference in October 2024 in Gdańsk. Important speeches were also given by Nobel Prize winner Oleksandra Matviichuk and Carsten Schneider, then Federal Government Commissioner for Eastern Germany. And everyone enjoyed a concert by the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra. The musicians, conducted by Stephan Frucht, played Schubert's Symphony in C major, *The Great*, and the short piece "Melody" by Ukrainian composer Myroslav Skoryk, written for the 1981 film *High Pass*, which portrays the resistance in Ukraine during the Second World War.

This evening, whose special atmosphere is documented in the photos in this magazine, was unforgettable. The event took place at the historic site of the former Lenin Shipyard. Although Lech Wałęsa himself was unable to attend, his work and the legacy of Solidarność were clearly felt when there was talk of a united Europe that continues to work for freedom, democracy and prosperity for all its inhabitants. Being in Gdańsk and participating in this conference together with the Europejskie Centrum Solidarności (European Solidarity Centre) 35 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain was a very special experience for me, having grown up in the free part of Berlin before 1989, in the shadow of the Berlin Wall. We Germans all too easily forget that it was the courage and foresight of the Polish people that contributed significantly to the transformation of the whole of Europe in the 1980s. The peaceful revolution began in Gdańsk, not in Leipzig, and we owe part of our freedom to our Polish sisters and brothers.

After the 24th of February 2022, even those who had not recognised it before finally had to realise that many people in the countries we call "Western Europe" had a frightening ignorance about so-called "Eastern Europe". But there is only one common history of Europe, and we all belong together. This realisation struck me particularly during a visit to Lviv in the summer of 2023, where people rightly insist that they do not live on the edge of Europe, but at its heart. What we need is a new openness, attention to new voices and greater visibility for different perspectives on Europe, so that this long-standing ignorance can finally be overcome.

The essays in this magazine reflect the topics discussed during the conference that followed the opening evening. Like pieces of a mosaic, they fit together to form a larger picture that shows what *Reclaiming Europe* can mean – from deeply personal reflections on displacement to analyses of political developments, from the challenges of artificial intelligence to the ecological consequences of ongoing war. I hope you find reading it as thought-provoking and inspiring as I did.

Christoph Markschies

President of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities

Content

Manifesto: Reclaiming Europe
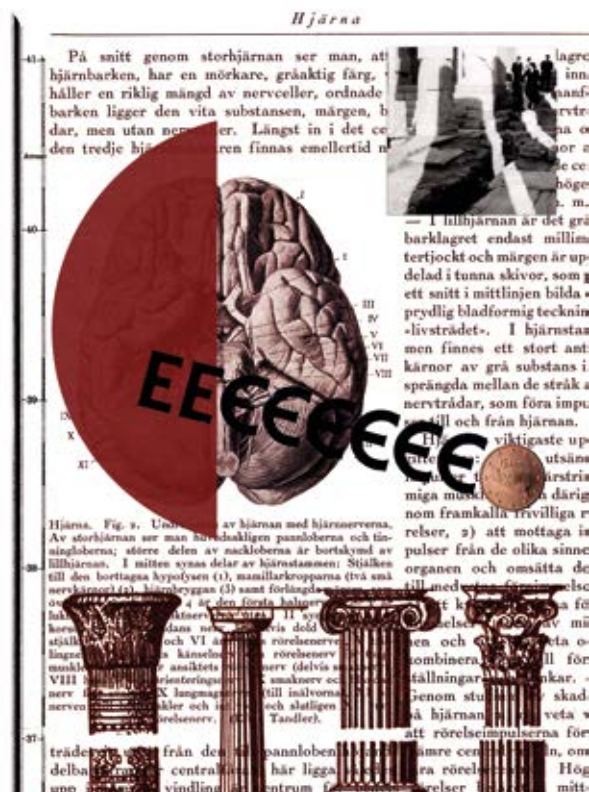
Europe has constantly been reimagined – yet in facing the criminal and destructive war against Ukraine and all the tragedies resulting from it, the need for a more comprehensive rethinking toward a more open-minded and future-oriented cultural imaginary of Europe has become obvious. The Russian war of aggression has revealed the extent to which the existing expertise on countries so often bundled together under the misleading label "Eastern Europe" has been neglected and marginalised. Across Europe in general, but especially in Germany and its western neighbours, relevant research institutes have too often been closed and down-sized.

The countries in question are not "the East". They lie in the north, south and centre of Europe and all of them belong to the core of the European landscape. Their complex histories are full of entanglements. Yet each history has unique characteristics – resulting in a rich diversity of cultures, academic systems, politics and the perspectives of the respective inhabitants.

Ignorance resulting from a failure to listen to the Europeans living in these diverse landscapes more closely and to engage with their manifold perspectives has had dire consequences. This must not happen again.

The time for new approaches is now. Many steps have already been taken, but we must not stop at "first aid". The goal must be to establish closer ties across borders and to gain a new understanding of Europe. We – presidents of Academies and Universities, office holders from other academic institutions as well as from politics, and actors from civil society – are resolved to further this goal.

We are convinced that academia must play a key role in such processes. Firstly, it offers the ideal prerequisites for such a transnational agenda because of its standards of openness, curiosity, willingness to cooperate, critical questioning and motivation to perform. Secondly, scholars use their academic expertise to question traditional, seemingly self-evident truths in order to gain new perspectives and insights. Such abilities are urgently needed in the current situation – and they are especially embodied by younger excellent scholars.

We therefore formulate the following theses and declare that we want to move forward in their spirit:

1. It is time to reclaim Europe from chauvinist, nationalist and illiberal agendas. This means taking back the initiative and creatively promoting European unity, also beyond a political agenda of integration.

2. Reclaiming Europe requires putting the regions that have for too long been seen as its periphery back at the centre of attention and allowing their own voices to be heard.

3. Such a reclamation must be transnational in spirit: it crosses borders, languages, cultures, histories, identities, and much more. This does not imply any form of homogenisation – we can only really see our many similarities when we adequately appreciate the rich regional diversity of Europe.

4. Reclaiming Europe is a process that will last for many years to come. We must be prepared to continue with this process long after peace in Ukraine has been achieved. Our attention must not be diverted from it, even when other challenges remain or arise.

5. Academia plays a fundamental role in shaping such an agenda. Indeed, it can act as a driving force for positive change. This must be recognised throughout all societal spheres and by different actors.

6. But academia itself must also recognise its responsibility and that it can and must be such a driving force in reclaiming Europe.

7. In order to be able to fulfil this role properly, academia's many voices, but especially the most qualified ones, must be heard and listened to. They need to be given adequate platforms.

8. This is especially true for younger excellent scholars, even more so for those who work in academic systems that offer fewer opportunities for networking and international cooperation.

9. We need platforms that bring such younger scholars together so that they can develop projects and visions for the future of European academia and society more broadly.

10. We encourage others, actors from all societal sectors, to join us in advancing this agenda and in creating adequate networks for this purpose.

First Signatories (2024):

1. Jūras Banys
(Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, President)

2. Julia von Blumenthal
(Humboldt University Berlin, President)

3. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon
(European Research Council, Former President; Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Directeur de recherche émérite)

4. Helen Eenmaa
(Young Academies Science Advice Structure, President)

5. Bohdan Ferens
(Ukrainian NGO "Progresylni" / Progressive Teachers, Head)

6. Olga Garaschuk
(UKRAINET, Co-founder; German-Ukrainian Academic Society, President)

7. Oliver Günther
(University of Potsdam, President)

8. Basil Kerski
(European Solidarity Centre Gdańsk, Director)

9. Gisela Kopp
(Die Junge Akademie, Chair)

10. Christoph Markschies
(Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, President)

11. Bettina Martin
(Minister for Science, Culture, Federal and European Affairs of the State of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)

12. Diana Mishkova
(Centre for Advanced Study Sofia, Director)

13. Eduard Mühle
(European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder), President)

14. Marie-Louise Nosch
(Royal Danish Academy, President)

15. Jan Ostrowski
(Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences Krakow, President)

16. Valentina Sandu-Dediu
(New Europe College Bucharest, Rector)

17. Gwendolyn Sasse
(Centre for East European and International Studies, Director)

18. Tarmo Soomere
(Estonian Academy of Sciences, President)

19. Carsten Schneider
(Minister of State, Federal Government Commissioner for Eastern Germany)

20. Anastasiia Simakhova
(Scholar Support Office, Vice-Head)

21. Manja Schüle
(Minister for Science, Research and Culture of the State of Brandenburg)

22. Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger
(Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Rector)

23. Olesia Vashchuk
(Young Scientists Council at the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, Head)

24. Anatoly Zagorodny
(National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, President)

Become a signatory at https://www.bbaw.de/publikationen/reclaiming-europe.

Protecting and Perfecting Our Democracy

OLEKSANDRA MATVIICHUK

I don't know how historians in the future will name this historical period. The world order, based on the UN Charter and international law, is collapsing before our eyes. It did cope more or less with global challenges before, but now it is stalling and reproducing ritualistic movements. Fires like wars will occur more and more frequently in different parts of the world because the international wiring is faulty and sparks are everywhere.

Europe is not an exception. While the end of the Second World War marked the victory of good over evil for Western Europe, for Central and Eastern Europe, it was the victory of one evil over another. While Nazi war criminals were tried at the Nuremberg Tribunal, the Soviet totalitarian Gulag was never convicted or punished. When the whole world remembers millions who died in the Second World War, saying 'Never again,' Russia celebrates it, exclaiming 'We can do it again.'

Unpunished evil grows. Russia is an empire. An empire has a center but no borders. It is no surprise that Russia has broken the UN Charter and launched a full-scale war in Europe. People in other European countries are safe only because Ukrainians are still holding back the Russian offensive.

For Ukrainians, 'never again' literally means this. We will not tolerate evil, even if it is many times greater than our capacity. We will resist evil, saying 'never again' to concentration camps, to occupation, to the destruction of entire nations, to murder and torture. We will fight for the slightest chance for our children to have the free-dom to live without fear of violence and to shape their future. For Ukrainians, 'never again' is not just a phrase. They have proved it on the battlefield.

However, many people in Western societies interpret 'never again' in a different way. For them 'never again' has come to mean that we will never again pay a high price for our freedom. Even when our lives are at stake, we are no longer willing to risk them. There are reasons for this.

The coming generations replaced those who survived the Second World War. They inherited democracy from their grandparents and began to take it for granted. They understand freedom as a choice between different cheeses in the supermarket. They became consumers of democracy. Therefore, they are ready to exchange freedom for populist promises, economic benefits, the illusion of security, and, above all, for their comfort.

In addition to this, many people in Western societies are disappointed with democracy because a large number of problems, including social inequality, remain unresolved. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, we were so confident that democracy was the final answer that we stopped promoting it. No-one explains to people that we have to perform two tasks in parallel – to protect our democracy and to perfect our democracy. Because the alternative to our imperfect democracy is an authoritarian regime where the space of freedom is limited to the size of the prison cell.

Oleksandra Matviichuk speaking during the opening event of the workshop "Reclaiming Europe" on the 13th of October 2024.

Let me finish with a personal story.

I recorded the testimony of Ukrainian scientist and philosopher Ihor Kozlovskii after 700 days in Russian captivity. I had interviewed hundreds of survivors before that, and they had told me how they were beaten, tortured, raped, locked in wooden boxes, given electrical shocks to their genitalia, and their fingers were cut off, their nails were torn out, their knees were drilled, and they were compelled to write with their own blood. So, there was little that could surprise me. However, Ihor mentioned a detail that might be considered insignificant for the evidence base. But it struck me.

He described his daily life in solitary confinement. It was a basement room where death-row inmates were held during the Soviet era. The cell had no windows or sunlight and was poorly ventilated, making it difficult to breathe. Sewage flowed across the dirty floor. Rats crawled out of the sewer opening. And a scientist known throughout the country told me how he gave lectures on philosophy to these rats just to hear the sound of a human voice.

Legally, Ihor Kozlovskii was a victim. He was abducted and held in inhumane conditions. He was tortured so severely that he had to learn to walk again. Yet, even this did not become a reason for him to treat and experience himself as a victim. He said that the foundation of our existence is dignity, not victimhood.

Dignity is action. It's not just about feeling responsible for everything that happens; it's also about doing the right things to change it. We are not hostages of circumstances but participants in this historical process. Dignity gives us the strength to fight, even in unbearable circumstances.

Europe is less about geography than about the values of freedom and democracy. We live in a world where values have no national borders. And only the spread of freedom makes our world safer.

Oleksandra Matviichuk is a human rights lawyer, head of the Center for Civil Liberties and Nobel Peace Prize recipient 2022.

On Lech Wałęsa's Sweater and the Concreteness of Truth

MARIE-LOUISE NOSCH
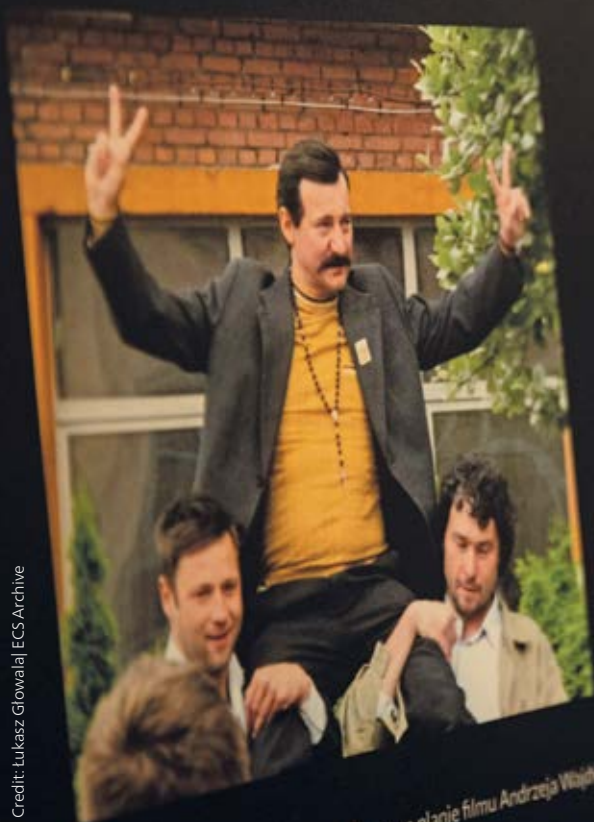
In some strange way, I find myself thinking and writing about textiles and clothing – even when I didn't plan to or even want to.

But here I was again, contemplating a knitted sweater. It was at the conference Reclaiming Europe for the founding members of the Young Network TransEurope, in Gdańsk, a city marked by historical and ground-breaking events of the 20th century. Good and bad: The beginning of World War II, the first free trade unions and the first free elections in the Eastern bloc.

When visiting the spectacular exhibitions on Solidarność's history, I was drawn to the brown and yellow striped knitted sweater on display. Probably made of nylon, or of the synthetic fibre dederon, the GDR-alternative to nylon. It was clearly machine-knit of synthetic yarns, perhaps from the spinning mills in Leipzig, or from the great "Olimpia" textile factory in the bustling metropolis of Łódź, Poland's Manchester. Before WWII, metal and textiles were Poland's biggest industries.

The sweater had belonged to Lech Wałęsa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, leader of Solidarność and the first president of Poland elected through democratic elections.

He trained as an electrician in the Lenin Shipyard of Gdańsk. He wears the sweater in photographs from the 1980s on political rallies and at intense meetings. I wonder if his wife bought it for him and whether he liked it. I think about the skinny man he was in 1980 when he challenged the Polish establishment and the Cold War status quo by demanding free trade unions for the workers in the Gdańsk Agreement. He co-founded the Solidarność trade union, whose membership rose to over 10 million people. Among them were the 3,000 workers in the "Olimpia" textile factory in Łódź, who went on strike in solidarity with the shipyard workers of Gdańsk.

Lech Wałęsa reclaimed Europe. In this sweater.

Die Wahrheit ist immer konkret (Truth is always concrete). The quote is ascribed to an uncanny group of men, from Hegel, to Brecht, to Stalin. Yet, I still like this expression.

The last time I thought about this expression was during the online meetings when YNT's members came together to plan the Gdańsk conference Reclaiming Europe. It was in the summer of 2024 and the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, had just launched the European Union programme for the coming years under the three headings: Democracy, Prosperity, and Freedom. Did she thereby outline the areas where Europe aims to challenge, compete, and surpass?

The US on prosperity, China on democracy, Russia on freedom?

The YNT members critically debated Democracy, Prosperity, and Freedom as themes during their online meeting: Prosperity for whom? Prosperity or growth? Academic freedom? Freedom of speech? Democracy or rule of law? How can we reclaim Europe? Reclaim from whom? Discussions we have been having for generations.

But quickly, the debates turned in new directions, which truly testifies to where we stand now: Should we travel by plane? What about our Ukrainian colleagues who cannot leave their country? What about exiled scholars from Belarus and Russia? And will childcare be provided during meetings?

Die Wahrheit ist immer konkret.

On the museum label, it says that the sweater was donated to the European Solidarity Centre by Lech Wałęsa's wife. To me, this is not new. Women are those who care for garments and especially the clothing of their family. It would not be statesmanlike for Lech Wałęsa to donate his clothes to a museum, but his wife Danuta can.

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, it was people who wore and people who made these kinds of sweaters who reclaimed Europe. Today, we are again in a situation where Europe must find a new identity, dress differently, discard old habits, and change its fabric.

I like to see Wałęsa's sweater as a metaphor for Reclaiming Europe. Not made by one genius but by many collaborating hands, in solidarity. We don't need red silk ties, we need a close-knit Europe, flexible, durable, colourful, multi-voiced, and made from a blend of fibres.

Marie-Louise Nosch is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Copenhagen. She serves as ALLEA Vice-President and Board Member and was President of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters.

Past Utopias – Future Research

PHILIPP PILHOFER

The Young Network TransEurope was founded in October 2024 with an impressive concert and a dynamic conference at the "Solidarność" European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk – and that's a very important step.

But: We are not exactly early to the party. The 'Reclaiming Europe' Manifesto was published and signed by various scientific organisations, including Die Junge Akademie, in February 2024. It states: "The Russian war of aggression has revealed the extent to which the existing expertise on countries so often bundled together under the misleading label 'Eastern Europe' has been neglected and marginalised. Across Europe in general, but especially in Germany and its western neighbours, relevant research institutes have too often been closed and down-sized. The countries in question are not 'the East'. They lie in the north, south and centre of Europe and all of them belong to the core of the European landscape. Their complex histories are full of entanglements. Yet each history has unique characteristics – resulting in a rich diversity of cultures, academic systems, politics and the perspectives of the respective inhabitants. Ignorance resulting from a failure to listen to the Europeans living in these diverse landscapes more closely and to engage with their manifold perspectives has had dire consequences. This must not happen again. The time for new approaches is now."[1]

The time is now, certainly, but we, the scientific community in 'old' Europe, are a tad late with that, too. The arts demonstrated a more refined sense of this much earlier. Take literature as just one example. Almost simultaneously with the publication of the Manifesto, the conference "Utopie Osteuropa" ("Utopia Eastern Europe") took place in Berlin, at which the author Mely Kiyak gave a speech.[2] She reflected on the "Europäische Schriftstellerkonferenz" (European Writers' Conference) that she had co-organised ten years before, in 2014 and 2016 respectively. Authors from east and west, north and south took part at that time, and they were already addressing precisely our current questions. Mely Kiyak draws several important conclusions from her experiences at these conferences, which can only be examined in part here. One of her key points: "Languages are our capital. Nationalism is characterised by unanimity and unambiguity. This means one flag, one language, one culture, one religion and one narrative, and so on. The true struggle for emancipation lies in the fact that we all come from different narrative landscapes and speak different languages, and we must protect that diversity. We should throw ourselves in front of one another and protect each other's languages and styles. For me, this struggle begins when our texts are published, and our publishers do not categorise us according to our own understanding. It also begins when critics, limited by their reading repertoire, try to reduce us to their own level of knowledge and their narrow, outdated canon." Consequently, this diversity of voices could have been reflected in this volume by publishing everyone in their native language, but this is uncommon in many fields of international academia today. Instead, let us rather continue to follow Mely Kiyak, even if we have to set aside

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1   The manifesto is printed above.

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2   Mely Kiyak: "Wo Bekenntnisse herrschen, liegt ein Mangel an Sprache vor", manuscript of a speech given in German at the conference "Utopie Osteuropa" (February 2024), curated by Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Max Czollek, initiated by the Berlin Haus der Kulturen der Welt, and held at the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin on Lake Wannsee; available at https://kolumne.gorki.de/kolumne-136/ (last accessed 01.07.2025). I translated the text for convenience here.

Credit: Jonas Bornemann

through multiple voices, i. e. their own. When applied to scholarship, this means enabling researchers to contribute and share their perspective on a given question. Even when expressed in a single language, plurality requires multiple perspectives on a phenomenon and thus true interdisciplinarity. It is not only one field of research or one discipline that comes up with the only correct perspective, and there is not only one correct approach to a single phenomenon. The plurality of perspectives

a few of her important considerations (such as "Being an author, remaining human"). We want to move on to the bigger picture: "Protecting history and stories. The struggle for cultural identity is no trivial matter. When a people are no longer allowed to speak their language, their entire cultural identity is taken away. Their music, their legends, their songs, poems and epics – everything that makes a person human – are taken away too. As minorities, regardless of which country we live in, we have a right to tell our stories. […][3] It is also a question of democracy versus non-democracy. The biggest difference between these two forms of government is who is allowed to tell your story. In a democracy, it is the citizens, historians and artists who recount their experiences. In a dictatorship, however, it is the leader who decides who you are, what makes you who you are, what you have experienced, and how you should feel."

There is no need to explain why these thoughts are particularly significant in 2025 or how clear the value of true democracy has become. It is obvious. Instead, let us try to apply Kiyak's ideas to the worlds of science, scholarship, and research. In Kiyak's view, the main difference between democracy and non-democracy is whether people are permitted to recount history and stories

and approaches is what is required for actual research, and it is the researchers who decide which way to take. Put in very simple words, Kiyak's ideas call for academic freedom. However, academic freedom does not come for free. Securing sufficient funding for the growing Network is a task for the foreseeable future. As of now, the Young Network TransEurope provides young scholars from a diverse range of disciplines with the opportunity to conduct research from multiple perspectives, and with the approaches they deem appropriate. They are here to shine a light on countries that are often referred to as 'Eastern Europe'. Voices from and about these countries have been neglected for far too long. In this respect, past utopias become reality, at least in the realm of science. Even in the field of science alone, this is already a small step towards fostering democracy.

Although we are late, the Young Network TransEurope is here. Some old utopias have become reality in the world of science, and the Young Network TransEurope is working to realise more of them. It is committed to these goals. The following contributions demonstrate this commitment poignantly and highlight the necessity of the Network. At Die Junge Akademie, we are proud to represent the voices of early-career researchers and academics from a diverse range of disciplines. As the world's first academy of young scholars, we are dedicated to promoting interdisciplinary dialogue and addressing critical societal issues through pioneering research. We wholeheartedly support the Young Network TransEurope and want to help it realise many more of the 'past utopias.'

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***Philipp Pilhofer** is Professor of the History of Christianity at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Vienna. He is a member of Die Junge Akademie.*

3   For the sake of completeness (and to avoid the impression of cherry picking), here's what has been left out in the main text: "Adding to that: No one should be allowed to steal our stories. We must insist on portraying our characters as we see them. This is something that our German colleagues in particular do not always understand when viewing the world from Germany. Not all countries have Goethe Institutes that use state funding to defend language and culture, finance theatre performances abroad, and promote translations and German schools overseas. Some wars and border conflicts originate in the defence of cultural self-determination. War and border conflicts are not just about drawing borders; they are also about which language is used to remember history, i. e. from which perspective."

To Produce the World You Want to Live in

HELEN EENMAA

When my supervisor was working on her dissertation, she had a close friend, also a doctoral candidate, who came from a family deeply rooted in the field of pharmacy. Both parents were pharmacists, and one of their two daughters chose to follow in their footsteps, studying pharmacy as well. The other daughter, however, took a different path, pursuing a doctorate in philosophy with a focus on the philosophy of science.

The parents supported both of their daughters during their studies, but the daughter studying pharmacy received twice as much pocket money as the one studying philosophy. Why? Because the parents considered pharmacy to be a much more practical and profitable career choice than philosophy.

One day, the parents received a visit from a professor of philosophy who had been working with their daughter at the university. Being a philosopher of science, the professor talked to them about science and philosophy and how the knowledge about these, as well as skills in both, are useful in society. He told them how well their daughter was doing and how meaningful the path that she had chosen was – how philosophy helps to explore the depths of our knowledge about the world and communicate the findings of science to society with clarity and precision.

After that visit, the daughter studying philosophy started receiving just as much pocket money as the daughter studying pharmacy. [1]

There are two ideas that this story helps to illuminate. First, *trust begins with understanding*. To foster trust in the value of academic pursuits, they must be explained in a way that resonates with society. Building trust towards specific academic communities requires communicating and explaining their contributions. Second, *mentorship and sponsorship matter*, and those who are in the position to offer these do well to pave the way for others.

Among else, mentorship and the support of senior colleagues are essential for young scholars to get ahead. Young scholars face various hurdles in their academic lives – lack of pocket money being only one of these. [2]

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1 My former supervisor, Professor Margit Sutrop, shared this story – drawn from her personal experience studying in Germany – when introducing me to the audience at the Estonian Parliament in spring 2025.

2 For example, see our recent "Report on challenges for early and mid-career researchers in the provision of science advice" published by SAPEA. Available at https://scientificadvice.eu/reports/report-on-challenges-for-early-and-mid-career-researchers-in-the-provision-of-science-advice/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

While universities and research institutions are increasingly establishing policies for equal treatment and diversity, we know from many studies that training the faculty to adopt a set of EDI practices is not the most effective measure, as the mere provision of knowledge and skills creates resistance in those engaged. [3] What works much better for the equal treatment of various groups, including young scholars, is mentorship and sponsorship – the practices where colleagues – often those more experienced in academia, and ideally working in small groups – advise and pave the way for younger scholars, advocating on their behalf in front of other faculty members and their peers.

This has proven to work not only on an individual level but also at the level of institutions. In academia, we have seen how national academies of sciences have backed the establishment of national young academies of sciences and paved the way for them around the world for over two decades. This has enabled young academies to become influential institutions in their respective societies, offering not only avenues for the recognition of young scholars' academic contributions but also supporting evidence-informed policymaking and building trust in science through young scholars' engagement with the public.

The establishment of a new organisation of young scholars – the Young Network TransEurope – fits perfectly in this context and is, at the same time, truly unique and remarkable. The launch of the Young Network in the legendary Gdańsk Shipyard on October 13, 2024, was the launch of a transnational young academy with special intellectual and ethical commitments that it may use to guide its work and pursue its goals. The Young Network represents a vision – a commitment to creating an academic and policy environment that draws together and supports the diversity of thought, expertise, and experience across Europe, recognising its geographical reach and seeking to overcome its political, cultural, linguistic, economic and other divides.

We built the intellectual foundation of the Young Network by writing the manifesto "Reclaiming Europe". Tellingly, the manifesto starts with the words: "Europe has constantly been reimagined – yet in facing the criminal and destructive war against Ukraine and all the tragedies resulting from it, the need for a more comprehensive rethinking toward a more open-minded

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3 Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study. Room to Explore. Why many diversity programs backfire (February 18, 2025). Available at https://creators.spotify.com/pod/profile/nias-knaw/episodes/Room-to-explore----why-many-diversity-programs-backfire-e2v1s6i (last accessed 01.07.2025).

and future-oriented cultural imaginary of Europe has become obvious. (...) The goal must be to establish closer ties across borders and to gain a new understanding of Europe."[4]

To me, this foundation is tied to the idea of *struggle*. A year ago, when I attended the commencement ceremony at Yale Law School, my alma mater, the commencement speaker, Professor Douglas NeJaime, said something that stayed with me: "To produce the world you want to live in, you must struggle."[5] We can all think of the struggles happening in the world. We can also all think of the struggles in our lives as academics, scholars, and communicators. Think of the struggles towards better ways to express ourselves, to generate insight, or to defend evidence-based reasoning in complex and contested spaces. These are part of our struggle to produce the world we want to live in. As scholars, we do it by offering the best available knowledge and new ways of meaning-making to society.

This idea – "To produce the world you want to live in, you must struggle" – is also central to our manifesto and the establishment of the Young Network.

On the one hand, the manifesto calls for a new conceptualisation of Europe hoping that, by this, we become more ready to acknowledge, include, and strengthen Europeans across the continent. As the manifesto says: "Reclaiming Europe requires putting the regions that have for too long been seen as its periphery back at the centre of attention and allowing their own voices to be heard. Such a reclamation must be transnational in spirit: it crosses borders, languages, cultures, histories, identities, and much more. This does not imply any form of homogenisation – we can only really see our many similarities when we adequately appreciate the rich regional diversity of Europe."

On the other hand, the manifesto and the Young Network pave the way for young scholars to take the lead on these ideas, advocating an inclusive and diverse academic engagement across Europe. My hopes for the Young Network are focused on the creation of an institutional space where these ideas and values are not aspirational but operational. Happily, this is a collaborative effort, and there are many great examples to follow, including, among other things, the institutional foundations of national young academies, the scientific advice

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4   Cf. the manifesto printed above.

5   Yale Law School. Celebrating the Class of 2024 – Forging Ahead with Strength and Kindness (May 20, 2024). Available at https://law.yale.edu/yls-today/news/celebrating-class-2024-forging-ahead-strength-and-kindness (last accessed 01.07.2025).

mechanism to the European Commission, and many EDI initiatives across Europe.

Some of the ideas on which the Young Network was built derive from the institutional underpinnings of scientific advice in Europe. Coming from the fields of law and legal philosophy, I am drawn to explain these with the help of a parallel between policymakers' approach to law and their approach to establishing the scientific evidence grounding their policies.

Every year, I teach a course on international law. Some of the first topics we cover are the sources of law – treaties, judicial decisions, customary law, etc. There is a more-or-less fixed set of sources of law in any particular society, and this allows us to find law when we need to know what rules apply in any particular situation. Sources of law contain information about the law, but they are not mere containers of information. The sources are also constitutive of law. First, they provide legal norms with authority, i.e., they make them valid legal norms. Second, they make legal norms binding in their effect, i.e., they have to be followed.

This approach to law is similar to the approach that policymakers take with regard to scientific evidence and advice – they look for similarly authoritative sources. There are many findings, and one needs to be an expert in a particular field of research to understand how to evaluate them. Policymakers look for scientific evidence and advice that is *authoritative*, i.e., backed by the consensus of the research community, or even better, conveyed by a body or person they deem to have sufficient authority to sort out the findings into evidence. Moreover, we could say that they look for scientific evidence that is *binding* in a moral sense – something that cannot be ignored, carrying a normative weight that compels attention and action in the development of policies in a particular field.

Additionally, policymakers require *certainty*. Any society can operate with greater certainty about applicable norms when there is a fixed list of sources of law. In a similar manner, policymakers want to rely on a more-or-less fixed set of authoritative sources to turn to when they seek scientific evidence for policymaking. Usually, these sources are scientific advisors. The fact that there is only a relatively fixed set of people policymakers turn to for scientific advice can be a source of greater certainty, but we should not ignore the fact that this can also be a problem.

To frame these issues, I draw on an observation made by Professor Tarmo Soomere, long-time President of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. He referred to the 'three

golden rules' of scientific advice, as formulated by the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors to the European Commission: (1) the advice must be grounded in cutting-edge science; (2) it must be publicly accessible; and (3) it must come from someone with a clear mandate. It is important to notice that each of these principles has a shadow side: this model can foster elitism in gatekeeping, oversimplify evidence in communication, and establish rigid hierarchies – creating a new kind of scientific aristocracy, even if its members rotate.[6]

When policymakers become overly reliant on a narrow circle of advisors, two well-documented phenomena often emerge: (1) the Matthew Effect, where already prominent individuals are repeatedly invited to provide advice, reinforcing their visibility; and (2) the Matilda Effect, which refers to the systematic marginalization of women and other underrepresented groups – including caregivers, non-native speakers, and scholars working outside major policy centres. This cumulative exclusion leads to scientific advice that might not rely on the best knowledge available in the world, the best interpretations and meaning-making, and the best solutions to the problems the policymakers are seeking to solve. In effect, this limits their capacity to respond effectively to complex societal challenges, whereas more inclusive structures would result not only in more representative knowledge but in more legitimate and actionable advice.[7]

On the one hand, it is in our interest to include a wide variety of scholars so that the best knowledge, solutions, and interpretations ground the policies that are developed in our societies. On the other hand, it is not only a matter of our interest in the results and welfare, is it? We need to include a broader set of scholars – also because inclusion is a matter of fair treatment in academic environments, being central to great academic culture. Without fair treatment, any academic environment, no matter how successful, lacks legitimacy. If scientific advice is to serve society well, we must reconsider who is recognised as an authoritative source. The academic community has a responsibility to ensure that legitimacy is not inherited or static but earned and inclusive.

The Young Network has taken its place among the European young academies. Its role is not decorative. The presence of young scholars is not about diversity optics.

It is about substantive engagement. Indeed, it is excellence – not charity – that demands broader inclusion. Too often, Europe's academies and policymakers overlook voices from less central regions, from interdisciplinary or emerging fields, and from demographic groups historically underrepresented in decision-making. This oversight has been short-sighted. If we are serious about better policy and governance, we must draw from the full range of Europe's intellectual capital.

The Young Network is part of this struggle towards richer knowledge and better meaning-making. It is about advancing justice and reimagining the systems that advance academia and policymaking. This struggle is necessary not only because it produces better outcomes but because it reflects the kind of society we believe in – a society where excellence is plural, authority is earned, and inclusion is the norm, not the exception.

Use this struggle to create change – not to coerce people, but to move them.

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Helen Eenmaa is Associate Professor of Governance and Legal Policy at the University of Tartu, President of the European Young Academies Science Advice Structure (YASAS) and was Vice-President of the Estonian Young Academy.

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6   Tarmo Soomere's intervention during the session "Winning from greater inclusion: Relation between diversity and academic culture" at the Triennial Conference of the InterAcademy Partnership (3 November 2022). Available at https://www.interacademies.org/page/session-12-winning-greater-inclusion-relation-between-diversity-and-academic-culture (last accessed 01.07.2025).

7   Ibid.

Ten Things One Should Know About Ukraine's History

ANDRII PORTNOV

An unfinished building on the Dnipro embankment with the coat of arms of Ukraine.
Credit: Andrii Portnov.

1. Ukrainian history, language, and culture did not begin in 1991 or 1917. Neither Lenin nor Gorbachev created Ukraine – their policies were primarily attempts to respond to the initiatives of Ukrainian political and cultural elites.

2. Modern Ukraine was not just a "bloodland," and the Soviet Union was not just Russia. The phenomenon of Soviet Ukraine is neither reducible to Bolshevik enslavement nor to the will of the Ukrainian people. It was a painful and dynamic compromise between Bolshevik centralism and the Ukrainian national movement and local elites.

3. Bandera is not a key figure in Ukrainian history, and it is important to distinguish Bandera's contradictory and politically coloured mythologies from the real history of a political terrorist and leader of one of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalist factions.

4. Ukraine is an example of perhaps the greatest religious pluralism among Central and Eastern European countries, with deep historical roots. It is a country with at least three influential Orthodox denominations and a Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church.

5. Ukrainian history is not only about ethnic Ukrainians and their state formations. Nomadism, like settled agriculture, is an important part of it. Judaism and Islam are an organic part of Ukrainian history. The Jewish history of Ukraine is one of the richest in Europe. Emphasizing this, of course, does not mean denying its tragic and violent pages.

6. A large part of present-day Ukraine belonged to the Kingdom of Poland for much longer than it was part of the Russian Empire or the USSR. Yet it is not the so-called historical rights, but international law and human rights that should be the key to discussions about Ukraine's just and internationally recognized borders.

7. To adequately describe the linguistic situation in Ukraine, it is important to remember the situational nature of bilingualism and the significant role of Surzhyk as a transitional socio-cultural phenomenon. Ukraine's linguistic history is not identical to either the Canadian or Swiss models. It is a distinctive phenomenon that awaits contemporary academic analysis.

8. German troops occupied the territory of present-day Ukraine twice during the twentieth century. In both 1918 and 1941, this military presence bore tangible signs of colonialism. However, Germany's and Ukraine's shared history should not be reduced to colonialism and victimization, just as Ukraine's and Poland's, Ukrainian-Crimean Tatar, or Ukraine and Russia's shared history should not be.

9. A remarkably important topic in Ukrainian social history is liberation movements: from the Cossack uprisings of the seventeenth century to the peaceful (and not only) mass protests on the Maidan in our time. The historical phenomenon of mass protest movements for more rights and freedoms requires a new analytical language of description. The same need applies to a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of Ukrainian pluralism and its regional, linguistic, religious, and political dimensions. Moreover, it is important to remember that pluralism and diversity are not synonymous with clash and confrontation, but rather one of the sources of strength and resilience of the Ukrainian political nation.

10. Reflections on history are important for attempts to understand the present and to sense the future. But the latter is not predetermined by history. It is not only history that explains why in 2014 Donetsk and Luhansk, unlike Kharkiv and Odessa, became the centres of self-proclaimed pro-Russian quasi-state entities. This was not determined by the previous history of these regions, but by the sum of situational socio-political factors. And it was not determined "forever". In general, very little happens in history "forever"; history is a living social process in which each of us takes an active part.

Of course, this list of theses is by no means complete. It is the result of freely writing down thoughts that come to mind and an impetus for further exploration and reflection. I first presented these Theses on March 11, 2025, at Café Kyiv in Berlin. They have been developed in more detail in a book that I recently published: *Ukraine-Studien. Eine Einführung* (Nomos Verlag).

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I

FREEDOM

fläcken» (synnervspapillen). Ögonklotets bakre vägg, »ögonbottnen» är avbildad å Pl. VIII. Den ärtstora mörkare fläcken till vänster å bilden är centralgropen, den andra ljusare fläcken är synnervspapillen, genom vilken synnerven och näthinnans kärl inträda. — Hela det rum, som omslutes av

Öga, i horisontell genomskärning. Vänstra halvan av figuren visar ögat i vila, högra halvan däremot vid ackommodation för närseende. 1. Hornhinnan. 2. Främre kammaren. 3. Regnbågshinnan. 4. Bindehinnan. 5. Strålkroppen med ciliarmuskeln. (Jämför med andra sidan, där muskeln är sammandragen.) 6. Strålkransen och bakre ögonkammaren. 7. Kristallinsen. (Märk den större tjockleken och kupigheten av den högra halvan.) 8. Senhinnan. 9. Åderhinnan. 10. Näthinnan. 11. Synnervens utträde (papillen, blinda fläcken). 12. Centralgropen. 13. Synnerven. 14. Inre raka ögonmuskeln. 15. Yttre raka ögonmuskeln. Det stora hålrummet bakom linsen utfylles av glaskroppen.

näthinnan och linsen, är utfyllt av en geléartad, genomskinlig substans, glaskroppen. Rummet mellan hornhinnan samt regnbågshinnan och linsen kallas den främre ögonkammaren, ävensom den lilla springan mellan regnbågshinnan och linsens randparti, bakre ögonkammaren, innehålla däremot en vattenklar vätska, det s. k. kammarvattnet.

