ASPEN Review

Central Europe Reloaded

Annual No.
2022

ASPEN.REVIEW
CONTENTS

Dear Readers

On the occasion of the Annual Conference of Aspen Institute Central Europe, it is my greatest pleasure to introduce you to the printed version of the Aspen Review 2022 in which we selected the articles published throughout the year 2022 which resonated the most as well as reflect on our program activities. There is no need to be concerned that you might have missed something, however, as all the articles are available on our website where we publish articles on a weekly basis. I hope you will enjoy this special edition which is mainly focused on the current situation in Central Europe and the heavy load of issues that this region currently faces.

Dariusz Kałan in his article "A Hungarian pro-Moscow course?" describes how Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was reluctant to believe that Putin would attempt a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Zuzanna Lewandowska, social entrepreneur and NGO executive from Poland, is looking for answers on who shapes the Brave New World now. Should we be building artificial intelligence just because we can? Is there a master plan behind the way technological advancements shape our societies, or are we putting humanity's future into pure chance? We are proud to say that this article was published thanks to Zuzanna's participation in the Socrates Seminars held by Aspen Institute Central Europe this September.

In 2022, we also published an expert study The Future of the Labor Market in cooperation with the Boston Consulting Group, and in an interview for Aspen Review, Jiří Švejcar, a partner of BCG, goes deeper into the outcomes of the study. He says: "The Czech labor market will have transformed radically by 2030, some jobs will disappear entirely and approximately 330,000 people will lose their jobs," and explains why upskilling and reskilling are so important.

In another article, Bruno Maçães shared his thoughts with Tomáš Klvaňa. They make us reflect on problems beyond this region, making a case for Europe emerging as a geopolitical Union. "The EU has been much bolder and more decisive than the average member state in this crisis," Bruno Maçães says, and we are curious if you would agree?

Last, but not least, Benjamin Cunningham reviews "My Seven Lives: Jana Juráňová in Conversation with Agneša Kalinová". Nearly 100 years after her birth, Agneša Kalinová's story serves as a bridge to an entirely transformed Central Europe, and we invite you to dive into this article and the book itself to reflect on questions of survival, cultural evolution and Kalinová's memories which bring color to what might otherwise appear as black-and-white images.

I would like to express my deep gratitude for your support and we cannot wait to connect with you at one of Aspen Institute Central Europe's programs.

Enjoy the reading and I wish you health, positive energy, respect and courage.

MILAN VAŠINA
Executive Director Aspen Institute CE

Today, the Future of Europe is Being Decided in Ukraine

A future author of the history of Europe in the twenty-first century will perhaps conclude that the most consequential event of the previous decade for our continent was the refusal of the Ukrainian President at the time, Viktor Yanukovych, to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union in November 2013.

What comes to mind is an analogy with Czechoslovakia's Communist leader Klement Gottwald, who intended to sign an agreement with the Americans to adopt the Marshall Plan, but was told in Moscow that he could not.

Yanukovych learned this in Sochi, in a face-to-face conversation with Vladimir Putin. "He was told three things. First, if you sign the association agreement, you will not get any loans from us and your economy will collapse. Second, if you sign it, do not count on any re-election help. And third, if you sign it, we will show the world where your money is, what kind of money it is and how corrupt you are," former Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski told me. "I think the third argument appealed to him most."

According to Kwaśniewski, Yanukovych intended to sign the deal—not in order to join Europe, but to win the elections again. He realized that this was what Ukrainians expected. For them, the Association Agreement with the EU was a chance for the closest integration with the West since the seventeenth century.

Vladimir Putin also knew this. His goal was to rebuild Greater Russia, and this was impossible without subjugating Ukraine.

Kwaśniewski heard this from Putin in a conversation in the Kremlin in 2002. "I admit that I took his words as an expression of ambition or a dream of a relatively young man; Putin was 50 at the time," Kwaśniewski told me. "Not as a plan of action or an obsession. The plan began to crystallize in 2004, in response to the Orange Revolution. Since the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, it has been an obsession on his part."

During the Revolution of Dignity, Ukrainians overthrew Yanukovych and thus saved their country from the fate of Belarus. Russia responded with the illegal annexation of Crimea, the establishment of the separatist republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, the ongoing armed conflict in the east of the country since 2014, and finally the armed aggression against Ukraine in February 2022.

It is likely that the war will continue for many years to come and a significant part of Ukrainian territory will remain under Russian occupation. This is all the more reason, however, for the European Union to do everything possible to ensure that a free Ukraine joins it as soon as possible, within this decade.

This would not be an unprecedented event. The northern part of Cyprus has been occupied by Turkey for almost half a century. That did not stop the Republic of Cyprus from joining the European Union in 2004. Residents of the divided island are allowed to cross the demarcation line, and European tourists can legally visit northern Cyprus as long as they arrive on the island somewhere in its southern part. If Turkey someday becomes a member state of the European Union, the island may be reunited.

Aspen Review Central Europe is celebrating its tenth birthday this year. The magazine was established to describe events and processes taking place in our region in a way that readers around the world can understand, while presenting global processes from the perspective of Central Europeans. Since the inception of the magazine, we have published texts by prominent Ukrainian authors, including Mykola Riabchuk, Yaroslav Hrytsak and Andriy Portnov. We write about events in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.

Today, more than ever, we need Central Europe's voice to be heard in the European Union and the world. More than ever, we need joint initiatives involving Ukrainians or Belarusians. Today, the future of Europe is being decided in Ukraine. Our future.

ALEKSANDER KACZOROWSKI
Editor in Chief Aspen Review Central Europe

ASPEN.REVIEW
MYKOLA RIABCHUK

IDENTITY
UKRAINE
PUTIN

Who Are These People?

One may only guess whom Mr Putin is going to 'liberate' and 'protect'—and from whom? Certainly not the Ukrainian soldiers who speak mostly Russian on the battlefield, writes Mykola Riabchuk

On February 24, shortly after Russia launched an all-out military invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian ambassador in Berlin Andriy Melnyk desperately approached the top German officials, begging for help. One of them, Finance Minister Christian Lindner, reportedly met him with "a polite smile" and talked as if the defeat of Ukraine had long been sealed. "You only have a few hours," he allegedly said at Melnyk's request for defensive arms and more sanctions on Russia. He apparently saw little problem with a Russian-occupied Ukraine under a puppet government, insofar as a profitable business with Moscow could be resumed.

Fifty days after that conversation, Ukraine still withstands the rabid attacks of one of the presumably strongest armies in the world, to the great surprise of many Western observers and the bitter embarrassment of the others. While the military experts point out at the glaring mistakes of the Russian commanders, some of them recognize that it is not the purported weakness of the Russian army that determines the war outcome but, rather, the unexpected strength of the Ukrainian army and the spectacular resilience of Ukrainian society.

A popular joke on the web consists of a witty parody on the comments of Western security analysts as they were evolving throughout the first two weeks of the Russian assault:

1st day *Ukraine will be defeated in 2-3 days;*
3rd day *Ukraine is still fighting because Russia didn't send in real units yet;*
5th day *It's hopeless, they will lose even if they put up some fight here and there;*
7th day *Russia has logistical and communication problems. They will regroup and will take Kyiv;*
10th day *Ukraine is fighting well but Russia will achieve air superiority soon and then it's over;*
12th day *We don't understand what's going on;*
16th day *Ukraine fights so well because we armed and trained them.*

Certain points listed above are not completely nonsensical, especially the last one: the Ukrainian army has indeed undergone a sea change with NATO help since 2014 when the new Kyiv government had reportedly only 5,000 battle-ready troops to withstand the Russian invasion of Crimea and the hybrid takeover of Donbas. But the change in Ukrainian society within the past eight years was even more remarkable.

A Sea Change

In the wake of Euromaidan (2014), many people in the south and east of Ukraine were bewildered, frustrated and disappointed, especially those who cast their votes for the now deposed President Viktor Yanykovych. For them, he could be a "bad boy", but he was their "bad boy". His removal alienated many of them from the Kyiv government and made them more susceptible to Russian propaganda. The Russian invasion was seen as contingent on the domestic quarrels, their 'side-effect' rather than unprovoked alien aggression. Most Ukrainians in the south and east did not embrace Russian forces but only a tiny minority moved to fight them. They defended successfully Kharkiv, Odessa and other cities but they lost dramatically in Crimea and eventually in Donbas.

Today, there is no ambiguity. No substantial internal conflicts. No doubts in the legitimacy of the Kyiv government, elected in 2019 by a clear majority in all the regions. And no confusion over who is the aggressor and what were the reasons for the attack—or, rather, a lack of any.

The scarecrows of Ukrainian 'fascism', of sinister NATO, of forcible 'Ukrainization' and "a ban on the Russian language" that worked so well in 2014, now scare nobody. They actually are so ridiculous that even some Kremlin loyalists doubt their efficiency and expedience.

Natalia Poklonska, who worked as a Ukrainian prosecutor in Crimea and shifted sides in 2014 to become an ardent supporter of Putin's regime, gave an extensive interview recently that revealed much confusion over the ongoing events. "Ukraine is not Russia," she said. "Their society is organized differently... And if I were asked a year or two or a month ago whether they would greet [our troops] with flowers all over Ukraine, I would have said definitely no. [Because] I understood that it was an absolutely different society. Really different. So, I am not surprised that people in Ukraine do not behave as our media envisioned... In general, I feel like an information sabotage is going on in our country. Very strange things are said".

The interview is remarkable insofar as the speaker's pro-Kremlin loyalism clashes here with her personal (Ukrainian) experience and with the sober analysis of events that makes her recognize, however euphemistically, the blatant idiotism of the official Putinist propaganda (though she tries to divert criticism from the impeccable führer to some unnamed "informational saboteurs" in his propaganda machine).

The societal changes, indeed, were so big that some experts were tempted to credit Vladimir Putin for the awakening if not creation of the Ukrainian nation.