Ögats rörelser åt olika håll (blickrörelserna) ombesörjas av sex tvärstrimmiga muskler, som utgå från ögonhålans väggar och fästa sig på ögon

Empowering Trust, Upholding Academic Freedom: A Pathway to Reclaim Europe

JONAS BORNEMANN & SEBASTIAN WILLERT

Trust is a fundamental prerequisite for fostering cooperation in Europe, and it is vital for establishing a Europe rooted in principles of freedom and shared values. Likewise, trust sits at the heart of academic cooperation between scholars and institutions. The opportunity to briefly contact a trusted colleague to discuss a specific question, for instance, or the possibility of running an initial project idea by someone you trust, are invaluable assets for a researcher wishing to excel in their work. While the pivotal role of trust is often acknowledged as commonplace, the different forms, effects and manifestations of trust in transnational academic cooperation are usually not fully appreciated. Rather, nationalistic narratives, geopolitical conflicts and austerity measures can impede efforts for transnational collaboration, thereby curtailing or obstructing the emergence and development of trust between researchers from different regions from the outset.

1. Historical continuities and the emergence of new forms of transnational academic cooperation

Historically, trust has been crucial in transnational academic cooperation in Europe. In early spring 1933, for instance, a group of four German-Jewish refugee scholars around Philipp Schwartz convened in Zurich, establishing the so-called *Notgemeinschaft Deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland* (Emergency Committee of German Scholars Abroad). This initiative became part of a transnational effort to address the plight of academics fleeing the rising tide of racial and political persecution in Nazi Germany. While the freedom of movement within Europe was extremely limited by law, immigration quotas and border regimes, members of the Notgemeinschaft assisted fellow refugees in finding prospects in exile. In this context, Istanbul University became the most significant temporary host institution for refugee scholars globally. Trust was pivotal in facilitating academic collaboration in exile, enabling migration and offering perspectives.

Nowadays, Berlin has become a centre for those persecuted in Turkey and elsewhere, and current initiatives aim to support the migration of academics in the opposite direction. This effort is rooted in a historical context, involving organisations established after the dismissal of Jewish and oppositional scholars from German universities in the 1930s. The wars in Syria and Ukraine, restrictions on academic freedom in Egypt, Turkey, and Hungary, and the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan have led to the establishment of numerous programs to support fleeing academics. Various institutions, usually in the Global North, select refugee scholars and grant them temporary work or study options. However, trust in those arriving, in their experiences and opinions, seems to be under threat. Geopolitical conflicts or nationalistic views put existing connections in peril and may discourage the emergence of trust between academic institutions and researchers. For example, Iranian academics may face visa rejections due to concerns that their knowledge could be exploited by their government to threaten EU security.

At the same time, academic cooperation can also serve as a pillar for promoting democracy, equality and prosperity in other states and regions. A good illustration of this effect can be seen in the acceptance of research institutions and EU Member States to host academics from Ukraine following the Russian full-scale invasion in February 2022. The willingness of immigration authorities and academic institutions to host those fleeing the war stands out as a remarkable gesture of support and trust vis-à-vis these persons. It reflects an understanding that the research that academics otherwise working in Ukraine perform is valuable and equal to that performed at research institutions in the EU. Conversely, however, a similar sentiment of trust is not featured, without qualification, about researchers and research institutions in other states or regions of the world. Often, migration policies preclude cooperation between researchers from different regions. It is deplorable that persons who have acquired a scholarship to work abroad may not be able to go because of immigration restrictions. Similarly, the inability to move across borders also makes it impossible to establish connections that may, in the long term, grow into relationships of trust. The loss will be that of the receiving country.

2. International Researchers as Informal Ambassadors of their Home Country

When academics travel abroad for research, teaching, or collaboration, they naturally represent their home countries, whether they realise it or not. Academics who work or study abroad shape how their home country is perceived, including its education system, research traditions, and even broader cultural values. Outside of their academic work, they build trust between universities and communities, shaping how people see and relate to each other.

Studying and working in different academic settings helps people share ideas and learn from each other, building connections between different cultures and ways of thinking. As Michal Kolar, a member of the Czexpats in Science initiative, points out, researchers abroad often unconsciously influence the perception of their home country's academic and intellectual standards. At the same time, they may also encounter biases against scholars from countries with less established research infrastructures. Yet, through personal engagement, collaboration, and, quite simply, the quality of their work, mobile academics can challenge these stereotypes and help people gain a more transparent and more open-minded view of academic life in their home countries.

The experiences of academics from Ukraine and Belarus exemplify this dynamic. Many of them, particularly during political crises and war, have found opportunities in universities elsewhere in Europe. They contribute to cutting-edge research and play a crucial role in shifting perceptions about their home countries. In this sense, they act as ambassadors, as Yevheniia Polishchuck, Co-founder of Ukrainian Science Diaspora, an initiative set up by Ukrainian researchers working outside their home country, explains. During the 2024 conference "Reclaiming Europe" in Gdánsk, Yevheniia emphasised that the role of informal ambassadors is crucial for signalling Ukraine's commitment to European values to host countries. Simultaneously, she stressed the risk the exodus of scholars entails. Individuals exposed to and sooner or later integrated into foreign academic structures might develop a preference for remaining abroad and may subsequently be disinclined to return to their home institutions.

3. Brain Drain or Brain Gain?

Scholars find themselves acting as informal ambassadors, not just when they come from outside the European Union. It is equally relevant concerning academic mobility within EU Member States. Researchers from Central and Eastern Europe, for example, may often find positions outside their home state, where their expertise is an indication of the quality of education in their home regions. While brain drain remains a significant challenge, it can be mitigated when it translates into brain circulation. As Michal Kolar emphasises, facilitating the return of scholars – or at least maintaining active

academic links with their state of origin – allows for a more balanced academic exchange. In this way, trust built through individual scholars can lead to systemic improvements in research collaboration and policy development. All this suggests that academic mobility is far more than a career choice. It is both a prerequisite and a product of trust. By embodying their home countries' intellectual and cultural strengths, scholars from other states may challenge stereotypes and create networks that benefit their home and host institutions. The trust they build, intentionally or not, paves the way for more sustainable and balanced collaboration.

Nevertheless, trust can be a significant concern for researchers who remain in their home countries despite limited academic freedom. Some might want to continue to serve students at the last remaining independent university, facing challenges such as low salaries, and dwindling resources. This raises questions about perceptions among foreign colleagues regarding the roles of people who choose to stay and whether they see participation in academic committees as collaboration or resilience. The motivations for staying in one's home country vary widely; a sense of responsibility towards preserving independent thought and nurturing future generations often weighs heavily. Additionally, family structures and caregiving responsibilities can limit international mobility, particularly for women.

4. Trust as a Self-Reinforcing Phenomenon

Against this backdrop, trust between academics tends to be self-reinforcing. Whether it starts with a single researcher, joint projects, or exchanges between institutions, cooperation often breeds opportunities for more collaboration. In this vein, the reliability of one researcher may open doors for others, either from their institutions or countries more broadly, allowing them to join academic networks, apply for grants, and co-author papers. This amplification of trust through trust means that academic exchange does not just happen once but becomes an ongoing process, creating partnerships over a more extended period.

This process does not just happen at an institutional level but likewise affects how individuals interact. As Tatiana Shchyttsova, Professor at the European Humanities University in Vilnius, explains, trust in academic research does not just relate to positive experiences regarding academic ethics and diligent performance of research tasks but may likewise pertain to a more advanced level of intersubjective trust. During our conference, Tatiana

stressed that a more advanced level of trust is formed by "mutual empathy and natural mutual motivation for creativity and scientific inquiry". In this sense, trust seems to correspond with empathy for colleagues and their research projects, thus inspiring a sense of curiosity that extends one's field of interest and expertise. Mutual empathy inspires an openness to new topics and research agendas that may otherwise not have sparked one's interest.

5. Prestige and Issues of International Mobility

In many countries, international experience is seen as a mark of excellence, signalling adaptability, expertise, and a broader professional network. In this sense, international mobility forms a prerequisite for trust that is vested in a researcher by the broader society of their home country. As Michal Kolar notes, Czech researchers working abroad are generally held in high regard, with international mobility even being a formal requirement for specific grants and academic positions. The Czech Science Foundation, for instance, expects junior researchers to demonstrate substantial international experience, whether through a PhD abroad, a postdoctoral stay, or research visits.

However, attitudes toward mobile researchers can be more complex. While they may be valued for their global expertise, those who leave their home institutions might also face scepticism or resentment. Some may be seen as abandoning national academia, contributing to a 'brain drain' rather than enriching the local research landscape. Their return can sometimes be met with challenges, as reintegrating into home institutions is often a difficult endeavour. Ultimately, trust in mobile researchers depends on whether their experience abroad is perceived as benefiting their home country's academic community – or distancing them from it.

This alludes to a more general problem in transnational cooperation. Collaborating partners may benefit to varying degrees from such cooperation. While those with sophisticated administrative support and infrastructure may benefit significantly from such coordination, others may often not see similar privileges. This may be described as an imbalance or even unfairness, which may lead to complications at the institutional or even national level, as explained by Tarmo Soomere, until 2024 President of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. Careful designing and operation are needed to ensure that transnational collaboration is mutually advantageous for all participants involved.

6. Creating Trust

Examining historical expat communities, particularly in the context of forced academic migration, reveals important mechanisms at play. Despite facing persecution in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, opposition and Jewish refugee scholars were viewed in Turkey, Great Britain, the US and other places as prominent representatives of German science and research. They played a significant role in the professionalisation and reform of the university systems in their host countries and, in several instances, influenced the development of generations of researchers. However, establishing trust was essential from the onset. In the example of the Notgemeinschaft, the initial interactions among professors were crucial in fostering mutual trust. This foundation facilitated the expansion of an interdisciplinary community composed of refugee scholars, which enhanced professional networking and provided essential support for young academics and students seeking assistance and employment opportunities.

In the historical context, scholars in exile frequently encountered nationalist discourses that sought to undermine the trust established between hosting communities and hosted academics. Tarmo Soomere notes that "Nationalist narratives are, in essence, a derivative of (or a natural outcome from) a certain level of mistrust". In this context, as Tarmo argues, it is imperative for the scientific community to work towards enhancing and reconstructing trust as a priority actively. Such efforts are essential, as a corresponding reduction in the influence and prevalence of nationalistic narratives is likely to occur, although not necessarily in an immediate timeframe.

In the absence of substantial state or professional support, refugee scholars in Turkey during the 1930s and 1940s established a collaborative support network with local allies of diverse religious backgrounds, thereby ensuring their survival and professional prospects during their exile. However, the extent of assistance provided by host countries significantly influenced the trust that the exile community developed in hosting research institutions, hence, the host society. This dynamic relationship subsequently impacted their identification with local institutions and the research environment. Consequently, building on past experiences, cultivating and maintaining trust among incoming scholars and their host institution and fostering solidarity within these communities are critical for countering nationalist discourses threatening European academic freedom.

7. Trust as the Cornerstone of Academic Cooperation

Trust is not merely an abstract value. It is a tangible force shaping transnational academic cooperation in Europe. The Reclaiming Europe manifesto underscores the importance of resisting nationalist narratives and inspiring cross-border solidarity instead. In this sense, trust is a call to action. It is both a precondition and a product of academic cooperation.

Trust is under strain in a time of rising geopolitical tensions, restrictive migration policies, and growing scepticism toward international institutions. Yet, as history shows, academic cooperation thrives when scholars and institutions defy these pressures and invest in relationships that transcend national borders. The initiatives that supported persecuted scholars since the 1930s and contemporary efforts to integrate academics from crisis-hit regions demonstrate that trust is not static – it must be actively enabled, cultivated and defended.

While often framed in terms of individual career advancement, academic mobility fundamentally strengthens the European educational space. Scholars moving across borders build intellectual bridges, challenge stereotypes, and, through their work, reinforce the interconnectedness of knowledge production. However, as the manifesto highlights, reclaiming Europe means more than just preserving existing structures: it requires reimagining a European space that is genuinely inclusive, where trust is extended beyond familiar networks and regional borders. This may extend to large-scale collaborative initiatives like the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in physics or the European Social Survey in the social sciences, but likewise to smaller and local initiatives, as Tarmo Soomere adds.

Ultimately, trust in academia, be it between researchers, institutions or nations, can be self-reinforcing. By embracing a vision of academic cooperation that prioritises openness, solidarity, and intellectual curiosity, Europe can uphold the ideals of academic freedom and collective progress. In reclaiming trust, we reclaim Europe itself.

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Some Reflections on the Origins of Academic Freedom

IRIS FLESSENKÄMPER

The conditions for the free circulation of knowledge and scientific theories have deteriorated worldwide in recent years. Europe too has seen an increase in the polarization of public debate and greater interference in research and teaching by social and political forces that have led to the persecution, expulsion, and incarceration of academics. These developments fundamentally narrow the space for intellectual discourse and dispute, which is essential to scholarly work.

As representatives of academic institutions, our duty as I see it is to maintain the difficult balance between countering these threats and preserving valuable free spaces for collaborative research. First, only *free* research can facilitate the emergence of new ideas and insights and help us identify ways of dealing constructively with current social conflicts and challenges; and second, both freedom of thought and freedom "of the word" are expressions and guarantors of democratic culture.

With the founding of the *Young Network TransEurope*, another academic space is being created in Europe where, following the example of the Young Academies, scholars from different backgrounds can engage in free exchange among diverse traditions of thought while drawing inspiration from those who think differently. This upholds an ideal that did not in fact first emerge with modern democratic societies; rather, the idea of cross-border, domination-free academic discourse goes back to a social construct that the humanists had already brought to life in the 17th century under the name *res publica literaria* or "Republic of Letters".

According to this ideal, the republic of letters was a free, quasi-universalist community that transcended all differences in social status and nationality and where only the word, argumentation, and scholarship counted. It existed solely in the imagination of those involved; in a sense, it was a state without geographical location. Anyone who spoke Latin and was interested in scholarly discourse could become a citizen of this new academic republic.

Scholarship thus became a practice that one pursued not in privacy and isolation but within a social network where status, seniority, national origin, and religious affiliation played no role. This idea was based on the conviction that scholarly knowledge could be gained only through dialogue across local and national borders – by an intellectual exchange with persons who were working on similar subjects in distant places. The German poet Gotthold Ephraim Lessing emphasised this aspect of supranationality when he asked in 1747: "What is Saxony, what is Germany, what is Europe to us scholars? A scholar like me is for the whole world, he is a cosmopolitan." [1] The scholarly culture of the early modern period – and of the Enlightenment in particular – can thus be understood as a "communication process",[2] which on the one hand served to gain knowledge, but on the other hand was also intended to promote tolerance towards those who thought differently.

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1   Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Der junge Gelehrte", in: Sämtliche Schriften, ed. Karl Lachmann, Stuttgart 1886–1924, vol. l, p. 318, quoted from Marian Füssel: Einleitung, in: Aufklärung 26 (2024), pp. 5–16, here p. 11.

2   Hans Erich Bödeker (1988), "Aufklärung als Kommunikationsprozess", in: Aufklärung als Prozess, ed. Rudolf Vierhaus, Hamburg, pp. 89–111.

For Enlightenment thinkers, *dispute* was a necessary element in the scholarly search for truth. In 1697, the French philosopher Pierre Bayle even spoke of an "innocent War" in which every citizen of the republic of letters could metaphorically exercise "the Right of the Sword (…) without asking leave of those who govern". He was well aware that as a result, "the Reputation of being a learned Man, which an Author has acquired, is, sometimes, diminished thereby, as also the pecuniary Profit, which he drew from it: but if it be done in Support of the Cause of Reason, and for the Interest of Truth only, and in a civil manner, no Body ought to find Fault with it."[3] However, at a time when religious wars and campaigns of conquest were the order of the day in the political sphere, scholars agreed that the dispute should be conducted in a morally acceptable – or, as Bayle puts it, "civil" – form; in other words, in a way that did no discredit to the other party and did not jeopardize the exchange. Each citizen had to make an informal commitment to a style of conduct that included courtesy and politeness, a tolerance for those with different opinions, and the preservation of a certain distance from one's own social, national, and religious background. Distance and impartiality were proclaimed the principal virtues of the researcher – and gradually became the cornerstones of what is now regarded as a prerequisite and ideal of scientific work: the concept of "aperspectival objectivity."[4]

The ideal of "self-effacing cooperation of scientists"[5] found its institutional counterpart in the numerous learned societies launched in the late 17th and especially in the 18th century. They offered scholars the opportunity to exchange ideas and network on an egalitarian basis, away from the rather inflexible curricula of the universities and, in most cases, from the supervision of the local rulers. They followed self-imposed statutes that not only regulated the organization of meetings and the admission of new members but also contained specific guidelines on communicative etiquette. In principle, the learned societies sought to ensure that their members were prepared to accept divergent views of others and not only to tolerate contradiction, but also to use it to correct and develop their own ideas. In so doing, they created the conditions for the practice of egalitarian forms of thought and behavior that are still essential to the development and maintenance of fundamental democratic values.

However, numerous studies have shown unsurprisingly that the ideal of the *res publica literaria* at times differed from actual practice, and that not only national, social, and religious differences, but also breaches of etiquette could severely impair a scholarly discourse. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that, in an era characterised by armed conflict, profound social inequality, and powerful territorially political interests, the scholars of the time developed a communication space free from domination that, according to the ideal, was distinctly separate from contemporary social reality. It is therefore not surprising that, in 1769, the Berlin writer Friedrich Nicolai described the ideal republic of letters as a "perfect democracy".[6]

More recently, the concept of a *scientific community* has revitalised the ideal of a republic of letters; in France, academics are once again talking about a "république des sciences".[7] In the face of a nationalist far right that is gaining strength in many places in Europe and beyond today, it is essential to keep alive this enlightened ideal of a supranational community of scholars who argue respectfully with and against each other – not only to promote science and scholarship in general, but also to strengthen the fundamental values of liberal democracy. By creating a network that brings together young researchers from all over Europe, from states and regions with very different approaches to academic freedom and freedom of expression, we can make an important contribution to this effort.

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Iris Fleßenkämper is the Secretary of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin – Institute for Advanced Study.

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3   Pierre Bayle (1735), Catius, in: idem: The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr Peter Bayle, Second Edition, vol. 2, London, p. 388.

4   Ibid., p. 609.Lorraine Daston (1992), "Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective", in: Social Studies of Science, 22/4, pp. 597–618, here p. 599; idem (2001), Wunder, Beweise und Tatsachen. Zur Geschichte der Rationalität, Frankfurt am Main, pp. 127–155.

5   Ibid., p. 609.

6   Friedrich Nicolai (1769), Rez. Über den 'Antikritikus', in: Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek 10/2, p. 103, quoted from Marian Füssel: Einleitung, in: Aufklärung 26 (2024), p. 7.

7   Ibid., p. 7; Irène Passeron, Siegfried Bodenmann, René Sigrist (eds.) (2008): La république des sciences, Paris.

(Neo-)Imperialism Means War, not Peace

OLGA GARASCHUK

Було нам важко і було нам зле,
І західно, і східно,
Було безвихідно, але
нам не було негідно!

Ліна Костенко

We had it hard, and we had it tough,
Both westward and eastward, rough.
Life seemed so hopeless,
Still, we never lost our dignity!

Lina Kostenko

During the 20th Yalta European Strategy (YES) Conference Annual Meeting in Kyiv in September 2024, Sanna Marin, the former Prime Minister of Finland and a Member of the YES Board, said: "We are like a frog sitting in gradually warming water. But so far, the water is just warm, and we like that. We like to trade with China. To trade and have relations with countries whose values are far from ours. And we don't want to realize that the temperature is steadily increasing."[1] Today, not even half a year later, the water in our pond heats up so quickly that we don't know which side to jump out. Westward or eastward. The old world, the cosy, comfortable, wealthy, and lazy old world, is being demolished in front of our eyes…

What is becoming obvious, not only to political analysts and historians but also to anyone able to think, was recently aptly summarised by Valeriy Pekar, a co-founder of the Ukrainian New Country Civic Platform, whose thoughts I will now and then cite below: "The old world order is over. The good old world order based on rules, agreements and values does not exist any longer… It was never perfect, but it existed. Now it no longer exists. In the "new world without order", the United States will not defend its European or Asian allies. In this world, there are no more alliances and allies, no more mutual obligations, and old treaties can be revised unilaterally. There are only big, strong countries that take what they want, and small, weak ones with no rights or voice that fall victim to such policies. At least, this is how the new US administration sees the world. They are not isolationists; they are neo-imperialists and expansionists. Therefore, we should not be surprised by their expansionist claims on Greenland, Canada, or Panama".[2]

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1   "Global Axis of Evil – Do We Have a Strategy?", panel with Wesley Clark, Niall Ferguson, Oleksandr Lytvynenko, Sanna Marin and Radosław Sikorski, https://youtu.be/Q1vwq3PzfII?si=kmD0p_tJOe_eHJ2C (last accessed 01.07.2025).

2   Valeriy Oleksandrovych Pekar (20 February 2025): Нова реальність [New Reality, translation by O. G.], https://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2025/02/20/7499245/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

What does the new US policy mean for Europe? The post-World War II period of relative global stability, when the United States played a pivotal role in shaping international institutions like the United Nations, NATO, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund as well as promoting "Western" values such as democracy, free markets, and human rights, is over. The security contract with Europe is over too. Europe as a centre of power is disadvantageous to Trump's America: now it is seen not as an ally (because there are no allies), but as a competing centre of power. Yet in their view, the fewer centres of power there are, the better. And here, Trump's goals align with those of russia and China: to sever European ties to America, to break up the European Union, and to make Europe weak, divided, and powerless, consisting of a number of separate unprotected markets that can be taken over or plundered. A kind of large but clumsy seal that can be bitten from all sides.

It is still unclear how the new US administration sees the zones of influence in Europe. Whether they plan to ambush and rob Europe together with russia and China. Or, as during the Cold War, Western Europe shall be a zone of exclusive American interests, and Eastern Europe – of russian interests. If it is the latter, what will happen to the encroachments of China, which is already gradually buying up Europe piece by piece? However, the main objective of weakening and breaking up the European Union is clear. For years, russia has covertly bolstered both the far right and far left across Europe and worldwide. More recently, Trump-aligned forces have joined the game. If any strong leaders from these extremist political camps emerge from the wreckage of Europe that putin and Trump have caused, then they might cooperate with them.

Can Europe shake itself awake, or is it sleepwalking consciously into this disaster? Can Europe unite its diverse contentious principalities? Will it eventually consolidate or remain paralysed? As of today, these are all questions without clear answers. Over the last three years, Ukraine has bought us time to understand what is at stake and

In this "new reality" or "new world order", Europe will not be able to survive without Ukraine. And Ukraine will not be able to survive without Europe. We will either sail together or drown together. The sooner we recognize this, the better. Europe needs Ukraine as a protective shield. Ukrainians have the largest army on the continent. According to Statista,[3] the current Ukrainian Armed Forces consist of approximately 900,000 active military personnel (compared, for example, to 183,500 in Germany), 100,000 paramilitary units, and 1.2 million reserve forces, together amounting to 2.2 million military personnel. This is the only army that knows how to deter russia and how to fight a modern high-tech war. Isn't it the core interest of Europe to absorb this knowledge and experience vital under the current circumstances? Now more than ever, Ukraine also needs us. As a source of immediate financial and military assistance, weapons, technology, investment, political and moral support. Our paths are bound to be together.

Until now, supporting Ukraine was often seen as an act of morality and humanity. It was "us" – safe and generous, and "them" – brave and in need of support. We declared we would help "as long as it takes". Yet only a few truly believed that russia poses a real risk to Europe. putin would never dare to attack a NATO country – would he? But now, with Trump's apparent withdrawal from Europe and the relentless attempt to force Ukraine into a surrender, a capitulation or a dictated "peace", the world suddenly looks different. What if putin does not stop? russia's economy has already been transformed into a war economy with 1,320,000 active soldiers, some 500,000 of which are currently fighting in Ukraine. What will happen when this war pauses? The russian soldiers – battle-hardened, brutalised, and accustomed to killing and impunity would return home. Back to a society that has no work for them, to an economy that is on the brink of collapse, to a regime that can only use them as cannon fodder. Should putin let this powder keg explode in his homeland? Or will he take a short break to rearm and continue the war, which is essential for his hold on to power, – this time against us? Which country is next then? Moldova? One of the Baltic states? Poland? If Trump withdraws troops and the nuclear umbrella from Europe, if he declares that the Baltic states "have actually always been russian" and will no longer provide military support to NATO partners, who or what is supposed to stop putin?

On one hand, the only army on the continent that has learned how to fight russia is the Ukrainian army. It has

prepare. Bought, paying the highest price – the lives and blood of its best sons and daughters. But did we utilize this enormous sacrifice to any benefit? I am sorry to say this time was wasted… Wasted, because we did not believe we were with them in the same boat. Us, as the noble and well-to-do hiding behind the iron NATO shield and them, out there… According to a Canadian politician Alexandra Chyczij: "Now Canada is to a small extent experiencing what Ukraine was experiencing the last 3–10 years". Mexico is as well. And more nations are to follow soon. Only now, under the influence of the apparent destruction of alliances and commitments, does the European awakening begin. Ukrainians have repeatedly told us that they are protecting us by fighting for their and our freedom, but we refused to believe them until the new reality has now made this painfully obvious.

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3   https://www.statista.com/statistics/1296573/russia-ukraine-military-comparison/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

the manpower – true, exhausted by three years of the most brutal war, permanently undersupplied and forced to innovate, but by far the only deployable army in Europe to date. It has experience and determination, it has shown incredible resilience, and it has proven that it is capable of not only stopping putin's advance but also throwing his horde back. On the other hand, we should not fall prey to russian propaganda as the US administration did. If 40 million Ukrainians have been able to resist the russian army, even although it is backed by China and has been directly supported by Iran and North Korea for three years, how come the 450-million strong European Union with a GDP of 17 trillion Euro is scrambling to get its wits together to mount a formidable defence against the fascistic tyranny with a quarter of its population and some 10% of its GDP?

But what if Ukraine is demolished by Trump's and putin's "peace"? What if its army is demoralised, reduced, and weakened or absorbed by russians? Would it be in a position to rush to Europe's aid when the latter is attacked? It is Europe's only chance not to walk blindly into disaster! Supporting Ukraine is no longer a question of morality only. It is an existential question of survival for all of Europe. As long as Ukraine holds, putin cannot go further. As long as russia fails in Ukraine, Europe (and the world, remember Syria) has a chance to defend itself. There is only one way to end this war: Ukraine must prevail. The sooner, the better. Only then can we hope to reinstate the rule of law, justice, and fairness. Impunity encourages aggression and will result in more wars. Remember Winston Churchill words to his friend Lord Moyne: "We seem to be very near the bleak choice between War and Shame. My feeling is that we shall choose Shame, and then have War thrown in a little later on even more adverse terms than at present".

9th of March 2025

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Reclaiming Europe as a Claim and Task of Christian Churches

SEBASTIAN HOLZBRECHER

Europe is in the midst of far-reaching transformation processes. Since the 'European liberation revolution' (Wolfgang Templin) of 1989, the European continent has reorganised itself. However, the events of Maidan, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine since 2022 mark turning points that raise fundamental questions about European identity, cohesion and values. These questions not only touch on political, military and economic dimensions, but also cultural and religious ones. Europe is more than the sum of its many interconnected individual states and is not only reflected in the structures of common European policy. Europe stands for a common and at the same time ambivalent historical heritage. Europeans are united by common values, standards and interests – but they are constantly challenged by their concrete implementation. The diverse networks between the states and their citizens do not ignore religious and cultural issues. Despite all the processes of secularisation, Christianity still has a religious, spiritual and cultural influence in Europe. The churches can certainly provide resources for the discourse on freedom, peace, justice and solidarity in the endeavour to reclaim Europe and become active themselves. In the current mixed situation, the question arises anew as to what role churches can play as ethical, social and transnational institutions.

1. Opening spaces of freedom

The Catholic Church played an important role in providing freedom for civil society in the repressive communist states before 1989. Not only in founding and developing the Polish trade union movement Solidarność in Gdańsk from 1980, but also in opening meeting places and com-munication structures in the former GDR, Hungary and former Czechoslovakia, the Church provided a protected space for freedom of speech, political discussion and social mobilisation. As a non-governmental organisation, it avoided dictatorial attempts to bring people into line and became a refuge for political dissidents. The churches' support for individual and social freedoms was logical and natural, since the core of the Christian message is about the greater freedom of man provided by God.

2. Strengthening peripheries

Many regions in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans were marginalised after joining the EU. Their role as Western Europe's 'extended workbench' and their cultural independence were little recognised. The Catholic Church already had access to these regions before 1989 through a variety of networks, such as *Caritas Internationalis and the European Relief Fund* in Vienna, which was transformed into the German Church's episcopal aid organisation *Renovabis* in 1993. Among other things, the Church supported programmes that strengthened religious and civil society life. This not only had a stabilising effect on the preservation of cultural and religious identities, but also promoted intercultural and interreligious education through transnational networks. The church aid and support programmes thus successfully undermined the politically targeted isolation through the 'Iron Curtain'. In times of growing populism, national isolation and political fragmentation, the globally active church could once again take on an integrative role and initiate aid programmes where political and ideological boundaries prevent urgently needed support and the breaking down of isolation.

The Cossack Cathedral in Stara Samar
Credit: Andrii Portnov
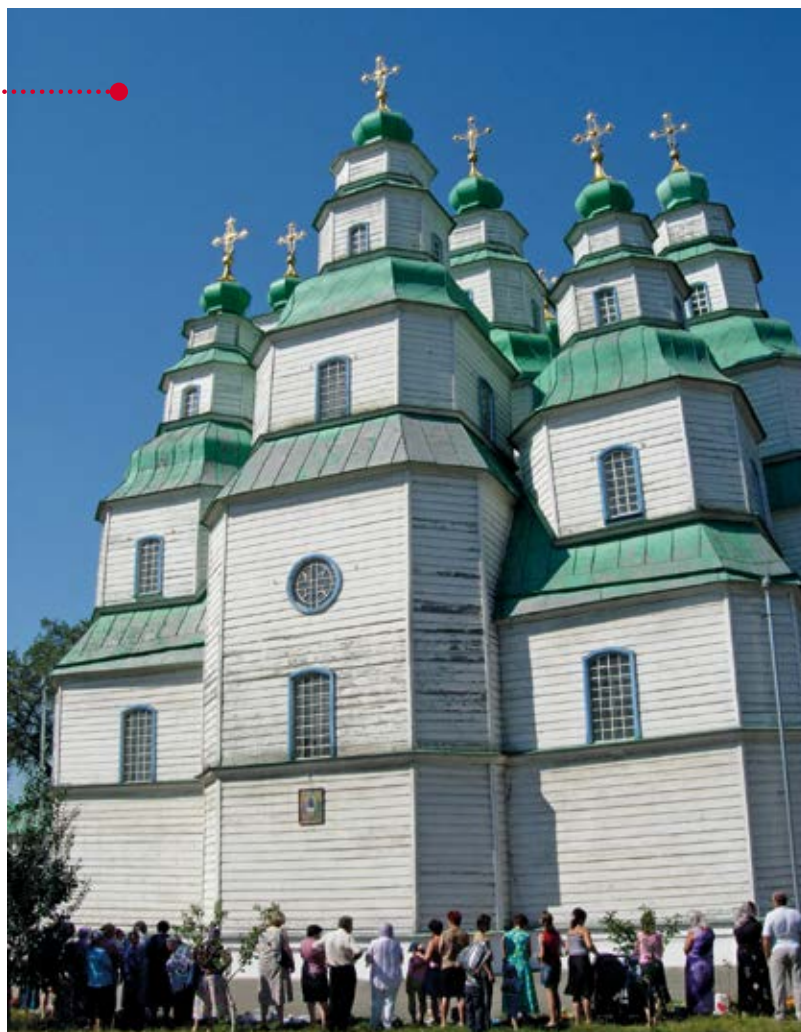
3. Cross-border networks

Over the centuries, the Catholic Church has grown into a global institution. The papacy, religious congregations and worldwide aid organisations naturally transcend national borders and are involved as global players, beyond political interests. This is also demonstrated by European unification processes: for example, through the expansion of European pilgrimage routes (e.g. Lviv to Santiago di Compostella), through the targeted promotion of youth exchange formats, such as the International Christian Ecumenical Youth Meeting Centre in Taizé or through the World Youth Days of the Catholic Church. Church and faith are aimed at community, cross-border experiences and peace. Peace is not just the absence of war, but an active project of remembrance and reconciliation. In the 1960s, the churches in Poland and Germany made a significant contribution to the historical reconciliation of the formerly hostile nations. In ecumenical formats, Christians and churches can strengthen a common European consciousness that can challenge the ever-increasing narratives of nationalism and isolationism.

4. Contributing potential

Pope John Paul II proclaimed that 'Europe needs a soul' and Pope Francis never tired of reminding Europe of its common values and responsibilities in the face of the refugee crisis. The Catholic Church can contribute to rediscovering the 'soul of Europe'. It is not a power factor for which political majorities, economic goals or military alliances are decisive. Rather, the Church is a transnational dialogue partner for whom democracy, peace and justice are indispensable values for religious reasons. Where they are attacked and negated by wars, it is also the task of Christians and churches to defend them effectively. This requires Christians to take a self-confident stand in states and societies in order to shape this world in a humane way based on religious conviction. The potential of Christians and churches should therefore not be missing in the reclamation of Europe.

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Two Threats to Academic Freedom

STANISŁAW KRAWCZYK

In April 1902, the French colonial authorities in Hanoi made a mistake. Rats were infesting the city's new sewer system in the French district, and their fleas were spreading bubonic plague. To involve the Vietnamese population in the fight against the rats, the authorities offered a bounty for every rat killed and started collecting rat tails as evidence. At first, this policy appeared to be effective – hundreds of thousands of rodents were ostensibly killed. However, suspicions arose when tailless rats began to be seen in the city. It turned out that the locals were simply cutting off the rats' tails and then letting the animals escape so that they would breed more rats. In addition, the locals created a smuggling network that was bringing rats to Hanoi from outside. When the colonial authorities eventually realised all this, they removed the perverse incentive by cancelling the bounty.[1]

In present-day academia, some incentives of this kind have risen as unintended consequences of research evaluation reforms. These reforms, introduced in numerous countries since the 1980s, have in turn been inspired by New Public Management – a neo-liberal approach to governance which places emphasis on the accountability of public institutions, including universities.[2] If universities are to be held accountable, then the value they generate must be measurable. This measurement can be done by means such as paper numbers and citation metrics. Intricate performance-based systems are used by national governments to distribute research funding among universities; even more importantly, those systems promote competition for prestige.[3] In all this, governments are supported by larger organisations (e. g., the European Union) while also relying heavily on international corporations, which dominate the market of English-language journals, calculate the most popular research indicators, and produce world university rankings.

On the surface, nothing forces anyone to conform with performance-based systems; universities can evaluate their employees however they see fit, and researchers can submit their work to any journal or publishing house. This is a promise of freedom from political interference (or from future political interference, at least, as the establishment of performance-based systems has already been a political intervention). Yet the market pressure is strong: if a university does not conform, it is likely to lose funding and stop attracting students, and if a researcher does not conform, they are likely to be deemed ineffective and lose their job. As a result, both institutions and individuals need to focus on countable outputs, submitting to the tyranny of metrics[4]. And when what is counted is not what counts, researchers end up collecting rat tails.

1   I. Franceschini and M. G. Vann, *The Great Hanoi Rat Hunt: A Conversation with Michael G. Vann*, "Made in China Journal", August 20, 2020

2   M. Olssen and M. A. Peters (2005), *Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: From the Free Market to Knowledge Capitalism*, "Journal of Education Policy", issue 3, pp. 313–345.

3   D. Hicks (2012), *Performance-Based University Research Funding Systems*, "Research Policy", issue 41, pp. 251–261.

4   J. Z. Muller (2018), *The Tyranny of Metrics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

A one-cent coin of the French Indochinese currency (piastre) issued in 1902
Credit: http://art-hanoi.com/

Another major threat is a new wave of nationalism sweeping across the world – from Brazil to the United Kingdom to China.[5] Here, the promise made to universities and researchers is that they will finally be free to work for the good of their nation (which can also be framed as freedom of self-expression), yet thinly veiled behind this promise are repeated attempts to subjugate academia to the government.

An ongoing example of these attempts is the actions of Donald Trump's administration in the United States, such as freezing hundreds of millions of dollars in funding to Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania in March 2025 due to their stances on pro-Palestine protests and transgender athletes, among other issues.[6] In Central and Eastern Europe, the most famous subjugation attempts are probably those by Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary. These attempts led to the relocation of most of the Central European University's operations to Vienna in 2019; to the 2021 privatisation of many public universities, which are now managed by board members with ties to Orbán; or to the generous financial backing of the pro-Orbán Mathias Corvinus Collegium.[7]

At the same time, we must not forget about the consequences of Vladimir Putin's decision to launch a full-scale invasion against Ukraine. The Russian government's modus operandi is much more brutal than that of the US administration or the Hungarian government, but it also has neo-nationalist underpinnings. An academic is hardly free in their work when their university is being bombarded, or when they are forced to seek refuge in another country.[8]

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5   J. A. Douglass et al. (2021), *Neo-Nationalism and Universities: Populists, Autocrats, and the Future of Higher Education*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

6   J. O. Conroy, *US Universities Face Choice to Surrender or Fight Back against Trump's "Takeover"*, "The Guardian", March 20, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/20/universities-trump-administration (last accessed 01.07.2025; the present text was first submitted on March 24, 2025.)