His aggression not only caused a rally-around-the-flag mobilization, but also gave a powerfully enhanced Ukrainians national self-awareness and civic unity. "Putin", a renowned author quipped, "unintentionally became the father of the Ukrainian nation. It was the annexation of Crimea and the Donbas that initially created a Ukrainian identity, one which is rooted in two principles: opposition to Russia, and opposition to Putin".

One may contend, with a similar perverse logic, that Hitler strengthened Jewish identity and contributed substantially to the creation of the state of Israel. But what we see here, is not only the authors' fondness for paradoxes, but also a profound misunderstanding of what Ukraine and Ukrainian identity are about.

Today, there is no ambiguity. No substantial internal conflicts. No doubts in the legitimacy of the Kyiv government, elected in 2019 by a clear majority in all the regions. And no confusion over who is the aggressor and what were the reasons for the attack—or, rather, a lack of any.

A Nowhere Nation?

The very emergence of independent Ukraine in 1991 evoked much confusion on the international scene—among both professionals and the general public. The first reactions to the event did not bode well for the nascent state—starting from the infamous "chicken Kiev" speech of George Bush in 1991 to the ill-fated Budapest memorandum with worthless "security assurances" from Russia, USA and UK in exchange for Ukraine's voluntary nuclear disarmament. International media greeted the birth of Ukraine with titles like "Nasty Ukraine", "A Nowhere Nation", or "An Unwanted Step-Child of Soviet Perestroika". The reputable "Slavic Review" organized, in 1995, a discussion "Does Ukraine Have a History?" where the question was answered mostly in the positive but with the important caveats: Ukraine has a history but it should be retrieved and reinvigorated at the level of both popular knowledge and as an academic discipline.

The renowned Canadian historian Orest Subtelny complained bitterly that "well into the 1980s, Ukrainian history was considered not only a peripheral but even intellectually suspect area of specialization by many North American historians;" the assumption prevailed that "a historian of Ukraine was, almost by definition, a Ukrainian nationalist." Professor George Grabowicz, long-time director of the Ukrainian Research Institute in Harvard, supported the claim: "Up to the end of the 1980s the very term 'Soviet empire' was seen as an obvious sign that the text in which it was used was not very serious—the author being either 'right wing' or not all there. One can check this in the bibliographic sources: up to 1989, studies or overviews that use this term can be counted on the fingers of both hands."

This largely explains the reluctance of both Western politicians and academics to accept not only the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, but also the thoroughly unexpected emergence of an independent Ukraine. It took three decades to replace the colonial names of Ukrainian cities with the authentic ones in the official international usage, and to eliminate, at least from the serious scholarship, the bizarre formula "Kievan Russia" meaning Kyivan Ruś. Still, the "imperial knowledge" retained its discursive power, popping-up in myriads of falsehoods, seemingly minor and innocent if taken separately but producing cumulatively a highly distorted view of reality, harmful for Kyiv and beneficial for Moscow.

Ukraine had been voiceless and almost invisible throughout most of its modern history, represented by the colonial masters in a way and to a degree that suited and solidified their dominant position.

There is little surprise that throughout the 1990s the reputable Western papers averred that Ukrainian language was derived (sic) from Russian in the sixteenth century, that Ukraine is primordially divided between "nationalistic West" and "pro-Russian East" (as if sheer being 'pro-Russian' absolved anybody from being 'nationalist') and, of course, that Crimea had 'always' been Russian until drunken Khrushchev passed it to Kyiv.

The most toxic, however, was the myth of the "Kievan Russia" invented at the turn of the seventeenth century when the Tsardom of Muscovy turned into the Russian Empire by appropriating new lands and, crucially, the new name that phonetically and symbolically alluded to the Medieval entity called (Kyivan) Ruś. The real connection between the two entities was very vague, like between Ancient Rome and modern Romania, but its invention allowed Eurasian Muscovy to appropriate a few centuries of the Kyiv Ruś history and, eventually, the core lands of historical Ruś (today's Belarus and Ukraine) that belonged at the time to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Muscovy, which evolved rather late in the north eastern fringes of Ruś under the auspices of the Golden Horde, managed not only to legitimize its claims to Ruś history and territory but also, crucially, to delegitimize the very existence of Ukrainians and Belarusians, downgraded now to the status of regional Russian ethnic subgroups.

The societal changes, indeed, were so big that some experts were tempted to credit Vladimir Putin for the awakening if not creation of the Ukrainian nation.

The story is not unique since quite a few nations draw their histories on invented traditions. But hardly any invention appeared as harmful for both the dominant and subaltern groups as the Ruś=Russia myth. For an entire three centuries, it increasingly hindered development of both Ukrainian and Russian national identities (out of either local or imperial) and hampered the successful modernization of both nations. All the history of the Russian-Ukrainian relations since then can be described as a history of colonization, oppression and cooptation—on the one side, and of resistance and collaboration—on the other side.

By the end of the 1980s, most Ukrainians internalized, to varying degrees, inferiority complexes vis-à-vis the Russian language and culture seen as the vehicles of progress and social advance, and accepted, however lukewarmly, the official notion of Ukrainians and Russians as the 'same', or 'almost the same', or 'brotherly' (in the Soviet parlance) people—where the status of the 'older brother' was predictably assigned to Russians. This largely determined the low intensity of ethnic nationalism and the relative weakness of the national liberation movement in the republic during Gorbachev perestroika and, eventually, the slow pace of the professed "national revival" after political independence was attained. Ukrainian identity was deemed rather weak and fluid, though in fact its alleged weakness was not so much a sign of its low strength as of a relatively low salience. Its alleged 'weakness' hid from observers' eyes a highly important phenomenon that persisted intrinsically at the grass-root level in all the Ukrainian lands and through most of its history,

and came increasingly to the fore in the past decade enabling a spectacular civic mobilization today across all the Ukrainian regions.

From the Imperial Periphery to a Political Nation

It was local patriotism that survived in Ukraine in the darkest years of imperial pressure and 'anti-nationalist' terror, to fuel the national sentiment and facilitate the 90% vote for independence in the 1991 nationwide referendum, and to enable the gradual, smooth transition of Soviet subjects into loyal Ukrainian citizens. If there was a nationalism in Ukraine, it was primarily 'banal'—operating at the level of daily habits and rituals, symbols and discourses. All of them were highly eclectic, a mix of the Soviet and the Ukrainian, but the active minority used the grass-root patriotism to promote things Ukrainian and demote things Soviet, diplomatically avoiding direct confrontation with things Russian. The invisible hand of the "nationalizing state" worked slowly but steadily, making 'Soviets' into Ukrainians primarily in civic terms and caring much less about their language, let alone ethnicity—a category that disappeared completely from all the official documents and largely faded away from the public discourse. Paradoxically, the same mechanisms that facilitated assimilation of Ukrainians into Russian language and culture, now started to operate in the opposite direction. While the linguistic Ukrainization proceeded slowly, despite some government efforts, the ethnic re-identification processed surprisingly fast, without any noticeable government interference.

The number of self-identified ethnic Russians in Ukraine in 1989 (according to the last Soviet census) amounted to 22%; then, by 2001 (the next census), it declined to 17%, and then, according to sociological surveys, it fell to 9% in 2015 and to 6% in 2017. The further downward dynamic seemed to be predetermined by the low salience of that category and the promotion of civic identity by both the state and civil society. Independent Ukraine was conceived as a political nation with a Ukrainian ethno-cultural core (which implies some entitlements to the historically oppressed language and culture) but a nation politically inclusive and culturally tolerant. This made all the citizens into "political Ukrainians" while rendering the category of ethnicity increasingly obsolete. The 2017 nationwide survey revealed that only 3% of the youngest respondents (18-29 years old) defined themselves as ethnic Russians.

The assumption that the respondents may have not dared to disclose their Russian ethnicity, being afraid of possible persecution or discrimination—as Moscow contends,—holds no water because the surveys were carried out anonymously, and the notion of ethnicity was strictly private, not indicated in any official documents. Moreover, none of the respondents tried to 'hide' his or her Russian language—a much more conspicuous indicator of the allegedly 'undesirable' Russianness than the practically invisible and undetectable (beyond self-declaration) ethnicity. The rapid re-identification of ethnic Russians as Ukrainians was remarkably not accompanied by the concurrent linguistic Ukrainization. Most of them remained primarily Russian-speaking. In 2012, as many as 42% of Ukrainian citizens declared Russian their "native language", then, by 2013 (before Euromaidan), the figure fell down inexplicably to 37%, and again to 33% in 2015, after large chunks of predominantly Russian-speaking territories fell out of the surveys. Then, the figure gradually decreased year by year down to the current 20%—which is still much higher than the number of self-defined ethnic Russians.

Questioning "Imperial Knowledge"

The Kremlin's blatant lie on the alleged 'oppression' of ethnic Russians and Russophones in Ukraine is understandable as part of the hybrid war and propagandistic slandering that paved a way for the eventual military aggression. But the Western susceptibility to this lie is a more complicated phenomenon. It partly stems from the traditional tuning of all their sensors to the imperial messages as presumably the most comprehensive, 'important', and authoritative—rather than to the marginal voices of minor, subaltern, and 'less important' nations. In practical terms it means that whatever chutzpah comes from Putin or Lavrov's mouth, it is reproduced globally by top international media and considered seriously, regardless of its falsity and mendacity. Nobody dares to call the liars the liars and the chutzpah the chutzpah.

All the alternative voices of Ukrainian experts and politicians are rarely heard and even more rarely overweigh the "imperial knowledge" disseminated by Moscow. At best, they are recognized as "an alternative view" that does not disprove Kremlin's lie but rather implies that the truth dwells somewhere in between.

The second problem is a poor knowledge of Ukraine in general and, in this particular case, of its linguistic and ethno-cultural peculiarities. A typical template applied to the Ukrainian situation is that of a 'nationalizing' state that tries to assimilate the minorities into the dominant language and culture, and of the titular majority that predictably strives to oppress minorities and variously marginalize them. It completely ignores the fact that Ukraine is a postcolonial country where the 'dominant' language and culture had been (and remained) that of the imperial minority, while the titular majority was (and remained) a socially disadvantaged and culturally marginalized part of the population. It ignores the even more crucial fact that an independent Ukraine emerged not as a result of the national liberation struggle and radical political turnover, but as a marriage of convenience between the old, thoroughly Russified communist elite and the nascent civil society led by an Ukrainian national-democratic intelligentsia.