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7   G. Halmai and A. Ryder, *How the Destroyers of Academic Freedom Masquerade Themselves as Its Victims: The Battle for Hearts and Minds in Hungarian Academia*, "Verfassungsblog", January 15, 2025, https://verfassungsblog.de/how-thedestroyers-of-academic-freedom-masquerade-themselves-as-its-victims/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

8   M. McQuillan, *Cara Highlights Crisis in Ukraine's Universities, 1,000 Days into War*, "Research Professional News", November 19, 2024, https://www.researchprofessionalnews.com/rr-news-uk-universities-2024-11-cara-highlights-crisis-in-ukraine-s-universities-1-000-days-into-war/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

The building of the Donetsk National Technical University in Pokrovsk
after a Russian missile attack on the night of 28 February 2024

Neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism are not the only threats to academic freedom (examined here primarily with regard to research rather than teaching or service); still, they may well be the most significant, at least in Europe. In many cases, however, the distinction between these two is itself a simplification. For instance, liberal tools can be used to promote nationalist policies: while in the 2010s the ministerial rating of academic journals in Poland strongly encouraged local researchers to publish their work in international English-language venues, in the early 2020s Przemysław Czarnek, a right-wing Minister of Education and Science, modified that rating to improve the overall standing of Polish journals (which was decried as a move based in part on those journals' personal or ideological connections to the government).[9]

Depending on the country or region, either threat can loom larger. Yet if we want to avoid both Scylla and Charybdis, we need to think about them both.

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9   S. Krawczyk (2023), *Disciplinary Responses to the Rise of English in Metrics-Driven Social Sciences and Humanities*, "Globalisation, Societies and Education", advanced online publication.

Scientific Freedom in a Difficult World

OLE H PETERSEN

Freedom, democracy and prosperity are closely linked[1]

There is no freedom without democracy and no democracy without freedom. The link to prosperity may not be so immediately obvious. Democracy depends on individuals knowing and understanding what is happening around them. If you are poor and toiling, you may be so exhausted during the few hours left to yourself that you don't have the energy to inform yourself. Obtaining relevant information may also require tools that you can't afford. Obtaining an education that enables you to understand the mechanisms operating the institutions controlling your life may require resources that your family may not have been able to provide. When I first visited India in 1974 and saw the truly awful poverty there, I understood that the Indian government's claim that the country was the largest democracy in the world was meaningless. To the masses of destitute people living on the pavements in Old Delhi, the concept of democracy was completely irrelevant.

Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité

'Liberty, equality and fraternity' is the official motto of the French Republic and has its origin in the French Revolution. Fraternity (brotherhood – generally meant gender-neutrally) is signposted as an important 'value' in the text of Schiller's 'Ode to Joy', incorporated into the fourth and final movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. In 1972, the Council of Europe adopted Beethoven's music to the 'Ode to Joy' as its anthem, and in 1985 it was chosen as the anthem of the European Union. The official anthem only consists of the music to the 'Ode of Joy' without the text. The official EU view states that, "in the universal language of music, this anthem expresses

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1   The opinions expressed in this essay are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisations I am affiliated with.

the European ideals of freedom, peace and solidarity". In truth, Schiller's text does not contain the words freedom or peace, but the word "Brüder" (brothers) appears repeatedly. In any case, the values signposted in the motto of the French Republic have officially been accepted as genuine European values and, as such, they are at the heart of what may be described as the 'European project'.

Whenever I despair because of the many and continuing failings of European politicians, I am brought back to a degree of optimism by focussing on the amazing fact that politicians from the many and very different countries and cultures of Europe could agree to select music by a German composer, linked to the text of a German poet, as the EU's official anthem. This not only affirms genuine European values but also serves to signpost European artistic and intellectual quality. For me, this is personal. In the summer of 1964, I had the great luck of being in the audience at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam when Otto Klemperer (the last of the German conductor giants) performed Beethoven's 9th. The power and glory of this work, in that towering performance, is still – more than 60 years after the event – vividly in my mind and I consider it an integral part of my European identity.

Scientific Freedom

In Germany, scientific freedom ("Forschungsfreiheit" – freedom of research) is enshrined in the Basic Law. It is also protected in the EU as "a constituent part of academic freedom and scientific integrity in Europe" (European Parliament resolution of 17th January 2024) but, sadly, there is one EU country, namely Hungary, that is poorly rated in the Academic Freedom Index (AFI 2025 update). Worldwide, scientific and academic freedoms are in retreat, exemplified by the situations in Russia and China and now, suddenly, also in the US.

Freedom of research is generally taken to mean that those engaged in this activity, typically academics employed by universities or research institutes, can prosecute their research and publish the results without any censorship either internally in their institutions or outside (from government departments, for example). However, in practice, there can never be complete scientific freedom. The most complete scientific freedom I have personally enjoyed occurred during a period when I was still a clinical medical student at the University of Copenhagen. At that time, I was of course completely unknown in the scientific world, had no status and had no money.

In the 1960s, the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Copenhagen was overwhelmed by a rapidly increasing intake of students (at that time there were no specific entry requirements for medicine, or any other subjects). Everyone who had passed the final school leaving examinations (the equivalent of the German 'Abitur') had the right to study any subject at any Danish University. The Medical School in Copenhagen simply did not have sufficient academic staff to cope with all these students. To solve the problem of teaching the basic subjects (anatomy, biochemistry and physiology) to the large number of new students, the University hired students who had just passed the part I examinations in these subjects with top marks as instructors. In the summer of 1964, I was thus appointed as an instructor at the university's Institute of Medical Physiology with the sole duty of giving 4 tutorials per week to a class of ~30 medical students, who were just one or two years younger than me. I had no right to do research work and there was certainly no indication that I would be allowed access to any laboratory or would be able to use any equipment in the institute. Nevertheless, I decided to start some experimental research work. I found an empty laboratory room and a substantial amount of unused but useful equipment that enabled me to measure electrolyte concentrations in the saliva and electrical potentials in the salivary glands of anaesthetised cats. At that time, in Denmark, there were no formal requirements for working with animals in university laboratories and the Institute of Medical Physiology had its own animal house from where I could simply order cats to be delivered to my laboratory without any payment. All standard chemicals were available in the institute and could be used without any individual user being required to have funds to pay for these. Thus, it was – at that time and in a period where formalities were regarded as relatively unimportant – possible for me to spend all my free time working intensively in the laboratory on projects generated by myself that had never been formally approved by anyone. Of course, I took advice from many academic staff members in the institute, who were unfailingly helpful when they realised my enthusiasm for research work, but I had no supervisor and there were no requirements for formal permissions or any obligation to attend courses. I published quite a few original scientific papers in competitive peer-review journals during these student years, and, towards the end of my student period, I was even invited (all expenses paid) to give a major lecture at a prestigious conference on exocrine glands at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Apart from the peer review by the journals to which I submitted my research reports, there was never any formal review or approval of my work in the institute until I, after passing the final MBChB examinations in 1969, was appointed Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in the Institute of Medical Physiology.

The near-total academic freedom that I enjoyed during the period when I was a clinical medical student in Copenhagen does not exist anywhere anymore. Today, it would be completely impossible for anyone even to attempt to do a fraction of what I was allowed do in the 1960s. However, one should not fall into the trap of

representing the 1960s as a golden area of totally free research opportunities. The freedom I was allowed to enjoy was only possible because other medical students were uninterested in spending their free time doing unpaid research. If, for example, just ten other medical students had decided to invade the Institute of Medical Physiology, wanting to use its space and resources to carry out their own research, it would have created an impossible situation requiring immediate regulation. I am also aware that I was in the privileged situation of having complete financial support from my parents. They were not rich, but they did have sufficient resources to supply me with everything I needed. I lived at home during my student years, and not only did I not have any living expenses, I did not even have to spend time organising the many practical aspects of life that most people have to deal with. In contrast, many of my fellow medical students had to take on menial jobs to cover their living costs. It must also be admitted that there are, of course, many obvious and good reasons for regulating research work, but it comes at a price.

Restrictions to freedom of research: general issues

The majority of scientists would probably agree that censorship should not be allowed. In the context of scientific research or scholarship, this means that no area of research should be forbidden and that there should be no political / governmental interference in the process of publishing research results. Unfortunately, there are many countries in which research publications are checked and require approval by state censors before they can be submitted to any scientific journal. Politically controversial areas and statements that might be uncomfortable for a government can in this way be stopped or modified and false science (for example, Lysenko in the Soviet Union) can instead be promoted. This continues to happen in the many countries worldwide governed by dictators. Even in democratic countries, such actions will apply to research in many areas of military interest.

Overall, the most significant restriction to freedom of research lies in the control of funding. It is clearly impossible for all scientists or scholars to be provided with all the necessary resources they would require to investigate their favourite topics. Only a few scientists (for example, Charles Darwin) have been financially independent but, even so, Darwin's famous Beagle Journey required sponsorship by the British Government. As long as the overall scientific enterprise is small in relation to the resources available, funding can be dealt with on an ad hoc basis, but in today's world with substantial research establishments in all developed countries there is a need for mechanisms to decide on the distribution of research funding. In most countries, the government is the dominant funder (for example, NIH and NSF in the US, the DFG and the Max Planck Society in Germany, the Research Councils in the UK), although non-governmental institutions (for example, Howard Hughes in the US, the Wellcome Trust in the UK, NOVO Nordisk in Denmark and the Volkswagen-Stiftung in Germany) are also critically important. In Europe, research funding from the European Commission (for example, the European Research Council) has not only become quantitatively important, but is also regarded as a quality indicator. All these organisations create rules and employ panels of scientists to make funding decisions. Such arrangements are clearly necessary but, inevitably, restrict freedom of research. The time spent on writing and revising grant applications has become a very significant burden that takes away a lot of time that could have been spent on actually doing research and, perhaps most importantly, trying new ideas. The bureaucratic grant-assessment machinery inevitably favours 'more of the same' rather than genuinely new, and therefore risky, projects. This is, in my experience as Panel Chair, even the case for the European Research Council, which prides itself on funding 'high-gain, high-risk' projects. In this respect, scientists are often the worst enemies of other scientists trying to do something that is not 'safe'. That said, specialist grant-funding panels have important roles in 'weeding out' unsound research proposals and will generally be able to recognise high-quality research proposed by those who already have a substantial research record.

What is much more difficult is to decide on the distribution of funds between different subject areas. Every scientist and scholar will inevitably be inclined to think that their particular field is very important and is entering an important new phase requiring significantly more funding. How can we decide, for example, whether to invest more in Quantum Optics or Genomics? Neither scientists, politicians, administrators or the general public have good answers to this dilemma. However, decisions will of course be made and the increase in funding for certain areas will in practice always mean restriction of funding in other areas, which dictates that some researchers will have no access to funding. To those denied funding opportunities the general law of research freedom ("Forschungsfreiheit") will be meaningless. This is inevitable and is a problem that can never be solved. What is worrying is that there is not a level playing field. The large research organisations (for example, CERN) have a huge budget and can afford to have very effective Public Relations departments reaching out to the general public, thereby generating enthusiasm for their work.

This helps generate more funding for the projects they wish to promote. In contrast, a small research field, composed by individual research groups distributed across several Universities, will not have such opportunities. In my own field of Biomedical Research, there is now a tendency to focus funding on the so-called 'big' diseases, such as diabetes, cancer and Alzheimer. Together they do account for a substantial part of the overall disease burden, but it is mostly forgotten that the combination of the very many so-called 'small' diseases also creates a very large overall disease burden. However, researchers and clinicians working to prevent and cure these 'small' diseases are increasingly not selected for panels making biomedical funding decisions. We therefore effectively have a law of concentrating research activity in certain areas, while neglecting many others. This is of course not only a question of restricting research freedom, but also a case of neglecting critical health issues.

Restrictions to freedom of research: administrative problems

The greatest and most important resource scientists and scholars possess is time, but it is a limited resource. There are only 24 hours per day, and time lost can never be recovered. Every extra hour of administration is an hour lost to science. Whereas I, in my period of greatest research freedom during my student years in Copenhagen, did not spend any time at all on administration – there were no forms to complete, no requirements for progress reports, no obligatory courses, no departmental meetings to attend, no grant applications, no time sheets to complete etc., etc. – the situation for academic staff in today's universities or research institutes is totally different. Grant applications, as already discussed, take up an enormous amount of time. Application forms have become increasingly detailed, in certain respects ridiculously so, requiring masses of information that no grant reviewer or panel member will ever need or even have time to look at. In many institutions, pre-applications must be evaluated internally before permission is given to submit a request to an external funding body, creating extra work not only for the applicant but also for other staff members.

There is also an increasing internal burden of reporting and accounting (for both time and money), and this has become a major issue. Every time an institution aims to reduce the administrative burden, an enormous number of meetings seem to be required to get agreement, so that the overall burden actually increases. In times of severe financial restrictions and threats of redundancies,

now a major problem in the US, the number of internal meetings inevitably increases dramatically, making a difficult situation even more difficult.

PhD supervision has become a nightmare of formal reporting and formal meetings. For that reason, I have, for now many years, refused to take on PhD students. When I had PhD students, earlier in my career, I spent time with them in the lab, discussed data with them daily, advising on new experimental protocols. Now supervisors write reports in their offices and attend formal meetings with students and co-supervisors. PhD students also have severe restrictions on their research time. They need to attend many obligatory courses before they are allowed to do anything. Some of them may be useful, but I have noticed that many students – supervised by close colleagues in my group – are unable to engage with a new technique, unless they have been 'shown' exactly what to do. The increasing 'course culture' has in many cases ruined the spirit, so essential for real research work, of being willing and indeed enthusiastic about trying something for the first time. Furthermore, it is now regarded as inappropriate to criticise students. Everyone has to be encouraged. It is no longer regarded as appropriate to suggest that working a bit longer, perhaps after normal 'office hours', may be a good idea. In many institutions, students are no longer allowed to work in their laboratory outside normal working hours in order for official supervision to be available. If such restrictions had been in place when I worked as an independent student in Copenhagen and frequently continued experiments until very late in the night, I would not have achieved much in that period.

What can we do to fight the external and internal threats to research freedom?

There is no doubt that we live in exceptionally difficult times and that 2025 will be seen historically as a significant turning point. For science, it would appear that the continued leadership of the US is now in question. Most likely, a period of significant decline has begun. The twin elements of steeply decreasing funding and steeply declining academic freedom will inevitably lead to an exodus of scientists who are looking for a stable future in which they can pursue their research relatively unhindered. Other countries will not be able to save US science, as indeed Germany's neighbours were unable to save German science in the 1930s when the Nazi regime decided to get rid of its most prominent (Jewish) scientists. US science can only be saved from the inside, and this would require a different regime to the present one.

Unfortunately, scientific freedom – although never complete or perfect – only exists in a minority of countries worldwide. The control freakery of all dictators is a major reason. Wars, mostly caused by power-greedy dictators, including the severe financial restrictions they bring, are major contributors to the lack of scientific freedom. It is easy to despair at this state-of-affairs, but this is precisely what must be avoided. Everyone can make a contribution, and it is crucially important not to be deterred because each small contribution can't by itself solve the problem. It would of course be great to be able to 'save science' in a failed country, but this can't be done. It is much better, for example, to save one refugee scientist by providing a place in one's laboratory than not to save anybody. Every scientist can also be an advocate for freedom. We are trained in analytic thinking and in presenting and defending arguments and, in my opinion, we have a duty also to do so outside our laboratories. There are certainly 'grey areas', which can be tricky. There have been, and will continue to be, many instances when important organisations and threatened individuals could be saved by judicious interactions with those in power. However, history also teaches us that it is not always possible to separate science and politics and, as the judgement of history has shown, a clear political stand may in some cases be required. That said, it is too easy and cost-free for those of us living in countries led by relatively benign governments to criticise colleagues who live and work in countries with much more difficult regimes and who therefore may need to make compromises in order to be able to function.

We should also not forget the many internal threats to scientific freedom. The increasing and time-robbing bureaucracy is a clear threat. Some parts are imposed on universities and research institutes by governments and, unfortunately, the leaders of our scientific institutions have generally not shown much courage by standing up to bullying governments. Equally, senior scientific staff (Heads of Colleges, Schools and Departments) tend to be too willing to accept whatever is demanded of them by the leaders of their institutions. This tendency has become more pronounced in recent years, because top scientists are generally no longer willing to take on senior administrative tasks, which leaves the door open for mediocrities to take on these roles.

The important demand for 'fraternité' (brotherhood), expressed in the slogan from the French Revolution and immortalised by Schiller's words used by Beethoven in the final movement of his 9th Symphony, should remind us all of our duty to help each other by fighting for scientific freedom. Brotherhood may mean giving up parts of our personal research time to spend time improving the overall political system as well as the specific elements controlling how research is regulated.

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Freedom and its Challenges in Times of the War for Freedom in Europe

DENYS SHATALOV

At least since the Renaissance, all of European history can be described as a process of expanding freedom. For European civilization, the latter has become synonymous with the very notion of progress. Freedom as a destination replaced Salvation, which was considered to be the goal of humanity in the Middle Ages. Today, one might argue that it is the degree of freedom and democracy that defines the borders of "Europe", understood not in strictly geographical terms, but rather as a mental space.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the western part of Europe began transforming into a space where borders became increasingly symbolic and where people have every opportunity to develop their self-expression. At the same time, for the nations east of the Schengen area and the EU, the western border has become the border of "Europe" itself, regardless of their actual location on the European continent (meanwhile this imagined "Europe" includes not only the EU member states but also the UK, Switzerland and Norway). It is telling that the process called "Eurointegration" requires the candidate countries to liberalize their laws and norms. To join the European community, nations must demonstrate their commitment to freedom.

The most visible gain of "Eurointegration", which offers a real opportunity for millions of Ukrainians to feel themselves "Europeans", was not any of the economic agreements signed, but the introduction of visa-free entry to the Schengen area in 2017. Although the border remained in place, it suddenly felt semi-transparent. I can refer to my own experience, when entering "Europe" no longer meant standing in long lines at visa centres or being scrutinised by border guards but simply showing your passport and receiving an entry stamp – often without a single question. That was when I truly began to feel like "also a European". Freedom of movement, the absence of visas, and reduced border controls make you feel a true co-owner of Europe.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic served as a reminder that borders have not disappeared. Even the EU's internal borders were closed in some areas. This situation also reminds us that, in emergency circumstances, individual freedom might be restricted to create collective protection. The situation also showed us once more that the very concept of "freedom", however it may be defined, does not equate to "arbitrariness". It should imply responsibility in its exercise and respect for other people's boundaries.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 became an even more shocking reminder that freedom does not exist as an unconditional good. It is something that still,

quite literally, has to be fought for. Even though, until recently, it seemed that such brutal encroachments on the freedom of a nation could not take place on the European continent in the 21st century.

The new war in Europe is a war for freedom in the fullest sense. The Russian aggressor wants to impose its own will, its own values and its own system on Ukrainians, to put it simply – to completely conquer them, while destroying the very Ukrainian identity. At the same time, this is Ukraine's war for its choice to be European. Russian aggression in Crimea and Donbas began in 2014 as a reaction to the overthrow of the pro-Russian regime by pro-European protesters. Putin cannot tolerate the sovereign choice of the Ukrainian nation.

This war is an issue for the whole of Europe. It is not just about the specific situation in the east of the continent, the millions of refugees, and the funding to support the Ukrainian government that the EU members provide. For European nations, an attack on Ukraine is an attack on freedom as a basic European value, and therefore on Europe itself. It is therefore not surprising that support for Ukraine is almost unanimous.

However, from an internal Ukrainian perspective, this war also highlights a different reality. During the struggle for freedom for the nation, individual freedom and rights for citizens were to be replaced by duty. The most noticeable implication of this is the ban on leaving the country for men of military age, imposed on 24 February 2022. Martial law also provides for restrictions on other freedoms, such as the dissemination of information or holding elections. For anyone liable for conscription, there is no option to not join the army or to legally evade military service. Thus, we have a somewhat paradoxical, though not unique, situation – the struggle for freedom for the nation requires (temporary) restrictions on individual freedom.

It may seem that there is a way out from this situation. Losing the fight for national freedom would mean losing the individual freedoms that people can enjoy in a democratic society. This is not an abstract example: one only needs to take a look at the human rights situation in Russia, the nation that started this aggressive war. At the same time, the mobilization of a nation in the fight for freedom also requires citizens to take responsibility for consciously accepting such restrictions. However, witnessing Ukrainian society from the inside, it is clear that not everyone shares this responsibility. In the case of a direct threat to individuals, the nation and its freedom may seem like abstract values to some, not worth risking their lives for. Fatigue from three years of full-scale hostilities has also had an impact. It has created a

fertile ground for populists and outright Putin's agents to disrupt conscription and to undermine trust in the Ukrainian government under the motte of supposedly "protecting citizens' rights". In doing so, they attempt to portray heading the war for freedom government as a dictatorship.

This domestic Ukrainian situation has parallels with the political situation in the EU. The current wave of rising right-wing populist parties is also a challenge for Europe as we know it. Instead of building a space based on common values, European nations are being encouraged to focus on their own imagined problems. In countries where such governments have already come to power, they have consistently sabotaged the common European position on Ukraine's opposition to Russian aggression and support for its struggle for freedom. Just as the Ukrainian case demonstrates the need for unity within the nation, the situation around the war in Ukraine demonstrates the need for transnational European unity to confront modern challenges and protect shared ideals.

The situation has become even more dramatic with the political crisis in the United States since January 2025, which once again demonstrates the threat of right-wing populism to modern liberal societies. It has also made clear that, from now on, Europe will have to assume global leadership in defending freedom and democracy.

We do not yet know when and how the ongoing war in Ukraine will end. However, we can already argue that it certainly will change the whole of modern Europe. I would like to believe that this will lead to a further softening and reconfiguration of Europe's internal borders, dismantling the rigid divide between "East" and "West". Instead, Europe should be strengthened in its unity to defend and develop itself as a shared space of freedom.

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Perspectives for the Young Network TransEurope

ANASTASIIA SIMAKHOVA

In 2024, the Young Scientists Council at the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (YSC) joined the process of founding and setting up the Young Network TransEurope. This is an important step towards consolidating the efforts of young scientists to promote democracy, freedom and prosperity in Europe.

The establishment of YNT in Gdansk in October 2024 presents a significant opportunity for young researchers across Europe. The following goals and activities for YNT in three key areas – democracy, freedom and prosperity – can be proposed:

1. Democracy. The goals for YNT should be to promote the active participation of younger people in democratic processes at local, national, and European levels; its work should strive to strengthen democratic values, transparency, and accountability among young Europeans.

   This can be implemented through:

– Youth democracy forums: for example, YSC organizes an annual young council forum with international panellists (https://ysc.in.ua/proiekty/). Such forums, where young researchers can discuss democratic challenges, share best practices, and propose policy recommendations to EU institutions can contribute productively to democracy promotion.

– Democracy education programmes: development of workshops and online courses on democratic principles, civic engagement, and the functioning of EU institutions are important, as our current work in Ukraine shows. There is much potential and demand for further formats.

– Digital democracy tools: creating platforms for online debates, petitions, and collaborative policymaking to engage tech-savvy youth and young adults. Scientific input is needed to make such tools impactful.

2. Freedom. YNT's goals should be to contribute to the defence and promotion of fundamental and academic freedoms in Europe. We urgently need more advocates for the protection of human rights and the rule of law across the continent. This might include activities such as:

– Freedom advocacy workshops: Training of young activists in advocacy, human rights law, and nonviolent resistance to defend freedoms in their communities.

– Media literacy campaigns: It is necessary to create a situation where research has more impact by transferring expertise on how to identify disinformation and propaganda and to create more awareness about sound scientific methods (and what distinguishes them from bad approaches), so that critical thinking is promoted and people are more informed about where to turn for information.

– Rapid response networks: Networks like YNT can join efforts by Academies of Sciences and Humanities all over Europe to create task forces that can provide a rapid response in critical situations or when repression or censorship are happening.

– Monitoring and reporting: YNT could consider working on a platform to report violations of freedoms and human rights, with a focus on issues related to the concerns of younger researchers and young people in general.

3. Prosperity. Many goals need to be pursued when thinking about prosperity across national borders in Europe. There are gaps to bridge between the financial support of younger researchers in Western and Eastern Europe, as well as between education and the labour market. Ideals such as innovation, entrepreneurship, and green growth must be promoted further among young Europeans.

In this respect, we believe it is important to introduce non-resident scholarships in Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, etc. to ensure that scientists stay in their countries to conduct research.

For Ukraine, as a result of the war and the destruction of its scientific infrastructure, it is important to transfer scientific equipment from European countries and provide access to remote work to enhance the possibilities for research in times of war and in anticipation of post-war reconstruction.

YNT could facilitate exchange among young researchers across borders. In this way it could help to build solidarity and understanding among young people from different European countries. Using up-to-date digital tools for such goals will be vital.

By focusing on these goals and activities, YNT can become a powerful force for democracy, freedom, and prosperity, ensuring that young scientists play a central role in shaping the future of Europe.

Young researchers are the driving force behind scientific progress, bringing new ideas, fresh perspectives and innovative approaches to address global challenges, including in Europe. Young scientists' initiatives contribute to the creation of a competitive, innovative Europe, capable of leading the global knowledge economy. The involvement of young scientists in international projects strengthens European scientific integration and creates networks of cooperation across borders. Young people's initiatives contribute to the formation of an inclusive and diverse scientific environment, which is the foundation of Europe's democratic and sustainable development.

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Central European Literature, Olga Tokarczuk, and the Quest for "European Values"

ALEXANDER WÖLL

The literatures of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, the Baltic countries, and all other cultures between Germany and Russia are considered as 'small literatures'. The alternative term 'minor literature' leads us to the book published in French in 1975 by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari entitled *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure*.[1] Deleuze and Guattari worked with the French translation of Kafka by Marthe Robert from 1954, which was based on the diaries published by Max Brod in 1951. The fact that Robert had translated Kafka's term 'small literatures' into French as 'littérature mineure' contributed to a shift in meaning, as a more accurate translation would have been 'petite littérature'. The term 'mineure' goes back to the Latin comparative 'minor', which means 'inferior' as well as 'second-rate'.[2] The text has been quoted again and again for decades, whereby a central problem is usually overlooked: The two authors theorise a radically re-evaluated function of the writer in terms of a marginal subjectivity, an 'immigrant' whose task it is to create an innovative 'small language' on the margins of the 'big language' of mainstream society while

projecting new visions of different collectives within the traditional nation state that question and change its identitarian definitions of gender, of class and of ethnic, cultural and linguistic 'standards'. However, questions of sexuality and queerness in Kafka's texts and in his real life are significantly left out.[3]

The concept is based on the 'great literatures', which are to be innovatively renewed through such a revolutionary outsider position. The French term 'littérature mineure' already signals that we are not dealing here with 'minor literature' and its formation of a public sphere in the true sense, but with the literature of a minority written in the language of the dominant major literature. Kafka himself, to whom the researchers re-

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31 Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari (1975), *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.

2 Tuckerová, Veronika (2017), The Archeology of Minor Literature. Towards the Concept of the Ultraminor. In: *Journal of World Literature*, 4 / 2, pp. 433–453.

3 "Some critics have argued that these awkward and difficult heterosexual relationships as well as some of Kafka's descriptions of boys and young men's bodies in his writings are an indication that he may have been gay or bisexual (see Mecke, Corngold, Friedländer). […] Literary critics have pointed to homosexual, homoerotic, and masochistic desires on the part of the author and his characters." Britta Kallin (2020), From the Body in Pain to the Body Transformed. In: *Journal of Austrian Studies*, 53 / 4, pp. 51–74, here p. 56f. Compare Stanley Corngold: Kafka & Sex (2007), In: *Daedalus*, 136 /, On Sex, pp. 79–87. Or Friedländer, Saul (2013), *Franz Kafka: The Poet of Shame and Guilt*. Yale UP. Or Mecke, Günter (1982), *Franz Kafkas offenbares Geheimnis: Eine Psychopathographie*. Wilhelm Fink.

fer, initially speaks of the 'literature of a small nation' in his diary entry of 25 December 1911. He links the 'small literatures' primarily with the concept of 'liveliness'.[4] In her chapter on the 'small literatures', Pascale Casanova even claims, with a reference to Kafka that runs completely counter to the meaning of his diary entries, that individual literary texts from the periphery only gained their meaning from a direct reference to the 'world literary space'.[5] Galin Tihanov criticises this approach, arguing that the history of the 'small literatures' in the sense of the small and poor relatives of the great European literatures only began with the end of the exotic phase of folklore and the emergence of synchronous literary movements in a larger public sphere of shared conventions and styles.[6]

For Kafka, the Yiddish writers, among whom he did not count himself, did not develop an independent 'German' literature on a par with the 'great German literature'. [7] Stanley Corngold has also clearly demonstrated that Kafka does not write a 'Prague dialect' of German, as Deleuze and Guattari claim.[8] For him, the literature of a small nation serves precisely to defend its own otherness and is not revolutionary.[9] In contrast, in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's theory, the conscious decision to opt for a large language goes hand in hand with 'deterritorialisation'. In this respect, this theoretical approach is particularly suitable for analysing migrant literature, where the learning of the foreign language often takes place under extreme violence, and the conquest of the major language is described as a bitter struggle that never ends, making exile feel like a 'desert'. The focus is not on the independent development of these 'small literatures' with their different language and traditions, let alone their decoupling from the larger one. Following the arguments of Britta Kallin, we can include Kafka's queer positions in this: "The pain and the injury of the flesh represent the deeper psychological wound, a wound that is possibly shame, that Kafka's lifestyle and

way of writing during the author's time would create. Saul Friedländer has famously called Kafka the 'poet of shame and guilt'. [… We can draw] parallels between twenty-first-century minorities and the 'insectile situation' in Kafka's short work that women, transgender people, disabled persons as well as ethnic and religious minorities still experience."[10]

Instead, the theoretical approach has evolved to focus on narrative representations of deterritorialised subjects as transnational nomads inhabiting plural borderlands[11] and transnational empires.[12] At the margins of the general social norm, borderlands and empires are understood not as geopolitical spaces but as conceptual atopic sites of social experimentation. The 'small literatures' thus express the desire of left-liberal Western intellectuals to overcome all borders, whether imaginary or geopolitical. The feeling of not being at home in the state-centred, nationalistic world of late capitalism creates a community and public sphere of bastardised marginal nomads, immigrants, and Roma. This utopian new community is to be an all-encompassing, open collective of homeless strangers, to be brought into being thanks to the hybrid text and the bastardised imagination of its authorial creators. The focus thus emerges from 'great literature' with its claim to universal values and asks how postmodern minoritarian literatures can position themselves in relation to capitalist transnationalism in the era of the borderless, uberised 'gig economy'.[13]

Olga Tokarczuk, one of the main writers of these so-called underrepresented Central European literatures, recently published her book *Księgi Jakubowe* (Books of Jacob) that traces the demise of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and permanently shatters the image of Poland's supposed "Golden Age". She shows how, due to mutual intrigues and selfish power games, this great European empire completely disappeared from the map during the three partitions of Poland. The historical figure of the Messiah pretender Jacob Joseph Frank (1726–1791), who is the focus of this book, was viewed very ambivalently by contemporaries as well as in his historical assessment.[14] Gershom Scholem, who researched the foundations of Jewish mysticism and especially

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4 Edmunds, Lowell (2010), Kafka on Minor Literature. In: *German Studies Review*, 33 / 2, pp. 357 – 374, here: p. 352 and 368.

5 Casanova, Pascale (1999), *La République mondiale des lettres*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

6 Tihanov, Galin (2014), Do 'Minor Literatures' still exist? The Fortunes of a Concept in the Changing Frameworks of Literary History. In: Vladimir Biti (ed.): *Reexamining the National-Philological Legacy. Quest for a New Paradigm?* Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, pp. 169–190; here: p. 173.

7 Edmunds, Lowell (2010), Kafka on Minor Literature. In: *German Studies Review*, 33 / 2, pp. 357 – 374; here: p. 367.

8 Corngold, Stanley (1994), Kafka and the Dialect of Minor Literature. In: *College Literature*, 21 / 1, pp. 89 – 101.

9 Tuckerová, Veronika (2017), The Archeology of Minor Literature. Towards the Concept of the Ultraminor. In: *Journal of World Literature*, 4 / 2, pp. 433 – 453.

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10 Britta Kallin (2020), From the Body in Pain to the Body Transformed. In: *Journal of Austrian Studies*, 53 / 4, pp. 51 – 74; here p. 66f.

11 Anzaldúa, Gloria (1987), *Borderlands / La Frontera. The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

12 Acker, Kathy (1998), *Empire of the Senseless*. New York: Grove Press.

13 Hardt, Michael und Antonio Negri (2000), *Empire*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

14 See Paweł Maciejko (2015), *Mixed Multitude. Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755 – 1816*. Philadelphia, p. 20.

Sabbatianism, to which Frank is usually attributed, simply called Frank a "power-hungry messiah" whose only driving force was the "will to rule".[15] It is primarily this quest for power and the means he chose to maintain it, that make Jacob Frank a scandal in Jewish religious history – or a cosmopolitan charlatan, as Maciejko argues in his recent discussion of Frank.[16] Frank is portrayed as both a cosmopolitan and a charlatan who viewed the Polish-Lithuanian aristocratic union as a promised land and sought to gain power and influence there through

his sham baptism.[17] His life is also a struggle for rights for himself and his followers. What he failed to achieve in Poland, he continued on a smaller scale in Moravia and in Offenbach, Germany, where he lived in a castle as a Polish baron with his "company". Using this figure, Tokarczuk develops a critique of the historical image of 18th-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as an Arcadia in which peaceful and conflict-free coexistence between different nations and religions was possible, while simultaneously creating a vision of a Central European Poland in which

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15 Gershom Scholem (1980), *Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen*. Frankfurt am Main, p. 369.

16 Lenowitz also argues that the figure of the charlatan best characterises Frank. See Lenowitz, Harris. The Charlatan at the Gottes Haus in Offenbach (2001), In: *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture. Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World*, edited by R. H. Popkin and M. D. Goldish, Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 190–202.

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17 Frank was baptised on September 17, 1756 (along with approximately 600 followers). Probably more than 3,000 people converted to Christianity in the five years following his baptism. Some of them were immediately ennobled under a 1588 Lithuanian law permitting the ennoblement of baptised persons and their descendants. Frank then moved to Warsaw, was baptised a second time in a royal ceremony, and then moved in aristocratic circles. However, the sham nature of the baptism quickly came to light, and the following year, Frank was convicted of a sham baptism and, after interrogation by the Inquisition, was exiled for life to the monastery on Jasna Góra in Częstochau, thus separating him from the other converts. Frank was imprisoned in Częstochowa for thirteen years. After the first partition of Poland in 1772, Częstochau fell to the Russian occupying forces, who had little interest in him and released him on January 21, 1773. See Antony Polonsky (2010), *The Jews in Poland and Russia*. Volume 1, 1350 to 1881, Oxford, p. 14.

encounters with strangers were and are a cosmopolitan option.[18]

The novel's character, Jacob Frank, renounces his Yiddish name, Jankel Lejbowicz, on his wedding day. However, the historical figure was actually given the nickname "Frank" or "Frenk" earlier, during a stay in Turkey.[19] By linking this name change with the wedding ritual, Tokarczuk marks the wedding as a moment in Jacob's identity creation as a stranger and as a redeemer – for it was during the wedding and the revelation of the "secrets of faith" that Jacob supposedly questioned the divinity of Sabbatai and/or Berukhyah. "Frank" is a Turkish equivalent of the Arabic "ifrandj" or "firandj", which established a reference to the Franks. In the 16th century, this word became a common term in many oriental languages for everything associated with Europeans: "In Jacob Frank's milieu, his nickname betrayed his foreign European origins, identifying him as a Polish Ashkenazic Jew, a native Yiddish speaker who found himself among the Ladino-speaking Turkish Sephardim."[20]

Tokarczuk presents being a stranger as the core of Jacob's teaching or the core of the identity that he embodies and that he wants to pass on to his followers: "This state must be preserved with all due care, for a great power flows from it."[21] This great power of the stranger is downright mystified and, alongside the almost aphoristic sentence "To be a stranger means to be free", finds its climax in the contemplative reflection of the narrator Nachman: "Whoever is a stranger gains a new point of view, he becomes, whether he wants to or not, a true sage. Who has persuaded us that it is good and excellent to always and constantly belong? Only

the stranger understands the world."[22] Strangeness is thus linked to freedom and a deep understanding of the world. The link between being a stranger and having a wise understanding of the world reveals a deeply cosmopolitan understanding of the stranger in the *Księgi Jakubowe*, if cosmopolitanism is understood as a specific mode of dealing with the otherness of others that neither dissolves it into universalist principles nor absolutises and essentialises its particular characteristics.[23]

In her *Księgi Jakubowe*, Tokarczuk therefore attempts to give the 'foreigner' a voice by drawing a multi-perspective picture of the time around Jakob Frank and, through the various narrative perspectives, above all by presenting the perspective of the self-proclaimed 'foreigners'. In this respect, it is precisely the multi-pluralism of this Central European literature that makes it clear that the core of European values is precisely that they are dynamically in flux and traditionally always redefine themselves hybrid, which in my view defines what it means to be 'European'. I don't need to reclaim that because it has always been like this – and hopefully always will be like this.

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18 The belief in Sabbatai Zevi as the Messiah spread from the Ottoman Empire throughout Europe, where there were so-called crypto-Sabbatians everywhere who did not publicly profess their belief in the Messiah Sabbatai and outwardly continued to live as Orthodox Jews, but secretly practiced the forbidden rituals of Sabbatai. However, Sabbatianism found a particularly strong resonance in Poland-Lithuania, and especially in Podolia in the southeast of the country, which was also under Ottoman rule from 1672 to 1699. "Podolia was the only place in the world where – almost a hundred years after Sabbatai Tsevi's conversion to Islam – many Jews openly adhered to Sabbatianism." Maciejko, *Mixed Multitude*, p. 10.

19 See Maciejko: *Mixed Multitude*, p. 12.

20 See Maciejko: *Mixed Multitude*, p. 13.

21 "Trzeba tego stanu uważnie pilnować, bo daje ogromną moc." Olga Tokarczuk (2014), *Księgi Jakubowe. Wielka podróż przez siedem granic, pięć języków i trzy duże religie, nie licząc tych małych. Opowiadana przez zmarłych, a przez autorkę dopełniona metodą koniektury, z wielu rozmaitych ksiąg zaczerpnięta, a także wspomożona imaginacją, która to jest największym naturalnym darem człowieka*. Kraków, p. 732. The page numbers in the Księgi Jakubowe are in descending order, beginning with the highest number and ending with page number zero.

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22 "Człowiek, który jest obcy, zyskuje nowy punkt widzenia, staje się, chcąc nie chcąc, swoistym mędrcem. Kto nam wszystkim wmówił, że być swoim jest tak dobrze i tak wspaniale? Tylko obcy naprawdę rozumie, czym jest świat." Tokarczuk, *Księgi Jakubowe*, p. 375.

23 Benedikt Köhler (2006), *Soziologie des Neuen Kosmopolitismus*. Wiesbaden, p. 38. This is how Benedikt Köhler defines the "New Cosmopolitanism," which has developed since the 1990s in contrast to "classical cosmopolitanism". This new form of cosmopolitanism emerged primarily against the backdrop of postcolonial critiques as well as critiques of the universalist principles of cosmopolitanism since the enlightenment.

Freedom in Times of War: From Non-Interference to Non-Dependence

OLEKSANDR ZABIRKO

1.

The most common perception of freedom, whether for individuals or groups, is usually negative: freedom is seen as requiring the removal or restriction of whatever is deemed "unfree." This conception of freedom hinges on the absence of external interference as a necessary precondition. As a result, freedom is frequently characterised not by any intrinsic content but by what obstructs it.

The short twentieth century provided numerous examples of how freedom was reified negatively, encompassing various domains like the nation-state, social groups, political ideologies, and even gender. In each case, freedom is viewed as something that exists outside the status quo, making it appear fundamentally alien to regular life and social order.

Nevertheless, following John Stuart Mill's seminal treatise *On Liberty* (1859), European liberalism has consistently emphasised non-interference as the core principle of freedom. As Isaiah Berlin famously argued, individuals are free only to the extent that they can exercise their abilities without interference. This perspective also implies that freedom expands alongside one's capabilities – what one can afford to do or possess – leading to what might be called "freedom through prosperity".

Initially, this concept was not tied to wealth or consumption but rather to the capacity for self-realization, where freedom meant acting in accordance with the essence of one's nature. Although defining "human nature" is both complex and ambitious, liberalism offered a compelling answer: it equated self-realization with political engagement. In her programmatic essay *What Is Freedom?* (1958), Hannah Arendt framed freedom not merely as a moral virtue but as an active practice: for her, freedom was fundamentally a form of political engagement.

As influential as this view is, it largely overlooks one scenario, when the drive for self-realization and self-expression reduces citizens to mere consumers of liberties, rather than fostering conscious and active participation in political life. As Zygmunt Bauman observed, living amidst seemingly infinite choices cultivates the taste of "freedom to become anybody", yet, instead of revealing the multifaceted essence of human nature, this understanding of freedom often leads to what he terms consumer misery – a state of constant anxiety epitomised by the haunting question: "Have I used my means to the best advantage?"

2.

The individualistic, liberal view of freedom has not only profoundly influenced political thought but has also become a kind of orthodoxy: within the liberal tradition, the order that limits individual freedom is deemed unsustainable and should be either reformed or dismantled.

However, this perspective reveals its darker side in contemporary contexts, where the negative conception of freedom poses a threat to collective decision-making and even to the lawful powers of the state. The more states call on their citizens to act in the name of the common good, the more they encounter protests and violence justified in the name of freedom as non-interference. This resistance, while destructive, is entirely logical: if liberty is defined by the absence of constraints, then the imposition of law is easily framed as coercive interference, rendering it the enemy of freedom.

Consider, for instance, the radical example of spreading conspiracy theories or fake news. While this may be seen as an exercise of free speech and self-expression – cornerstones of modern societies – it is subject to limitations

imposed by government institutions, online moderators, and simple fact-checkers. Yet in a world where self-expression and self-actualization are celebrated as the ultimate manifestations of freedom, an original opinion, however unsubstantiated, can become as valuable – or even more so – than a verifiable fact.

Today, populist and nationalist regimes exploit inherent tension between the liberal notion of freedom and societal order by promising to reduce interferences and limitations imposed by governmental agencies, political elites, or civic activists. Unsurprisingly, many of these political groups and movements incorporate the word "freedom" into their names: the Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei*, the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid*, or the Ukrainian VO Svoboda. These movements feed on the alarming combination of societal fears and disillusionments, coupled with a growing desire to rebel against "the system". Yet their proclaimed fight for freedom often leads to the establishment of restrictive, undemocratic structures, thereby undermining the liberal order from within.

Meanwhile, on the opposite end of the political spectrum, ritualised reverence for freedom risks reducing the concept to a synonym for minimalist laissez-faire governance, which equates politics with bureaucratic administration – an attitude exemplified by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel in her recently published biography, titled *Freiheit (Freedom)*.

3.

The evident fallacies and dangers of the negative concept of freedom have prompted the search for its positive counterpart, making "positive freedom" something of a Holy Grail in Western political thought. While the quest is far from complete, several significant arguments merit attention.

Cambridge historian Quentin Skinner, for example, turns to a legal understanding of freedom rooted in Roman law, where freedom is contrasted not with interference but with slavery. In a number of publications, most notably *Liberty Before Liberalism* (1998), Skinner compellingly demonstrates that, in Western political theory prior to the 19th century, freedom was commonly understood as the absence not of interference but of relationships of domination and subjugation between individuals. In this framework, freedom is the antonym of slavery. A slave is unfree, not because of specific acts of interference, but because of the very existence of a master. To be free, then, is not simply a condition of one's actions but a status – one in which a person is their own master, subject

to no one, and thus able to act in accordance with their autonomous will.

Irish political philosopher Philip Pettit has termed this view, which defines freedom as the absence of domination, the "republican" theory of liberty. Skinner, by contrast, often uses the term "neo-Roman," highlighting its roots in Roman legal traditions. Despite these terminological differences, both thinkers converge on the notion of freedom as the absence of arbitrary power. In the modern context, this understanding is intrinsically tied to electoral rights and the secret ballot, making it apt to describe as "freedom through democracy": without democratic mechanisms, people may not be slaves in the technical sense, but they are not truly free either, as they remain vulnerable to external pressures that shape their decisions.

The concept of freedom as non-dependence is by no means a purely Western European invention. It has long been prominent in Eastern Europe, notably in Poland, where the maxim *Nic o nas bez nas* ("Nothing about us without us") has served as a profound political principle for centuries.

The contributions of Central and Eastern European thought are prominently featured in Timothy Snyder's recent book *On Freedom* (2024), which explores the pursuit of a positive, self-determined, and thus free life. Snyder's focus on figures such as Edith Stein, Václav Havel, and Leszek Kołakowski highlights how these thinkers navigated the interplay between autonomy and freedom in their political and philosophical writings.

Snyder outlines five steps toward freedom: sovereignty of the body, unpredictability, mobility, and factuality. However, his most politically compelling argument emerges in the final chapter, where he focuses on solidarity. Snyder frames solidarity as an essential precondition for freedom, contrasting it with the hubris of individual self-realization. For Snyder, freedom cannot exist without solidarity; freedom for one is inherently tied to freedom for all.

Such declarations, while compelling and persuasive, are indeed challenging to implement in practice. Yet, both Skinner's and Snyder's works reveal that the true contestation often lies beneath the surface of what is formally discussed in the "public square" – a clash of fundamentally different conceptions of freedom. This conflict raises existential questions about the meaning of democratic politics in an age characterised by widespread technological access and pervasive existential anxiety in a stressed-out Europe. While individual liberty is widely regarded as one of the most fundamental political val-

ues, many of today's most pressing problems demand collective political action. We must ask ourselves whether our strong emphasis on individual freedom might hinder efforts to address urgent issues such as the looming climate catastrophe or the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Snyder's book, in particular, draws extensively on the Ukrainian struggle for freedom, underscoring the historical and long-term significance of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. While "learning from Ukraine" has become a commonplace, sometimes bordering on lip service, the country's recent history indeed offers valuable insights into the evolution of competing notions of freedom.

Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine has exemplified the tension between prosperity and democracy as sources of freedom. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, mass protests by miners from the Donbas region demanding better working and living conditions represented a vision of freedom through prosperity without democracy. These protests ultimately concluded with the miners submitting to local oligarchs, who would dominate the country's political landscape for decades. This alienation of Donbas from the rest of Ukraine deepened during the 2014 Euromaidan movement, where the democratic principle of responsibility for the *res publica* – the common good – became the driving force behind the fight for freedom. Russia's military aggression in Donbas and Crimea later that year further entrenched this division.

Today, Ukraine also illustrates how dependence on arbitrary power can arise even within democratic societies. In wartime, governments often invoke emergency powers that bypass normal democratic processes, reducing accountability and heightening the risk of arbitrary rule. While from a "neo-Roman" or "republican" perspective, there is no inherent conflict between the imposition of martial law and the preservation of liberty, this view, however, hinges on the principle that laws must reflect the collective will of the people. If laws are not expressions of this collective will, citizens remain subject to the will of others and are thus deprived of their liberty. Ensuring that liberty is upheld while enabling collective decision-making requires equal representation in enacting and enforcing laws. But can this ideal of civic solidarity be achieved under the extreme conditions of the genocidal war Ukraine is enduring?

Even more striking is the growing alienation between Ukraine and the rest of Europe and the shrinking solidarity with Ukraine in the international arena. While Ukraine continues to uphold the democratic notion of freedom as "non-dependence on arbitrary power",

many European societies, driven by the liberal ideal of "freedom through prosperity and non-interference", appear increasingly willing to make political and economic concessions to the Kremlin. This effectively elevates Putin's Russia to the role of Europe's master – not through direct ownership but by imposing its will, instilling fear, and undermining security through threats.

This dynamic is leading to Europe's dangerous willingness to avoid conflict with Russia at any cost – ultimately, at the cost of freedom itself.

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II

DEMOCRACY

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Hjärna. Fig. 2. Undre sidan av hjärnan med hjärnnerverna.
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For All People
Without Exception

NATALYA BEKHTA

In one of her essays on utopia, Ursula Le Guin ponders the following imaginary interaction, based on a classic dilemma: "I am offered the Grand Inquisitor's choice. Will you choose freedom without happiness, or happiness without freedom? The only answer one can make, I think, is: No."[1] Le Guin's ingenious solution to the riddle, breaking the communicative expectations and rules of syntax, provides a concise and effective example of a utopian operation. The choice either to be free or to be happy is a false choice. To recognize this is to break free from the tyranny of a particular structure – of syntax, of language, of politics – and to expose this structure as that which should be challenged in the first place.

Democracy, in strictly electoral terms, is often faced with such false choices. Philosopher Jacques Rancière has phrased the dilemma at the heart of democracy very clearly: "Democracy is not a form of government. Any state form relies on the rule of oligarchy. Our governments are actually oligarchic. Power is seized by a small minority, which reproduces itself. This system reduces democratic action to nothing more than the electoral process."[2] By the time electoral 'campaigns' for popular support are over and people get to cast their votes in a free and democratic fashion, they usually face a non-choice between Candidate A and Candidate B but not between fundamentally different approaches to governing a state.

To complicate matters further, the masses themselves may be accused of not being fit to exercise their democratic rights, even in a situation with limited choices – or so the creeping suspicion that has arisen in recent years. In 2020, writing about the future of Ukraine after the start of the 2014 Russian-Ukrainian war, Serhiy Zhadan laments how, during elections, a country's future hinges on emotional and shortsighted – rather than rational and long-term – choices. Zhadan writes: "Precisely the question of choice and of the inevitable responsibility for one's choice has been a particularly urgent and painful one in our country lately. Sometimes one has the impression that, in electing the future for our country, we act not so much out of care for someone but out of vengeance" ("Саме питання вибору та обов'язкової відповідальності за нього останнім часом у нашій країні чомусь є особливо гострим та болючим. Іноді складається враження, що, обираючи майбутнє для своєї країни, ми не так про когось дбаємо, як комусь мстимося").[3] The framework of Candidate A versus Candidate B and 'revenge voting' against the previously victorious group seem to plague democratic societies today – not just in Ukraine.

Zhadan was writing in the aftermath of the 2019 elections, which might even be interpreted as an exception to the framework outlined above. These elections brought to power Volodymyr Zelenskyi, an outsider in institutional politics and not quite the familiar ruling-class candidate. Before becoming president, Zelenskyi was a well-known comedian and actor. His hugely popular TV series "Слуга народу" / "Servant of the People" (2015–2019) catered to a particular fantasy of an

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1   Le Guin, Ursula (2016), "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be," in Thomas More, *Utopia. Introduction by China Miéville, essays by Ursula K. Le Guin*, London, New York: Verso, p. 193.

2   Rancière, Jacques, "Демократія – ім'я 'аномальної' влади тих, хто не має повноважень її здійснювати [Democracy is the name of 'anomalous' government of those, who do not have the authority to govern]." An interview with Andriy Riepa, 22 May 2018. Hromadske.ua.

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3   Zhadan, Serhiy (2020), "Що буде потім? [What will come after?]." In Kebuladze, Vakhtang, ed. *Майбутнє, Якого Ми Прагнемо [The Future We Want]*, Kyiv: Tempora, pp. 65–82, here p. 78.

independent Ukraine: that a truly democratic leader, elected by the popular vote, could fulfil the collective desire for a prosperous and peaceful future. In the TV series, Zelenskyi plays a schoolteacher: the quintessential representative of 'ordinary' people, overworked, underpaid and under-appreciated, who is elected president. This comes as a shock both to the nation and the ruling elites (as well as to the new president himself). This unexpected victory comes across as hilarious precisely because it draws on – and thus reveals – the general understanding that all those who participate in the 'democratic' elections do so with the full knowledge that the very line-up of candidates is shaped by those with money and power. In this limited sense, "Servant of the People" illuminated the contradictions inherent in the idea of democracy – contradictions that resurfaced during the non-fictional presidential elections of 2019.

When Zelenskyi actually became Ukraine's president, the public opinion was extremely divided – many didn't go to vote at all, many were left bitter about the stupidity of their fellow citizens, who they deemed to have fallen prey to straightforward populism (Zelenskyi's campaign, for example, promised an income per household higher than the European average and a swift end to the 2014 Russian-Ukrainian war without, however, providing any details as to how these goals would be achieved). As heated social media discussions and countless essays made visible, many suddenly started questioning whether democracy was such a great organizing principle for politics. What if the majority of demos are fools? What if, as seems to be happening repeatedly across Europe, the majority of the population can be successfully manipulated?

Six years on, the European debates about democracy and its abuses have only become more heated. Consider one final anecdotal example: In March 2025, the top court in Romania banned Călin Georgescu from running for president. A representative of Romania's far-right and a pro-Russian candidate, Georgescu won the first-round vote through an apparent manipulation of the digital media on a massive scale (and not without help from the interested parties abroad, it would seem). The vote was annulled and Georgescu was put under criminal investigation for false claims about his campaign financing, the fraudulent use of digital technologies and the promotion of fascism, amongst other charges. The court's decision prompted a swift response from Moscow, calling the Georgescu ban a violation of all 'democratic norms'. Similar comments on Romanian elections also came from the US and other right-wing voices across Europe. Members of Donald Trump's team, for example, variously decried what they called the 'cancellation of democracy' in Romania.

Indeed, if elections in accordance with the democratic norms should allow for free and equal expression of the will of the people, then who is to pass judgment on and legislate the content of that will? At the same time, what do calls for 'democratic norms' mean coming from a country, where one man has held the presidential post for well over two decades, bending and re-writing the constitution along the way? What does 'cancellation of democracy' mean in a context where popular opinion is influenced and manipulated by political technologists on an unprecedented scale? What is free expression in a context where freedom of speech has been hijacked by anti-democratic groups to advocate for public expression and promotion of any (political) view, however discriminatory? Democracy, being an empty signifier, does not fare well in such stormy waters.

So, what is democracy? Is it something worth reclaiming from illiberal tendencies, instead of ditching altogether in favour of, say, reformed monarchy? Apparently, yes, it is still worth fighting for – as the major popular uprisings in Ukraine, in 2004 and 2013, or in Russia in 2011 – 2012, or in Belarus in 2020, or in Georgia in 2003 and 2024, or the developments in Romania in 2025 would testify to. For all its contradictions, democracy continues to carry a utopian promise of a better society, and this ideal lives on even through its populist misappropriations.

Philosophers Shaj Mohan and Divya Dwivedi formulate the meaning of democracy as follows: It is "founded on the […] promise to deliver an egalitarian and just society where all are equal participants in the making of decisions."[4] In the context of our cause, broadly framed as reclaiming Europe, equality plays a central role. The manifesto of the Young Network TransEurope says:

Reclaiming Europe requires putting the regions that have for too long been seen as its periphery back at the centre of attention and allowing their own voices to be heard. Such a reclamation must be transnational in spirit: it crosses borders, languages, cultures, histories, identities, and much more. This does not imply any form of homogenisation – we can only really see our many similarities when we adequately appreciate the rich regional diversity of Europe.

All people, regions, cultures, all histories without exception. Except for those, of course, that threaten to destroy the very idea of equality in diversity. Please don't misunderstand me. My goal is not to relativize every single notion mentioned in this essay but to try and make their meanings visible and as precise as possible. And since meanings are usually differential, democracy and equality brought together in a productive opposition, rather than in the structure of a false choice, help delineate the semantic and political scope for each other.

To say that, in a democracy, everyone without exception is *equally* capable of participating in the decisions about a society means, at its most basic, that everyone is as well-equipped as possible to make such decisions. That everyone is informed – and informed well – and that everyone has an understanding of what repercussions various political agendas actually have, what consequences one's political actions or inactions may have. Or, more generally, that everyone is in an equal position to figure out what's at stake when making decisions for a society, and as a member of a society.

The ways to achieve such equality are obvious. To maintain itself, a democratic society has to ensure that:

– everyone has equal access to education;

– that educational institutions serve the purpose of knowledge and democratic goals – rather than, for example, metrics and rankings;

– that such educational institutions are in a position to properly engage in an elaboration of knowledge, research and teaching – rather than become the first ones to suffer cuts when austerity hits;

– that media, and, increasingly, digital media, function as vehicles of free expression and circulation of knowledge – rather than producers of content within unsustainable profit models;

– that the legislative system is independent from, say, business interests, – a reality, which the climate agenda in the EU parliament, for example, makes painfully clear;

– that elections are democratically organised, and the electoral campaigns are transparent.

And so on – the list is obvious.

What is not obvious is how these basic things – such as access to and quality of education – can be reclaimed today from what seems like their inevitable drift towards disintegration. What's also not obvious is how to reclaim Europe in *fully* democratic terms, predicated on such an idea of equality and justice – for all people without exception. Classical utopias, as is well-known, were isolated on islands, on other planets or set in other times, revealing the fact that desirable forms of living needed isolation from the rest of the world to survive. Europe, obviously, cannot and should not be isolated. Which implies one final question: can we feasibly imagine a democratic Europe in today's world?

I hope the answer will be positive. Reclaiming Europe, in a democratic world, would require a complex system of (re)adjustments – beyond the obvious list above – but, first of all, it would require a certain consensus across our differences. And for this a continuous, collective and informed *negotiation* of substance – such as the foundations of democratic societies or the notions of equality and freedom – is paramount.

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4   Mohan, Shaj and Divya Dwivedi (2024), *Indian Philosophy, Indian Revolution: On Caste and Politics.* Hurst Publishing, p.108.

Reclaiming Europe: Let's be Proud but Realistic

JEAN-CLAUDE BURGELMAN

The European Union (EU) is a unique and evolving political and economic entity that has shaped Europe's trajectory for almost 70 years. The EU is an expression of the political will of – now – 27 countries to bundle what they all agree to bundle. The EU is "managed" by the European Commission, by several thousands of technocrats mainly based in Brussels.

I will start by reflection on the ideals that underpin this union and what to do with a vital conclusion from the organisers of "Reclaiming Europe": reclaiming Europe's ideals is not just about resisting authoritarianism and illiberalism; it's about proactively building a Europe that lives up to its democratic principles, embraces its diverse regions, and adapts to the changing global landscape."

This statement underscores a critical point: while defending the EU and its institutions is important, so is actively nurturing a Europe that can stand the test of time. In this reflection, I will explore the benefits of the EU, examine its challenges, and propose steps to safeguard its future in an – as always – complex global order. As always indeed, because, when the EU was created in the 50s and 60s of the last century, the then global order was at least as complex for those who had just lived through the horrors of two world wars, the widespread adoration of authoritarianism (communist and fascist), a universal economic depression and the introduction of a complete new way of doing things (the industrial revolution – based on revolutionary technology like steam engines, combustion motors and electricity…).

The European Union is the most evident demonstration of Europe's collective will, identity and ambition. When we talk about the EU, it is important to stress what works, and also ask the critical question: *What would Europe be like if the EU did not exist?*

Economically, the EU has brought about unprecedented prosperity. With a combined market of over 400 million people, the EU has created a global economic powerhouse. It is worth reflecting on what the global economy would be like without the EU's market strength – what would European nations have done without the clout they collectively wield today? The EU has facilitated free trade, reduced barriers, and promoted innovation across the continent, transforming Europe into one of the world's largest and most competitive economic regions and welfare "states".

Security has also been a significant achievement of the EU. Over the past seven decades, the EU has played a crucial role in ensuring peace and stability in Europe. The union's economic and political integration has helped prevent conflicts between member states; it was the raison d'être to create the EU.

In the face of Russia's aggressive actions, the EU has provided a rather united response, one that would have been far more fragmented in the absence of the union. The question is not only What would Europe have done without the EU? but also *What might have happened without this unified front in the current geopolitical climate?*

Ecologically, the EU has emerged as a global leader in environmental protection and sustainability. The EU's Green Deal is one of the most ambitious climate initiatives in the world, setting the stage for a green transition that could inspire global cooperation. Without the EU, the fragmented approach to climate policy would have likely led to failure, with individual nations lacking the coordinated efforts required to tackle such a complex global issue. The EU's establishment of carbon markets and emissions trading systems (ETS) has resulted in a

30 % reduction in emissions compared to 1990 levels – a feat unlikely to have been achieved without the collective action fostered by the EU.

Education has also been a cornerstone of the EU's success in fostering a shared European identity. The Erasmus programme, which has allowed millions of young Europeans to study abroad, has played a pivotal role in shaping the continent's educated and mobile workforce. It has created a "European feeling," a sense of belonging and solidarity that transcends national borders. This symbolic and intangible capital has been essential in forging a collective European identity, and the value of education in creating leaders of tomorrow cannot be overstated.

The Challenge: Defending the EU and Its Ideals

While the EU has undoubtedly achieved remarkable successes, these accomplishments are not guaranteed. The benefits of the EU are not inherent or "genetically embedded"; they must be defended by each generation.

Together with not highlighting the benefits of the EU (and not only criticizing it) the biggest "mistake" we have made to date is to take a liberal, free and prosperous democratic union to be self-evident. In the face of rising nationalism, populism, and authoritarian tendencies across Europe and the world, it is essential that future generations understand and appreciate the value of the EU and democracy. These principles must be taught, defended, and expanded to ensure that Europe continues to thrive.

The challenge we face is that the EU and its institutions need constant support, much like the democracies they represent. The EU's current predicament involves a delicate balance between advocating for more integration and respecting national sovereignty. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that there is no going back. The regret expressed by the UK in the aftermath of Brexit serves as a reminder of how critiques of Europe have often been instrumentalised for nationalistic purposes, yet the realities of disintegration are too severe to entertain. The invasion of Ukraine has shown the importance of European unity and has made the prospect of further exits highly unlikely.

The Future of European Integration: The Way Forward

While a European federation, akin to the United States, may remain a distant dream, we must be realistic about what the EU can achieve. Full political integration across the continent is not on the horizon. The concept of a "United States of Europe" can only be built on a pragmatic approach first that respects subsidiarity, the principle that decisions should be made as close to the citizens as possible.

In addition, the EU's geographic boundaries have often been fluid and contested. For much of Europe's history, regions such as Turkey, the African Mediterranean, and Russia were part of the European political and cultural reality. While the dream of integrating all of these areas under a single European umbrella is utopian, failing to engage with these regions risks deepening divides. A pragmatic approach, similar to the arrangements currently in place with countries like Norway and Switzerland, may offer a way forward – one that allows Europe to maintain its unity while extending a hand to its neighbours.

Investing in Europe's Symbolic Capital

One of the less tangible yet crucial aspects of reclaiming Europe's ideals lies in investing in Europe's symbolic capital. Culture, sports, and tourism are powerful tools for building European unity. By investing in these areas, the EU can promote a shared European identity that transcends national differences. Cultural exchange, sporting events, and cross-border tourism help to foster a sense of belonging and solidarity among Europeans. These symbolic assets are invaluable in creating a Europe that feels cohesive and strong, even in times of crisis.

Conclusion

Reclaiming Europe's ideals is an ongoing process. It not only requires defending the European Union and its institutions but a proactive commitment to building a Europe that lives up to its democratic principles. This means ensuring that Europe remains a beacon of prosperity, security, ecological sustainability and education. It means embracing a realistic vision of European integration, one that respects subsidiarity while fostering unity. By investing in Europe's symbolic capital, Europe can create a shared sense of belonging that binds its diverse peoples together.

Ultimately, the future of Europe lies not in resisting change but in embracing it, adapting to the challenges of a changing world while holding fast to the principles that have made the European Union one of the most remarkable political and economic experiments in history. The road ahead is not without its challenges, but if we continue to build on Europe's strengths, the future will be one of unity, resilience, and shared prosperity. And that will make sure Europe remains a global powerhouse.

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The War on Information in Ukraine: A Global Ecology[1]

BILL DUTTON

Donald Trump and J. D. Vance publicly reprimanding Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the Oval Office on the 28ᵗʰ of February 2025.

The Trump White House, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, launched on 24 February 2022, was preceded by and continues an unprecedented hybrid form of information warfare. While it reflected a history of propaganda during the Second World War and the ensuing Cold War, this political war on Ukraine could undermine the global world order.

The fallout from Russia's invasion may reconfigure interrelated areas critical to local and global information, communication, and security, which I have labelled broadly as: influence operations. These are centred around new forms of propaganda and disinformation. And they are likely to impact public reception of narratives and international networks and alliances. However, these effects will probably be moderated by the nation's political literacy, cybersecurity, and innovation capacities.

The Idea of an Ecology of Games

The conceptual framework of an ecology of games has been employed in studies of how multiple actors across different domains can shape outcomes in ways that no single actor planned or anticipated. It helps comprehend the dynamic and often unanticipated interactions between various actors pursuing distinct objectives under different constraints.[2]

At the infamous clash in the Oval Office of the White House, during President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's first meeting with President Donald Trump on 28 February 2025, the US President rudely scolded his guest, saying "You don't have the cards right now [they are] with us. You're gambling … with World War Three." He went on, saying: "With us, you have the cards, but without us, you don't have any cards." The President of Ukraine attempted to reply – rightly – that he is not playing a game. However, Trump acted in line with this analogy

Before the escalation of the meeting on the 28th of February 2025.

The Trump White House, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

In this essay, I will convey ways in which the concept of an Ecology of Games (EoG) can provide a simple framework for understanding the complex and shifting interrelationships within and across these areas. From this framework you can see how unanticipated interactions of many actors with diverse and changing objectives are reshaping democracy, freedom, and prosperity in Ukraine and worldwide. I then provide a few examples of the EoG across these areas. These illustrate how Ukraine has surpassed the limited expectations of early forecasts of the Russia-Ukraine War, including the changing role of the United States.

and in time, Zelenskyy would have an important new card, as he had been negotiating the so-called 'mineral deal' with the Trump team, discussed later in this essay.

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2   Key sources on the EoGs include: Long, N. E. (1958), 'The Local Community as an Ecology of Games', *American Journal of Sociology,* 64(3), pp. 251–261; Crozier, M., and Friedberg, E. (1977), *Actors & Systems*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and Dutton, W. H. (1992), 'The Ecology of Games Shaping Telecommunications Policy,' *Communication Theory*, 2 (4), pp. 303–328.
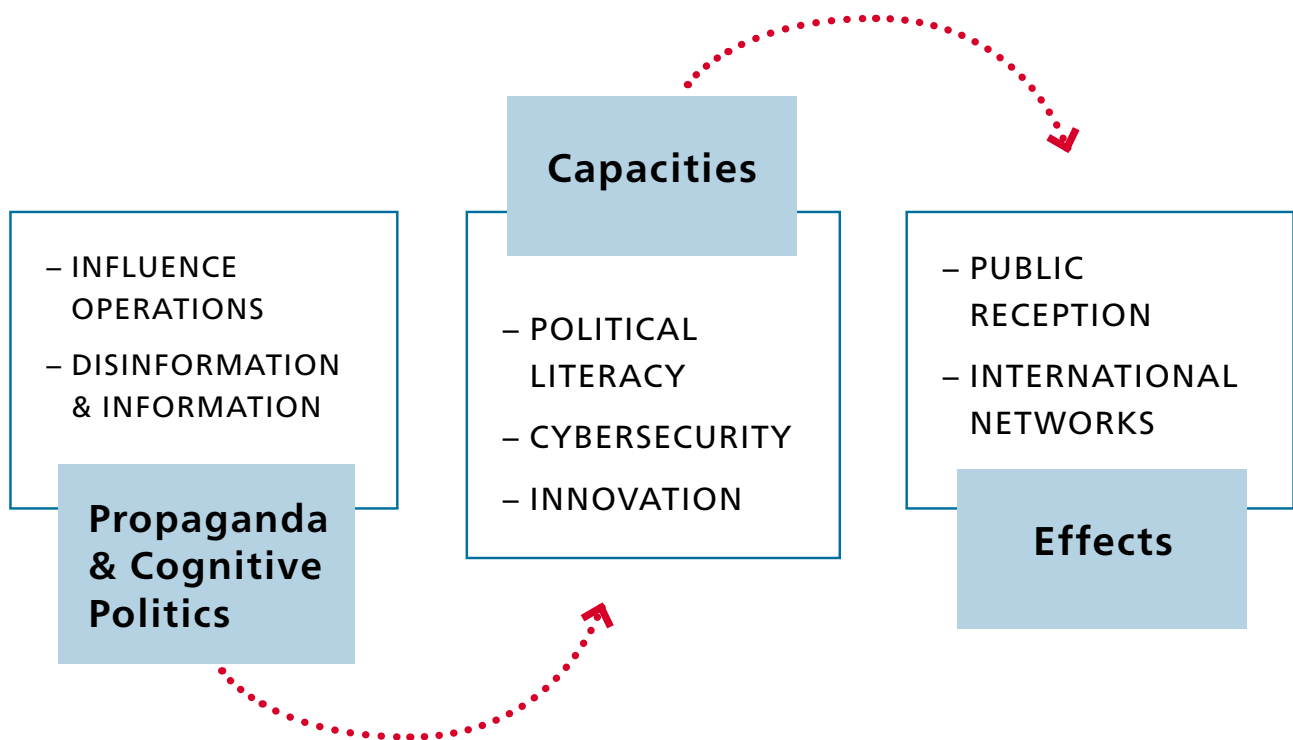
Dynamics of the Hybrid Information War on Ukraine

The late American political scientist, E. E. Schattschneider, compared politics to a game of football, noting that in politics, in contrast to sports, the players can change sides, change the rules, and spectators can even come onto the field and join one or another side.[3] In games and politics, there is competition between players, with objectives, rules, strategies, and prizes or outcomes at stake. From this perspective, if you understand the game an actor is playing, you can see the rationality of that actor's decisions. If an actor seems irrational, it may be that the actor is playing a different game than you perceived. Understanding the games being played and the interaction of players, often involving more than one game, can help understand the dynamics shaping the interaction and outcome of complex political activities. Knowing the objectives, rules, resources, and strategies involved in each game in an ecology of games can then help explain how decisions in one domain can cascade and shape the decisions in related games.

Arenas in the Study of the Information War on Ukraine

My colleagues and I have been conducting a collaborative study of the war in Ukraine across three related arenas of decision-making and action as noted above.[4] These are: propaganda and cognitive politics, including influence operations and (dis)information; the capacities of actors, such as their political literacy, cybersecurity capacity, and ability to innovate; and effects of these activities on the public's reception within a nation and on international actor networks (Figure 1). Research across these domains is in progress, but some emerging themes are developed in this essay.

3   Schattschneider, E. E. (1960), *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

4   Background on the Portulans Institute Ukraine Project is here: https://portulansinstitute.org/about-the-ukraine-case-studies/.

Propaganda and Cognitive Politics

A seminal scholar of propaganda tied to the Second World War, Harold Lasswell, argued that influence is central to politics and that "[c]oncepts for the study of influence must be changed or invented when influence is sought by novel means or under changed circumstances."[5] Early studies of propaganda focused on the influence of radio and then television as the most central media then shaping public opinion. In the twenty-first century, the internet, social media, and related digital technologies have become channels for new approaches to influence, such as in the use of 'computational propaganda'.[6] Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, its military efforts have been accompanied by concerted efforts to exploit all media – new and old – to support its influence operations, including the use of disinformation, to shape who supports whom in a political war over information.

There are many points of continuity and change from the 1930s to the 2020s. One change seems to be a move from focusing on agenda setting, attitudes, and opinions among the public to changing the public's beliefs – beliefs about the invasion and the roles of different actors – about what is perceived to be the objective truth. A 2023 NATO report refers to this focus as 'cognitive warfare', which the authors defined as "activities conducted in synchronisation with other instruments of power, to affect attitudes and behaviours by influencing, protecting, and / or disrupting individual and group cognitions to gain an advantage."[7] This is a useful definition as it can accommodate efforts to sow uncertainty over what is true – leading to the rejection of alternative narratives of events.

This shift towards shaping cognitions resonates well with many communication strategies in domestic and international politics, including war propaganda. It might be useful therefore to refer to this more generally as 'cognitive politics' as a complement to more traditional notions of propaganda.

The notions of propaganda and cognitive politics cover the strategic use of influence operations, such as the development and communication of narratives, along with other efforts to shape the beliefs of an audience. Narratives are a central aspect of propaganda, such as Putin's early efforts to define Ukraine as the aggressor and Russians as the victim of the Nazification and militarisation in eastern Ukraine. The Kremlin demanded that its invasion be referred to as an SMO, and people who referred to it as a 'war', for example, could be detained or arrested.

However, narratives such as this often entail disinformation, since it was not credible to educated publics to claim a nation that elected a Jewish president was dominated by Nazis, or that Russian special forces were not key to the emergence of conflicts within the eastern Ukrainian oblasts. It was not unprecedented for Russia to call the full-scale invasion of Ukraine a 'special military operation', as this was a euphemism that avoided legal and popular complications of calling its invasion a 'war'.[8] However, the arrest or detention of individuals who referred to Russia's SMO as a war made it more clearly an aspect of Russian information operations aimed at controlling public discourse and shaping beliefs and cognitions rather than simply influencing attitudes and opinions about the invasion.

Capacities of Actors

The public and all other actors are not powerless in the face of propaganda and related influence operations, including the use of disinformation. They have capabilities that can be used to protect or defend them. These include various levels of capacity as well as what I have called political literacy, cybersecurity, and innovation.

Political literacy represents an effort to adapt contemporary ideas of media and information literacy (MIL) and digital skills to the political arena.[9] All the capacities of MIL and digital skills are relevant to sorting out propaganda, disinformation, and related influence operations aimed at influencing political attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and agendas, such as who is the aggressor and who is the victim.

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5   Lasswell, H. D. (1936), *Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How*. York, Pennsylvania: McGraw-Hill Book Company, p. v.

6   Computational propaganda involves the "use of algorithms, automation, and human curation to purposefully distribute misleading information over social media networks" as defined by Woolley, Samuel C., and Howard, Philip N. (2018), eds., *Computational Propaganda: Political Parties, Politicians, and Political Manipulation on Social Media*. New York: Oxford University Press.

7   NATO (2023), North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 'Cognitive Warfare: Strengthening and Defending the Mind', ACT, 5 April: https://www.act.nato.int/articles/cognitive-warfare-strengthening-and-defending-mind (last accessed 01.07.2025).

8   The Vietnam War was most often referred to by the US and allied forces as various military operations, and by Vietnamese as the American War.

9   The definition of MIL was developed by UNESCO (2021), 'Media and Information Literate Citizens: Think Critically, Click Wisely!', *Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Educators & Learners*. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377068 (last accessed 01.07.2025).

Internationally, political literacy entails an understanding of the politics and history of Ukraine and other nations of Central Europe that is often neglected in education worldwide. The former republics of the Soviet Union, such as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and former Soviet satellite states of Central and Eastern Europe were clearly controlled by the Soviet Union. However, since the Cold War, their independence and development have increased dramatically, even though dated stereotypical images tied to their colonial status prior to independence persist. As one Ukrainian put it to me in a conversation: "If Russia had invaded France, would journalists speak about the 'conflict in France' as some have spoken of the 'conflict in Ukraine'".

Cybersecurity is principally concerned with the security of information and infrastructures, such as surveillance, data collection, disruption of critical infrastructures, and hacking. However, it also relates to linked dimensions of security such as defending against cognitive warfare and breaches of security linked to kinetic warfare, or efforts to undermine communication capabilities, such as Musk's Starlink satellites. In 2023, the Prime Minister of Estonia cited Ukraine as a "masterclass on cyber-defence". And cybersecurity is tied to all the other areas of study through the propagation of disinformation, the use of digital media for surveillance and collection of data about the public and military, and the use of cyberattacks to disrupt nationally critical infrastructures and services like information and communication networks. The expertise required in this area includes backgrounds in cybersecurity policies and practices that seek to address these issues, such as education and awareness campaigns, the development of cyber expertise, and cybersecurity capacity building.

Innovation and R&D crosscut all these other areas in addressing how this war leads to new developments and investments in particular areas, from security to information warfare, and the development and use of drones and AI in surveillance and warfare. For example, Ukraine's innovations in drone warfare have been among the more remarkable in the war to date, enabling Ukrainian forces to challenge Russian naval forces, despite Ukraine not having a functioning navy beyond their home-grown amphibius drones. Innovation, along with media literacy, is also connected to the degree that the people of Ukraine can access information via smartphones, which are in the hands of 75 percent of the Ukrainian adult population.[10]

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10 Goroshko, O., Dutton, W. H., Dembitskyi, S., Chernenko, L., Boiko, N., and Blank, G. (2025), Media Use and Attitudes in Ukraine: Foundations of a Smart Nation. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4958986 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4958986.

Effects

There are two categories of effects of propaganda and cognitive politics that cover a great deal of ground: public reception and international networks.

Public reception, including opposition, rejection, or resistance to competing narratives, focuses on whether and how the attitudes or beliefs of different sectors of the public are reshaped because of different information operations, such as various forms of propaganda. The study of public reception, rejection, and resistance to the narratives of different states, adversaries, and other actors is related to political communication and closely linked to the study of influence.

However, the study of reception faces major methodological issues, especially in Russia, where governmental censorship makes it difficult if not impossible to collect or access reliable data on public opinion and media use. Yet, there are mechanisms for teasing out insights from longitudinal surveys and trace data that enable us to know more about the direction of changes in public opinion.