All the alternative voices of Ukrainian experts and politicians are rarely heard and even more rarely overweigh the "imperial knowledge" disseminated by Moscow. At best, they are recognized as "an alternative view" that does not disprove Kremlin's lie but rather implies that the truth dwells somewhere in between.

The result of this pacting was a negotiated transition—very slow, convoluted but relatively smooth, insofar as the ancient regime has largely retained its political and economic power while making important concessions to the junior partners in terms of political freedoms and civil liberties as well as the soft 'Ukrainization' policies. On the one hand, thirty years after independence, Ukraine does not have a single Ukrainian-speaking 'oligarch' (all the top richest men speak Russian as their only or primary language), and of the six Ukrainian presidents (1991-2022) only Viktor Yushchenko spoke Ukrainian at home and in private (as a joke says, he had to because his wife, a Ukrainian-American, knew no Russian). The same can be said about the huge majority of the Ukrainian political, business and military elite, predominantly Russian-speaking, so that one may only guess whom Mr Putin is going to 'liberate' and 'protect'—and from whom (certainly not the Ukrainian soldiers who speak mostly Russian in the battlefield—for both the Soviet military terminology and the imperial swearing serve them best).

Different but Unified

The conspicuous regional, ethno-cultural and linguistic differences in Ukraine have obscured for years two other phenomena that determined the development of Ukrainian society and, by and large, today's response to the Russian invasion. First, all the differences, though broadly recognized, had rather low political salience. Society was fragmented but not compartmentalized. The borders between the groups were fluid, vague and permeable. The intergroup differences were multiple but non-confrontational, occupying a rather low place in the hierarchy of people's concerns and priorities. There were attempts to exploit them in 2002-2012 by pro-Russian political forces but this did not result in any significant splits or cracks, until the Russian troops and mercenaries arrived in 2014 and blew them up.

The second phenomenon, as already was mentioned, was a local patriotism that provided, in the Soviet times, a safe substitute for Ukrainian nationalism and competed for primacy with the national identity in many regions throughout the 1990s, until losing the priority in the hierarchy of people's self-identification in all Ukraine's regions in the 2010s.

What we observe today in Ukraine is a surprisingly strong, mobilized and consolidated political nation where millions of people, including the ethnic Russians, proudly claim they are politically Ukrainian—and defend their newly acquired Ukrainianness with arms—contrary to Putin's beliefs and expectations.

Because the political nation for them is not about language and blood, nor about a common history and religion, but about the common values and common future that Ukrainians envision as 'European'. They fight not so much for the territory occupied by the intruders but for freedom and dignity—something that Putin and his obedient subjects barely understand.

MYKOLA RIABCHUK
is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Political Studies in Kyiv and a Visiting Researcher at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Paris. His latest books (in English) are *Eastern Europe since 1989: Between the Loosened Authoritarianism and Unconsolidated Democracy* (Warsaw, 2020), and *At the Fence of Metternich's Garden. Essays on Europe, Ukraine, and Europeanization* (Stuttgart, 2021). His last collection of essays *Nationalist's Lexicon* (in Ukrainian) won the Taras Shevchenko National Prize in arts in literature in 2022.

ASPEN.REVIEW
JAKUB DYMEK

WAR
HUMANITARISM
INTERVIEW

Janina Ochojska: Humanitarian and Military Aid are Two Different Things

Humanitarian and military aid are two different things. If we confuse one with the other, the very idea of humanitarian aid is at risk of being destroyed, says Janina Ochojska in an interview with Jakub Dymek.

JAKUB DYMEK: In the early weeks of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Poland was internationally praised and celebrated for welcoming millions of refugees from the country of an attacked neighbor. Yet—as you relentlessly point out as both a humanitarian and member of the European Parliament—there are other refugees from other countries, who at the same time are stranded, mistreated and refused entry at the Polish-Belarussian border. My question is: why do feel it so necessary to remind the political class and the world at large about this discrepancy?

JANINA OCHOJSKA: The 'why' question is frankly quite obvious, at least for me it is. Every human being has certain inalienable rights. Violation of these rights equals lawlessness—unacceptable for me, for many in Poland, not least amongst them the activists who at this very time are busy saving people's lives. This is all the better reason to irritate, to burden my political colleagues, with the knowledge of this.

We simply cannot accept, cannot allow for young people, children and families dying in the deep Polish forests and swamps, because we denied them entry on the basis of their religion, skin color and nationality.

We simply cannot accept, cannot allow for young people, children and families dying in the deep Polish forests and swamps, because we denied them entry on the basis of their religion, skin color and nationality. The border wall Poland erected to stop the refugees is not working—not even in the narrow sense Polish authorities wanted it to work, because there are still people crossing the border and applying for asylum. And, of course, these people are illegally pushed back towards the Belarussian side, where some of them—beaten, starved, tortured—die. I once said how this brings to mind what was done to the victims of Nazi occupation during WWII—hunted, chased, arrested—and I do not regret this comparison.

Yet, you of all people, a humanitarian delivering aid to victims of conflicts, war crimes and catastrophes of all kinds, must be acutely aware of how strong these words are. You've yourself seen the consequences of horrific atrocities against civilians in the Balkans a quarter of a century ago. Yet, speaking of 'genocide' or 'crimes against humanity' is something one shouldn't do lightly.

You can accuse me of abusing the word, sure. But we've discussed it, even recently, in the European Parliament: how many people have to be killed for a crime to be called a genocide? When and where are we justified in using the strongest of possible words of condemnation? For me, the numbers are not as important, to put it bluntly. What is important, however, is the method of extermination that is being used against them. Is it systematic, is it deliberate, is it cruel—to take a refugee, to deny him/her asylum and then purposefully drive that person deep into the woods or swamplands and leave them there? We have witness statements claiming this is what is happening to families with children. There's a video recording of border guards discussing such tactics between themselves. So, let me reiterate: it's not about the numbers, it's about the methods: torture, beatings, robbing people of phones, warm clothes, documents and backpacks. All of these serve a unified purpose: to deny right to asylum and prevent asylum-seekers from reaching a safe haven where their asylum application would be legally recognized. I've used the word 'genocide' in the context of the Polish border with a full consciousness of it's meaning. Especially, when we already know what we condemn the Kurds, the Syrians, the Congolese to—when we deny them asylum or send them back to their abusers.

"Polish borders have to be secure, who does not understand this, does not understand what the word state means." You know whose words these are?

The Polish PM or his cohort of security ministers, I'd presume...

Donald Tusk, the leader of the European People's Party, your party.

The thing is: I believe in secure borders too. But building a wall, torturing people, illegal pushbacks—this is not how you do it. I'd be happy to hear how Mr. Tusk imagines this. Because human rights violations aren't helping us achieve this goal. Why aren't the refugees using legal means of entering the country? Because those legal means have been denied to them. We've closed the legal ways of entering the country. We—as the EU—more and more often confuse 'securing borders' with 'defending borders by all means', regardless of their legality and basic common sense.

I've used the word 'genocide' in the context of the Polish border with a full consciousness of it's meaning.

I'm asking you as an MEP. The EU decided a couple of years ago to externalize the refugee problem outside its borders, tasking various third parties, autocrats and warlords among them with keeping the refugees out. In hindsight, do you think this was the lesser of two evils, or simply an evil choice regardless?

I think it was a bad policy. If I was a Member of the European Parliament back then, I would have voted against these measures. Even if my political group in the EP did otherwise. Unfortunately, the 'Fortress Europe' mentality is growing stronger. Up until 2014-2015, the EU was way more open towards migrants and refugees. I detest the policy of paying autocrats and foreign regimes for keeping refugees out and detaining them. We cannot stop migration this way, because there's no way to stop migration. Humanity has migrated since the dawn of man. What I believe is: introducing legal ways of migration, aid to countries suffering from climate change, negotiation and a hardline stance towards aggressors, whose wonton violence—be it Syria, Yemen or Ukraine—is causing people to flee.

Can you give me an example of how this might work in practice?

What we, as Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH) did in Sudan for example, is a telling story. After building a 1,000 water wells, giving people ready access to fresh water, life and economic opportunities, hundreds of villages changed for the better. One can argue that a thousand water wells doesn't change much in the whole of South Sudan. Sure. But these people aren't fleeing to foreign countries, the people who benefited

from these water wells are actively working on bettering life conditions for themselves and their families: building gardens, planting vegetables, improving farming and animal husbandry, not starving for once.

And as for legal migration?

I strongly believe in legal migration, which is necessary for our economies. But—let's stick to Poland for a moment—after 24 February, nobody really cared to collect the data on arrivals, to asses who are those people, what are their qualifications, what languages they speak, how can we offer them the quickest possible adaptation and how can we, pardon the word, use them best in our society. This priceless knowledge had been completely neglected.

As a humanitarian with decades of experience, I refuse to acknowledge Ukrainian victims as better in any way than any other victims of war worldwide.

Exactly 30 years ago you initiated—alongside journalists, intellectuals and other respected people of the time—a humanitarian convoy to besieged Sarajevo, which later became the Polish Humanitarian Action, which is active to this day. Let me ask this question a little provocatively... Have you been bringing in weapons to the warzone?

No, of course not. [laughs]. I would not touch a weapon with a ten foot pole. And believe me, I checked every container on every truck back then.

"What is the best humanitarian aid for Ukraine? I'm sorry to say, but I say it's weapons"—is what Yevhenia Kravchuk, Ukraine's governing party spokesperson and parliamentarian, sitting on Ukraine's information policy and humanitarian aid committee, said recently to a Davos crowd.

I would like to have an opportunity to talk to her and explain how humanitarian and military aid are two different things. These two things not only are separate issues, but they simply cannot be conflated into one under no circumstances! If we confuse one with the other, the very idea of humanitarian aid is at risk of being destroyed. Of course, Poles nowadays are crowdfunding for weapons to be sent to Ukraine, buying an attack drone even! I refused to participate in these efforts. I'm a humanitarian, that is what I'm known for. Even if nobody mentioned my name, even if I was asked to do it anonymously, I refuse to support uncontrolled civilian efforts to buy arms. As a member of the European Parliament, I have always supported and voted in favor of efforts to control and monitor transfers of weapons. Either we have checks and balances or we don't. Ukraine is no exception. The same as with humanitarianism—humanitarians don't support armed forces with weapons, with food, with medicines. We help civilians, the victims of war, not provide backup for belligerent armies. This goes for Ukraine as well. The rules of humanitarian aid are very clear. So, again. Personally: I'm happy that this bayraktar drone will be bought in the end. But I could not participate.

Those who support crowdfunding of weapons are saying that refusal to buy more arms means war will last longer and more people will die. "Weapons will end the killing of people, which would be the best doctor, in my opinion"—Fyodor Serdiuk, ex-Red Cross humanitarian from Ukraine puts it.

Weapons are for killing people. I'd like to ask those who say that refusal of crowdfunding for drones for Ukraine is the equivalent of accepting civilian slaughter. Why didn't you buy a drone for Syrians? There's been 11 years of war going on. Is this something you're willing to accept? Are Syrian lives less worthy than Ukrainian? Is the slaughter of Syrians more acceptable? Or maybe you can kill Yemenis with more impunity, can you? People are being starved to death there. While we crowdfund for weapons for Ukraine, we at the same time accept the wars in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan. Maybe we should have bought a drone for anti-taliban forces, shouldn't we? Everybody can use their money however they wish. They can buy Ukraine an attack drone too. It's fine by me. But insisting this is the highest form of humanitarianism is a lie. I disagree with this ideology. "Help Ukraine, let the others die!"—is not my kind of humanitarianism.

Yevhenia Krachuk, the Ukrainian politician whom I cited previously, says in an interview with "The New Humanitarian": "I don't believe in neutrality, in our case, because you can't be neutral to evil, you can't be neutral to what we have in Ukraine."

I agree that this is evil in its purest form, what is happening to civilians in Ukraine. But it isn't some singular, 'never-before' evil. This is the same suffering that is being visited upon children and families in other countries as well. I understand what's going on. Because of our proximity to this war, we feel we should be more involved than ever. Our organization has raised huge amounts of money for humanitarian aid, we have sent hundreds of transports with aid to Ukraine. We're already planning on help with rebuilding Ukraine. One of the slogans I was thinking about was "30 schools for Ukraine for 30 years of Polish Humanitarian Action". We're already doing research into possibilities of that. We've been able to rebuild schools in Syria even, so I'm hopeful. We're on the lookout for ambitious goals that are compatible with the humanitarian mission that we believe in. But, let me reiterate.

As a humanitarian with decades of experience, I refuse to acknowledge Ukrainian victims as better in any way than any other victims of war worldwide. This is against humanitarianism as such.

But you're aware that just as we speak, the prevalent mood among European politicians and elites is exactly the opposite. What we're hearing is that we have to turn a blind eye towards all the other war crimes, atrocities and civilian suffering, because now all other tyrants are our 'allies' against Vladimir Putin.
I do realize that. But this will not in any way change what I believe in. If you're in league with murderers, you'll lose eventually. I have never advocated against Russia as such, I do not consider Russia to be a country of evildoers and aggressors as such. It is the Russian elite. But I've never—contrary to almost all European, even Polish, politicians—courted Putin, believing he's somebody to befriend, to appease. And I've never stained myself or our organization by being in cahoots with dictators. Unfortunately, it is still many people in the EU who did, and who let the dictators have their way—just name, besides Putin, Assad for one—time and time again. I believe what I believe, and will not change the definition, the very sense of humanitarianism, for short-term applause.

JANINA OCHOJSKA
is an astronomer, member of the democratic opposition in pre-1989 Poland, humanitarian, long-time director of *Polish Humanitarian Action* and a member of the *European Parliament* since 2019 (the EPP group).

Javier Blas: For Those Who Barter the World's Resources, the War Is an Opportunity

The point when Russia has maximum energy leverage against Europe is early winter, when during the coldest snap Vladimir Putin decides to turn off the gas. I think the people really realize how ugly it could get. And it will get ugly—says Javier Blas, co-author of *The World for Sale*, in conversation with Jakub Dymek.

JAKUB DYMEK: Are the commodity traders the closest thing we have to a secretive cabal running the world in shadows?
JAVIER BLAS: I wouldn't use such a wording for it having possibly xenophobic conotations. And commodity traders have been active in the global economy and remain today, because they perform an important business and economic function. If it weren't so, capitalism would have thrown them out long ago, because nobody wants to pay for a service that is not needed. So commodity traders are needed and perform a function that is needed, and therefore valuable, to society.
It is true, however, that they operate in the shadows, almost anonymously, with barely any regulations and governments know very little about them. And, not only historically, but even recently, there have been a lot of cases of bad behavior in the industry. Corruption, bribery and manipulation of markets was seen as an extension of regular business activity. And therefore you can make an argument that this is an industry that misbehaves and operates in ways that are not up to the standard that society would expect.

But even putting misbehavior and corruption aside, trading the world's resources comes with enormous power and influence in itself, doesn't it? At least that's what *The World for Sale*, a book you and Jack Farchy wrote, argues.

The most amazing thing for me is that beyond business and trade, commodities play an enormous political role. Commodities are money, money is power. And in many countries, the commodities they produce are the main source of income for them. And they can break a country's economy, too. It's amazing how things we're seeing today in Sri Lanka, for example, resemble historical episodes from our book so closely. When there's the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, who says "we have enough gasoline for two days", but there's a vessel with oil just over our coast, but we don't have enough money to pay for it. I thought to myself, "my God! we've already written about this story, only the country was Jamaica back then." It's so similar as if somebody had literally made it for us. What's extraordinary is that commodity traders are mostly unknown in business and in the world of politics, the way both are typically covered. At the same time, they're extremely active in the most unusual and dramatic of examples, like financing a war or an uprising! In doing that they're literally shaping the course of history, because they support or finance certain outcomes. And it's either the traders are extremely smart and are betting on the side that is winning a particular war or it's that their participation that tips the balance and helps one side in winning the conflict. And usually the side getting their help is winning.

So commodity traders are needed and perform a function that is needed, and therefore valuable, to society.

Like where for example?

I'll give you three examples. In the 1980s, we had Marc Rich and company financing the Communist side of the civil war in Angola. Which is interesting also, because here you see how the commodity traders are willing to do business with whomever. Marc Rich who is an epitome of capitalism, and here he is, supporting the left or even outright Communist government of Angola, which was also backed by the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, you have the example of Glencore financing aluminum exchange with the government of Tajikistan during one of the bloodiest post-soviet collapse conflicts. And more recently, in 2011, Vitol, the world's largest oil trader, financed a rebel movement against Gaddafi, to the tune of providing a billion dollar's worth of gasoline, diesel and fuel oil on credit! This is extraordinary. The last example is particularly unusual. Because in the 1980s and 1990s,

both in Angola and Tajikistan, we had traders supporting governments fighting against guerillas. But in the case of Vitol in 2011, it was the other way round. They supported the rebel movement which at the moment was perhaps backed by some members of the international community—they were 'our guys' if I may. They were supported by the French government, the British, the Americans, sure. But at the time, Vitol started supporting the rebels, they didn't have a reliable power structure. I was in Benghazi, a major rebel outpost at the time, and almost nothing was working there. So that was an almost unprecedented bet.

What's extraordinary is that commodity traders are mostly unknown in business and in the world of politics, the way both are typically covered.

And the traders engage with whom they like, regardless of cold and hot wars, as well as economic sanctions?

These three examples showcase the span of at least 40 years of commodity trader's interventions in war, where they put the balance in favor of the winning side. But there are other examples. I like to point to the way the commodity trades helped Fidel Castro in the early 1990s. Cuba needed the help of the Soviet Union, but the USSR collapsed and the money and resources flowing to the island disappeared. It was the commodity traders who replaced the Soviets and saved Fidel Castro. In 1992, when Cuba was going through an economic crisis—at the time called "a special situation in times of peace" as the euphemism coined by the authorities at the time called it—it would not have survived, in my view, if it wasn't for the commodity traders. Cuba would have run out of gasoline and oil, without which it is simply impossible to run a country.

Would you go as far and say the commodity trade is the most important vehicle for outrunning sanctions in the modern world?

Not so much today... In the twentieth century, yes, definitely! Nowadays, European banks would be much more considerate in their lending so as to avoid sanctions imposed by the capitals. There's much more scrutiny—journalistic, civic and other—and oversight over what the traders are doing. In the previous century however, it is not that the traders themselves who were the biggest breachers of sanctions. And we have to remember that many sanctions—for South Africa under the apartheid regime for example—were volountrary. Countries could join them or not. So it is fair to say that some commodity traders saw sanctions as a business opportunity rather than moral impediment in doing business. In the twentieth century, both sanctions and wars were seen as an opportunity.

Is today's situation similar in that regard?

Ever so often a commodity trader or an executive tells me: "oh no, we don't do that, Javier, the industry has moved on, your concerns are of the yesteryear, blah, blah, blah." And then, literally just weeks ago, Glencore pleads guilty and agrees to pay billions in fines, after admitting to the Department of Justice to paying bribes in multiple countries in Africa and Latin America as recently as 2018. Vitol, about a year to a year-and-a-half ago, admitted to paying bribes in Mexico, Ecuador and Brazil up to as recently as 2020, which is in business terms like yesterday. So you have two of the largest commodity traders engaging in illegal behavior and paying bribes very, very recently. So when people tell me how the industry has changed, I remain deeply skeptical. Because we have proof that if circumstances permit, they will engage in bribery and corruption. Is this as outlandish as in the 1970s and 1980s? Probably not. But we also have this new crop of commodity traders in the Middle East and Asia, who are buying a lot of Russian oil—which is practically legal—and looking forward to making a huge profit. Believe it or not, one of these trading companies is named after a baddie from a Harry Potter book!