In the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, there is no safe access to information about the public. A 27-year-old Ukrainian journalist, Viktoriia Roshchyna, was driven to cover developments in the occupied regions, but was brutally detained and tortured, dying a year after being detained in a Russian prison, before being returned in a body bag.[11] The chilling effect of this brutality is clear.

In the unoccupied regions, public opinion data is widely available – surprisingly so given its wartime context.[12] Major survey organisations, such as Ipsos, YouGov, and the European Social Survey, have been able to collect data on opinion changes in Ukraine. Our own study of access to trusted information and media literacy in Ukraine gained support from UNESCO and the People of Japan, and we worked with colleagues associated

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11 Garside, J., Walker, S., Ganguly, M., Sauer, P., Nikoayenko, T., Naumliuk, A., and Mazhulin, A. (2025), 'Numerous signs of torture': a Ukrainian journalist's detention and death in Russian prison', *The Guardian*, 29 April. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/29/viktoriia-roshchyna-ukrainian-journalist-death-russian-prison (last accessed 01.07.2025).

12 Survey data has been supported in part by public funding that has been reduced since the election of Donald Trump in the US and the closing of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programmes.

with the National Academy of Sciences in Ukraine.[13] Our survey found that the Ukraine public was adept at using multiple forms of media and information sources to access information, leading us to speak of their foundations for a smart nation.[14]

International networking concerns how Ukraine and Russia have enrolled international support in public arenas, such as the UN, and in trade and the supply of arms. How have international alliances, opposition, and neutral actors been defined and redefined over time and with what effect? The study of international networks is global and the topic of many, if not most, news and public affairs reporting on the crisis, but it can gain from a variety of other methods and theories that could be used in this area, such as more systematic network analyses. As discussed in this essay, these alliances can change with dramatic real-world consequences when actors change sides.

These areas are closely related but are treated separately because they are often tied to different research and expertise. The study of influence and reception, for example, is a key topic in political communication. It could well be that the influence operations in Russia will become a similar driving force in the development of digital propaganda and influence studies. Cybersecurity is increasingly multidisciplinary but tied more closely to expertise in computer science. Nevertheless, they often connect within the dynamics of an ecology of games (EoG) around information warfare.

The Dynamics of an EoG: Changing the Narrative

The value of an EoG can be illustrated in a few of many possible examples. These include the evolution of the cognitive politics of the war's origin, the role of new actors in changing sides and in changing the games being played.

Cognitive Politics of the War's Origin and Related Narratives

In the early stages of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it quickly became defined by the West as a David v. Goliath narrative – a giant, well-armed nation attacking a far smaller and less well-armed nation. In this narrative, increasingly more widely accepted, Russia was the aggressor and broke international legal precedents by invading a sovereign nation. Ukraine was the victim. Putin expected the Russian forces to succeed in their full-scale invasion within days, including the elimination of President Zelenskyy and his team. The David-versus-Goliath narrative resonated well with the invasion since Ukraine prevailed in repelling the Russian forces from a nation nearly four (3.8) times the population of Ukraine.

Russia's President Putin defended his Special Military Operation with an original narrative that the invasion was necessary to save the lives of Russians living in Ukraine, and to de-Nazify and de-militarise Ukraine. None of these justifications held up to empirical scrutiny. The war in the Donbas, a region in eastern Ukraine, became prominent in 2014. Russian armed invaders (Russian Special Forces – the RSF) were critical to the outbreak of violence. RSF sought cover, being masked and wearing unmarked uniforms (referred to as 'little green men'), fighting with Russian-backed separatists. And in contrast to the SMO narrative, the Russian military far exceeded the military capacity of Ukraine.

The de-Nazification of Ukraine lacks credibility as well on several fronts: There were and remain far-right extremists fighting for Ukraine, but also for Russia.[15] Moreover, far-right groups do not have serious support in Ukraine. The most common rebuke to this pretext for the war is that President Zelenskyy himself is Jewish – hardly a Nazi.

The Kremlin eventually recognised the limitations of its initial narrative, particularly outside of Russia. It was self-evidently false. Putin shifted the Kremlin's international propaganda to define the aggressor as the US and NATO, which positioned Russia as the victim of a larger enemy. According to this narrative, Russia was defending its sovereignty against invasion by Ukraine as a proxy of the US and NATO. This narrative was more commonly echoed by allies of Russia in the Global South.

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13 https://billdutton.me/2024/07/24/media-literacy-and-access-to-trusted-information-during-the-war-in-ukraine/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

14 Chernenko, L., and Dutton, W. H. (2025), 'Who Trusts Telegram? The Dynamics of Trust and Use of Social Media in Wartime Ukraine', Working Paper, Portulans Ukraine Project. Washington DC: Portulans Institute; and Goroshko, O., Dutton, W. H., Dembitskyi, S., Chernenko, L., Boiko, N., and Blank, G. (2025), Media Use and Attitudes in Ukraine: Foundations of a Smart Nation (September 17, 2024). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4958986 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4958986.

15 Cf. the information on the research project "Media Literacy and Access to Trusted Information during the War in Ukraine" at https://billdutton.me/2024/07/24/media-literacy-and-access-to-trusted-information-during-the-war-in-ukraine/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

With Donald Trump's election as President of the USA, he inexplicably continued to parrot this Russian narrative, blaming previous US presidents and NATO for provoking the war.[16]

In these ways, conflicting narratives of the origin of the war set up a continuing controversy over the objective truth. Was Ukraine the victim of an unprovoked, unlawful, and brutal attack on the sovereign nation of Ukraine, or was Russia provoked by the US and NATO to defend its own sovereignty? Uncertainty over the correct answer means that cognitive warfare has prevailed.

As suggested above, the origin of the conflict is only one of many conflicting narratives. There is hardly a claim made by either party in the conflict that is not countered by others. However, five of the most prominent are around the terminology, origin, winners-losers, obstacles to peace, and a trade deal (Table below).

NARRATIVE	OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES	KEY PLAYERS	SELECTED STRATEGIES
Terms for the Invasion	a SMO, or war	Putin, Russia, Ukraine, UN	Enforcing use of SMO in Russia; Use of 'war' in Ukraine; Drafting UN motions
Origin: Who initiated the conflict? Who is the victim?	Denazifying and demilitarising Ukraine; David v. a Russian Goliath; US-NATO provocation	Political leaders of Russia and Ukraine; UN; and national and global publics	Russia changes justification from denazifying and demilitarising Ukraine to emphasise the defence of Russia against NATO & USA
Who is winning, who will win?	Define frontlines & who is winning / losing territories, soldiers, and civilians	Russia, Ukraine, Press, Bloggers	Bloggers, YouTubers, and Tik-Tokers' coverage of battles and operations on the front lines
Who is obstructing a ceasefire, or peace; stopping the war?	Change focus from defeating Russia / Ukraine to stopping the war	Trump, US, Russia, Ukraine, Europe	US President Trump making ceasefire a condition of support; agreeing on terms that are fair, or favourable to Russia – a pro-Russian ceasefire
Making a winning tariff and trade deal?	Bring Russia into new trade and tariff discussions	Trump engages Putin	In a phone call, President Trump introduces the trade benefits to Putin of resolving the conflict

Narratives Shaping the Cognitive Politics of the Russia-Ukraine War

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16 Historians, Russia watchers, and media pundits cannot definitively explain Trump's use of Putin narratives, although many conspiracy theories have developed as well as systematic accounts that speculate on the link between Putin and Trump, such as Pomerantsev, P. (2015), *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*. London: Faber & Faber; Pegues, J. (2018), *Kompromat: How Russia Undermined American Democracy*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books; Pomerantsev, P. (2019), This is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality. London: Faber & Faber; and Unger, C. (2021), American Kompromat. London: Scribe.

First 100 Days of Trump: Illuminating the Ecology of Games Shaping Ukraine

By June of 2025, Americans and the world were left struggling to understand what happened in the first 100 days of Donald Trump's presidency and what its consequences were. Frequently characterised as chaotic, Trump sought to 'flood the zone' with decisions that had major implications for the US and nations worldwide, including Ukraine. Indeed, the Trump administration's first 100 days reconfigured the EoGs shaping the future of Ukraine.

In the last months of President Joe Biden's administration, the US and NATO allies remained focused on supporting Ukraine's defence against Russia's unlawful invasion of the sovereign territory of Ukraine. Since Russia's arranged referendum set up to legitimate the annexation of Crimea in 2014, through the War on Donbas, including the south-eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, and then the 2022 full-scale invasion, the US and NATO-allied countries of the West have sought to provide financial resources, services, and arms to support Ukraine's defence while avoiding trip-wires that would provoke Russia to act out its threats to use nuclear weapons.

The November 2024 US Presidential election of the Republican Party's candidate, former President Donald Trump, ushered in dramatic changes. Trump and his administration introduced new actors and objectives for the US. Rather than supporting Ukraine for 'as long as it takes', which was Biden's basic objective, Trump promised voters to end the war on 'Day One' of his Presidency. This sound bite was popular in the US but in conflict with existing US-NATO policy and the internationally accepted rule of law. Ending the war immediately would leave nearly a fifth of Ukraine occupied by Russian forces. Opponents of this approach compared Trump's idea to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler and Nazi Germany in the Munich Agreement of 1938. Britain's Winston Churchill and others condemned the Munich agreement as rewarding Hitler, and it failed to prevent further Nazi invasions of Czechoslovak and other European territories that led to the Second World War.

Once elected, Trump justified his advocacy of a quick end to the war with a narrative that closely parroted the Kremlin's narrative, which was that Russia was provoked by US President Biden, the US, and NATO fighting a proxy war against Russia. In doing so, he also ran roughshod over the norms and rules that underpinned US policy since the Second World War, namely, the rule of law and respect for the principle of the sovereignty of nations, on which the 1945 establishment of the United Nations was based.

Trump – a new actor, with new objectives, and new rules – led to the US government literally switching sides in the conflict when the US voted in February 2025 with Russia, North Korea, and Belarus on a UN resolution concerning the Russia-Ukraine war, against America's former allies of the Western alliance. The US then abstained from a resolution that the US had drafted, which did not mention Russian aggression, after it was amended by European nations to reflect Russia's full-scale invasion. Literally, the US switched sides to align with Russia in the UN and increasingly in its public rhetoric. This not only undermined US allies opposing Russia's invasion but also threw a wrench into the gears of NATO, where the US has been the central force.

Despite an apparent betrayal of NATO and the Western alliance supporting Ukraine, the Trump team appeared to be losing their rendition of the David-versus-Goliath debate over who started the war. The public understood the self-evident position that Russia invaded Ukraine. In response, Trump and his team subtly shifted their objectives away from blaming the Ukraine and the Western alliance for provoking Russia to create new games with new objectives – to support a ceasefire to save lives in both nations.

In parallel, Ukraine pro-actively responded to Trump's transactional mindset by developing a prospective business deal with the US for the extraction and processing of rare minerals and energy resources. Trump's Special Envoy to Ukraine, Steven Witkoff, a former property developer, lawyer, and golfing partner of Trump's, without diplomatic experience, initially negotiated concessions in direct talks with Russia. He believed a ceasefire could be agreed by making concessions to Russia that aligned with the conditions that Russia presented, such as Russia's claim to Crimea. His team also negotiated with Ukraine over the joint business deal initiated by Ukraine but arrived at a proposal on the mining of rare minerals and energy resources that were criticised as being far more favourable to the US than Ukraine – even as 'extortionate'.

Trusting that Russia would agree to and sustain a ceasefire, as it occupied significant territory in Ukraine, Trump and his team literally sought to bully President Zelenskyy to go along with the terms the US discussed with Putin. In a live televised session in the Oval Office, and in other public arenas, Trump tried to convince Zelenskyy to agree to a pro-Russian ceasefire. For example, the Trump

team wanted Ukraine to recognise Crimea as legitimate Russian territory[17] and endorse a version of the mineral and energy deal that was disproportionately beneficial to the US.[18] These issues were among those behind President Zelenskyy's refusal to sign 'the deal'.

Weeks later, a revised proposal of the mineral and energy deal was negotiated that was more equitable – viewed by many as a win-win for the US and Ukraine. Then, on the day of Pope Francis' funeral, on the sidelines in a one-to-one private meeting in the Vatican, a second meeting between Trump and Zelenskyy led to an agreement in principle on the revised minerals and energy deal as a potential win-win for the US and Ukraine financially and for legitimating the continuation of US support of Ukraine.[19]

Far from settling on a way forward, this meeting was followed by rapid asynchronous sequences of private and often public rounds of negotiations via interviews, social media, and press releases between Ukraine, European allies, the US, and Russia with shifting positions by Presidents Trump, Putin, and Zelenskyy driving fast-moving reconsiderations of stances on a ceasefire and even direct talks. A Trump phone call with Putin even opened another game when Trump sought to entice Putin to resolve the conflict in Ukraine to reap the benefits of a trade deal with the US. The promise of this call was deflated by a Russian offer to work with Ukraine on drafting a 'memorandum' – far short of agreeing a ceasefire. Moreover, Putin's proposal was followed by an escalating series of Russian aerial attacks on Ukraine over several days – including the largest since the beginning of the war.[20] Over the three days, more than 900 drones and over 90 missile strikes targeted Ukraine cities.[21]

Amid these airstrikes, Trump seemed to have moved from celebrating his personal relationship with Putin, to describing his behaviour as "CRAZY" on his social media. Putin is "killing a lot of people … We're in the middle of talking and he's shooting rockets into Kyiv and other cities … I don't like it at all". This was dismissed by the Kremlin, labelling Trump's reaction as 'emotional', while in the same breath thanking Trump for organising direct talks with Kyiv. In parallel, Trump criticised President Zelenskyy for being critical of the inaction of the US, saying: "Everything out of his mouth causes problems. I don't like it, and it better stop." Zelenskyy replied that, "only a sense of total impunity can allow Russia to carry out such strikes…"[22]

This mercurial EoGs might well shape the unfolding Russia-Ukraine War in significant ways. As I write, it remains unclear whether this unfolding ecology will escalate the Russia-Ukraine War or move the actors closer to a peace process.

Conclusion

Understanding the political dynamics of the Russia-Ukraine War is an empirical and theoretical challenge. We need to understand the political dynamics of events, such as the role of new forms of propaganda and cognitive politics, the capacities required to moderate their influence, such as knowledge of and respect for Ukraine, and the implications of cognitive politics on the public's reception of information, and for international alliances. If we have such a conceptual framework, it is possible to make better decisions and target activities aimed at mitigating bad actors, anticipating actions, and avoiding poor decisions.

However, as in many political processes, the relevant events and decisions often fail to follow a clear linear logic. As we can see, as in the '100 days of Trump' example, we also need to understand the dynamics of the changing ecology of actors, objectives, rules, and prizes that can be in play over very short periods of time, as well as from a more long-term historical perspective. Only then can we begin to address the dynamics leading to unanticipated, disastrous, or promising outcomes in Ukraine and worldwide.

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17 Crimea was first annexed by Russia in the 18th century and illegally annexed again in 2014.

18 For example, an early draft proposed that profits would be used to repay past US funding of the war.

19 Miller, C., and Politi, J. (2025), 'Zelenskyy's minerals gambit enough to lure Trump after fraught meetings', *Financial Times*, 2 May, p. 5.

20 Miller, C. (2025), 'Kyiv braces for summer assault from Russia as peace hopes fade', *The Financial Times*, 26 May, p. 5.

21 Seddon, M., and Miller, C. (2025), 'Moscow Dismisses Trump's "Crazy" Putin Jibe', *The Financial Times*, 27 May, p. 4.

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22 Beaumont, P., and Sauer, P. (2025), 'Putin has 'gone crazy', Trump says, as Russia escalates drone campaign', *The Guardian*, 27 May: p. 12.

Shifting the tone: Zelenskyy and Trump meeting on the sidelines of Pope Francis' funeral on the 26th of April 2025.

The Trump White House, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Navigating the New Battlefield: Democratic Resilience in an Era of Hybrid Threats and AI

KATERYNA LATYSH

Hybrid Threats in the 21ˢᵗ Century: Cyberattacks, Disinformation, and Beyond

Democratic societies today face hybrid threats that blur the line between war and peace. These threats combine cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and other tactics to undermine national stability, the social order and security from within, often without a formal declaration of war. Cyberattacks and disinformation have emerged as powerful weapons in the 21ˢᵗ-century struggle between democratic and authoritarian societies. *The contours of this new emerging battlefield are evident, for example, in contemporary Ukraine: while bytes and narratives rarely inflict the same physical devastation as bullets and bombs, their strategic impact on morale, decision-making, and international perception can prove comparably decisive*. Hybrid threat actors operate within the seams of our interconnected world – hacking networks, distorting information, and exploiting social divisions to advance their strategic goals without overt warfare. Their efforts can weaken economies, tilt elections, and fray the social fabric on which democracies depend. Hybrid warfare targets the minds and the will of citizens and demands from them new resilience against such hybrid threats if they are to be successfully countered. Artificial intelligence (AI) is accelerating these trends, enabling higher volumes and more personalised forms of manipulation.

Democratic Resilience will be Tested as Never Before

Can free societies protect the integrity of their information space without closing it? Can they use technology to defend against technology while preserving fundamental freedoms? The answers will shape the future of governance and stability. What is certain is that democracies cannot be passive. A proactive stance is needed: investment in cybersecurity, vigorous counter-disinformation strategies, public education to immunise citizens against falsehoods, and robust international partnerships to present a united front against hybrid aggression.

Artificial Intelligence is Reshaping Democratic Systems in Unexpected Ways

AI-powered tools allow malicious actors to quickly manipulate information and disrupt electoral processes, posing new dangers to democracy. On the one hand, AI offers smarter governance: by streamlining decision-making and public services, it can empower policymakers to identify and seize new opportunities. Automated tools and data analytics are already enabling governments to be more responsive and efficient, potentially transforming the way citizens interact with government institutions. But this transformation is not without its challenges.

As news and narratives are increasingly curated by AI, the very basis of an informed electorate is at risk. When algorithms dictate what information (with intentionally formulated manipulative or divisive messages) reaches the public and what does not, citizens may lose the ability to critically evaluate it and engage in political debate – a vital skill for any democracy. The rise of automated systems in the information space can, however unintentionally, undermine public trust and make citizens deeply sceptical of both media and government motives. It is possible through AI-driven targeting that mines harvested data to craft precisely tailored, manipulative or divisive messages for each audience segment.

Another growing concern is the use of AI in surveillance, whether by government agencies or private companies. Such practices, while potentially enhancing security, also threaten personal privacy and weaken the bonds of trust between citizens and their government. As surveillance technologies become more sophisticated, the balance between security and freedom becomes more delicate.

AI-Generated Deepfakes and Bot Armies: The Case of Ukraine

One prominent AI-driven threat is the rise of deepfakes – hyper-realistic fake video or audio material generated by machine learning. Cheaply produced, large-scale disinformation is becoming a daily reality. In March 2022, in the midst of Russia's war on Ukraine, a fake video of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy was circulated online, showing him calling on Ukrainians to surrender. This 'deepfake' was quickly identified and removed, but it illustrated the danger: threat actors can use AI-generated synthetic media in influence campaigns. A fake message from a national leader, if believed even briefly, could sow panic or confusion during a crisis. Deepfakes and similar AI techniques allow completely fabricated events to be presented as real, misleading audiences and eroding the baseline of truth.

Beyond deepfakes, AI can create armies of bots and fake personas on social media that mimic human behaviour. These AI-driven bots can flood online spaces with tailored propaganda, interact with real users, and even coordinate inauthentic campaigns. During elections, such AI-enabled influence operations can micro-target voters with false stories or distorted facts tailored to their profiles and biases. For example, generative text models can produce convincing fake news articles or social media posts on demand, allowing malicious actors to automate the 'firehose' of disinformation. The scale and speed of these AI tools threaten to outpace the ability of govern-

ments or fact-checkers to respond. By the time a false narrative is debunked, it may have spread to millions of people. This creates a cat-and-mouse dynamic in which democracies struggle to counter waves of AI-fuelled falsehoods in real time.

Moreover, the so-called "persuasion industry" has found a powerful ally in AI. Data-driven algorithms now have the capacity to influence public opinion on an unprecedented scale, targeting individuals with tailored messages that can undermine the autonomy of their political choices. At its worst, this technology can be used to spread disinformation, further destabilising the relationship between democratic institutions and the electorate.

There is a Silver Lining: How AI can Empower Democratic Participation

AI holds great promise for civic technology. Plain-language chatbots and real-time translation already lower entry barriers, allowing citizens without legal training – or who speak minority languages – to follow and comment on draft laws. By fostering new channels for citizen engagement (for example, AI-supported *vTaiwan* and Citizens' Assemblies), these innovations can enrich democracy and empower individuals to actively participate in policymaking. Yet even here, caution is needed: issues such as algorithmic bias and digital exclusion threaten to deepen existing inequalities and potentially sideline marginalised voices. Designing civic-tech systems therefore requires rigorous bias auditing, open-source transparency, and continuous human oversight to ensure that the same technologies that widen participation do not simultaneously narrow whose voices are heard.

In summary, as AI develops, it presents both opportunities and risks for democracy. In the face of these challenges, democracies are slowly adapting and building resilience. Many have established cyber command centres to strengthen the defences of critical networks and share threat information. The challenge ahead is to harness AI's potential to improve governance, while safeguarding the democratic values and trust that underpin the relationship between citizens and government. The dual nature of AI's impact on democracy calls for a balanced approach to ensure that technology serves as a tool for empowerment rather than division.

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How to Speak Democracy: Internal and External Multilingualism in European Literatures, Cultures, and Society

JANA MENDE

"sprache bezeichnet im allgemeinen die thätigkeit des sprechens und das vermögen dazu: sprach, red, dialogus. Dasypodius; spraach (die) red, sermo, lingua, oratio. Maaler 381d; spraach, rede, f. langage, parolle, langue. Hulsius 304a; sprach, f. favella, parlata, parola, loquela. Kramer dict. 2, 879a; sprache, die, loquela, sermo, lingua, oratio, vox, locutio. Stieler 2101".[1]

This entry on the word "language" lists many languages to describe what it is: a translingual phenomenon to speak and communicate. It is curious that *Das Deutsche Wörterbuch*, initiated by the brothers Grimm in 1838 as a monumental endeavour to create a basis for the German language, relies on words from different languages in this entry, a well-known linguistic practice known as code-switching.

In 1821, the German author Rahel Varnhagen wrote a letter to her friend, the author Henriette Herz, using a mix of German, French, Italian, Yiddish, and Hebrew to design an intimate and creative way of communication. Varnhagen and Herz, both actively engaged in the cultural life of salons in the Romantic era, were well-versed in keeping conversation between various partners flowing and in including everyone in those discussions. For Varnhagen, language was inseparable from life itself: *"Unsere Sprache ist unser gelebtes Leben"*.[2]

Code-switching, or changing between different varieties of one language as well as between various natural languages, is both a literary technique and a part of everyday communication. The language used in a letter to a friend – or in a text message today – differs markedly from that of a spoken conversation, a workplace meeting or an academic discourse. Adapting our language to fit the recipient is something we do almost automatically – in everyday contexts, it usually goes unnoticed.

This is what linguists call internal multilingualism: it refers to our ability to switch between different varieties of language according to whom we address. This is not only an individual feature. Internal multilingualism is as much part of learning a language as its grammar: using adequate style and expressions and adapting linguistically to diverse situations is central to communicating in

1 Entry "Sprache", In: Deutsches Wörterbuch der Brüder Grimm, Vol. 16, col. 2719, https://woerterbuchnetz.de/?sigle=DWB&lemid=S36301 (last accessed 01.07.2025).

2 Rahel Levin Varnhagen (1877), Aus Rahel's Herzensleben. Briefe und Tagebuchblätter. Ed. by Ludmilla Assing. Leipzig, p. 159.

any society. Democracy, relying on the engagement of its citizens, depends on adequate usage of language and internal as well as external multilingualism to guarantee an inclusive community and communication.

Monolingualism, however, is the paradigm of nation states at least since Abbé Grégoire's *Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d'anéantir les patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la langue française*, first published in 1794, in which he demands the general use of the French language in public and to abandon the languages that were spoken by other language groups in France – Alsatian, Breton, Basque, Catalan, or Occitan. A majority, given that an estimated 10 % of the population of 25 million spoke French as their first language. By the 19th century, the rise of nationalism made language a defining feature of identity. Johann Gottfried Herder, a key figure in German Romanticism and a multilingual translator, argued that a nation's soul was expressed through its language and folklore. National languages – German, Polish, Estonian – became markers of belonging. By the early 20th century, the idea of "one nation, one language" was firmly entrenched in the political and cultural mind. National and monolingual thinking paved the way for dangerous ideologies. German National Socialism weaponised language, linking it to race. Words were manipulated to serve propaganda. Belonging to the 'wrong' language group, such as the Roma and Sinti, became deadly under racial persecution.

Not only history shows that the equation of one nation, one language is problematic at least: if monolingualism is imposed as suggested by Abbé Grégoire during the French Revolution, it violently interferes with minority languages and gravely affects the way people use language in everyday life, in their families, communities, schools. Enforcing the language of one linguistic group onto others creates a hierarchy of one dominant official language and many dominated smaller languages.

The argument that democracy needs one language to function as a common way of communicating does not take internal multilingualism into account. The appropriate and effective use of language is constantly negotiated in social interactions, shaped by purpose, and subject to ongoing change. Unlike external multilingualism, internal multilingualism is rarely subjected to explicit language policies. Rules are imposed by social exchange, mutual agreement or disagreements about appropriate language use. Thus, democratic use of language is by nature multilingual.

However, the main paradigm of literature, culture, and language has focused on monolingual narratives. The national monolingual perspective has been central

to the perception of national literature. Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, Hugo, Pushkin, or Mickiewicz have all been celebrated as the pillars of their respective national language and literature. Yet a closer look reveals that literary creation has always been multilingual in nature. Goethe's concept of world literature relies on multilingual translators. French was an important language for both the Russian writer Pushkin, who used it in his works, and the Polish author Mickiewicz for whom it even became his second writing language. On second glance, most literary production is at least internally multilingual.

Academic traditions are equally affected by national lines which dominate philological research along linguistic boundaries – German studies, Romance studies, English Studies, Slavonic Studies, etc.

Thus, the perception of monolingualism as the norm and multilingualism as a deviation is deeply ingrained in (Western) European traditions of thought. Within this framework, the assumption that democracy requires a single, common language might appear logical and self-evident. Language use, however, is far more complex. Shifting the focus to multilingual traditions allows for a deeper appreciation of communication in all its nuances – and invites us to imagine more inclusive, flexible, and democratic forms of exchange.

Institutions like the Council of Europe, founded in 1949, sought to protect democratic values, including minority languages, in a more complex way. The European Union took this idea further, promoting linguistic diversity and encouraging multilingualism across its member states, even though national governments sometimes promoted monolingual policies. Language was one of the key arguments in Russia's war against Ukraine: to protect the Russian speakers.

The most European cultural event of the year, the Eurovision Song Contest, demonstrates how internal and external multilingualism foster mutual understanding: in the history of the ESC, contestants have sung in more than 57 languages and language varieties. The language policy of the ESC is free: "Each Participating Broadcaster is free to decide the language in which its Contestant(s) will sing".[3] This has not always been like that. The ESC also tried to impose a national language policy but returned to linguistic freedom in 1999.

As anyone who watches the Contest knows, language practices at Eurovision routinely involve code-switching between English as a lingua franca and a wide range of other languages used by moderators, performers, and guests. Communication and entertainment are key elements which often include translations into sign language.

Literature provides a mirror for society and its use of language. It questions society's beliefs on the necessity of monolingualism for communication and shows that the adequate understanding of language in context – or *langage* – is the way to successful communication. Or, as the bilingual Spanish-French author and Buchenwald survivor Jorgen Semprún – echoing Varnhagen – put it: "Ma patrie n'est pas la langue, ni la française ni l'espagnole, ma patrie c'est le langage".[4]

As literary theory has explicitly pointed out, literature makes visible how language is always multilingual, always aimed at different audiences, never unambiguously monolingual. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* refers to the inert polyphony of literary texts, which contain the historical meaning of words, the voice of the author, the narrator, and the characters – all of whom cannot be separated. Speaking monolingually or univocally becomes impossible. When the Polish Nobel prize winner, Olga Tokarczuk, tells the story of the 18th century religious leader Jacob Frank, she tells it as "Wielka podróż przez siedem granic, pięć języków i trzy duże religie, nie licząc tych małych" [The Books of Jacob. Or: A fantastic journey across seven borders, five languages, and three major religions not counting the minor sects.][5] – a polyphonic narrative of Polish-Jewish history in Europe that counters political appropriation of a monolingual national past.

Instead of Herder's *Ursprache*, contemporary poets like Dagmara Kraus writing in Polish, German, and French offer an "urkreol" for European understanding in the future: "zupełnie niedeutschałe słowa / drängen sich hier in die futura".[6]

Where does multilingualism begin? What is allowed under a monolingual regime? And how do we speak democratically?

Literature offers a critical perspective on monolingual practices and challenges their practicality. Culture and pop-culture showcase the need for and ease of internal and external multilingualism. Democratic societies rely on these practices to be heard and understood. The aim of multilingualism in society is not a naïve multicultural perspective of crude mixing, but a pragmatic and creative way of communication between societies' many people. Looking at Europe today, we need fewer language policies and more communication policies. Reading and speaking multilingually will encourage democratic communication. If democracy is for the people, its internal and external multilingualism is the only possible way of communicating. One can only hope that democracy in Europe will grow strong in the "creative shadow"[7] of the tower of Babel. Let us listen to the multilingual voices of literature and the people in Europe to speak democracy.

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3   ESC: The Rules of the Contest 2025, https://eurovision.tv/about/rules (last accessed 01.07.2025).

4   Jorge Semprún (1995), *Mal et modernité*, Paris, Climats, p. 77.

5   Olga Tokarczuk (2014), Księgi Jakubowe albo Wielka podróż przez siedem granic, pięć języków i trzy duże religie, nie licząc tych małych.

6   Dagmara Kraus (2020), Liedvoll, Deutschyzno, Berlin, p. 19.

7   George Steiner (1998), After Babel, Oxford, p. VII.

Continental Sovereignty or Fragmented Subjugation: Europe's Existential Choice in the Emerging New Global Order

NAZAR PAVLYUK

While this essay is being written in March of 2025, major geopolitical shifts are taking place globally, firstly in Europe, which faces losing the main security guarantor it relied on since the end of World War Two under the North Atlantic Treaty, namely the USA.

Firstly, besides the US geopolitical shift, the EU faces risks of inner destabilisation by attempts to replace the democratic order with an authoritarian one, caused by the far-right parties, obviously supported by the mass-scale disinformation campaigns backed by Russia and Trump administration officials / propagandists. So, given that risk, together with other issues such as high energy prices, inflation, debt-related risks and a potential trade war, the European Union together with EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), UK and Ukraine must unify and continue to integrate in order to solve these problems together, as a Union with a mighty force of more than 500 million people and a combined nominal GDP of 20 trillion euros.

Alternatively, countries may choose to shift into a propaganda-driven version of so-called national "sovereignty". In this context, the term no longer refers to democratic self-governance or autonomy within a rules-based global framework. Instead, it becomes a cover for the rise of resentment-driven, corrupt, and authoritarian regimes.

These regimes aim to consolidate power locally, unchecked by institutional oversight or democratic accountability. They achieve this by deliberately manipulating the population, often through the construction of imagined enemies. This is done using a globally familiar propaganda playbook, uses terms it considers to be threatening, such as "liberals", "NGOs", "globalists", "Soros networks", or claims like "Zelenskyy is stealing billions".

Such regimes reject the principles of a rule-based international order. In its place, they promote a worldview where power dominates and might makes right – where unchallenged control by strong states is framed as preferable to cooperation or multilateralism. To legitimise their rule and rally national support, they often invoke themes of national messianism and exceptionalism. Political leaders appeal to the idea that their nation holds a unique, often redemptive, role in the world. For instance, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán claims that "Hungarian voices are ignored by Brussels' globalist bureaucrats", while Romanian former presidential candidate Călin Georgescu has declared that "Romania is the last redoubt against global uniformity".

In this way, the rhetoric of sovereignty is repurposed – not as a path to freedom, but as a justification for isolation, control, and the erosion of democratic norms in the name of the uncontrolled group power under the foreign influence.

But the core issue with the ideology of a so-called "Europe of Nations" is that it does not genuinely promote national sovereignty. Instead, it replaces that concept with a series of propaganda talking points. This agenda is further influenced by the support these movements receive from foreign actors, particularly Russia and the

Trump administration. We can see this in Hungary's close ties between Orbán and Russia, the AfD's links to both Russia and Belarus, and Romanian ex-presidential candidate Călin Georgescu's association with Alexander Dugin and Russian bot farms.

Alongside this foreign alignment, these actors advocate for dismantling the EU, or at the very least, weakening it as much as possible. They consistently show indifference to European security concerns, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Their proposed positions often include calls for neutrality, appeals to restore friendly ties with Russia and resume energy imports, rejection of Ukraine's EU membership, and even express support for dividing or occupying Ukraine. All of this occurs in parallel with Russia's broader geopolitical demands, such as the 2021 Geneva talks proposal to revert NATO borders to their 1991 lines. Taken together, the goal of this movement is not to build a strong "Europe of Nations", rather, it is to fragment Europe into a weak constellation of states, each vulnerable to foreign influence. This would result in governance by corrupt, authoritarian regimes, aligned not with European interests but with those of Russia, Trump-era America, and potentially China. Ultimately, it undermines any attempt to assert Europe's independent role in global affairs and risks turning the continent into a subordinate player on the world stage.

Sometimes it is said that, in Europe, "Western values and civilization are declining", but I'm eager to ask how the destruction of a unified European project serves the interests of preserving the Western values. In fact, these forces in the scenario of power control over the selected country won't fix the underlying economic issues, but will simply exacerbate them, as they aim for the disintegration from a shared trade agreement and protectionism at best, together with the erasure of important European civilisational predicates such as democracy, equal rights, rule of law, the social welfare system and a shared economic union. Given those challenges, Europe stands firmly with a need to become a transnational political subject, an independent sovereign global force, not merely an economic union (EU).

Secondly, as mentioned above, it is pretty obvious that, during two next years, Europe will face additional economic pressures – debt increases and loans needed to cover rising European defence spending, together with a potential trade war with the USA, as well as higher energy costs. Given the performance of the current US administration, the EU will be constantly under attack based on economic, structural ('Brussels bureaucracy', 'overregulation') and ideological reasons, together with security risks caused by Russia: firstly through indirect massive disinformation campaigns targeting the populace and spread through social media, using manipulative talking points, with the goal of funnelling political support to pro-Russian parties and, secondly, through direct risks related to war/sabotage, mostly in the target regions of the Baltic states, the Balkan states and the Arctic (Svalbard), not to mention the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The third area of risk is the need for the European continent to become a self-reliant force less dependent on the US, specifically because of the actions driven by the Trump administration, which despises European and democratic values, supports anti-European groups, and can easily use blackmail for its own purposes – as the situation with the Ukraine peace talks has firmly shown. This is especially problematic considering existing deep economic ties, together with the defence and intelligence integration between European countries and US under the NATO framework. And considering the fact that Europe must reassess its ties with the US, and come to rely more on our own defence sector and industries, replacing US weapons and creating a European army together with a European intelligence service that also has a firm space programme in place.

In conclusion, it can be said that Europe is entering a period of increased self-reliance in an age of uncertainty and in a pretty competitive landscape. And given the tendencies in the USA, the EU will become the only superpower force in the world that stands for the democratic values. Two intervening issues must be mentioned here: firstly, Europe must create the predicates it lacks to become a superpower political force (I suggest that these be a European army and intelligence agency, with an integrating strategic space component; a functioning defence sector; a clear and defined independent energy strategy, strategic planning of internal and external EU policy; more institutional political weight for the European Commission by applying fewer economic regulatory steps; easing accession to the EU while strictly demanding that applicant countries share European ideological principles; and essentially abolish a 'liberum veto' policy to a majority-based voting approach to block the saboteur policies of Orbán's Hungary and Fico's Slovakia, as well as other countries that could potentially fall into the hands of the far right). Secondly, Europe has to preserve societal order under the global competitive landscape, while managing the pressure applied to a populace subject to social media disinformation campaigns and targeted anti-democratic politics under foreign influence that can be seen daily on X and other such platforms.

Yet, as I assume that order can only be preserved by proactively adapting to a shifting political landscape, and

also by not being ashamed to project its soft power and influence externally (this may apply to Syria, besides the current struggles in Georgia). Projection of soft power can be more effective when the societal model applied to the inner populace in Europe is trusted and is attractive as a global brand. Let's bear in mind the power of the "American Dream", especially in the 1980s–2000s, followed by the "Chinese Dream" being constructed today. We can say we have our "European Dream", as we have a democratic system with an existing social welfare system and free education. But given massive attacks on "European bureaucracy" and the idea of "diminished technological progress" due to "overregulation", there's a need to face these propaganda talking points.

However, in an age of global shifts, it is not enough just to preserve the current societal order without proper reactions, as this policy is already backfiring. Propaganda attacks work on the populations of Europe, as they face disappointment and frustration. Europe has to be adaptive and proactive to find a way to restructure its societal model during the ongoing crisis, with its goal being to have a strong, functional society that is economically self-reliant and sustainable during the post-crisis period of recovery. It has to ensure trust in a European population and to promote sustainable and sufficient economic growth for at least one generational timeframe. I suggest that the best way is to activate the economy via enhanced engagement of the population in entrepreneurial-based economic activities – and I assume that one of the novel working frameworks with a mass scale could be decentralised energy systems.

I work in a field of applied materials in the energy sector, namely with hydrogen-related ones. There is much work being done today in the area of decentralised, autonomous, green and sustainable energy, seeking ways for energy production and storage to be localised on a small scale. Take the example of solar panels. In Ukraine, before the war, people could easily sell the surplus electric energy they generated themselves to the grid. Hence, given that more and more households can provide such services using solar panels, small facilities can install wind energy and biogas facilities, thus becoming self-sufficient, independent, and they can even make money out of that. And such independence scaled for the many is a good thing. It makes people more confident in themselves, thus making them happier, instead of being dissatisfied with their own lives and vulnerable to becoming victims of manipulation. Decentralisation of the grid is a must. The second thing is resilience. In Ukraine, where I come from, we witnessed missile / drone attacks that were followed by periods of electricity cut-offs. The people who had the means to generate electricity themselves or to store their surplus electric

power using charging stations were the ones who felt the consequences less. The more people who have these possibilities, the more resilient the system will be, and we can assume that the system overall is dependent on such personal independence.