You've said the community traders used to—or still do—treat wars like a business opportunity. Asking more broadly about Russia's war with Ukraine and energy markets: who stands to benefit from the conflict? If it is an opportunity, for whom?

Every oil and gas producer today is making—and this might not be the most appropriate word—a killing these days. Even Norway is making enormous amounts of money, even without taking advantage of the conflict. It's just that the price of oil is 120$ a barrel, the price of gas is 100 euros per megawatt/hour. And if you have oil and gas to sell, you make a lot of money. Simple as that. The same goes with Saudi Arabia, which is making about one billion dollars a day gross income selling its oil.

Commodity traders are set to make more money in 2022 than any other year in history and a lot of it thanks to the war. In some cases, they are helping countries secure alternative sources of oil, which means a lot of extra work, with a difficult market and charging extra for their services. In other cases it's countries that are trying to resign from importing Russian oil. But generally this is a very good environment to be a commodity trader, one that you can make a lot of money in. And some commodity traders are buying discounted Russian oil...

...to sell it later?

No! To sell it immediately, just in a place that will accept it. Look, you're buying

Russian oil today with a 35$ discount and selling it with 10 or 15$ of discount. The difference is 20$ a barrel that you can pocket. And typically a commodity trader would be very happy to make a profit of 20 cents per barrel. Now dealing in Russian oil, which is perfectly legal by the way, could make you a hundredfold the premium you were getting previously. The only thing is, you and your customer have to—let's put it this way—have a taste for this particular product. And again: you're getting a profit that is orders of magnitude higher than normally, without doing anything that is today yet illegal.

If you ask me personally: would I like to do business with Rosneft, with the Russian government at that time, with these types of characters? No, I would not like to be involved with them. But commodity traders usually see themselves as "beyond politics". They're happy to deal with them.

And we have to remember that many sanctions—for South Africa under the apartheid regime for example—were voluntary.

How far does the Western rhetoric of "not buying from murderers and despots" really go? Not buying from Russia equals buying even more from Saudi Arabia, which is not a paragon of democracy either.

When people ask me "do the sanctions achieve anything?" I tend to be skeptical of the idea that by sanctioning Vladimir Putin's government we can achieve something. Are we going to stop the war in Ukraine? I don't think Vladimir Putin cares much about what happens with the Russian economy in the short term. We can put even more sanctions and that wouldn't stop him from killing the people of Ukraine. Is there a moral case to be made? That Europe is stopping its business with Russia and is unwilling to send even a dollar there? Sure, I understand there's a moral case for that.

But when at the same time you take that dollar and transfer it to another country that is—or was up until very recently—conducting another bloody war, the moral argument becomes more complicated.

And not only that, Saudi Arabia was involved in the civil war in Yemen for many years, it is an ally of Russia within the OPEC+ agreement. So by shifting the oil demand towards Saudi Arabia you're helping Russia's allies too.

My Dad asks me sometimes, why do I have to travel to so many dangerous countries, sometimes shady places in very remote areas. I won't name the continent, but let's say these are difficult places if not outright war zones. And what I say to my father is "I don't know why, but the Dear God put the Earth's resources in the wrong places I suppose". The main problem is that many commodities we buy are located and extracted in countries that are very much unlike Europe. Period. We have been lucky in so many ways, to be born in a time and place to enjoy the freedoms and liberties of European democracy. Many people aren't. I'm fully aware of the hypocrisy of criticizing the same governments that we later buy oil and gasoline from—be that Venezuela or Russia. But this is what we do. Should we? Perhaps not.

Commodity traders are set to make more money in 2022 than any other year in history and a lot of it thanks to the war.

In a moral universe, we shouldn't. In the real world however, where globalization is the king, we simply have to? Speaking of hard choices: what's your assessment of the most recent Russian oil embargo by the EU?

We saw how the sausage is made, and it's never pretty. Especially when Viktor Orbán was at the time the cook-in-chief. But at the end of the day, the embargo the EU enacted will cover 90% of oil and 95% of refined products that Europe was buying pre-invasion. It also covers the insurance of shipping, which is very very important. So I think it will be quite an effective embargo. It's going to take several months, but I'm sure European companies will start acting earlier instead of waiting until 31st of December to curb their Russian imports. Yes, there's a chance that Russia will be able to reroute that oil to different places, but it's going to be very difficult for them to reroute four million barrels a day someplace else. So eventually Russian production is going to come down and this is going to be incredibly significant for the Russian economy. But it's going to be extremely expensive for Europe and the rest of the world too. What it means is higher energy prices for longer, that's for sure.

Is there the possibility of a recession coming sooner and higher prices of not only energy, but everyday consumer items as well?

This guarantees higher inflation and raises chances for a recession quite significantly. What we are seeing is a very painful measure. I want to raise another very important point here. We're entering the fourth month of the war [the interview taking place in the first week of June—JD], Ukraine had been under attack for much longer if you include the Crimea annexation and the ongoing conflict. The EU has approved, by unanimity, six packages of sanctions already, among them targeting both the central bank and biggest commercial banks in Russia, now an oil embargo coming in six months on top of that. Apart from that, a range of other measures targeting influential business people, officials and so on. If somebody had told me that the EU was going to do all this

in 100 days and break the taboo of going after Russian oil—I would have a hard time believing that even a couple of months ago. There are people who would simply claim back then that it was impossible. So I know some steps took longer and a lot of people are frustrated with the pace of European response, but as for European standards it's really meaningful what happened. And these are extremely painful measures to take. And some of the leaders decided to go forward with this, regardless of them facing an election—like for example Emmanuel Macron did. You know, normally I'm a pessimist, a "glass half-empty" type of guy. But in this particular case I'm inclined to say the glass is half full, being impressed by how much Europe was actually able to approve, eventually bringing Viktor Orbán onboard with the sixth package of sanctions. Up to some point I wouldn't bet any money on that happening.

The country is devastated, their economy in tatters, the state is on its knees even though they're fighting very valiantly and fiercely to say the least. But economically they're just devastated.

But in several states, Poland and the Baltics foremost, there's still a certain dissatisfaction and a sentiment that the EU isn't acting with urgency. You're saying the reality is quite different and we're observing some kind of breakthrough?

I fully understand where these voices from Eastern Europe and the Baltics are coming from. The enemy looks all the more scarier the closer you are. And Poland as well as many other countries in the region are really facing it, and have a historical experience with that sort of challenge. So the rest of Europe should listen very attentively to what they have to say. But I also understand that other European countries are walking a fine line too. Europe is using energy as a weapon against Russia. At the same time Russia is using energy as a weapon against Europe. We're arming the country that is fighting Russia on the battlefield as we speak. So what we're having is really a borderline hot war with Russia. If this was the Cold War, the original one, we would be in a very hot phase of it, wouldn't we? When we will put everything we can into economic war with Russia and at some point the Kremlin says it will treat any next step as a casus belli, that their national security came under threat and is considering our moves as de facto war, I don't know what Europe will do then. And I fear we're approaching that point.

So are we to expect a harsh winter ahead of us?

It is Ukrainians who are in for a very, very hard winter. Regardless as to whether this

Europe is using energy as a weapon against Russia. At the same time Russia is using energy as a weapon against Europe. We're arming the country that is fighting Russia on the battlefield as we speak. So what we're having is really a borderline hot war with Russia.

phase of war ends within two weeks or continues for a long time, sadly the situation is going to be horrible. The country is devastated, their economy in tatters, the state is on its knees even though they're fighting very valiantly and fiercely to say the least. But economically they're just devastated. If the war continues, it is going to be hard for the democratic governments in Europe as well. The voters will face high inflation rates, and even when the inflation cools down, it doesn't necessarily mean the prices will go down. What it means is that the prices will still be rising, just not as fast. It's very different when the prices are going up just as the winter—a relatively mild one—ends and you don't have to spend as much on heating. And we might face the exact opposite: entering the winter with extremely high prices already and with a heating season ahead of us, where there is expensive heating oil, gas, coal, electricity and so on. It's going to be tough on Europe. On the other hand, it's going to be hard in Russia too. But Putin has an advantage: there's no real democracy and public opinion that he has to answer to. So Putin has an iron grip on the population. The point when Russia has maximum energy leverage against Europe is early winter, when during the coldest snap Vladimir Putin decides to turn off the gas. I think the people really realize how ugly it could get. And it will get ugly. To think, for example, Europe is going to be facing blackouts. And this is a scenario that is much more likely today than it was just six months ago.

JAVIER BLAS
is a *Bloomberg Opinion* columnist covering energy and commodities. A former reporter for *Bloomberg News* and commodities editor at the *Financial Times*, he is coauthor of *The World for Sale: Money, Power and the Traders Who Barter the Earth's Resources*.

Bruno Maçães: Europe is Emerging as a Geopolitical Union

If we want real democracy in the EU, we need to reduce German and French power, says Bruno Maçães, Portuguese politician and member of the European Centre for International Political Economy Advisory Board. Are we seeing the emergence of European political consciousness and European interests?

TOMÁŠ KLVAŇA: Welcome to Prague, Bruno, and congratulations on the Czech publication of your book *Geopolitics for the End of Time*. We seem to be at a decisive juncture in the history of Europe and its integration process, post pandemic, amidst war. How have we done so far?

BRUNO MAÇÃES: I am interested in this idea that we have to distinguish between EU member states and the European Commission. There is a connection, but there is also the spirit of the EU and the spirit of the member states. In this crisis the EU has been much bolder and more decisive than the average member state. On the issue of giving Ukraine EU candidate status, the Commission was pushing ahead ambitiously, and Germany and France were creating difficulties all the time. There is a popular view that the Commission is useless or the EU institutions bureaucratic, but the war has shown the opposite. The problems that Europe is facing are directly related to errors of national policy, particularly in Germany. The EU has been quite good on Ukraine already for ten years. It has been pushing for energy diversification. So if you think about Europe as a whole, of course, the EU and member states are mixed together and it is difficult to distinguish between the two, but the EU has been better than the member states.

Why is it the case? Perhaps the idea that was at the start of European integration way back finally germinated—that the Commission would be looking after European interests as opposed to the interests of individual member states? Are we seeing the emergence of European political consciousness and European interests?

I think that's it. The European Commission represents a broader view. It is not as captured by interests, business interests or national interests. Overall, it is much better to project European power. There is something proper that national interests get corrected by another perspective and you end up with something that is better. For example, the German perspective of Russia will be complemented by the Polish perspective. Germany and France resist this a lot and they also resist enlargement because they do not want to lose the influence and power that they have right now. Enlargement would be very good news because, first, you create a bigger geopolitical bloc. And second, if we want real democracy in the EU, we need to reduce German and French power. After the UK left, the way to do this is to bring one or two large countries in. I am thinking of Ukraine and Turkey. That would be my ideal scenario. With 120 million new European citizens, French and German power would be diluted. It would be good news for states like Portugal, Czechia and others. It has been my view for a long time. The Franco-German engine is a big problem for the EU.

Turkey sounds far-fetched right now...

Right, the Turks themselves are not interested anymore, but Ukraine hopefully joins within 10–12 years, not 30, which is what you hear in Paris.

Does Biden's America read the European theater correctly?

On the whole Biden has been positive, supportive and has made a real difference. There has been some hesitation that could have been avoided. They doubted that Ukraine could resist. He was convinced that Ukraine would fall in three days. That has retarded support. But the United States has been able to do things that Europeans could not. Its logistic power is impressive. The ability to move equipment quickly and deploy it is a humbling experience for Europeans because without the US, Ukraine would not have survived. Certainly, if it was up to France, Germany and Italy, Ukraine would have been doomed. That is a disturbing thought.

Are we eventually going to see a coherent, unified and strong EU foreign policy?

I think so, it is happening. Everyone my age or little older than me remembers disagreements that were incredibly profound. During the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, France and Germany were on opposite sides. France was close to Serbia, Germany to Croatia and Slovenia. During the second Iraq War, there were radical disagreements among European countries. Today, there is an alignment of views if not policies on the current crisis, so it represents a leap forward. You have the High European Representative on Foreign Policy saying that the European Defense Fund will provide Ukraine with military equipment. It would have been unthinkable just two or three years ago. For the first time, we see real meaning in the label of Europe as a geopolitical union. Now we need institutional reforms. We must talk about the questions of qualified majority and unanimity. We need the enlargement process to move forward. We need a geopolitical energy policy. However, the process has started. It is no longer possible to ignore the idea of European foreign policy. This crisis—you see the French position, German position, but they can be interpreted within the European position. It is the first time the European position is dominant. What you saw in Kyiv was Germany's Chancellor being dragged along having to accept what the European view is. This is major progress. Germany alone would probably not agree to grant Ukraine a candidate status, but there is a European dynamic that forces Germany to compromise.

BOX: If we want real democracy in the EU, we need to reduce German and French power.

Will this war improve Euro-American ties? Especially in view of how the Trump administration brought it to a completely different place.

I don't think so. My impression is that the war is increasing the annoyance in Washington that even such a crisis on our borders has to be addressed by the US. It is making a backlash—when it comes in 2024—even stronger than it would have been. There is a trend in the US to pivot to Asia and tackle China in a more strategic way and this war is not making things better. A couple of countries such as Estonia and Poland have done more than the US on a per-capita basis. But on average it is not true, and Germany and France have not lived up to expectations. The conclusion in Washington will be that Europe will only learn after the US either withdraws from Europe or makes a very credible threat of doing so. The annoyance is growing. I see indications that a crisis is coming. There is concern about war in Taiwan and the US will have to turn to that.

Are the US and EU playing it smart in China?

For a long time we have seen excessive self-confidence. Many people did not view China seriously. It is changing. I wrote a book in which I argued that the game on China turns on the question of who controls technology. The strategy used by the US has not worked. The US has to focus more on becoming a great player in

technology development with a world-class infrastructure. There is in American strategy, an attempt to stop China rather than race faster. You are not going to be able to stop China, so the only way to beat them is to race faster than China. On my recent visits to the US, I saw this decaying infrastructure and with the exception of some islands of innovation, the US is a less vibrant economy, a less vibrant country. That should be the priority. Trying to isolate China will only make it more self-reliant, which is what happened in semiconductors. China's been able to develop that capacity over the past five years, faster than expected. China has committed its own errors, but the US is not trying a more competitive approach. In terms of the EU and China, I am generally positive. In the last five years, the EU has developed more tools to be competitive with China. Before that, China was still seen as a developing country and was underestimated. Now the EU has more tools on trade, technology, investment, or public procurement. We are seeing a more balanced relationship between China and the EU. The EU is less naïve and regards China as a competitor. We have the same problems with lack of innovation and tech development as the US, but it is no longer the case that we open our markets unilaterally. We demand more reciprocity.

How do you see China evolving after this year's crucial Congress of the Communist Party when Xi secures his own position?

I see more continuity than disruption, continuity over decades. I am not one of those people to see great breaks. After Deng took power, there has been more continuity than discontinuity. Deng was not more pro-Western. He simply took decisions in a different context and Xi makes decisions in his context, but there is more that holds them together than what separates them over the last three decades of Chinese history. And there will be continuity in the future. We will see China interested in several things in the next five years, such as self-sufficiency; placing itself in a position that it no longer depends on the West. Further, they will focus on critical components, such as semi-conductors and other critical technology. Once China feels it is self-sufficient, we will see another quantum leap in its foreign policy. China will become more assertive. There are still some people in China believing it is too weak and dependent and they are working to change that. China will want to address its internal problems, particularly its over-reliance on credit and the real estate sector. It will want to shift the economy to more productive sectors. Much will hang on this. Then there is the question of Taiwan. More people are inclined to think that China will try to incorporate Taiwan by force. China will never give up on Taiwan and it will never be able to incorporate Taiwan peacefully. So, at some point there will be an attempt to use force. And that will probably be in this decade. Looking at the development of Chinese defense, it would be around 2027. After 2030, it will be more difficult. Some of the US's capacities will be ready by then. They are not ready now. 2027: a crisis point. I don't expect a move towards a more liberal China, but I also don't expect a move towards a more centralized and more authoritarian government than we have now. Generally, I expect continuity. The crisis point will come from the increase in China's self-reliance, and on Taiwan, and those two lines will eventually cross, when China feels it no longer depends on Western technology and capital.

Finally, do you believe we will ever see a post-Putin, more Europeanized Russia? Or is Russia going to be a threat for the foreseeable future?

I don't believe in a Europeanized Russia in my lifetime. After Putin, the regime will probably evolve. It will be more closed to the outside. I've suggested that it will perhaps resemble Iran. Perhaps there will be some form of a more collective leadership, returning to a Politburo occupied by people from the security services, much more disconnected from the West, economically, politically and culturally more linked to China, to India, to Iran. In 20-30 years, we will increasingly think of Russia as an Asian country partnered to China or India rather than to European democracies, more militarized—that's already the case but I think it's possible to imagine the next president coming from the military. I keep coming back to this image of Iran in terms of structural elements. Russia will be another Iran and certainly not another Poland or even another Ukraine. It might not necessarily be a threat because if we think of the analogy with Iran, we think of a very isolated Russia with diminished economic power. It may become a regional actor not able to impact European security anymore, with WMDs but not with conventional abilities to launch a major war. Again, coming to the Iranian scenario, Russia will be able to exert influence using proxies and militias but would be a lesser threat than today, a diminished power with a less powerful army.

BRUNO MAÇÃES
is a member of the *European Centre for International Political Economy Advisory Board*. He is also a Senior Advisor at *Flint Global* in London, where he advises companies on international politics, and a Senior Fellow at *Renmin University*, Beijing and the *Hudson Institute* in Washington. He was the Portuguese Europe Minister from 2013-2015, and was decorated by Spain and Romania for his services to the government. He received his doctorate in political science from *Harvard University*, and was a research fellow at the *American Enterprise Institute* in Washington and the *Carnegie Institute* in Brussels. He has written for the *Financial Times, Politico, the Guardian* and *Foreign Affairs*, and appears regularly on *CNN, the BBC, Bloomberg, Al Jazeera* and *CCTV*.

INTERVIEW
CZECH REPUBLIC
LABOUR MARKET
UKRAINE

Daniel Münich: The Labor Market in the Czech Republic. We Are Getting into a Rut, Again

We do not know anything about the people who came here due to the war in Ukraine, and that is a big mistake, says an economist Daniel Münich in an interview with Robert Schuster. He thinks that one of the biggest problems is that many young Ukrainians linger in an "educational vacuum".

ROBERT SCHUSTER: How has the Czech Republic fared so far, in your opinion, in handling the influx of refugees from Ukraine? It has been, after all, a totally new experience for its people and state institutions...

DANIEL MÜNICH: The first and second stage went down unexpectedly well, we have seen a welcoming public and flexible state institutions able to come up with legislative solutions on very short notice, and coordinate effectively on the governmental level. To be completely honest, I did not quite expect that our civil service would be capable of such an effort. When it comes to public reaction, there was an unbelievable solidarity and understanding—something completely different from what we saw during the migrant crisis of 2015. Yet we are beginning to hit quite a few snags. Now the focus must be on standardization of processes and situational monitoring, as we ought to implement at least a partial integration of newcomers—no one really knows how long they will stay here. We are beginning to be stuck in a rut, when we have stopped being able to come up with new, innovative solutions. We are not seeking real-time feedback and monitoring of the situation on the ground, we do not know what the new and real problems are. It may be that the state institutions do not want to see the problems. It mainly concerns integration of Ukrainian children into schools and how their parents, mainly women, can find work. I feel it is beginning to function similarly to how Czech bureaucracy typically deals with everyday issues for its own citizens.

Is it possible to gauge now how the immigration from Ukraine has influenced the Czech labor market?