However, this framework is just one of many that can ensure trust by the population in Europe, and it can be a part of the economic prosperity model during post-crisis times. Right now firm action is needed, by structurally campaigning against disinformation and a current that threatens constitutional order. The lies and foreign influence must be debunked openly to the public, describing the real threats beneath. And European leaders, together with their governments, must take clear action to deter the threats that come from Russia. They must build up strategic European defences, with intelligence and energy collaboration with the aim of decreasing European dependence on the US and achieving the status of a self-reliant global power, to mitigate all the risks emanating from the foreign influence.

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Reclaiming Europe in Action

GWENDOLYN SASSE

"Reclaiming Europe" describes a deliberate action; it implies an engagement with historical legacies and a correction of something perceived as outdated, undesirable or outright illegitimate. This corrective momentum as a driver behind the process of reclaiming is about both looking back into the past and formulating a vision for the future. Imagining "Europe" as a set of idea(s) is an inherently political process. Throughout the ages, ideas of belonging to "Europe" have been built on a combination of inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms and narratives. The intensity and wider significance of the competition about the idea(s) of Europe in a regional or global context has varied throughout history. The physical and the mental borders of "Europe" and the overlaps and gaps between them cast a long shadow. They can develop their own causal dynamic and, in turn, shape structures, institutions, practices, discourses, and individual trajectories. Academia is one field where these dynamics are prevalent, as the Manifesto highlights. The power of acts of "reclaiming Europe" also becomes tangible in particular contentious moments – I choose three such moments which I am familiar with from my research as a social scientist and contextualise them briefly.

Re-imagining Central Europe (1980s)

In the 1950s – 1980s, when the socialist system in Central and Eastern Europe came under increasing economic and political pressure from within and without, the idea of Europe was a powerful one, mobilising dissidents, political opposition and "ordinary citizens" across Central and Eastern Europe and attracting the attention of West European observers, including politicians, academics and civil-society actors. In his widely circulated essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe" (1980), Czech dissident Milan Kundera reclaimed a rightful place for the region on the mental and political map of Europe. He confronted "the West" and, in particular, Western Europe with its responsibility to recognise the strong historical and cultural links between Central and Western Europe. He went even further and argued that the political claims and struggles of Central Europe were closer to the core of European cultural values than the behaviour of a complacent Western Europe where values had become less central and compromised. He also accused Western Europe of not noticing the "loss" of Central Europe at part of its identity. While in the West, Kundera's essay was primarily read as a call for inclusion, he also overtly excluded other parts of Europe located further to the east. While he clearly distinguished Central Europe from Russia, his "Central Europe" lacks clear cultural and political borders: the Soviet Union is equated with historical Russia, and the countries between Poland and Russia do not figure prominently on his own map. His text, which became an important reference point in the debates of the 1980s / 1990s, therefore also points to the persistent shared or parallel blind spots on the mental maps across different parts of Europe. Some of them are only beginning to be filled in more comprehensively by the dynamics in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine.

Post-1991 EU and NATO Eastward Enlargement

The momentum for the eastward enlargement of the EU and NATO originated with the Central East European political elites and societies. A process to gain institutional membership channelled the claim to rejoin Europe and

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safeguard it more effectively – at least for the countries up to the Polish-Ukrainian or Lithuanian-Belarusian border. For Ukrainian or Belarusian citizens, for example, the EU's eastward enlargements of 2004 and 2007 fixed a new type of border to the West – a reversal or at least slowing down of the sense of opening accompanying the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Since 1989/1991, the distinction between the EU as a political institution made up of some European states on the one hand and a wider geographical, historical or "Europe" on the other hand has been reconfigured several times but remains blurred. Many refer to "Europe" when they mean the EU, thereby leaving a question mark over those countries to the (south-)east that are or strive to be candidate countries or have association agreements or other relationships with the EU. Similarly, as the country that has left the EU, the UK at times seems far from "Europe" – from both sides of the Channel. Moreover, as the early eastward enlargements become part of the past, two important facts disappear from view: just as the EU was initially reluctant to contemplate and institutionalise enlargement into Central Europe, it was also hesitant to actively engage with the countries on the other side of the new EU external border after 2004 and 2007.

Ukraine: Reclaiming Europe through Mass Protest and War

Ukraine is the country in the EU's vicinity that has reclaimed Europe most forcefully. Mass protests are generally rare; Ukraine has experienced several of them in quick succession, including: the "Revolution on Granite" in 1990, the "Ukraine without Kuchma" protests in 2001, the "Orange Revolution" in 2004 and the "Euromaidan" (known in Ukraine as the "Revolution of Dignity") in 2013–14. Each protest wave brought (limited) change, made the next wave more likely and shaped it through protest experiences, networks, memories and ideas.

The trigger for the Euromaidan protests starting in 2013 was the broken promise of then President Viktor Yanukovych, who at the last moment decided not to sign the long-prepared Association Agreement with the EU. The agreement as such seems like an unusually technical trigger for a mass protest, but it became the symbol for a conglomerate of hopes, claims and expectations. Closer relations with the EU have been associated with stability, democracy, the rule of law and higher living standards. Corruption had been a major concern in society – in fact, Yanukovych and his regime were as unpopular in western Ukraine as in the south-east of the country at

the outset of the Euromaidan. These protests, which started as a peaceful mass mobilisation of very different segments of society and were not restricted to Kyjv, subsequently narrowed in their composition and became radicalised – mostly in reaction to the violent attempts at repression by the regime.

Through interconnected moments of mass protest, Ukrainian society reclaimed Europe vis-a-vis different governments, the EU and "the West" more generally. Political elites reacted to these claims, tried to channel them and developed them further. External actors reinforced a domestic momentum but did not create it. The Euromaidan provided a new momentum for Ukraine's political and economic reforms as well as state and nation building, including a more coherent westward orientation towards the EU and NATO. The "Revolution of Dignity" lives on as a powerful memory and idea – arguably, it has become even bigger with hindsight. However, as it so clearly signalled Ukraine's political choice for democracy and "the West", it also prepared the ground for Russia's counter-reaction: Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, its war in Donbas from 2014, and the full-scale invasion since February 2022 aimed at disrupting and reversing this path. Ukraine's process of reclaiming Europe – ideationally and institutionally – has at the same time been an integral part of Europe's transformation since at least the 1980s and, sadly, Europe's biggest war since the end of World War II.

There is no just and secure peace in sight to date. Apart from the immediate destruction, mass displacement and casualties, many of the more medium- and long-term effects of this war cannot fully be grasped yet. Among the effects and learning processes is the realisation that, for decades to come, "Europe" (and the EU) will be seen through the lens of this war, the implications of which reach far beyond Ukraine and Russia. This war and its ramifications have put an end to the perception of a peace dividend and the post-1989 expectation that European/Western institutions could safeguard peace, stability, democracy, prosperity and, by extension, security as an alternative to (cold) war. In the wider region of Eastern Europe and globally, these ideas of "Europe" have been a powerful reference point. Beyond the EU, these values have often been appreciated more vividly than inside the EU where they have been taken for granted or remained overshadowed by everyday politics. How the EU or Europe will help to secure a peace in Ukraine and handle the legacies of Russia's war internally and externally will be of fundamental importance for its own future and position in the world. It is now up to the EU itself, its current and future member states, and other like-minded international actors to reclaim and reconfigure the idea of Europe.

In sum, the reclaiming of "Europe" as a set of ideas, practices and institutions is an inherently political and therefore contested process. It is closely tied to the openings created by critical junctures that demand a rethinking and reordering. We are in the middle of such a moment, sense its urgency, and cannot predict its outcomes. In other words, there is plenty to do for academia too.

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How Ukraine Helps Solve Global Problems

While the Russo-Ukrainian War is only one symptom of broader destructive international trends, its outcome co-determines in which direction the world will develop

ANDREAS UMLAND

Such still popular yet imprecise expressions like "Ukraine Crisis" or "Ukraine War" have been misleading many to believe that the Russo-Ukrainian War is a uniquely East European issue. According to this misperception, a Ukrainian leadership more submissive to Russia's could have avoided not only the unfortunate war. Kyiv supposedly still can, with concessions to Moscow, stem the rise of global risks spilling over from the "war in Ukraine" to other realms and regions.

If seen in historical and comparative perspective, the Russo-Ukrainian War looks very different. It has been only one of several permutations of Moscow's post-Soviet imperialism, and merely one facet of larger regressive developments since the end of the 20th century. Russia's assault on Ukraine is a replay, symptom and, perhaps, preview of pathologies familiar not only from Eastern Europe, but also from other world regions. The allegedly "Ukrainian Crisis" is neither a singular nor a local issue. It is less the trigger than a manifestation of larger destructive trends.

At the same time, the Russo-Ukrainian War is a grand battle about the future of Europe, the global principle of non-movability of state borders, and the impermissibility of such genocidal actions as the transfer of unaccompanied children from one ethnic group to another. The war concerns the integrity of the world's post-1945 UN order, by way of touching upon Ukraine's right to exist as a regular and integral member of the United Nations that was, unlike the Russian Federation, one of the organization's founding republics in 1945. The Russo-Ukrainian War has thus truly global significance.

To be sure, it is only one of several expressions of larger international disarray. Yet, the war's course and outcome can either, on the one side, accelerate or, on the other, reverse the current broader political, social and legal decay across the globe. Moscow's partial victory in Ukraine would permanently unsettle international law, order, and organization, and may spark armed conflicts as well as arms races elsewhere. A successful Ukrainian defence against Russia's military expansion, in contrast, will cause far-reaching beneficial effects on worldwide security, democracy, and prosperity in three ways.

A Ukrainian victory would, firstly, lead to a stabilisation of the rules-based UN order that emerged after 1945 and consolidated with the self-destruction of the Soviet Bloc and Union after 1989. Secondly, it would trigger a revival of international democratisation which has halted since the early 21st century, and needs a boost to start anew. And, thirdly, the ongoing Ukrainian national defence and state building contributes to global innovation and revitalisation in various fields from dual-use

technology to public administration – fields in which Ukraine has become a frontrunner.

Ukraine Stabilises International Order

The Russo-Ukrainian War has been only one of several attempts by powerful states, in their respective regions, to expand their territories since the end of the Cold War. Reviving practices of international politics from before 1945, several revisionist governments have tried or are planning to install their uninvited presence in neighbouring countries. The resulting military operations have been or will be offensive, repressive and unprovoked rather than defensive, humanitarian and preventive. Several revisionist autocracies have engaged in, or are tempted to try, replacing international law with the principle of "might is right."

An early post-Cold War example had been Iraq's 1990 annexation of Kuwait that was instantaneously reversed by an international coalition in 1991. Another example from the 1990s is Serbia's revanchist assaults on other former Yugoslav republics once ruled from Belgrade. During this period, Russia too began creating so-called "republics" in Moldova (i. e. Transnistria), and Georgia (i. e. Abkhazia and "South Ossetia"). At the same time, Moscow ruthlessly suppressed the emergence of an independent Chechen republic on its own territory.

Only recently, the Kremlin turned its attention to Ukraine. In 2014, Moscow created not only "people's republics" in Donetsk and Luhansk, but also scandalously annexed Crimea to the Russian Federation. Eight years later, Russia also illegally incorporated Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions into its official state territory.

The international community's reaction to Russia's border revisions has, unlike with respect to the Iraqi and Serbian attempts of the 1990s, remained half-hearted. The West's timid reactions only provoked further Russian adventurism. Moscow now demands Kyiv's voluntary cessation of all parts of the four Ukrainian mainland regions that Russia annexed in 2022. This oddly includes even some parts of Ukraine's territory that Russian troops never managed to capture. The Kremlin's final aim is still the eradication of Ukraine as a sovereign state and the Ukrainian nation is an independent cultural community.

At the same time, Beijing is bending established rules of conduct in the South as well as East China Seas and is stepping up its preparations to incorporate by force the

Republic of China on Taiwan into the PRC. Venezuela has announced territorial claims to neighbouring Guyana. Other revisionist politicians across the globe may be harbouring similar plans.

Moscow's official incorporation of Ukrainian lands into Russian state territory is unique by virtue of having been carried out by a permanent member of the UN Security Council once created to prevent such border revision. Russia's behaviour is also peculiar in view of its status as an official nuclear weapon-state and depositary government under the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Nevertheless, Moscow is trying to reduce or even destroy an official UN member and non-nuclear weapon state thereby undermining the entire logic of the non-proliferation regime, and its special prerogatives for the five permanent UN Security Council members whom the NPT allows to have nuclear weapons.

A Ukrainian victory against Russia would not be a merely local incident, but an event of far broader significance. It can become an important factor in preventing or reversing international border revisionism and territorial irredentism. Conversely, Ukraine's defeat or an unjust Russo-Ukrainian peace would strengthen colonialist adventurism across the globe. Ukraine's fight for independence is, for world affairs, thus both a manifestation of broader problems and an instrument of their solution.

Ukraine Revives International Democratisation

Russia's assault on Ukraine is not only a challenge to such principles as peaceful conflict resolution, national sovereignty, and the inviolability of borders. It is also the repercussion of another negative global political trend of the early 21st century, namely the decline of democracy and resurgence of autocracy. This regressive trend too manifests itself by no means only via the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine.

A major internal determinant of the Russian assault on Ukraine is that Putin's various wars have, since 1999, been sources of his undemocratic rule's popularity, integrity and legitimacy. Sometimes overlooked in analyses of Russian public support for authoritarianism, the occupation, subjugation or/and repression of peoples like the Chechens, Georgians and Ukrainians finds broad support among ordinary Russians. Their backing of victorious military interventions – especially on the territory of the former Tsarist and Soviet empires – is a major political resource and social basis of Putin's increasingly autocratic regime.

Regressive tendencies, to be sure, were already observable in Yeltsin's semi-democratic Russia of the 1990s – for instance, in Moldova and Chechnya. Yet, under Putin as Prime Minister (1999–2000, 2008–12) and President until today, the viciousness of Russian revanchist military operations in and outside of Russia has rapidly grown. This radicalisation is a function not only of escalating Russian irredentism per se, but also an effect of fundamental changes in Russia's political regime. Moscow's increasing foreign aggressiveness parallels the growth of domestic repression after Putin's take-over of Russia's government in August 1999.

The two major early spikes of Kremlin aggressiveness towards the West and Ukraine followed, not by accident, Ukrainian events of 2004 and 2014. They had much to do with the victories of those years' liberal-democratic Orange Revolution and Euromaidan Revolution. Ukraine's domestic development not only questions Russia's imperial pretensions, as it leads the largest former colony out of Moscow's orbit. The democratising Ukrainian polity is also a conceptual counter-model to authoritarianism in the post-communist world. Its very existence challenges the legitimacy of the post-Soviet autocracies in Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia.

Ukraine's fight for independence is thus not only a defence of international law and order, but also a battle for the cause of worldwide democracy. The contest between pro- and anti-democratic forces is global and had already been intensifying before, parallel to, and independently of, the Russo-Ukrainian War. At the same time, the confrontation between Russian autocracy and Ukrainian democracy is a particularly epic one.

If Ukraine is victorious, the international alliance of democracies wins and the axis of autocracies around Russia loses. In this scenario, not only will other democracies become more secure, self-confident, and energised. It is likely that more democracies will appear – above all, in the post-communist world from Eastern Europe to Central Asia. Diffusion, spill-over, or domino effects could also trigger re- or new processes of democratisation elsewhere.

Conversely, a Russian victory would embolden autocratic regimes and anti-democratic groups throughout the world. In such a scenario, democratic rule and open societies would become stigmatised as feeble, ineffective, or even doomed. The recent worldwide decline of democracy would less likely reverse and may even continue or accelerate further. While the "Ukraine Crisis" is not the cause of democracy's current problems, its successful resolution would reignite worldwide democratisation.

Ukraine Implements Transferable Innovations

A third, so far, underappreciated aspect of Kyiv's contribution to global progress are a growing number of new and partly revolutionary Ukrainian cognitive, institutional and technological advances which can be applied elsewhere. Already before the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2022, Kyiv initiated some domestic reforms that could also be relevant for the modernisation of other transition countries. After the victory of the Euromaidan uprising or "Revolution of Dignity" in February 2014, Ukraine started to fundamentally restructure its state-society relations.

This included the creation of several new anti-sleaze institutions, namely a specialised anti-corruption court and procuracy, as well as a corruption-prevention agency and investigation bureau. The novelty of these institutions is that they are all exclusively devoted to the preclusion, disclosure and prosecution of bribery. In April 2014, Ukraine started a far-reaching decentralisation of its public administration system that led to the country's thorough municipalisation. The reform transferred significant powers, rights, finances, and responsibilities from the regional and national levels to local self-governmental organs of amalgamated communities that have now become major loci of power in Ukraine.

The Euromaidan Revolution also led to a restructuring of relations between governmental and non-governmental organisations. Early independent Ukraine, like other post-Soviet countries, suffered from alienation between

civil servants and civic activists. After the "Revolution of Dignity", this gap began to close. For instance, Kyiv's famous "Reanimation Package of Reforms" is a coalition of independent think tanks, research institutes, and NGOs that has been preparing critical new reform legislation for the *Verkhovna* Rada (Supreme Council), Ukraine's unicameral national parliament.

Also in 2014, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia signed EU Association Agreements of a new and, so far, unique type. The three bilateral mammoth pacts go far beyond older foreign cooperation treaties of the Union and include so-called Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas between the EU and the three countries. The Association Agreements have been since 2014 gradually integrating the Ukrainian, Moldovan and Georgian economies into the European economy.

These and other regulatory innovations largely originating from post-revolutionary Ukraine have wider normative meaning and larger political potential. They provide reform templates, institutional models, and historical lessons for other current and future transition countries not only in the post-Soviet space. Ukraine's experiences can be useful for various nations shifting from a traditional to a liberal order, from patronal to plural politics, from a closed to an open society, from oligarchy to polyarchy, from centralised to decentralised rule, and from mere cooperation to deeper association with the EU.

While Ukraine's post-revolutionary developments are, above all, relevant for transition countries, its war-related experiences and innovations are also of interest to other states – not least the members and allies of NATO.

Such diffusion concerns both Ukrainian accumulated knowledge of hybrid threats and how to meet them, as well as Ukraine's rapid technological and tactical modernisation of its military and security forces fighting Russian forces on the battlefield and in the rear. Since 2014, Ukraine has become – far more so than any other country on earth – a target of Moscow's multivariate attacks with irregular and regular forces, in the media and cyberspaces, within domestic and international politics, as well as on its infrastructure, economy, and cultural, religious, educational and academic institutions.

Since 24 February 2022, Ukraine has engaged in a dramatic fight for survival against a nominally far superior aggressor country. Ukraine's government, army and society had to adapt quickly, flexibly and thoroughly to this existential challenge. This included the swift introduction of new types and applications of weaponry such as a variety of unmanned flying, swimming and driving vehicles as well as their operation with the help of artificial intelligence. In a wide variety of military and dual-use technology Ukraine had to innovate rapidly and effectively so as to withstand the lethal Russian assault.

In numerous further fields such as electricity transportation and preservation, electronic communication, information verification, emergency medicine, large-scale demining, post-traumatic psychotherapy, or veteran reintegration, to name but a few areas, the Ukrainian government and society had, have and will have to react speedily and resolutely. While Ukraine often relies on foreign experience, equipment and training, at the same time, it is constantly developing its own novel kit, approaches, and mechanisms which could potentially be useful elsewhere. This new Ukrainian knowledge and experience will come in especially handy for countries which may be confronted with similar challenges in the near or distant future.

Conclusions

The escalation of the so-called "Ukraine Crisis" in 2022 has been only one expression of already earlier and independently accumulating international tension. At the same time, the Russo-Ukrainian War is no trivial manifestation of these larger trends and no peripheral topic in world affairs. A Russian victory over Ukraine would have grave implications, not only on the post-Soviet region but far beyond it. Conversely, a Ukrainian success in its defence against Russia's genocidal assault and the achievement of a just peace will have stabilising and innovating effects far beyond Eastern Europe.

Apart from being a revanchist war of a former imperial centre against its one-time colony, Russia's assault on Ukrainian democracy is driven by Russian domestic politics. It is a result of Russia's re-autocratisation since 1999, which, in turn, follows larger regressive trends in the presence of democracy worldwide. Ukraine has been less of a trigger than a major victim of recent destructive international tendencies.

At the same time, Ukraine's fight can make crucial contributions to counteracting the global spread of revanchism. It can reignite worldwide democratisation and help modernise transitional as well as other nations in critical situations. A Ukrainian victory and recovery may save not only Ukraine and its neighbours from Russian imperialism. Ukraine's fight also contributes to solving numerous larger problems of the world today.

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Protecting the Rule of Law in Europe from Illiberal Threats

ANNA WÓJCIK

The Rise of Parties Challenging Liberal Democracy

In recent years, a growing number of political parties across Europe have gained prominence by challenging the foundational principles of liberal democracy, including the rule of law, adherence to international legal norms, and the protection of human rights, particularly the rights of minorities. This phenomenon is not confined to national borders; rather, it represents a broader transnational trend.

This process has been most prominently observed in Hungary, under the long-standing rule of Viktor Orbán's Fidesz; in Poland during the 2015–2023 tenure of Jarosław Kaczyński's Law and Justice (PiS) party; and, more recently, in Slovakia since 2023 under the leadership of Robert Fico and his party SMER–sociálna demokracia. However, this pattern is not restricted to Central and Eastern Europe. Illiberal and far-right parties have also gained traction in Western Europe. In Italy, Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy represents a more moderate articulation of the broader illiberal trend. In the 2025 elections, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) recorded significant electoral gains, while Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ) achieved its strongest result to date. In France, the Rassemblement National is preparing for the 2027 presidential election, poised to further challenge the liberal democratic consensus. These developments illustrate that democratic erosion can, and indeed does, occur even in consolidated democracies.

Transnational Networks of Illiberal Parties

Parties challenging the tenets of liberal democracy increasingly engage in cross-border collaboration, drawing strategic and ideological inspiration from one another and sharing resources and experiences. Similar developments are observable across the Atlantic, highlighting the global diffusion of illiberal practices. The exchange of knowledge among non-liberals or illiberals encompasses not only ideological narratives but also practical, technical, and strategic innovations in campaigning, especially in the context of digital and social media. This convergence has produced a "spillover effect", where political strategies and discourses are replicated and recalibrated across diverse democratic contexts.

Polarisation has become a defining feature of contemporary democratic politics in Europe. Particularly important here is affective polarisation, which is rooted not merely in ideological disagreement, but in deep emotional hostility between opposing political identities. Empirical studies indicate that negative emotions are the most powerful drivers of political mobilisation. In highly polarised systems with a limited number of parties, electoral engagement tends to increase; conversely, lower levels of polarisation and greater party fragmentation are often associated with political disengagement.

Political entrepreneurs exploit these dynamics by focusing on contentious and emotionally charged issues that elicit strong public reactions. The proliferation of social media further intensifies this process, enabling rapid agenda-setting and the amplification of polarising narratives, often in response to global rather than domestic developments. Ideological cleavages tend to transcend national contexts, contributing to a diffusion of illiberal ideas across borders.

Political actors intent on undermining liberal democracy often exhibit considerable adeptness in capitalising on both economic and non-economic sources of social discontent. These include income inequality, perceived socio-economic marginalisation, and relative deprivation, as well as concerns related to global geopolitical shifts, national security, migration, demographic decline, rural depopulation, demands for minority rights, and shifting cultural norms. These drivers are interdependent and interact in complex, often mutually reinforcing ways.

Actors who reject the normative framework of liberal democracy offer narratives that resonate with segments of the electorate. Consequently, a growing number of citizens appear willing to tolerate the erosion of democratic institutions in exchange for promises of cultural security, social order, or national renewal.

Playbook to Attack Democracy

Upon gaining power, such parties frequently employ what has been termed a "playbook of non-liberalism", a set of tactics designed to entrench incumbents and weaken mechanisms of democratic accountability. Common elements of this playbook include executive aggrandisement, the erosion of judicial independence, and constraints on media freedom, achieved, for example, through the politicisation of public broadcasters and regulatory or financial pressure on private media outlets critical of the government. Electoral success in these cases often occurs in environments where democratic institutions are already fragile, allowing illiberal actors to exploit systemic vulnerabilities and legal loopholes.

A key mechanism in the consolidation of illiberal governance is the deliberate intensification of social polarisation. This is often facilitated through the scapegoating of marginalised social groups, particularly migrants and ethnic or sexual minorities, and by contesting progressive achievements in gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. Additionally, Euroscepticism is instrumentalised to portray the European Union as a threat to national sovereignty and cultural identity.

Mainstreaming Illiberalism

Elements of illiberal governance have also been adopted by centrist or mainstream parties, contributing to the normalisation of anti-democratic rhetoric and policies. International law, particularly in areas such as migration and international criminal justice, has become increasingly contested, with even centrist parties applying its principles selectively. This gradual erosion of liberal democratic norms has significant long-term implications.

Reclaiming Europe

In the context of the illiberal surge, reclaiming Europe and its values entails strengthening and improving the quality of democracy within the EU Member States.

In practical terms, this requires, firstly, that the EU institutions make full and strategic use of the broad array of tools at their disposal to safeguard the Union's foundational values as enshrined in Article 2 TEU. The European Commission should not limit efforts to monitoring the rule of law situation in Member States. Instruments such as the Annual Rule of Law Report, the EU Justice Scoreboard, and the Media Pluralism Monitor play an important role in providing diagnostics. However, they must be complemented by more assertive political and legal actions.

In particular, the political dialogue procedure of Article 7 TEU should be used consistently and transparently. While it remains formally open in the case of Hungary, the procedure was discontinued against Poland in 2024 following the change of government in 2023, without a comprehensive and public assessment of the reforms undertaken by the new administration that would warrant such closure. Populist and illiberal actors frequently claim that EU enforcement actions are politically motivated and an example of double standards among Member States. To counter these accusations, EU institutions must provide clear and principled justifications for both the initiation and discontinuation of rule-of-law procedures. Moreover, they should assess developments in Member States cumulatively, taking into account the overall direction and interaction of legislative and institutional reforms.

It is equally important that the European Commission, as the guardian of the Treaties, actively and consistently launch infringement proceedings under Article 258 TFEU in cases where Member States breach EU law. When violations persist, the Commission should refer these cases to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), ensuring that judicial mechanisms remain an integral part of the EU's democratic defence.

Furthermore, the conditionality mechanism established by Regulation 2020 / 2092 (the Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation) must be fully utilised. It has already been activated in relation to Hungary. Legal analyses suggest that its application would have been warranted in the case of Poland prior to the 2023 elections and remains relevant today in the context of ongoing democratic concerns in Slovakia under the government of Robert Fico.

It is also essential that national courts make use of the preliminary ruling procedure under Article 267 TFEU when adjudicating cases that raise concerns about systemic deficiencies in the rule of law.

Moreover, it is crucial that the European Union provide systemic and sustained support to civil society and independent media across its Member States. Following the withdrawal of funding for civil-society organisations from the US budget under USAID, it has become evident how dependent many European pro-democracy organisations were on that external support. This development underscores the strategic importance for the EU itself to take a more active role in strengthening grassroots initiatives that promote the values set out in Article 2 TEU. In this context, the European Commission should significantly expand funding opportunities aimed at fostering a free, diverse, and pluralistic media environment, while also addressing long-standing structural challenges in national media sectors. Supporting independent journalism and civil-society actors not only enhances democratic resilience, but also constitutes a preventive strategy against democratic backsliding.

Conclusions

To conclude, it is crucial that the European Union respond swiftly and decisively to negative developments in Member States governed by openly illiberal parties or by parties exhibiting illiberal tendencies. The EU should not hesitate to employ the full range of legal and political instruments at its disposal. The effectiveness of the

Union's value-based framework depends not only on its formal availability but on its application.

Bottom-up actions remain equally vital. Judges in Member States, by referring questions to the Court of Justice of the European Union, play a critical role in clarifying and shaping EU standards in key areas.

Thirdly, sustainable EU support must be provided to grassroots civil-society initiatives that align with the values enshrined in Article 2 TEU. This is particularly urgent in light of the fact that transnational networks exist to actively undermine liberal democracy, to challenge or reinterpret foundational norms of the Union.

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III

PROSPERITY

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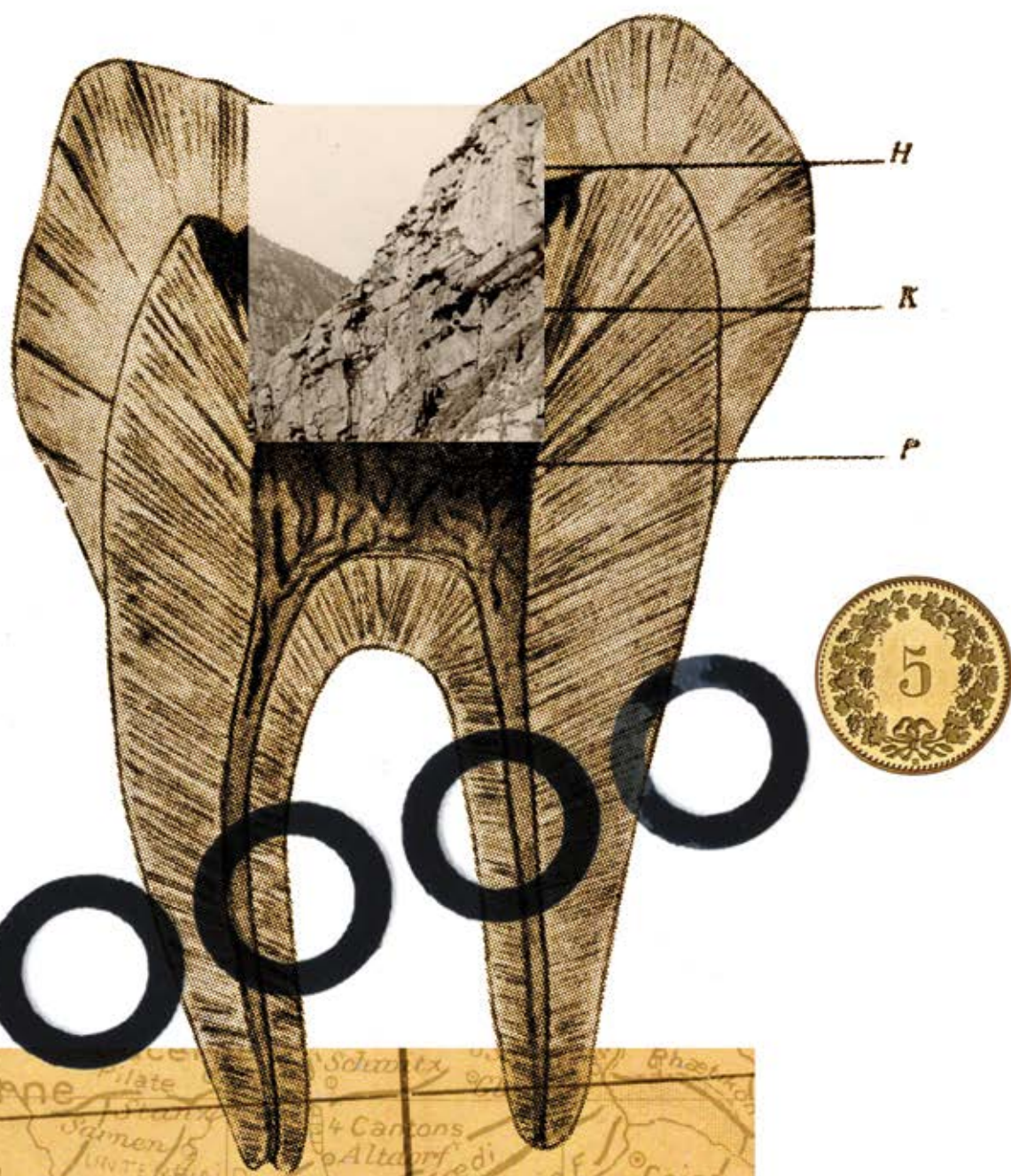
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Cities for Prosperity:
From Human-Centred European Urbanism to Post-War Reconstruction in Ukraine

GRUIA BĂDESCU

Reconstructed buildings in the historic centre of Warsaw.
Credit: Gruia Bădescu

I was born in Bucharest, a city that in my first decade of life witnessed large-scale urban destruction for a dictatorial urban remaking under Nicolae Ceaușescu. I grew up listening to stories of destroyed houses, shattering displacement, and a deep disgruntlement at the lack of agency people and communities had in shaping the remaking of their city. At eighteen, travelling to Warsaw, I was completely transformed by seeing the rebuilding of the city destroyed willingly by the Nazis. Reconstruction and making sense of difficult pasts in cities became my driving question – one that led me to study urban design, work for years on urban strategies for recovery, and do a PhD in Architecture on post-war reconstruction and dealing with the past. My work, both academic and in the practice of urban design, focuses on making sense of places with a difficult past, between city-making for the future and a care for memory and heritage.

I see cities in general as essential to prosperity: they facilitate exchange, weave connections between people, create synergies, and enable the circulation of ideas. They are complex assemblages of spatial and social infrastructures, of architecture and people, of flows and conversations. They make sense only when approached in an integrated and interdisciplinary way. Their planning and imagining must transcend beaten paths and create bridges between experts of many kinds and communities. I've been involved in city-making at different scales, from integrated urban development planning to strategies at neighbourhood level, including community-led urban plans, with a belief that participation is key for better cities. I admire how cities in Europe shaped a vision – an ideal of the European city model, as suggested by Juan Clos[1] – based on accessibility and public spaces, well-connected public transportation, the right to the city, equitable housing, and overall, a human scale that makes them primarily cities for people.[2] While there are limits, challenges, and geographic disparities within Europe on the articulations of urban policies, and while otherwise no-nonsense simple concepts like the fifteen-minute city have been weaponised by the far right, European city-making overall has been praised for its human-centred approach and the connected quality of life in urban Europe. And as research has emphasised, cities with a good quality of life attract people and generate prosperity.

While a discussion on European cities as engines of prosperity is timely, this text focuses on an even more urgent challenge, where prosperity intersects with the fight for freedom and democracy in Europe today: a vision for

Ukrainian cities for a world beyond the Russian aggression. The new realities in Europe make the conversation on Ukraine and beyond vital for prosperity. As such, I will concentrate in the remainder of this essay on post-war reconstruction. In today's context of widespread global destruction, the question of how cities are rebuilt after violent ruptures is more urgent than ever. Other important factors here are also pan-European solidarity and commitment to the triple vision of freedom, democracy and prosperity.

The first point to bear in mind is that reconstruction planning, thinking, and even actual rebuilding often begin before the war ends. Consequently, discussions about the reconstruction of Ukraine have to take place now parallel to the preparation of peace. This is attested by past experience. During the Second World War, British and German planners alike were drafting schemes for post-war reconstruction – often in the spirit of building "new, improved cities" in the wake of bombing campaigns. In Belgrade, after the Nazi bombings of 1941, newspapers were already publishing plans for a new central square. In Beirut, during the civil war, international experts were invited in 1981 to discuss visions for reconstruction, even though the war would continue until 1990. The absence of a clear end to conflict need not be a barrier – on the contrary, conversations about rebuilding Ukrainian cities, towns, and villages are vital now. They help initiate the long process of reconstruction and also offer people a sense of future orientation while the present remains harsh. In Sarajevo, interlocutors have told me over the years how meetings to discuss reconstruction during the siege – despite the risks of being shot by snipers – gave them a sense of purpose and resistance in a world that had become unrecognisable. In contemporary conflicts like Syria, residents and NGOs have even rebuilt entire structures without waiting for the end of the war.

Thinking and talking about reconstruction is also a matter of solidarity. Yet another essential point is that, notwithstanding all efforts to assist reconstruction from actors abroad, key to reconstruction is the empowerment of local agency. I have written elsewhere with concern that policy transfers and quick fixes as well as attitudes and practices which are paternalistic at best, and postcolonial at worst, can harm reconstruction processes.[3] Europe as a whole is implicated in – and should be part

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1   Juan Clos (2005), 'Towards a European City Model', in London: *Europe's Global City? Urban Age Conference Newspaper*.

2   Jan Gehl (2013), Cities for People. Washington: Island press.

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3   Gruia Bădescu (2023), 'Comparison and Its Discontents', *E-Flux* Architecture (blog), https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/reconstruction/560316/comparison-and-its-discontents/ (last accessed 01.07.2025); Gruia Bădescu (2024), 'Remaking the Urban: International Actors and the Post-War Reconstruction of Cities', *International Studies Quarterly* 68/2, sqae054.

of – Ukraine's reconstruction. In the discussions on other reconstructions in the Middle East, Africa, and beyond, another layer of responsibility, mitigated by historical awareness and sensitivity about colonial relationships must temper traditions of intervention and interference. Nonetheless, the fine balance between empowering the local and reinforcing local inequalities must also be problematised, as local actors who hold power in reconstruction processes often promote structural injustices and war-era gains.[4] As such, the question of power and agency in reconstruction has to be debated, and a horizontal, collaborative and civil-society-empowering approach is required to mitigate the power of local institutions and financial actors within a participatory, democratic city-making.

A third key point is that reconstruction is a development challenge, which is essential to long-term prosperity. Sultan Barakat defines post-war reconstruction as "a range of holistic activities in an integrated process designed not only to reactivate economic and social development but at the same time to create a peaceful environment that will prevent a relapse into violence".[5] Post-war reconstruction cannot be reduced to a mere technical task of rebuilding infrastructure – it is a deeply developmental challenge that touches every aspect of a society's recovery. War leaves not only physical destruction and the collapse of infrastructure, but also institutional fragility, depleted human and material resources, the absence or dysfunction of financial systems, and pervasive psychosocial trauma. These are urgent and interconnected problems, and they affect every facet of public life. In societies affected by civil war, or in territories where coping mechanisms during occupation may later be judged as collaboration, perhaps the most far-reaching and difficult to address is the destruction of human relationships: the loss of trust, dignity, confidence, and the capacity to imagine life in common.

While reconstruction is a development challenge, my fourth point is that it cannot be seen as 'business as usual'. Urban development plans must recognise the role of reconstruction in addressing psychological wounds and healing society. The trauma of living through destruction, of being displaced, of losing one's home, is not to be taken lightly. As architects in Sarajevo have shared with me, it is infinitely easier to reconstruct the physical fabric of a city than it is to rebuild trust, and society. Em-

placement – recovering urban environments for people to feel at home – is a key goal. And that is as much a spatial as it is a social process.