I am used to working with data and I base my conclusions on facts. Right now, there is a liability in the Czech system as it has not been able to process data flows to paint the current situation correctly. It mainly affects areas of education, employment and housing. We are in fact unable to determine how many Ukrainians are here and how many have already left. Hard data are, unfortunately, missing. The only exception is a survey done months ago by a private agency PAQ which interviewed a sample of Ukrainian families. It is a one off and it does work that should have been the state's remit. The simplest of data accessible from the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs enable us to track the number of people, based on nationality, who are officially registered to be working, in employment. Before the war, the ratio was heavily in favour of men, about two thirds compared to one third of women. Now the current migration wave has completely levelled that up. The PAQ research shows that the majority of these people work through agencies or do badly paid short term work and so on. Many are, surely, paid under the table without any further security. The Ministry of Labor has come up with a figure of 50 thousand of them having found work—most likely unqualified and inadequately paid.

And when it comes to the qualified workforce in IT that has been traditionally very strong in Ukraine? Have they found work here? Are companies actively seeking them?

Sadly, we don't even know what qualifications the immigrants have. They are mostly women who work in social care, cleaning services or as unqualified help. Yet we cannot find this data in official statistics, it is only a guess.

A big test comes in September, in the form of a new school year. What are your expectations? Will the Czech school system handle it?

Judging from the few data available over the summer break, the situation is certainly not very rosy. Many Ukrainian young people, mostly high schoolers, stay outside of the Czech educational system and are left in an educational vacuum. The authorities have their hands full trying to provide elementary and middle school education, not to mention preschoolers. The main discord in the capacities of schools and kindergartens is in the locations already known for having troubles providing services to local populations. This results in pressure to set up classes for Ukrainians only. Sometimes this ends in so-called adaptation groups which were meant to be only for initial orientation. The system is set up in such a way that it is up to the municipalities to deal with it. There are towns where 'problems' are concentrated and there are ones which are virtually untouched by the crises and thus prefer to have nothing to do with it. Municipalities often do not even apply for housing assistance and subsidies as these come with many strings attached. There is no governmental information campaign directed at municipalities, not even a motivational one. Those who simply "drew the short stick" are then left to deal with the consequences. It is also necessary to point out that Ukrainians have flocked to locations with a strong pre-war Ukrainian presence, i.e. where employment opportunities are but not necessarily where there is enough capacity in schools—typically in satellites around Prague and other big cities.

The main discord in the capacities of schools and kindergartens is in the locations already known for having troubles providing services to local populations.

Are these problems the result of a rapid influx of a great many people over a short period of time or do they point to more fundamental structural problems of the state?

Data collection has been problematic for a long time, for example in providing services to schools in disadvantaged localities. What is more, the state administration suffers from extreme compartmentalisation—Ministry of Labour cares only about employment, Ministry of Education about schooling, Ministry of Interior only about security aspects and registrations of residency. Their cooperation is very limited even in data mining and sharing. If the integration of children is to be a success, their parents need a place to live. The parents—mostly mothers—can go to work or training facilities only when their child has a school or kindergarten placement. And sadly, very often these things are not in sync, yet it would not take much for them to be.

Can this lead to an impulse to change things for the better and improve coordination and communication among various state institutions?

It is hard to see how. It all goes hand in hand with how slow and out of date our governance system is. For years now, even decades, it is in need of a serious overhaul for which the political representation has not had either strength or time, for there has been one crisis after another. The state administration has demonstrated its limited capabilities, and not only in the case of covid or migration. It concerns setting about the reforms of taxation, pensions, and public finances as a whole. I get a feeling that many of the politicians who last year came newly into the Parliament and into state administration are very surprised at what can pose as an impossible problem.

What do you think Ukrainian refugees make of it, seeing how things often do not work here? Will they feel like staying on?

The majority of Ukrainians are relatively hardened, shall we say, used to an entirely different scale of state and governmental dysfunction than what they encounter here. From their perspective, our state institutions work relatively well, yet we are not overly strict, so one can lead a problem-free life without a ton of paperwork, etc. We do have an immense number of laws and regulations, yet rarely anyone bothers to learn them all and we tend to let quite a lot of things slide. In other words, most people can get by without really following the letter of the law, many of them making a living in the grey economy. No one really minds unless they attract attention in some negative way. It can still be a better life than in today's Ukraine. It is especially true if they already have some sort of social network here, friends or relatives to lean on. That would also prevent them from moving on to the West, as they are lacking the same support network there. It is absolutely crucial for them to have that because these networks supplant the role of the state—instead of its institutions it is friends and family who help out with finding work, looking after children etc.—and that plays a decisive role.

Some day the war in Ukraine will end and the country will need every pair of hands to help with reconstruction. Do you think they will want to go back?

Here we come at the collision of two tendencies—brain drain and integration. The better they are integrated into our society, the less likely the war refugees are to return and to help rebuild Ukraine. Yet we do not know how long the war will go on. If we are to learn that it will last a long time, then the integration efforts will be stepped up, for currently they are sort of on the back burner. If the combat is to wind up by the year's end and there will be billions in foreign aid channeled into the country, then it does not make much sense to develop a profound integration strategy. I am of the opinion that these people might be here for a longer haul and

in that case it will help Ukraine as well, as there will be large remittances sent there. It does not only concern financial transfers but know-how as community, by staying in here and being close by at the same time, will aid the reconstruction as well.

Could it be that the Ukrainians who stay here and integrate well can become the "critical mass" that would positively influence economic growth in the Czech Republic and mitigate the lack of workforce that has always been called the biggest hindrance of further economic growth?

If the situation does not dramatically change and the numbers stay what they are now—there are roughly 300,000 people here, most of them women and children. Realistically, we can add between 50,000–70,000 people to the Czech labor market, which amounts to about 5 million people. From that we can see that it is about 1–1.5 percent—so it will not make a big dent. If their children do grow up here, and will be, hopefully, integrated and educated, then we shall add another 1 percent—all in all, not very dramatic numbers that could sway the situation on the Czech labor market.

So there will be no effect at all?

I think that many consequences will not be registered at all, regardless of the fact whether the integration process is going to be a success or a failure. There simply does not exist a system in the Czech Republic designed to evaluate how the integration process pans out. How successful the integration will be depends on whether or not the Ukrainians are fulfilling their potential and are working as productively as they could, either in positions adequate to their capabilities, managing to integrate successfully as scientists, IT workers, etc., or end up doing some menial work because they lack a stamp showing they have graduated from high school. Yet we have no way of knowing that, as we lack any data about them, so we do not know how they contribute to GDP, tax revenue and so on. I am afraid that the Czech system has no idea how to gain insight into that and we will only be guessing.

Integration and its success rate can be well tracked with young people, how they go through the educational system and what their results are.

What would need to change to have that data available?

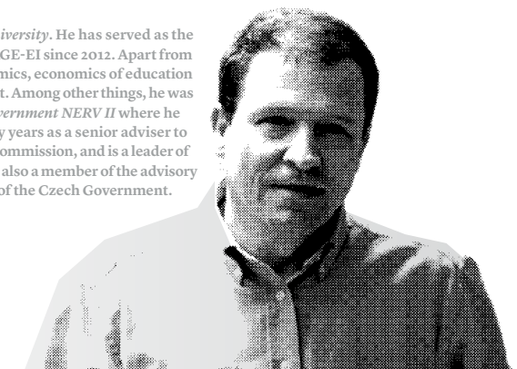
Integration and its success rate can be well tracked with young people, how they go through the educational system and what their results are. On the labor market, there could be traceability of Ukrainian employees, their original qualifications and current employment. This would, of course, mean that someone is systematically and regularly collecting this information, preferably once a year, or is monitoring a sample of people for a few years—which is a common practice in the world. Well, we will be very lucky to know how many of these people are really employed. There needs to be a demand for this data though, and governments do not request it. I am also surprised that neither the government nor the parliament get a regular monthly analytical report concernconcerning the development of the Ukrainian situation in terms of integration—the labor market, education, health care, etc. If I were in a position of a Prime Minister or a Parliament Speaker, I would certainly demand such a report. We went through something similar during the covid crisis and it took some repeated insistence for MPs to get relevant reports. When it comes to Ukraine crises, nothing is really happening, with the exception of mayors who have to deal with it on a daily basis—as if no one really cares. I do not understand why there is no requirement for Ukrainians to register for permanent domicile, even though it is mandatory for every Czech citizen—without a domicile one cannot obtain a passport, healthcare and insurance, employment, education, a bank account, etc. The vast majority of Ukrainians need something similar. Why not have the same rules for them as for the rest? The local municipality would confirm once in a month or two that they are still present on our territory. By the way, during the summer, many things have become standardized, various temporary solutions and exceptions have run their course. Ukrainian migrants will be viewed far more strictly in the eyes of the law now.

Are you then rather a pessimist when it comes to Ukrainians in the Czech Republic and their standing here...

The more real-world information I get, however partial, from mayors mainly, the more pessimistic I am about the success of the integration. I also think that failures will not be highly visible, so as it is in the saying " Out of sight, out of mind."

DANIEL MÜNICH

received his Ph.D. in economics from CERGE at *Charles University*. He has served as the Executive Director of the academic think-tank IDEA at CERGE-EI since 2012. Apart from teaching, he focuses on research in the fields of labor economics, economics of education and schooling, policy impact evaluation and R&D assessment. Among other things, he was a member of the *National Economic Council of the Czech Government NERV II* where he coordinated a chapter on education. He has served for many years as a senior adviser to the *European Network of Economists of Education* for the EU Commission, and is a leader of the national team in the European project *Euromod*. Daniel is also a member of the advisory board for policy impact evaluation to the legislative council of the Czech Government.



ASPEN.REVIEW
MAŁGORZATA NOCUŃ

INTERVIEW
RUSSIA
BELARUS

Adam Daniel Rotfeld: Moscow Perceives Fear as a Political Instrument

When Vladimir Putin decided to annex Crimea, the question in Poland and the West was, "Where will Russia stop? What will be its next territorial demands?" Both then and today my answer is the same: "It will stop where it is stopped," says Professor Adam Daniel Rotfeld, former Polish Foreign Minister, in an interview with Małgorzata Nocuń.