Dealing with the past through reconstruction is essential for peace and stability. In the 1960s, German psychologists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich wrote a provocative book, The Inability to Mourn, in which they argued that the frenetic focus on reconstruction in Germany after the Second World War hid an unresolved processing of the past. Undoubtedly, the German case is unique, involving the aftermath of a war started by the country and the crimes of the Holocaust. Yet the broader question applies: what role does reconstruction play as a way of engaging with war trauma? This is a key concern in my work on rebuilding cities, in which rebuilding for prosperity intersects with concerns about freedom and democracy. For Theodor Adorno, after atrocity, only a full reckoning with the meaning of violence could allow cultural production – including architecture – to become a vehicle for a meaningful dealing with the past. Cities and their architecture can be a way to recover what Hannah Arendt referred as the "world in common".[6] Reconstruction should not only happen quickly enough to provide shelter and infrastructure – it should also permit a form of societal engagement with the trauma of ruination and the loss of home.

Traces of war can themselves become part of reconstruction strategies, yet the role of memory in reconstruction has to be always situated. For instance, in Sarajevo, after a three-year siege marked by shelling and snipers, American architect Lebbeus Woods proposed rebuilding damaged buildings with visible "scars" and "scabs" on their reconstructed facades, to remind of the horrors of war. However, many in Sarajevo opposed the idea, as it was deemed too traumatising to confront people every day with the aftermath of war. In other cities, keeping a ruined building in a central location bolstered local victimhood narratives.[7] In Beirut, while the memory of the Lebanese Civil War was long suppressed by the post-war political elite, grassroots movements preserved spaces like Beit Beirut – a ruined building turned into a museum of memory.

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4   Dorothea Hilhorst, Ian Christoplos, and Gemma Van Der Haar (2010), 'Reconstruction "From Below": A New Magic Bullet or Shooting from the Hip?', *Third World Quarterly* 31 / 7, pp. 1107–1124.

5   Sultan Barakat (2005), *After the Conflict: Reconstruction and Redevelopment in the Aftermath of War*. IB Tauris, p. 11.

6   Gruia Bădescu (2022), 'The City as a World in Common: Syncretic Place-Making as a Spatial Approach to Peace', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*.

7   Gruia Bădescu (2021), 'Urban Memory After War: Ruins and Reconstructions in Post-Yugoslav Cities', in *Contested Urban Spaces*: Monuments, Traces, and Decentered Memories, ed. Ulrike Capdepón and Sarah Dornhof. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Gruia Bădescu (2021), 'War Ruins and Facing the Past: Architectural Modes of Engagement', in *Thinking with Ruins. Interdisciplinary Approaches to Functions, Interpretations and (Mis-)Uses of Remnants of the Past*, ed. Enass Khansa, Konstantin Klein, and Barbara Winckler. Berlin: Kadmos.

Every war is different, and every reconstruction must be different. While comparative insights are valuable, a central conclusion of my research is that only a context-specific reconstruction programme can be viable. Understanding the local context – both spatial and social – is essential. Even with the best intentions, architects and planners who are brought in without a real understanding of local realities often produce problematic results. Knowledge of other reconstruction cases can provide useful ideas, and international collaborations can be inspiring, but ownership must rest with local actors. And by "local actors", I don't just mean authorities and professionals – I mean a thorough inclusion of those who lived in and will return to these places. This kind of participation is essential; it was notably absent in most post-Second World War reconstructions. True participation is more than ticking a box – it requires deep engagement, including social mapping and understanding power dynamics within communities. Participation also means local ownership – not just by authorities and professionals, but by those who lived in these places and will live there again. Anthropologists and other social science researchers can play a crucial role in identifying key social dynamics and ensuring no group is left out. The goal of reconstruction should be a built environment where people feel emplaced, not alienated.

Finally, the question of post-war reconstruction is deeply tied to the idea of return. One of the lessons from past forced migrations is that, while many people express a desire to return after the war, post-war realities often lead them to settle elsewhere. The Dayton Accords placed a strong emphasis on enabling returns in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Yet with the country divided into two entities and industrial employment largely lost, many young people opted to stay in the larger cities of Sarajevo or Banja Luka – or to stay or move abroad. Nostalgia was strong, but economic survival and new opportunities often took precedence. In Ukraine, this means acknowledging that war-affected areas may see demographic changes after the war, and that large cities that might be less affected by destruction but provide refuge and economic opportunities could be in need of integrated urban thinking for development as part of the wider reconstruction. Lviv and Kyiv – as well as smaller cities in western Ukraine – have become safe havens for millions. Many have settled there, found new livelihoods, and may not return to the east or south. Reconstruction planning must therefore address both the rebuilding of destroyed areas and the adaptation of cities that now house new, possibly permanent populations.

Post-war reconstruction is not simply a matter of rebuilding roads, housing, or utilities. It is an opportunity – and an obligation – to shape the future of a society by how it remembers, heals, and reimagines itself. For Ukraine, this task intersects with the broader European aspirations for prosperity, freedom, and democracy. What is often missing in existing discussions about "cities for prosperity" is precisely this ethical and emotional dimension: the role of care, the importance of memory, and the need for justice. Too often, reconstruction is framed in technocratic terms, neglecting the wounds of war and the social fabric that must be mended. Without a deep reckoning with loss, trauma, and displacement, even the most advanced design or economically viable reconstructions risk alienating those who are meant to inhabit them.

The European city model, as an evolving process and practice, but also as a political project and horizon, is just as much about walkability and access to services as it is about participation, empowerment, and collective action. In the case of reconstruction, emplacement is a key value: fostering belonging and ensuring that rebuilt spaces respond to the lived experiences and expectations of people. In this light, rebuilding Ukrainian cities becomes a test not only of engineering or planning, but of values. Reconstruction is not only a spatial challenge but a deeply social one. Architecture can help heal, but only if reconstruction fosters belonging, reckoning, and hope. Cities must be built not only with concrete and glass, but with care, memory, and justice, and the hope of a better future.

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"I can tell you are too rich to be a refugee", or Perceptions of Prosperity in Times of Global Turmoil

LIA DOSTLIEVA
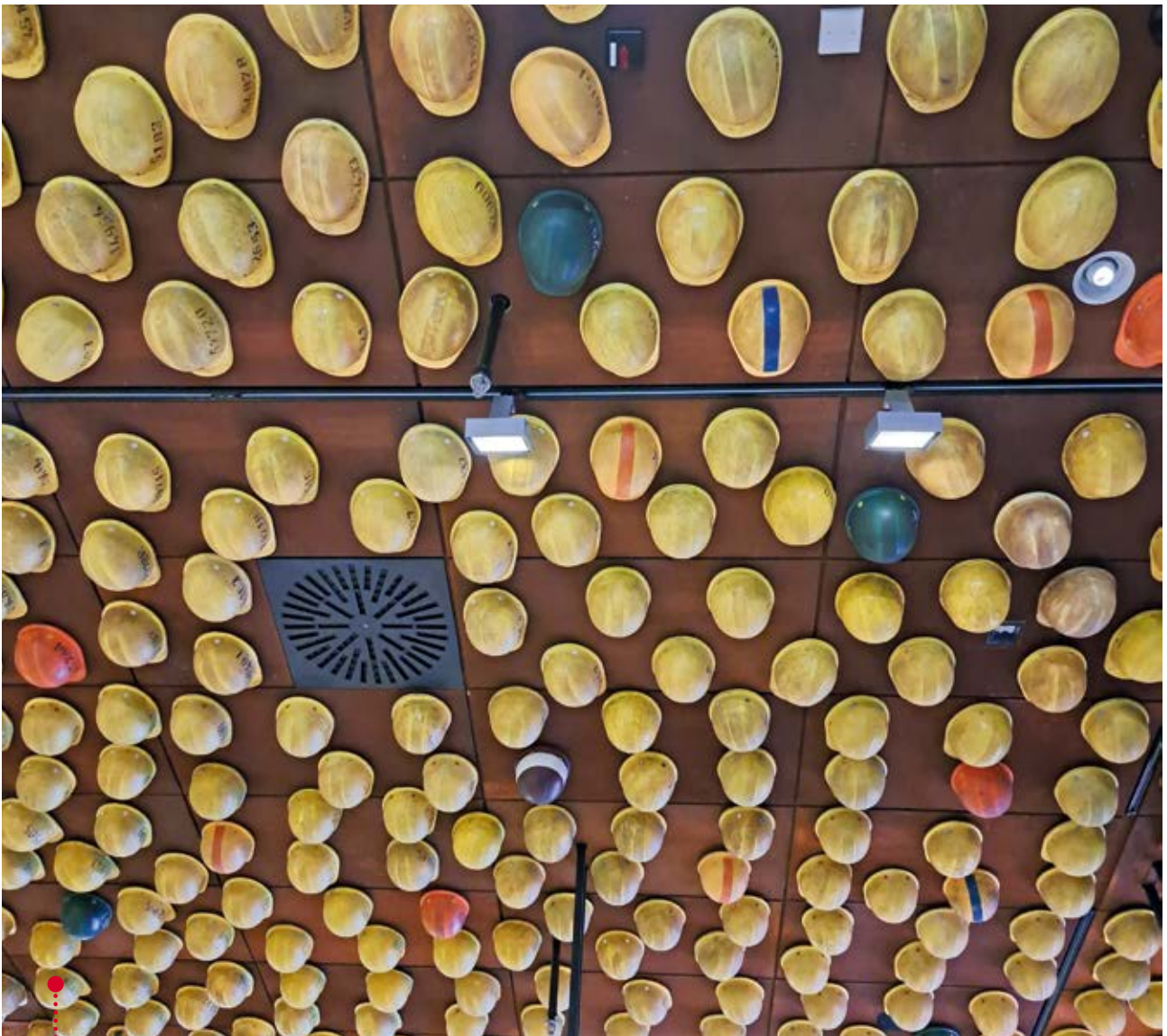
Museum at the European Solidarity Centre (Solidarnośc) Gdańsk –
detail of the workers helmets hanging from the ceiling.
Credit: Roland Römhildt

The United States had somehow never been on my travel list before: it was too far away, too expensive, and getting a visa with a Ukrainian passport was too troublesome. Yet here I was, wandering around the Bay Area, enjoying the warm autumn of 2024, trying to get a taste of the "land of the free".

Getting a visa actually turned out to be the easiest part: a friendly guy at the embassy asked what type of artist I am (visual artist) and whether I had made my huge plastic bracelets myself (I hadn't – they were cheap plastic crap from Zara). Then a nice lady at another window asked if I was going to bring my family (no), and what my host institution, CEC ArtsLink, does (brings artists from remote, weird places to the US).

In America, everyone asked how I liked it there. I struggled to give a proper answer so I wouldn't seem impolite or ungrateful. I felt like I was expected to be impressed – this was my first time there, after all, and I had spent most of my life in Ukraine. But in reality, I was mostly terrified. I felt unsafe. Sometimes I thought that wartime Ukraine still felt safer than some streets I accidentally walked through in the US, in broad daylight. That was definitely not what people asking me wanted to hear, so I kept those thoughts to myself.

I arrived just in time to witness how the proud citizens of the land of the free – the cradle of the first democracy in the world – overwhelmingly voted for Trump. My roommate, an artist from the Midwest, was scrolling through election updates on her screen. "I can't believe this is actually happening," she said. I thought I could but said nothing. She was already on the verge of tears, and I didn't want to upset her further.

Just a few days before election night, I had dinner with a pleasant, upper-middle-class older couple. After exchanging life stories and searching for some shared geography or common roots, they asked how I came to speak such good English. They were also interested in my thoughts on the war in Ukraine. I said it largely depended on how Americans would vote, and we ended up talking politics for most of the evening. I asked what they would do if Trump won. "Oh, we're not worried," they said. "We're not worried because our American institutions are very strong," they added in a slightly patronising tone. They repeated it once again later that evening as if trying to convince me – or perhaps themselves. I felt irritation slowly rising in me in response to their confidence. I couldn't help it – I wanted them to be worried. Just a little bit would have been nice. But I didn't want to seem ungrateful for their hospitality, so I said nothing.

I was invited to another dinner, quite similar to the previous one. This time it was a very established older white artist who invited me over, who was also a person within American academia. On our way to their home, they asked how my day had been. I shared that I had gone to see some art; I was curious to learn more about American art before the 17th century – not Native art, but that of the colonisers. My host looked at me as if they were trying to understand what I was saying, so for a moment, I panicked that I was too tired to explain what I meant. After a pause, they said: "Oh, I see. That is because you have never actually studied art history, right? Was an art school too expensive for you?" I thought that it was rather because that specific period of American art was not that popular in Europe, but I said that my main degree was in cultural anthropology and not in art. I could immediately see that my answer was wrong: the word "anthropologist" was totally out of scale here. It implied a different set of meanings and a different power structure. You were supposed to be from a much more privileged, much wealthier background, educated in a proper Western institution; then you could go to some remote islands and study exotic cultures there. How could you be someone from a poor, distant, war-torn country and say you are an anthropologist? That's not how things work.

I jumped from dinner to dinner, carefully avoiding questions about what I was working on while I was in the US. I was so overwhelmed by exposure to the extreme levels of misery that an unbelievably large part of society had been marginalised to, that I couldn't really concentrate on anything else. How was I supposed to enjoy outstanding contemporary art pieces in a flourishing art institution with giant budgets if I had to make my way there through a crowd of homeless people who were basically living on its doorstep? Why would I make any art at all – what was the point of it? Art (once more) started to feel like an exclusive toy reserved for a tiny group of the super-privileged, a toy that had no meaningful impact on real life. I had struggled a lot with that feeling in 2022 when the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine started; in the US, it struck me again. I shared my feelings with another artist, an American, and they said that I should always say "unhoused" instead of "homeless" because the latter is dehumanising, and that focusing on our personal art practice is a very powerful way of resisting oppressive powers, so I shouldn't refuse my art. I wasn't sure how using a slightly different word would help those people who were dehumanised by the system that denied them any human rights. I thought that hiding behind your personal art practice felt more like careerism or, at best, escapism, than actual resistance. I also felt that I wasn't up for a fight.

I talked to people with no homes (was that humanising enough?) on the streets, fluctuating between being more scared than heartbroken, or more heartbroken than scared, depending on the situation. I resented myself for that fear, but I couldn't help it. I was happy to give them cash or food, but whatever I could do for them would never fix their situation. Some shared their life stories and gave me long speeches about human rights. Some looked somewhat disappointed when I agreed with everything they said.

I walked around carrying on my shoulder a tote bag with a quote from our "Comfort Work" project with Andrii Dostliev, commissioned by the Ukrainian Pavilion for the 2024 Venice Biennale. In Ukrainian, it goes: "по вас видно, що ви багаті" – which I thought could be loosely translated as, "I can tell you're rich." The curators, who were based in the UK at the time, consulted with local native speakers, so the quote was translated as "I can tell you are loaded." When I came to the US, I brought that bag with me, with I CAN TELL YOU ARE LOADED printed on it. It was big enough to fit all the stuff I always carried around. So, walking along the beautiful and filthy streets of San Francisco, interacting with homeless / unhoused people, and carefully trying to avoid human bodies twisted into impossible shapes by fentanyl, terrified by the depth (and the look!) of this utmost despair and torn apart by anger at the system and power structures that created it, I couldn't help but think that in this context, that was probably the worst possible piece of merch a solo travelling female could have – but I also laughed at the fact that British English had probably made it incomprehensible to most Americans.

The quote belonged to one of the backstage heroines of our project – a Ukrainian woman displaced by war and now living in Düsseldorf – who had shared her experience of interacting with the host society – in this case, German society. She said she often felt she wasn't the kind of refugee people expected. She was told she looked too affluent, too accomplished to be a "real" refugee. This mismatch created a strange situation: because of her "too wealthy" and "too polished" appearance, she was assumed to be someone who couldn't possibly need help settling into her new life. Once, a landlord – a German man she hoped to rent an apartment from – told her she looked so rich that he could tell she could surely afford to stay in a hotel with her entire extended family – elderly relatives and children included. Apparently, in his mind, a refugee was someone in desperate need, with a poor, unkempt appearance, dressed in rags. A middle-class, educated woman from a capital city of four million didn't fit that mental image.

Another participant in the project, a university student from Kharkiv, offered a similar reflection. "Sometimes it felt like they thought we were fleeing poverty, not war," she observed. Whenever it became evident that many Ukrainians had led stable, even comfortable lives before displacement – lives that, in many cases, were of higher quality than the precarious conditions they now faced – this seemed to unsettle locals. The response wasn't always sympathy, but at times confusion or even hostility. How dare you be dissatisfied? *How can you say you used to live better than you do here? How can you be so ungrateful?* We were expected to quietly accept whatever came our way – even hard, underpaid labour – regardless of how well-educated and professionally accomplished many of our women were, she continued.

One couldn't overlook the role the media had played in shaping the image of the refugee as a poor, helpless figure. As Maryna Stepanska writes in her essay *"The New Norm"*,[1] Western media often portrayed Ukraine through a narrow loop of visual clichés – images so familiar they began to blur into one another. There was always an old lady, wrapped in layers, wearing a mohair beret, standing in front of a crumbling house. Then another old lady, this time in a queue for humanitarian aid. Occasionally, there were animals: stray cows wandering through debris, dogs with matted fur and haunted eyes. These creatures weren't just incidental. Stepanska suggests they functioned almost like emotional punctuation – the final sorrowful chord in a symphony of destruction. She shows how this curated imagery had come to dominate the global imagination of the war, coalescing into a collective visual myth about what Ukraine is under the banner of a single, all-encompassing hashtag: #Ukraine. "And now, editors at The Guardian or The New York Times don't even bother asking: "Does anyone else live in Ukraine?" Anyone besides apocalyptic grandmothers, smudged children, and cows with sad eyes?" she sums up bitterly.

This creation of stereotypical, exoticised imagery may help explain why some of the most pronounced expressions of discomfort across Europe weren't provoked by stories of loss or hardship, but rather by the sight of Ukrainian refugees arriving in relatively new cars – or by images of Ukrainian supermarkets from 2022 and 2023, their shelves not just stocked, but abundant with imported goods like mangoes and oranges.

As Stepanska suggests, part of the problem lies in the collective imagination – the long-established figure of the refugee, shaped not only by humanitarian narratives but also by decades of media imagery. A refugee

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1   Stepanska, M. (2024), "The New Norm", in: *We Who Have Changed*. IST publishing.

has to be visibly lacking. They have to appear entirely other: vulnerable, destitute, foreign. They have to wear their need on their bodies – in tattered clothes, in worn-out shoes, in a certain posture of desperation. Anything outside that frame can provoke discomfort, confusion, or outright resentment. Because, in this unspoken visual grammar, to be helped one has to first look helpless.

In examining the representation of refugees, it is crucial to understand the gendered dynamics that shaped how they are perceived. As Natalia Bloch highlights,[2] the discourse surrounding refugees is often deeply gendered, with women – especially mothers with children – framed as more legitimate or deserving refugees than men. This narrative is rooted in cultural perceptions that associate women and children with innocence, vulnerability and victimhood, while men are frequently cast as either threatening or responsible for their displacement. This gendered hierarchy of "deserving" refugees creates a visual and moral dichotomy that shapes both the humanitarian response and public perception.

Moreover, Bloch's discussion of the "feminised humanitarianism" that frames women and children as more deserving victims further complicates the refugee experience. Women who don't conform to the idealised image of the passive, vulnerable refugee are met with scepticism. This discrepancy between appearance and expected victimhood creates a situation where refugees have to prove their suffering by embodying the right markers of distress. In the eyes of the host society, women who appear to have the means to cope with their circumstances are seen as "unworthy" of aid, while those who visually embody or display suffering are more easily embraced by the humanitarian narrative. This pressure to conform to the image of the grateful, silent refugee is particularly pronounced for women, who are expected to bear the emotional labour of their families while also fitting into a specific visual and moral framing.

Still, regardless of how ready or not the Western public may be, everyone flees war. Poor people and rich people. Good artists and bad artists. Once they cross the border, they are all met with foreign aid, foreign bureaucracy, and a long list of expectations and stereotypes they somehow have to navigate – while the war still rages on.

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2   Bloch, N. (2024), "Is a Woman a Better Refugee Than a Man? Gender Representations of Refugees in the Polish Public Debate", Migration Studies – Review of Polish Diaspora, pp. 39–56.

Access to Healthcare as a Pillar of Freedom: Innovations for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine

ANNA GREBINYK & MANJIT DOSANJH

1. The Healthcare Crisis in Ukraine: Current Challenges

Access to healthcare is a fundamental precondition for equality of opportunity in a free and inclusive society, and it was the fundamental premise on which the WHO was founded in 1948. Without it, individuals struggle to be equally involved and to contribute fully to their communities, and it limits their ability to gain and take advantage of their freedom. These aspects become increasingly evident in times of war, as can be seen now in the Ukrainian healthcare system impaired by the ongoing Russian offensive. The conflict deepens a humanitarian crisis that leads to violations of human rights and threatens individual and societal freedom.

The Russian invasion has profoundly disrupted Ukraine's healthcare system and its infrastructure, leading to a crisis characterised by:

– Destruction of medical facilities. According to data from Physicians for Human Rights, there have been at least 1,336 attacks on healthcare facilities since the onset of the full-scale invasion. The resulting infrastructure destruction has disabled the operation of many hospitals and clinics as well as limiting access to the surrounding population.

– Shortages of medical supplies. Supply chains are disrupted, which results in critical shortages of medical supplies and equipment. The impacted medical facilities struggle to deliver both routine and emergency medical services.

– Loss of medical professionals. The war has precipitated a significant displacement of healthcare workers – over 30,000 medical professionals have joined the armed forces, and thousands more have emigrated or become internally displaced. This has resulted in a real shortage of trained personnel, compromising healthcare access for approximately 30 % of Ukraine's population.

– Impact on cancer treatment. In the initial months of the war, the number of cancer patients receiving surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy was halved. Although some stabilization has occurred, thousands of patients have been forced to relocate their treatment within Ukraine or seek care in neighbouring countries – radiation therapy in Moldova and Romania,[1] for example, leading to interruptions in treatment protocols and adversely affecting patient outcomes.

According to the ART (Access to Radiotherapy) study led by Dosanjh et al. for the International Cancer Expert Corps and University of Oxford,[2] Ukraine's radiotherapy capacity was already limited before the war, and the conflict has only exacerbated the situation. A significant number of patients, particularly those in rural or high-conflict areas, now face critical delays or a complete lack of access to radiation treatment, further deepening healthcare inequality.

Beyond cancer care, the closure or reduced capacity of hospitals has impaired the management of both chronic and acute medical conditions. This shortage deepens social and economic inequalities, undermines community resilience, and poses significant challenges to the nation's long-term stability and freedom.

2. A Vision for Sustainable and Innovative Healthcare Recovery

While rebuilding Ukraine's healthcare system is essential, simply restoring pre-war conditions is not sufficient. The post-war healthcare infrastructure must be designed to be stronger, more sustainable, and more inclusive. This requires:

– infrastructure reconstruction with resilience in mind: hospitals and research centres must be rebuilt with advanced, durable low-to-no-risk technologies.

– integration of innovative medical solutions: cutting-edge technologies, including advanced radiotherapy, telemedicine, and decentralised healthcare delivery.

– strengthening capacity building: Ukraine needs long-term strategies for training and retaining medical professionals.

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1   Vulpea H. et al. (2024), "Design and implementation of a humanitarian cancer care programme for Ukrainian refugees in Moldova and Romania", in *The Lancet Oncology* 25/3, pp. 289–291.

2   Dosanjh M. et al. (2024), "Access to diagnostic imaging and radiotherapy technologies for patients with cancer in the Baltic countries, eastern Europe, central Asia, and the Caucasus: a comprehensive analysis", in *The Lancet Oncology* 25/11, pp. 1487–1495.

3. Accelerator-Based Innovations in Radiation Therapy

Located at the intersection of international collaboration and support, cutting-edge technology and healthcare policy lie in the advancement of radiation research and cancer treatment. In this context, the humanitarian initiative within the framework of the non-profit project "Smart Technologies to Extend Lives with Linear Accelerators" (STELLA) led by International Cancer Expert Corps in collaboration with the European Organization for Nuclear Research, Science and Technology Facilities Council, as well as Cambridge, Lancaster and Oxford universities together with partners in African countries, headed by Manjit Dosanjh, represents an exemplary initiative that harnesses accelerator technology initially developed for particle physics to create novel, cost-effective radiotherapy systems. The core mission of STELLA is to bridge the gap in global cancer care by designing compact and adaptable linear accelerators suited for resource-limited environments, especially in low- and middle-income countries. By reducing the complexity and cost of traditional radiotherapy machines, STELLA works on a scalable and sustainable linear accelerator solution for regions including rural regions in high-income countries where access to high-quality cancer treatment remains a pressing challenge.

The STELLA project exemplifies how advances in accelerator and particle physics can be translated into real-world affordable medical applications. The system integrates compact accelerator designs, novel beam delivery methods, and robust quality control mechanisms to ensure treatment efficacy while reducing infrastructure and maintenance demands. Unlike conventional radiotherapy machines, which often require complex and specialised technologies and significant operational and maintenance costs, STELLA's technology prioritizes ease of operation, reduced maintenance, and adaptability to diverse clinical and infrastructure settings.

The STELLA project seeks to address several critical issues:

– Increasing access to radiotherapy: globally, there is a significant disparity in access to radiotherapy services. In African countries, there is approximately one radiotherapy device for every 35 million people, compared to one for every 80,000 to 100,000 people in the USA and many European countries. Ukraine faced a similar problem: before the war, the country had approximately 60 radiotherapy machines for a population of 41 million (one device per 680,000 people). By comparison, Germany, with a population of 84 million, has over 500 radiotherapy machines (one device per 168,000 people), ensuring significantly better and improved access to cancer treatment. STELLA aims to bridge this gap by developing a radiotherapy machine that is affordable and suitable for deployment in low- and middle-income countries.

– Enhancing equipment reliability: low- and middle-income countries often face challenges due to aging radiotherapy machines, delays in obtaining spare parts, and frequent power shortages that affect equipment lifespan. STELLA addresses these issues by designing a radiotherapy machine with integrated software capable of predicting faults, streamlining maintenance, and guiding physicians, thus reducing downtime and improving treatment continuity.

– Increasing efficiency using an AI-based knowledge system drawing on the experience of millions of cancer cases already treated that will reduce the time experts require and enable more effective and safer treatment plans and treatment delivery.

– Building local expertise: a lack of qualified personnel to operate and maintain radiotherapy machines presents a significant barrier in low- and middle-income countries. STELLA incorporates creative approaches to training and servicing, strengthening local expertise and ensuring sustainable operation of radiotherapy machines.

– Lower security risk technology: replacing cobalt-60 based machines with linear accelerators significantly reduces security risks, as cobalt sources require strict safety controls and pose long-term radiation hazards if not properly managed. Linear accelerator eliminates these concerns, providing a safer and more sustainable solution for modern radiotherapy infrastructure.

Beyond technological innovation, the success of such initiatives relies on coordinated efforts between clinicians, scientists, engineers, users, regulators, and healthcare policymakers. International cooperation plays a vital role in establishing regulatory frameworks, securing funding mechanisms, and streamlining the development of advanced radiotherapy solutions. For Ukraine, fostering partnerships between governmental agencies, research institutions, and international organizations could accelerate the adoption of compact linear accelerators and integrate them into a broader strategy for rebuilding medical infrastructure.

The potential impact of such technology-driven solutions extends beyond their initial target regions. Ukraine, currently facing enormous healthcare infrastructure challenges due to the ongoing war, could greatly benefit from the tailored adoption of the STELLA model. By leveraging this expertise in compact, efficient linear accelerator systems, Ukraine could implement resilient radiation therapy facilities that continue to operate more effectively even under adverse conditions. Given the destruction of several oncology centres in Ukraine, ensuring access to high-quality radiotherapy could be instrumental for long-term national recovery efforts.

Ultimately, the STELLA model serves as a non-profit blueprint for expanding access to radiotherapy, potentially transforming cancer care in the regions with infrastructural limitations. By addressing fundamental barriers such as equipment costs, operational complexities, and personnel training, this initiative aligns with a broader vision of democratizing access to life-saving cancer treatments worldwide. Through strategic investment in accelerator-based healthcare innovations, the international scientific community has the opportunity to make a lasting impact on cancer-care practices, ensuring that cutting-edge cancer treatment is no longer a privilege of high-income nations but a universal healthcare right.

4. A Vision for the Future: Rebuilding Healthcare Beyond Recovery

The ultimate goal is not just to restore Ukraine's healthcare system but to reimagine it as a model of resilience and innovation. This vision includes:

– investment in medical technology and research to foster innovation in diagnostics and treatment.

– fast-tracking medical innovation approvals and accelerating the adoption of cutting-edge treatments and technologies.

– international collaboration for knowledge exchange and capacity building in medical physics, oncology and emergency care.

5. Conclusion

Ukraine's experience demonstrates that healthcare is more than a service – it is a fundamental pillar of freedom and national security. The Russian war in Ukraine highlights the urgent need to design and implement sustainable, resilient and efficient healthcare systems that can withstand external shocks while continuing to provide essential services.

By prioritizing innovation, resilience and international cooperation, Ukraine can build a healthcare system that not only recovers from war but sets a new standard for equitable and sustainable cancer care.

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Sustainable Development and Resilience as a Basis for Reclaiming Europe

MARIA KUCHERIAVA

Europe stands at a crossroads, facing multiple crises that challenge its socio-economic and political stability. From climate change to economic downturns, geopolitical tensions, and social fragmentation, Europe must adopt a holistic and forward-thinking approach to reclaim its vision of freedom, democracy and prosperity. Sustainable development and resilience emerge as the dual pillars upon which the future of Europe must be built, ensuring long-term stability, economic prosperity, and social well-being.

Sustainable development serves as a cornerstone for Europe's future by promoting economic growth without compromising environmental integrity or social equity. Sustainable development is an important area for ensuring the recovery and prosperity of Europe, which includes economic, environmental, social and governmental aspects. This approach strikes a balance between the needs of modern society and the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and it contributes to strengthening European values.

Sustainable development allows us to create a stable and innovative economy, promoting the development of technologies and green investments. The European Green Deal[1] is aimed at transitioning to a climate-neutral economy, which would increase the continent's competitiveness and create new jobs. Renewable energy, circular economy, and digital technologies are important components of economic growth that integrates environmental constraints.

Furthermore, sustainable development extends beyond environmental concerns to encompass social sustainability. Equitable access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities must be prioritised to prevent growing disparities across member states. Sustainable cities and communities that integrate green infrastructure, efficient public transport, and smart urban planning will be vital in enhancing the quality of life for European citizens.

For Ukraine, under martial law, the need to support and develop the potential of the national economy makes it expedient to find new reserves and resources. It is adherence to the key principles of the circular economy (the 9-R concept encompasses the following principles: refuse, rethink, reduce, reuse, repair, refurbish, remanufacture, repurpose, recycle, recover) that will ensure the achievement of resilience and sustainability tasks.

Resilience, in both economic and societal dimensions, is crucial for Europe to withstand and recover from current and future crises. The challenges caused by the current polycrisis underscores the necessity of resilient systems, robust supply chains, and adaptive economic policies.

Economic resilience can be reinforced through strategic autonomy, reducing overreliance on external supply chains while fostering local innovation and industrial competitiveness. The European Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)[2] is an example of how targeted investments in green and digital transitions can create a more self-sufficient and adaptable economy.

Moreover, political and institutional resilience will be key to countering populism and fragmentation within the EU. Strengthening democratic institutions, promoting civic engagement, and fostering inclusive governance can help build a Europe that is both unified and adaptable to changing global dynamics.

Sustainability and resilience are deeply interconnected. One cannot exist without the other. A sustainable Europe cannot thrive without resilience to external shocks, and resilience is ineffective without a foundation of sustainable development. Addressing climate change, economic instability, and social inequality requires policies that simultaneously advance both goals.

For instance, investing in renewable energy not only supports sustainability but also enhances resilience by reducing energy dependency on external actors. Similarly, digitalisation and technological innovation contribute to both economic resilience and sustainable growth by fostering efficiency and adaptability in various sectors.

Examining the case of Ukraine in the area of circular economy shows the following:

Certain steps towards building the institutional prerequisites for the implementation of circular economy principles in Ukraine have already been taken. In particular, the National 2024–2027 Plan[3] of the Ukraine Facility implementation[4] provides for:

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1 Bonfani, M., Chiocchetti, I. (2024), A vision for delivering the European Green Deal in the new EU policy cycle: https://eu.boell.org/en/2024/02/06/european-green-deal-new-eu-policy-cycle (last accessed 01.07.2025).

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2 European Commission. The Recovery and Resilience Facility: https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en (last accessed 01.07.2025).

3 Ukraine Facility: https://www.ukrainefacility.me.gov.ua/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

4 Regulation (EU) 2024/792 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 February 2024 establishing the Ukraine Facility: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202400792 (last accessed 01.07.2025).

According to government policy documents, the circular economy is a tool that minimises the cost of recovery and reconstruction, as it requires significantly less amounts of natural resources, the extraction and use of which in the current environment can lead to increased damage to natural ecosystems.

In the context of European integration processes in Ukraine, it is advisable to rely on the EU's institutional experience in implementing the principles of the circular economy and to recognise the importance of bringing the domestic regulatory framework for the implementation of circular economy principles in line with EU legislation. The EU mechanism for stimulating and regulating the transition from a linear to a circular economy has demonstrated its effectiveness over the past decade. In particular, according to research by the Circle Economy Foundation, the level of implementation of circular economy principles globally in 2018 was 9.1 %, and in 2023 was 7.2 %. At the same time, the figure for the EU in 2023 was 11.8 %.[5]

Young scientists play a pivotal role in providing scientific justification for the implementation and adaptation of the European public administration mechanism to integrate circular economy principles. Through interdisciplinary research, innovative policy recommendations, and empirical analysis, emerging scholars contribute to the development of governance models that balance economic efficiency with environmental responsibility.

The process of harmonising Ukrainian legislation with EU requirements requires proper scientific justification for the implementation and adaptation of the European public administration mechanism for integrating circular economy principles.

In general, the EU experience is a vivid example of public policy aimed at rooting the principles of the circular economy in all spheres of economic life of its member states and, in the context of the European integration processes taking place in Ukraine, requires a comprehensive and systematic understanding for implementation in domestic practice.

The transition to responsible resource consumption should be a systematic, comprehensive and integrated process that requires proper coordination and cooperation between stakeholders at all levels: national, regional, sectoral and micro (enterprise) levels. The further

– adoption of the Strategy for the Implementation of Circular Economy Principles and the Action Plan; adoption of the National Waste Management Plan in Ukraine until 2033 (reform of Component 5 of Component I "Development of the Circular Economy");

– attracting investments in the areas related to critical raw materials, which include the circular economy (clause 3 of the General Investment Needs and Opportunities in 2024 – 2027);

– the gradual introduction of mandatory ESG reporting, which "will contribute to the sustainable development of industry, attract investment, and the transition to a circular economy" (reform of Pillar 3 of Component I "Use of modern extraction technologies and integration of Ukraine into modern processing value chains");

– the green transformation of Ukraine through reconstruction based on a "green, circular, nature-saving approach" (Section 15 "Green Transition and Environmental Protection) and others.

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5   European Commission. Circular economy: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy_en (last accessed 01.07.2025).

development of this process in Ukraine requires proper scientific substantiation of conceptual approaches and a strategic vision for the development of a circular economy in the context of European integration processes, ensuring resilience in the face of war and post-war recovery.

In this context, the Young Network TransEurope (YNT) could serve as a dynamic platform for facilitating cross-border cooperation, interdisciplinary research, and policy innovation among early-career researchers. YNT may initiate thematic working groups focused on circular economy implementation, post-crisis resilience strategies, and sustainable public governance. For example, one tangible initiative could be a collaborative research project on mapping the integration of circular economy principles in Eastern European reconstruction frameworks, involving both Ukrainian and EU-based scholars. Additionally, YNT could support policy labs and foresight workshops to co-design regulatory tools aligned with EU sustainability goals. Personally, I hope to contribute by leading a working group on fiscal incentives for green innovation in post-war economies, with the aim of producing evidence-based policy briefs for both national authorities and European institutions.

To reclaim Europe, sustainable development and resilience must be integrated into the long-term vision. Through green economic transitions, enhanced digital infrastructure, strengthened democratic institutions, and inclusive social policies, Europe can navigate the challenges of the 21st century while maintaining its core values of solidarity, prosperity, and environmental responsibility. By embedding sustainability and resilience into its foundations, Europe can emerge stronger, more unified, and better prepared for the future.

Europe's prosperous future depends on sustainable development and its mainstreaming into all spheres of society by developing appropriate institutional mechanisms for funding and supporting sustainable development and supporting resilience projects.

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Central European Road to Prosperity and Security through Democracy and Freedom – the Political Determinants of the Middle-Income Trap

RAFAŁ RIEDEL

In the living memory of Central Europeans, the road to freedom, democracy and prosperity has always led through Europe(anisation). The activists in the Solidarity movement of the 1970s and 1980s already expressed such ambitions, even though they predominantly meant Westernisation. From today's perspective, it is easy to judge the neo-liberal paradigm of the transitory late 1980s and early 1990s, but – and this is important to remember – at that time it was much more a chaotic 'escape from' than a well-thought 'run towards' any particular solution or system. That run away from a bankrupt political and economic regime was possible due only to the unprecedented (for hundreds of years) weakness of Russia. The geopolitical window of opportunity was open for a relatively limited time span and Central Europeans seized this opportunity successfully. They emancipated themselves from Moscow, transformed their polities, policies and politics, went through a painful shock therapy, joined the Western political, economic and security structures, and launched their journey toward a free, democratic, and prosperous future.

Today, after two decades of belonging to the European Union, the perspective is completely different. Most of the Central European states have caught up to middle-income levels through a continuous growth trajectory. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the road was quite turbulent and included such experiences as transition fatigue, authoritarian populism, democratic backsliding, Euroscepticism as well as various forms, scales and manifestations of illiberalism. External factors also contributed to this 'long and winding road', including the poly-crisis: the cumulative series of cascading financial, sovereign-debt, economic crises (2007+), Brexit (2016+), COVID-pandemic and related lockdowns (2020+), and finally – the Russian aggression against Ukraine (which brought about the energy crisis and consequently also the inflation crisis). All this made us reset our thinking about a free, democratic and prosperous future in Europe. It also meant the end of the 'business as usual' paradigm.

Searching for new coordinates, Europeans had to recall the original motivations that had set the foundations for the integration process. Directly after WWII, the European Community had been much more of a security project, and only later did it become a market friendship. When the Central Europeans joined, they saw the EU as a prosperity catch-up vehicle – a rich club that had prospered from the peace dividend. The 2022 invasion served as a wake-up call reminding Europeans of the centuries-long truth that it is the external threat that constitutes a crucial impulse motivating them to enhance integration on the European continent. Whether Russia can yet again act as a push factor for the

pro-European attitudes among citizens remains an unanswered question. Nonetheless, it definitely makes us rethink united Europe as a purely economic community, a legal one, a community of values, goals, interests, or a community of security.

From the perspective of Central Europe, which remains the Eastern flank of the EU, prosperity building has never been so critical. More and more countries (e.g. Poland or Estonia) spend close to 4% of GDP on military purposes, and their growth has not only become deterministic for economic development but also serves their existential security goals. Against this background, the question of the potential middle-income trap (MIT)[1] becomes crucial. The growth engines that elevated the post-communist economies from low-income levels to middle-income levels do not guarantee an advancement from middle-income levels to high-income levels.[2] The historical record of the EU's southern peripheries demonstrates the risk of stagnating at the middle-income levels, after reaching 80–90% of the EU average. The Central European front-runners (e.g. Slovenia or the Czech Republic) have already shown some symptoms of economic growth slowdown.

In the face of this challenge, it is necessary to focus some scholarly attention on the region of Central Europe and the risks of stagnating at the middle-income levels. So far, the literature in this area has focused predominantly on Asian countries and on economic determinants of the MIT. Relatively little attention has been dedicated to the post-communist area, as well as political factors. This contribution advocates for systemic scientific investigations on the political economy of the MIT in Central Europe. The thesis it puts forward is that, apart from purely economic factors, there are plenty of liberal democracy-related determinants that affect higher or lower levels of growth: public investments, populist politics, public over-indebtedness, or quality of governance institutions guaranteeing economic freedom and regulating sector-specific norms as well as many other determinants. Many direct and indirect determinants of

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1   MIT in which income gaps are understood in relative terms – compared to the EU average.

2   The conventional view of catch-up strategies suggests that low-income countries predominantly take advantage of their disadvantages ("the benefit of backwardness"), for example, higher expected return from capital, or relatively easy knowhow transfer. At further levels of economic development, when the production process is characterised by higher levels of complexity, some other qualities are important, predominantly continuous improvement of education, training, research and innovation. Other contributing factors that are studied include heavy reliance on FDI in export industries, overreliance on import of capital and technology intensive goods and services.

the MIT are subject to political decision-making, e.g.: insufficient inter-industry labour mobility, (in)ability to improve productivity, (lack of) innovation and investment in R&D, (in)efficient use of infrastructure, mono- and oligopolies of state-owned enterprises in main industries, (failure in) facilitating domestic demand, (failure in) implementing income re-distributional policy measures, and last but not least, a set of political items: poor governance standards, policy of protecting low-productivity industries, lack of government's ability to formulate and implement a comprehensive growth strategy.

Theories inform us of which symptoms we should inspect in order to diagnose the MIT problem. Nonetheless, it is quite a methodological challenge to identify whether a slowdown was worsened by the non-application of certain (hypothetical) policies and measures (counterfactual analysis can only remain highly speculative). Extremely low levels of these variables would indicate that there is a substantial deviation from the pro-growth policy mix. There is a growing consensus in the scholarly literature that long-term sustainable growth depends on infrastructure development, sound economic and political institutions (e.g. a fair business environment), legal stability, rule of law, transparency, openness to trade, solid property rights, or technological progress.

An illustration of the great potential of political science scholarship to be incorporated into the MIT explanatory models is democratic theory, specifically the relationship between political participation and redistributive effects. Theoretically, a democratic regime is expected to bring about a more egalitarian distribution of income in society. It may function via various mechanisms; first, the so-called "median voter theory" argues that median voters (based on their rational choice of redistribution logic) would choose higher taxation for rich people if the median income lies below the mean income. Secondly, the political participation mechanism literature suggests that the relative costs of political participation give rise to strong and organised labour and trade unions, political parties and interest groups representing low- and middle-income groups. These groups naturally push for more welfare-augmenting policies such as minimum wage, for example. Thirdly, the political competition mechanism suggests that re-election-oriented democratic leaders compete for citizens' support, and therefore invest more in meeting the needs of the larger segments of the electorate, who are usually low- and middle-income earners. Consequently, these leaders are much more eager to be supportive of various redistributive measures such as welfare spending, greater access to education and healthcare, as well as other public services provisions in order to win votes. Nevertheless, conclusions from empirical studies show that the inequality-democracy link is ambiguous and far from consensual. In the case of the post-Soviet states, there is only weak evidence for redistribution through the median voter channel. Some studies claim that, although democracy may pay higher average wages in manufacturing, the regime does not dampen wage dispersion between industries. Other studies reveal that democracy is not a sufficient condition to reduce income inequality in the presence of strong property rights. All the above-mentioned arguments demonstrate that the question of the political economy of the MIT is puzzling, and the holy grail of theorising remains undiscovered. Nevertheless, some strong empirical evidence has already been collected which proves that the liberal-democratic quality of governance correlates positively with long-term growth trajectories. On the opposite side, the oppression of liberal-democratic norms (e.g. economic, social and political freedoms) is linked to the private investors' risk aversion and an entrepreneurial climate, affecting economic growth directly and indirectly. Further studies are needed in order to fully grasp the nuances of the relationship between MIT risks and the liberal-democratic governance qualities.

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Understanding the Re-establishment and Sustainability of Water Resources in Times of Crisis

OLEKSANDRA SHUMILOVA

A view of the former Kakhovka reservoir bottom near the village of Novovorontsovka after drainage, 25th of June 2023.
Ivan Antipenko

Water is an inevitable source of life and human prosperity. Not surprisingly, since ancient times people have settled along banks of rivers and lakes, using water for drinking and fishing, crop irrigation, for operating mill dams, transporting goods for trading, and exploring new territories. Over the centuries, humans have learned how to harness and use water resources by building large dams, reservoirs and water transfer canals that transformed entire landscapes. Throughout history, rivers acted as country borders, and they sometimes were even the frontlines in times of war. Nevertheless, they more often united people from different nations living along their banks. However, it has also been said that "you cannot step into the same river twice" and "everything flows, everything changes…" These quotes from ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus have become relevant over the last decades more than ever before. In the 21st century, humanity faces global challenges that are closely connected to the state and the use of water resources: environmental change and armed conflicts. Moreover, environmental disaster in one region can reverberate far beyond its borders, with consequences that ripple across multiple countries.

Presently, while some regions experience catastrophic droughts and water scarcity, others suffer from floods and the impacts of heavy rainfall events due to climate change. Such extreme events are happening more frequently, and both floods and drought can hit the same regions, but in different periods throughout the year. Europe, being a densely populated area, is particularly affected – just recall the devastating floods in Central Europe and Spain in September-October 2024, or the extreme heatwaves and droughts in southern Europe in the summer of 2022. On the scale of Europe, flooding has already become the costliest natural hazard accounting for € 7.8 billion each year,[1] while costs of drought vary between 2 and 9 billion € p. a. depending on the year.[2]

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine is closely related to water issues as well.[3] As a highly industrialised country, Ukraine has large multi-purpose reservoirs, hydropower plants, cooling ponds for nuclear power stations, water reservoirs for industry and mining, and an extensive network of water distribution canals for agricultural and municipal purposes. Water resources and infrastructure have been affected since the first days of the war. On 26 February 2022, the dam on the Irpin River was demolished leading to the flooding north of Kyiv, which prevented the movement of troops approaching the capital. At the same time, a dam that has blocked water supply from the Kakhovka reservoir to the North-Crimean canal since 2014 has been destroyed to ensure the supply of freshwater to the "thirsty" Crimean peninsula.

Apart from such direct impacts, the conflict has affected the waters of Ukraine also indirectly – for example, attacks on the energy supply system stopped the operation of wastewater treatment plants and water transfer canals, leading to pollution and the disrupted supply of drinking water. The damage to the 112 km-long pipe transferring water from the Dnieper River to my home city Mykolaiv left its half of a million population without any water for more than one month, which also motivated a lot of its inhabitants to flee to other parts of Ukraine or abroad. The damage to the Kakhovka dam in June 2023 became the most dramatic example of the devastating impacts of warfare on nature, causing a flood downstream and a rapid drawdown of one of the largest reservoirs in Europe upstream of the dam. Draining of the reservoir led to enormous problems with the supply of drinking and agricultural water in the region and has exposed more than 1,900 km^2 of the reservoir bed, which has accumulated up to 1.7 km^3 of sediment polluted with toxic heavy metals since it went into operation. This giant, polluted "sponge" may have serious long-lasting effects on natural environments and human health in the region and far beyond. While scientists still need to investigate this in details in the future, local people should already be made aware of the risks now.

Despite differences in extreme events caused by climate change and armed conflicts, certain issues have become clear: river floodplains, defined as lower parts of river valleys periodically flooded during seasonal floods, have become the most affected. Floodplains occupy only a tiny proportion of the Earth's surface, but they provide multiple ecosystem services for the human population. It is therefore not surprising that up to 90 % of floodplains in Europe and North America become cultivated with subsequent effects on biodiversity.[4]

1 JBA Risk Management, https://www.jbaconsulting.com/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

2 Naumann, G., Cammalleri, C., Mentaschi, L. et al. (2021), Increased economic drought impacts in Europe with anthropogenic warming. Nat. Clim. Chang. 11, pp. 485–491.

3 Shumilova, O., Tockner, K., Sukhodolov, A. et al. (2023), Impact of the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict on water resources and water infrastructure. Nat Sustain 6, pp. 578–586.

4 Haubrock, P. J. et al (2025). A Holistic Catchment-Scale Framework to Guide Flood and Drought Mitigation Towards Improved Biodiversity Conservation and Human Wellbeing. WIREs Water, 12: e70001.

Changes in the cover of the Kakhovka reservoir bottom near the village of Novovorontsovka between June (left) and September 2023 (right).

Credit: Ivan Antipenko.

Despite being affected by seasonal periods of floods and droughts, natural river floodplains are known as one of the most diverse ecosystems. Yet how do floodplains recover after catastrophic events that actually put them into a state of chaos? This remains a highly interesting question not only for scientists, but also for practitioners dealing with the restoration of ecosystems affected either by natural or anthropogenic disasters. The answer can be found with the help of the modern scientific discipline called synergetics. It studies how specifically ordered patterns emerge from the state of chaos due to local interactions and feedback. Synergetics is based on understanding principles of self-organisation that have already been applied in ecology to explain, for example, how mussel colonies form on intertidal flats, or the development of vegetation patterns in savannahs or peatlands. In the case of river floodplains, quantitative understanding of self-organisation mechanisms leading to pattern formation is, however, obscure – floodplains are dynamically "shaped" by water flows and the movement of atmospheric masses, changes in morphological forms and the spatial distribution of living organisms.

As a scientist, my goal is to investigate all these processes in concert to develop a special theory for the self-organisation of floodplains that can be implemented in practical conservational programs. My main study system is the Tagliamento river located in the North-East of Italy – one of the last unmodified rivers known as a model ecosystem of European importance. In the past six years, I have conducted several experimental field campaigns there to study fundamental processes of abiotic-biotic interactions – for example, how does vegetation present in the channel affect river flow and the formation of riverine bedforms, or what is the role of plant canopies on the floodplain in the distribution of pre-surface atmospheric currents and consequently the dispersal of flying insects and seeds. As part of my project,[5] I also plan to test the transferability of the self-organization mechanisms observed at the natural Tagliamento floodplain to the floodplain of the Dnieper River that was affected by the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam, by analysing patterns of vegetation re-establishment based on remote sensing images.

However, understanding the re-establishment of nature is not only a question for scientists, but also for practitioners who will plan the future use of affected territories, and for local people who become accustomed to living in a certain area and benefiting from "ecosystem services" – all those advantages that nature gives us. This is a particularly urgent issue for areas affected by armed conflicts, like southern Ukraine. For example, there is currently ongoing discussion about the future

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5   Video-documentary "Islands in the stream", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPXFYvO0aWo (last accessed 01.07.2025).

of the former Kakhovka reservoir. Rebuilding the dam would solve the problem of pollution and support the environmental recovery of the region. Environmental activists argue that the ecosystem is quickly re-establishing to its pre-dam state, albeit neglecting the threat posed by long-term releases of heavy metals and their accumulation in food webs. Hence, if we really aim to "rebuild back better" – we need to understand all multifaceted aspects of this process. In my opinion, there is a need to establish a collaborative network of scientists, practitioners and other stakeholders focusing on environmental recovery after extreme events including post-war recovery. This topic is not only relevant for Ukraine, but also for countries in the Balkan region, which are still experiencing the negative environmental consequences of war, such as the redistribution of mines in river systems. Even natural river systems like the Tagliamento River, which was highly affected by military operations during World War I and II, are also providing a possibility to investigate the long-term effects of war.

A healthy natural environment is a guarantee of sustainable society as outlined by multiple international environmental conventions, which, however, lack comprehensive, harmonised legal regulation and clarity. Although global support is centred around mitigating the humanitarian and economic consequences of wars, neglecting environmental impacts may cause severe and long-lasting negative impacts that go far beyond the borders of the affected countries.

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Mobilising Brains for a Stronger Ukraine

How the war unintentionally pushes Ukraine closer into the european research and innovation Ecosystem – and why this matters

NATALIIA SOKOLOVSKA

In the fourth year of war, it may seem ironic – or even inappropriate – to imagine a Ukraine filled with state-of-the-art laboratories, creative minds reflecting on the future of society, and crowded university classrooms where bright young and old thinkers engage in abstract theoretical debates. As time passes, the fear grows that a tired, depressed, and desperate society may cease to care. From a distance – especially in parts of the world that had the privilege of never experiencing what Russian imperialism truly entails, whether led by a Tsar or a Communist General Secretary – it may seem as though Russia is fighting a war for territory or a mere expansion of influence. In reality, it is fighting against the very existence of Ukraine: against a country whose people have chosen a different way of living. Values such as self-expression, the rule of law, and personal freedom sharply contrast with those upheld in the Russian context.

Over the past three years, Russia has occupied Ukrainian cities and villages and killed thousands of Ukrainians. These lives cannot be restored. At the same time, the war has displaced millions, and the longer it continues, the less likely it is that many of them will return. According to a recent estimate by the Science at Risk Emergency Office, the war has severely impacted Ukraine's academic system: more than 2,500[1] buildings of educational institutions have been destroyed or damaged, including 141 institutions of higher education. Several universities have had to relocate from occupied territories. Approximately 18 percent of academics – mainly women[2] – have left the country. Today, academic research is not exploited to its full extent in Ukraine's reconstruction agenda. "Culture and research" are often seen as luxuries rather than necessities. In this brief essay, I would like to share a few reflections on why knowledge is a strategic resource in this devastating war – one that could help Ukraine not only survive, but eventually rebuild.

Attacking minds

From the outset, this war has not merely been about territorial conquest, but about the deliberate erasure of Ukraine's national identity – an identity that defies and resists the authoritarian, dehumanising regime Russia seeks to impose. Wherever Russian forces occupy cities or villages, they systematically dismantle symbols of Ukrainian culture: renaming streets, removing Ukrainian books from libraries, suppressing the language, and rewriting educational curricula. At present, preserving Ukraine's cultural and intellectual foundations may not appear to be an urgent priority amid more immediate threats. Yet I believe this is precisely the long-term objective of the aggressor – to wear down the population until frustration, pain, and fatigue give way to indifference. This is why sustaining Ukraine's intellectual potential is not only vital for winning the war, but also essential for rebuilding the nation from its ruins. With a significant share of Ukraine's research community now relocated abroad, we should seize the opportunity to resist Russia's attempt to extinguish the country's intellectual life.

Research for change

Research today is increasingly called upon to demonstrate societal relevance and address complex political crises.[3] Why, then, should it take a back seat in the face of a profound and multifaceted human tragedy such as the Russo-Ukrainian war? When I think of academia stepping beyond the ivory tower to engage with society's most pressing problems, I imagine living labs and international expert cohorts embedded in Ukrainian communities – working on how to preserve natural resources or design energy transitions. I envision Ukrainian engineers sharing their expertise on co-creation methods while demonstrating their latest drone innovations. I see Ukrainian history showcased across Europe's theatres, museums, and exhibition halls. And I believe both Ukraine and the EU stand to benefit significantly if this vision becomes reality.

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1   "Russia destroys or damages over 2,500 educational institutions in Ukraine", Ukrinform, September 20, 2024. https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-society/3907564-russia-destroys-or-damages-over-2500-educational-institutions-in-ukraine-since-invasion.html (last accessed 01.07.2025); "Academia in Ukraine in Times of War: Understanding the Status-Quo, Challenges, and Support Needs" Scholars at Risk, Monitoring report, https://science-at-risk.org/monitoring-reports/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

2   Cf. a current report by Anne Brüning, "Wissenschaft in der Ukraine: So verheerend sind die Auswirkungen des Kriegs", https://table.media/research/news/wissenschaft-in-der-ukraine-so-verheerend-sind-die-auswirkungen-des-kriegs/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (last accessed 01.07.2025).

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3   L. M. Bouter (2010), "Knowledge as a common good: the societal relevance of scientific research", *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 22(1), pp. 119–133; J. P. Smit & L. K. Hessels (2021), "The production of scientific and societal value in research evaluation: a review of societal impact assessment methods", Research Evaluation, 30(3), pp. 323–335.

Why? To Learn from Each Other

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and amidst a global "post-truth" era marked by declining media standards and the rise of disinformation, science continues to be one of the most trusted sources of expertise in democratic societies.[4] There is growing momentum – globally, at the EU level, and within individual nations – to explore how science can best inform policymaking and how interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research can be fostered effectively. Ukraine's academic agenda must be integrated into this broader quest. The presence of thousands of Ukrainian researchers within European institutions offers a unique opportunity to mobilise collective knowledge and resources. Already, there is a lively discussion on how research can contribute to Ukraine's recovery. What we must now acknowledge is that we cannot wait for the war to end before we act.[5]

Ukraine urgently needs support in the form of equipment, methodologies, ideas, and experience. For example: What will happen to the vast areas of land that have been mined or contaminated? Should the Kakhovka hydroelectric station be rebuilt? How can severely damaged natural reserves be revived? These are not just technical questions – they are research challenges requiring interdisciplinary collaboration. There is also a critical opportunity to redesign Ukraine's energy sector, which has suffered extensive damage from Russian attacks. While initiatives like the European Green Deal[6] focus on national-level systems, regional and local efforts offer even greater potential for fostering resilient, sustainable energy infrastructures. Ukrainian experts now working abroad – especially those from regional universities – can play a key role in this transformation.

In addition, Ukraine is arguably among the most experienced countries today in modern warfare. Innovation, technology, and research play a central role in its defence. Large-scale initiatives such as the "Army of Drones" have mobilised scientific and creative potential for the development of military technologies. According to a report[7] by the Dobrov Institute for Scientific and Technological Potential and Science History Studies of the NAS of Ukraine, conducted with support from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the country's relatively high

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4   V. Cologna et al. (2025), "Trust in scientists and their role in society across 68 countries". Nature Human Behaviour 9, pp. 713–730.

5   The Royal Society (2023), Ukraine's Recovery: Rebuilding with Research – Conference Report, 15–16 May 2023, https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/Publications/2023/Ukraines-recovery_conference-report.pdf (last accessed 01.07.2025).

6   Cf. https://greendealukraina.org/ (last accessed 01.07.2025).

7   Dobrov Institute for Scientific and Technological Potential and Science History Studies of the NAS of Ukraine, Ukrainian Science and Technology Foresight (2024), Strategic Directions and Prospects for the Development of Science and Technology, edited by O. S. Popovych.

standards of scientific and engineering culture have significantly contributed to the unexpectedly strong performance of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Under intense time pressure and in collaboration with OSINT researchers, citizens, academic and non-academic experts, and both national and international policymakers, Ukraine has cultivated a research ecosystem that is flexible, co-creative, and uniquely interdisciplinary. Where else do we find such adaptable and collaborative research efforts? These emerging practices offer valuable lessons for bridging the long-standing divide between science and society and for designing more efficient, impact-driven research models. The bridge between the Ukrainian and European research communities already exists – it now needs to be actively used and reinforced.

How? Through Institutionalisation Rather Than Short-Term Partnerships

Let us be honest: even in times of peace, Ukraine's research system was not functioning at its full potential. For too long, it operated in relative isolation, with limited pathways to becoming an integral part of the broader European research and innovation ecosystem. Today, this integration is still hindered by multiple interrelated challenges: the need for legislative alignment; deficiencies in research infrastructure[8] – both physical and digital; chronic underfunding;[9] insufficient collaboration between academia and industry; constrained resources; ineffective mechanisms for international cooperation; and poorly aligned strategic priorities.[10]

Over time, some change has occurred. Many Ukrainian researchers have gained recognition within the EU. Yet the current situation presents a dual challenge: how to support displaced researchers in continuing their work, and how to ensure that Ukraine retains its brightest minds in the long term. Those who have been forced to leave their home institutions can serve as scientific ambassadors – connecting Ukrainian universities with European institutions and helping to establish long-term collaborations. This moment offers a unique opportunity to exchange practices, explore shared research agendas, and mutually enrich academic perspectives. Indeed, these collaborations are already emerging organically as displaced researchers integrate into new academic environments. However, therein lies a risk: that this integration becomes assimilation, and that Ukraine's research talent becomes permanently absorbed by foreign systems. To counter this, a more institutionalised approach is needed – one that fosters durable, reciprocal structures for cooperation.

Such an approach could rest on three pillars:

– capacity-building within Ukrainian universities, aimed at embedding new research practices – such as scientific publishing, academic language training, and grant application skills;

– joint funding programmes in which Ukrainian institutions participate as equal partners;

– mobilising research expertise to inform key areas of national and international policy action.

As noted in the previously cited report, despite government programmes and public declarations of intent, technological breakthroughs have not yet translated into systemic reforms in Ukraine's science and technology policy. A more sustained and credible push by the international research and policy community could provide the momentum needed to drive internal change.

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8   Anna M. Liubchych (2023), "Науково-дослідницька інфраструктура як інструмент наукової інтеграції: деякі аспекти досвіду ЄС для України" (Research Infrastructure as a Tool for Scientific Integration: Some Aspects of the EU Experience for Ukraine), Law and Innovations, 4 (44), 2023, pp. 7 – 13.

9   Iryna Pidorycheva and Olena Sokolovska (2022), "Overview of the EU Innovation Policy Instruments Landscape: Conclusions for Ukraine," *Economic Herald of the Donbas*, 2 (68), pp. 96 – 107.

10 S. Ivanov & V. Antonyuk (2020), "European Research Space and Ukraine: Problems and Prospects for Integration," *Economic Herald of the Donbas*, 3 (61), pp. 166 – 176.

Prosperity Through Real European Integration

KATALIN SOLYMOSI

Introduction

As a plant biologist, I work on topics related to sustainable agriculture as an associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary. I have teaching experience in topics related to plant anatomy and cell biology at the BSc, MSc and PhD levels at several universities in Hungary and France. In addition, I have experience with various initiatives representing early to mid-career researchers at the national and international levels. I am a founding member and previous co-chair of the Hungarian Young Academy, and outgoing chair of the Young Academy of Europe. I am a fellow of the International Science Council and a member of its global roster of experts. Also, I represented the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the European Research Area (ERA) working group of ALLEA (All European Academies – the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities), and I participated in the meetings of the ERA Forum dedicated to Action 4, i.e. the Action whose aim is to "promote attractive and sustainable research careers, balanced talent circulation and international, transdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility across the ERA". I have first-hand experience regarding the usefulness and impact of these diverse interdisciplinary networks in science policy and science advice for policy, and this was also a reason why I wanted to join the Young Network TransEurope initiative. Below, I share some of my personal perspectives and thoughts related to this topic.

My Personal Perspective

Unfortunately, I see a significant divide between Eastern and Western parts of Europe (also between Southern and Northern Europe) in terms of science policy, research culture and research opportunities. EU13 countries[1] are lagging in various aspects, and they are not really integrated into the EU scientific community. However, in other respects they possess valuable knowledge and experience to share. Thus, in line with the core message of the Reclaiming Europe Manifesto, I strongly believe that it is crucial to recognise Central and Eastern Europe as integral regions of the European continent (rather than viewing them as a periphery between "the West" and Russia or Asia), whilst acknowledging their diversity.

At the same time, I am concerned that there is a lack of genuine, deep and open dialogue about our strengths and weaknesses, about the best practices we could adopt from each other, and about how we could build a prosperous Europe together.

This is particularly alarming as I am convinced that prosperity in Europe can be only achieved by real integration and by embracing and integrating the cultural heritage and diversity of the entire continent, including

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1   The phrase "EU13 countries" is used here *sensu lato* to designate Eastern (and Southern) European member states and countries with lower economic potential.

To effectively address crucial challenges of humanity such as globalisation, accelerated technological change including artificial intelligence, demographic shifts, and climate change, our discussions must be inter- and transdisciplinary, and they should be inclusive and should have a strong European voice in them. For this to happen, we need to have everyone on board.

Outline of the session dedicated to a discussion of European Integration at the Reclaiming Europe Conference

During the Reclaiming Europe conference in Gdańsk, we organised a breakout session discussion focused on prosperity in Europe, with an emphasis on the importance of making genuine and scientific European integration happen.

In advance, we set down the following questions to be covered by the conference participants interested in this topic:

Southern and Eastern countries as well. Achieving European integration at all levels is not only a question of Europe's technological sovereignty and industrial competitiveness, but also a question of political and economic stability. The existence of several regions and countries with populations that feel like second-class European citizens fuels political extremism and undermines democracy.

The inequalities observed in research funding across continents and regions within countries represent not only a European, but a global problem as outlined by many researchers.[2] These inequalities are deeply rooted in historical, political and economic differences between the Global South and North as well as between the Eastern and Western parts of Europe. They have several consequences, one of them being manifested in the massive brain drain towards more prosperous countries, fuelling migration and leading to a serious loss of human capital in other regions, further deepening the already existing inequalities. This is in line with the Matthew Effect based on the lines in the Bible stating that "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him".

– How can we enhance dialogue and discussion between the Eastern and Western, Southern and Northern parts of Europe? Can we envision real and sustainable prosperity in Europe if it now exists in only a few countries? How can we further promote cultural and scientific collaboration, thereby fostering true European integration within Europe?

– What actions can we take to transform the brain drain into balanced brain circulation in Europe? What measures could we use to enhance research excellence in regions and countries where research conditions are suboptimal? How is it possible that there are so few excellent researchers receiving ERC Starting Grants or Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action postdoctoral scholarships in Eastern Europe? For instance, out of 494 ERC StG awards this year, only about 20 went to EU13 countries, while Germany received around 100, and universities within the League of European Research Universities obtained 80. Of course, the above numbers should be evaluated against the number of researchers in each country, the number of applicants, which is much lower in EU13 countries, as well as their success rates. However, is the unspoken message that Eastern Europe lacks excellent science? How can this perception be changed?

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2   For example: Ole H Petersen (2021), "Inequality of Research Funding between Different Countries and Regions is a Serious Problem for Global Science", *Function*, 2 / 6, zqab060.

– Integrating all talents into the European scientific ecosystem is crucial for prosperity: some Eastern European countries have a relatively high proportion of women in science. What can we learn from each other in respect of gender equality, equity and inclusion?

– Biodiversity is better conserved in several Eastern European countries than in Western countries with intensive agricultural practices. Are there any good practices to be shared or learned about sustainable agriculture?

Before the conference, we sent out a specific invitation to some participants who had included thoughts related to this topic in their submitted conference abstracts. During our breakout session, we engaged in a lively discussion with many meaningful contributions from participants across Europe, representing diverse perspectives. I will summarise some of these below.

Some takeaways from the session on European integration at the Reclaiming Europe conference

The participants agreed that factual and evidence-based approaches should be used in these discussions, because they are often influenced by emotions, subjective perceptions or unrealistic expectations. In spite of all the problems faced, the European Union represents a highly positive narrative and should also be regarded as such: for instance, we should consider where we would stand today without it in terms of economic or defence capabilities.

We also share more similarities than differences, so differences should be balanced with common European core values and principles. These values could serve as a foundation for building a strong European community and identity. This framework should extend far beyond the four freedoms of the Single Market (the free movement of people, goods, services and capital), and should include a fifth freedom as outlined in the Report by Enrico Letta,[3] i. e. the need to "enhance research, innovation and education in the Single Market".

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3 Enrico Letta (2024), Much more than a market – Speed, security, solidarity. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf (last accessed 01.07.2025).

However, although the EU R&I budget is substantial, it cannot substitute for the commitment of the member states to invest a portion of their GDP in this area. On the other hand, this may pose challenges for countries caught in the middle-income trap that are fighting recession and transition fatigue.

Cross-border initiatives, common EU infrastructures and energy networks can enhance competitiveness and thus lead to greater prosperity. Good examples cited here include those that find a delicate balance between the national ownership of projects and EU decision-making processes. Joint efforts to develop or strengthen national excellence hubs in EU13 countries via national, EU and other (external) funding sources may be useful to decrease inequalities.

We should learn more about initiatives in the Czech Republic (Czexpats), Poland and Spain that facilitate networking and collect information about their expatriate researchers working abroad, as well as the conditions that would encourage them to return home. This would not only be useful to reverse brain drain but also to build international cooperation within the R&I sector. We cannot change the historical differences between the different regions and countries, but national science policy directives should focus on aspects that can be changed to reduce already existing inequalities. One such aspect is investing more in research structure support, which means professional administrative assistance. The help of professional administrators with grant writing, presentations, as well as science communication is crucial for success, not only in terms of the quality of grant management but also because it alleviates the substantial time and administrative burden faced by researchers. As the amount of time invested in research is exponentially linked to scientific success, we should aim to increase the amount of time researchers in EU13 countries can dedicate to their work.

In addition to enhancing the overall research ecosystem and administrative background, this might also involve a more flexible approach to determining the teaching load of university lecturers. Research-focused university positions with low teaching loads improve grant success rates. However, EU-wide data collection and surveys would be beneficial to clarify this issue and propose effective action plans (just in parenthesis: to ensure we have universities that can effectively train the next generations of researchers, research excellence should be strengthened in higher education institutions as well). Due to the war as well as their situation as citizens of a non-EU country, Ukrainian researchers are in many ways in a special situation. A large portion of the nation's scientific community is now working abroad. Hopeful-

ly expat networks across Europe will be built and used to stop the brain drain of researchers towards Western and Northern Europe, for instance by exchanging best practices on reinstallation grants. Fellowships, binational and transnational grants (such as those offered by the Collegium Polonicum located in the Polish city of Słubice) as well as non-residential grants could support researchers in Ukraine or in EU13 countries. At the same time, we should not overlook the non-EU states within Europe, which often have even fewer resources.

Several planned topics (such as gender equality or biodiversity) were ultimately not discussed during the breakout session; however, we thought it was worth mentioning them as they could serve as a basis for further discussions.

Although several potential solutions have been formulated above, many of them seem to be far beyond the influence of the recently founded Young Network TransEurope and its 17 current members. For this reason, I have tried below to collect the ideas that seem to be more or less feasible and were discussed in the frame of the session and the conference.

Points where the Young Network TransEurope could contribute to solutions

Events like this conference, which has brought together decision-makers, policymakers, politicians and scientific leaders, and raised awareness about Europe's cultural diversity and challenges, are useful for initiating the development of a common mindset and fostering changes in the field. Publishing this magazine about our conference and sharing our thoughts on the topic, writing policy briefs, position papers or manifestos are effective ways to influence decision-making at the national, European or institutional levels and advocating for changes in research culture that would lead to a better integration of EU13 countries.

As mentioned above, it is crucial for evidence-based policymaking to collect data through Europe-wide surveys, or to utilize available data, for example those that will soon be available via the European Union's Research and Innovation Careers Observatory (ReICO) initiative led by the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). The data should compare the situation of doctoral candidates (PhD stipends, teaching loads, working conditions), researchers (salaries, social housing, unemployment rates, time spent on administration and teaching), institutions (presence or quality of institutional support in grant writing, administration and science communication, if relevant, the state of the institutional research infrastructure) and the funding ecosystem (availability, size and diversity of grants, transparency of research evaluation).

Data could be also collected on expatriate researchers and their migration patterns – specifically, why they leave their home country and what would make them return as mentioned above. They probably possess unique experience and knowledge about the differences in the research culture within EU13 countries, or they might give us novel perspectives on the causes of brain drain. In this respect, data from the Czexpats movement has clearly shown that low salaries and underfunding are major barriers to balanced brain circulation.

In this context, collecting and promoting best practices about reinstallation grants can be useful to advocate for the initiation or strengthening of such support systems in countries or institutions where they are lacking. A website just showcasing the already existing initiatives (e. g. EMBO Installations Grants, Wellcome Trust and Max Planck return grants, dual and bilateral grants) could also be highly beneficial.

In terms of how to help Ukrainian researchers, a website collecting information about already existing resources and available funding, as well as channels for requests and offers should be considered. As underlined by Ukrainian participants, non-residential grants, mentoring in scientific writing in English and in grant writing would be greatly appreciated. Additionally, during the post-war reconstruction, computers and old research instruments that are no longer in use and would be thrown away in other European countries could be used to rebuild the research infrastructure and capacity of Ukraine.

I do hope that, by fostering international collaborations and dialogue, members of the Young Network TransEurope can help raise awareness about the above issues and contribute meaningfully towards finding some solutions for them.

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Reclaiming Europe from the West-East Gradient

TARMO SOOMERE

Europe, with its many common classic values, is often *a priori* regarded as being consistent with respect to principles but fairly diverse in realising interpretations of indisputable basic values, societal developments, economy, and political and governance systems. This perception is one of many deceptions that stem from the relative success of some European nations during the colonial era, and it is reinforced by a somewhat uncritical attitude to European culture during the Enlightenment era.

The supremacy of war weapons combined with fast population growth and the so-called Scientific Revolution paved the way not only for rapid developments in technology, culture, society, and democratic political systems, but also for arrogance with respect to other nations, races (including white supremacy), and cultures.

Several consequences and ramifications of this attitude (e.g., the lack of necessary technologies to improve living standards or mitigate climate-change-driven impacts in developing countries, rapid population growth outside Europe leading to local tensions and massive migration) may now contribute to global crises, while some other aspects (e.g., ignoring indigenous knowledge systems for a long time) have the potential to substantially retard the development of science, technology, and innovation and may impede a deeper understanding of the functioning of the Earth's ecosystem.

These considerations have strongly influenced the development of many aspects of society and science. Perhaps the most well-known outcome of these is the gradient between the so-called Global North and Global South in science and technology. This gradient pervades many facets of the science landscape, from the number of persons qualified to perform research, the availability or accessibility of research infrastructure, the various barriers in the publication process, including but not limited to financial aspects (publication fees) and supremacy of a single language as *lingua franca*, down to unequal (not to say unfair) opportunities based on gender and the discrimination of minorities, all this being modulated by a phenomenon usually described euphemistically in terms of the necessity to 'decolonise science'.

Many items in this list are explicitly or implicitly present in the contemporary landscape of science in Europe. Perhaps the largest formal difference compared to the global issues is that the fundamental gradients become evident in the West-East direction rather than between the North and South. These gradients are not created by climatic conditions. Neither have they been present

ab initio, that is, from undefined times in the past. Most of these gradients have been developing over just a couple of generations, and very few extend over several centuries.

These gradients in large part reflect the dark times of the two World Wars and in particular the aftermath of the Second World War. On the one hand, these decades have been times of explosive developments in science and technology. On the other hand, the formation of two clusters of political systems has led to massive differences not only in the quality of life in the clusters but also in value systems and associated ways of thinking and self-positioning.

The collapse of the USSR was a game-changer that blurred the formerly clearly defined border between the clusters. Most importantly in the context of Reclaiming Europe, it made explicit the presence of the above-described gradients. The brutal aggression of Russia in Ukraine can be viewed as an extreme counter-reaction of representatives of one of these clusters, perhaps expressing a feeling that their way of thinking belongs to the garbage heap of history.

This terrible development highlights numerous features of the (science) landscape of Europe that are either fundamentally unacceptable or should be addressed immediately and massively (if we really wish to reach a happy and prosperous Europe). It is not only related to research staff, financing, and infrastructure, and to the perception of science in society. It is even more importantly related to excellence in the governance of research and in the entire research system, combined with closing the gap in reputation, visibility, and ranking compared to well-established peoples and institutions of the "global West".

This *inter alia* means that a reinterpretation of formal CVs and positions held is necessary, as well as a renormalisation of the list of achievements and number of citations. If this gap is not closed, the essentially colonial attitude of the "global West" will continue: the "best" people from the "East" being invited to move and some funds being provided in return for keeping the rest of the system in the "East" functioning. This attitude is explicit in many Erasmus+ calls: payments to experts in different European countries for work of the same quantity and quality differ considerably.

In this context, the role of the belt of countries from Nordkapp (North Cape, Norway) to the Black Sea must be reconsidered. For a long time these countries have been considered to constitute a periphery of Europe and sometimes even a buffer between the "true West" and

Russia. These countries are now on the front line and also at the fore in the battle of values. Many scientists in these countries and many members of their Academies of Sciences were trained in Russia (even though it might be undiplomatic to mention it today). They lived in Soviet conditions under Soviet rule for decades. They understand the messages from Russia that exist between the printed lines and are enforced in reality.

These countries and their scientific communities and Academies are now embedded into the European research landscape. Some of them have entered that landscape most successfully. Much knowledge is concealed in those research communities and is almost completely untapped. The value of these communities as brokers and expert knowledge providers, or even ambassadors, you name it, is sometimes vaguely recognised, but never really harnessed. Systematic use of this knowledge may become one of the pillars of the success of Reclaiming Europe.

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The Young Network TransEurope (YNT) is a network of outstanding younger scholars from across Europe, established in response to the urgent need for deeper understanding of the region often referred to as "Eastern Europe" in the wake of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Initiated by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities together with partners like Die Junge Akademie, YNT brings together researchers from diverse disciplines and regions to transcend traditional East / West divides and foster cross-border collaboration. The network's founding members were welcomed during the workshop "Reclaiming Europe" in Gdańsk in October 2024. Over a five-year term, YNT members engage in interdisciplinary projects, contribute to public debate, and build lasting scholarly connections. The network serves as a platform for amplifying their research impact and helps to address the marginalisation of vital European perspectives and voices.

https://www.bbaw.de/en/young-network-transeurope