MAŁGORZATA NOCUŃ: Central and Eastern Europe is a difficult neighbourhood for the European Union, isn't it?

ADAM DANIEL ROTFELD: I understand that you don't mean all the countries bordering Russia in this region, but rather those countries of Central and Eastern Europe which joined the European Union nearly twenty years ago and are now an integral part of it. The roots of liberal democracy in this part of Europe—with the exception of the Czech Republic—are extremely shallow.

Let's start with Poland. In 1989, after the fall of communism, the West began to perceive our country as a fully democratic part of the European community. At first, political transition was supported as part of the preparations for accession and then, in 2004, Poland was accepted into the European Union. This decision was based on the assumption that we had chosen the path of democratic development and that we would keep following this path. Moreover, to emphasize that we were part of the European family, equals among equals, Jerzy Buzek was appointed President of the European Parliament, and a few years later Donald Tusk became President of the European Council. A decade earlier, the writer Stanislaw Lem, observing the democratic changes in Poland, remained sceptical and prophesied: "The West will yet see that we have managed to deceive them and will be bitterly disappointed in us." Lem was a perspicacious futurologist characterized by extremely deep analytical thinking. He knew that the sentiments and expectations of the liberal-democratic elite sharply contrasted with the sentiments of a

considerable part of the inhabitants of provincial Poland. People were not prepared to bear such high costs of transformation. These groups became fertile soil for the formation of anti-democratic and populist attitudes, often characterized by xenophobia and nationalism. Lem predicted that things would take a bad turn in Poland. And so it happened—his prophecy came true before our very eyes. To an even greater extent, the tendencies of "corrupting democracy" concern other countries in the region: Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria. Democracy is based on values, rule of law and procedures, and the creation of strong institutions to guard them. Unfortunately, this has not happened in Poland and other CEE countries. Also in the Baltic countries democracy is a process in its early stages. Before World War II, authoritarian tendencies and Fascist movements dominated in these countries. The Soviet period strengthened the prevailing conviction that a strong state must be based on authoritarian, single-party and oligarchic rule. To this day, the influence of Moscow and multifaceted connections of various groups with the Russian authorities persist there. Let us add that these former Soviet republics are inhabited by a large Russian minority, particularly numerous in Latvia. The fears that a dangerous choice of 'illiberal democracy', as happened in Hungary, may prevail in the societies and political elites there are not unfounded. This may lead—in a historically conceivable time—to the transformation of these democratic states into 'Russian protectorates' of a sort.

In most of the post-Soviet countries we observe the consolidation of authoritarian tendencies. This is the case in the countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and especially Belarus. After the rigged presidential elections (in August 2020), Lukashenka launched a repression campaign on an unprecedented scale. Today's Belarus is a country where human rights and freedom of speech are virtually non-existent. People are tortured in overcrowded prisons.

The opposition that erupted in Minsk and other Belarusian cities after the rigged presidential election was peaceful. Lukashenka realized that he had lost not only broad public support but even his 'rock-solid' electorate. This was no longer the Belarus that had elected him President in a fair election in 1994. During the last elections, young Belarusians opted for fundamental changes. The dictator could have stepped down without bloodshed when faced with the wrath of crowds dominated by younger generations. The Belarusian usurper might have done so if he had not received support from the Kremlin. A serious mistake was made in Russia in the fall of 2020. The Kremlin should not have sided with the dictator but allowed a peaceful transition. Moscow had a chance to maintain good neighborly relations with Belarus; there is not and never has been any Russophobia there. The Russian language is widely spoken, on a par with Belarusian, and Russian culture enjoys genuine respect. The society was and certainly still is positively disposed towards Russia. Moscow could have taken advantage of this and dealt with Belarus the way it defined its policy toward Finland after World War II. Finland deliberately chose a policy of self-restraint in its relations with Russia. It did not take steps to integrate into Western structures and did not join NATO. This policy earned the name of 'Finlandization'. The answer to the question as to why Russia did not adopt a similar strategy towards Belarus is quite simple. If the scenario of a peaceful internal transition had succeeded in Belarus, many Russians would have asked themselves, "Why are changes possible in Belarus and not here?" It was therefore decided to support the dictator, although the Kremlin elites treat him with undisguised and critical reserve. By bloodily suppressing the demonstrations, Lukashenko found himself in a dead-end situation. He now has no other choice but to accept Moscow's 'help' and protectorate. This actually means the de facto abolition of Belarusian sovereignty.

Lukashenka, as a former director of a sovkhoz, manages Belarus like one. He failed to notice that times had changed. During his rule, over 25 years long now, a new generation has grown up in Belarus. They no longer speak the language of Soviet nomenclature, which the Belarusian satrap still uses. They don't feel at home in the uncritical personal worship characteristic of the Soviet times and don't even understand Lukashenka's jokes.

Lukashenka has been recognized by Moscow as the rightful ruler of Belarus, but his relations with Putin are not at all smooth. Their talks, which last for hours, are harsh and far from the language of diplomacy. A dozen years ago, in the context of a debate about the Union State of Belarus and Russia, established in the late 1990s, Putin said: "One should finally separate the flies from the pork chops. That is, to stop subsidising Belarus if Russia hears endlessly repeated empty declarations about 'deeper integration' in return." Recent talks between the two rulers lasted many hours. We don't know what happened behind the scenes, but when documents ready for signing were presented to Lukashenko, he said: "I see here in the title the term *Directive*!"—meaning an order that must be executed. To which Putin replied, "You can sign it or not." And then he elaborated: if Belarus accepts these 'directives' here and now, it will continue to receive the gas and oil it needs at prices eight times lower than market rates (sometimes even ten times lower). These energy carriers obtained from Russia are partly re-exported in a processed form

and bring significant revenues to the Belarusian budget. Belarus simply cannot afford to buy crude oil at market prices. We are touching here upon the truth about the roots of modern conflicts: they originate not in relations between states but in the situation within them. This conclusion applies equally to tensions between Russia and its neighbors, and to internal processes that emerged with enormous force in many major democratic countries: USA (mass protest demonstrations on 6 January 2021 in front of the Capitol on the eve of the swearing-in of the new president), UK (Brexit), France ('yellow vests'), the Netherlands and many other countries with stable democracies, where populism and anti-immigration movements set the tone of public debate.

The democratic world today has a problem of how to arrange its relations with Belarus.

Lukashenka has not been recognized by the West as a legitimate president. He is a usurper. Like all the countries of the transatlantic community, we have recognised Svetlana Tikhanouskaya as the leader of the country.

The question on the agenda is: "How to shape relations with the official Minsk"? The answer became more important when Lukashenka deliberately created an artificial migration crisis on the Belarusian-Polish border, which is also the eastern border of the European Union.

The dilemma of EU diplomacy comes down to resolving the humanitarian crisis (preventing people from dying of hunger, cold and disease on the border) and at the same time not legitimizing the usurper, for whom power and international recognition are more important than people's lives.

In today's world, diplomacy is practiced in the spotlight. This is not conducive to solving problems, especially the difficult and sensitive ones. Seeking such solutions requires discretion and confidentiality to ensure each side 'saves face'. Making conversations public does not facilitate a way out of what is perceived as a no-win situation. I know this from my own experience. One of the most difficult tasks entrusted to me years ago by the CSCE Council of Ministers was to work out a political solution to the bloody conflict in the war-torn Transnistria.

At the beginning of the 1990s, as the representative of the Chairman of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I submitted a report, which was modest in form but proved effective in practice. It laid the groundwork for a political solution to the conflict in the sense that it allowed both sides to 'save face'. What made it easier for me to carry out this mission boiled down not only to gaining an understanding of the adversaries in the conflict, but also to avoiding the propaganda hype around the issue.

The conversation that German Chancellor Angela Merkel had with the Belarusian dictator should not be considered a 'mistake'. It was a gesture of an experienced politician, dictated in equal measure by the ethical and political considerations. People dying of cold and hunger should never be left on their own. If the crisis cannot be resolved without Lukashenka's involvement, we must talk to him, even though the European Union does not consider him to be the legitimate President of Belarus. The most important thing is that the strategy chosen by Merkel has proved partially effective. Fewer and fewer refugees are arriving in Minsk, and many have decided to return to their countries of origin.

It is practicing a foreign and security policy based on arousing fear and generating a sense of uncertainty and unpredictability. It is exploiting the fact that the people of Western Europe and its leaders are afraid of war.

Poland had delayed the internationalization of the crisis for a long time.

And this was a mistake. We should have acted from the position of a member state of the European Union and NATO; we should have taken advantage of the specialized institutions, experience, and resources of both these communities. Acting alone and in isolation carries the risk that did materialize this time, namely the search for solutions will take place without our participation. It is necessary to stick to the principle: "Nothing about us without us".

Russia is another great challenge to the democratic world. It is currently trying to achieve its goals by drawing more and more 'red lines'. We are constantly receiving information about the transfer of military units and equipment to the Ukrainian-Russian border. How to talk to Russia, a country that does not want to engage in any dialogue?

The Russian position thus outlined does not fully reflect the actual state of affairs. On this issue, on 7 December 2021, a conversation took place between the leaders of Russia and the United States. They agreed on the framework and forms of further contacts and continuation of dialogue. President Biden did not accept any 'red lines' to limit Ukraine's sovereign rights to take actions ensuring its security. Russia, in turn, expects the United States to provide 'written guarantees' of its own security and assurances that Ukraine will not be admitted to NATO. This expectation from a superpower with massive missile and nuclear capabilities signals that Russia is aware of its weaknesses. It has been experiencing an economic stagnation, declining standards of living, social tensions, a demographic crisis, etc. Moscow's strategy is based on an attempt to use the military potential for various

types of pressure, blackmail, intimidation of its neighbours, and destabilization of its surroundings (this concerns both the 'near abroad', i.e. Ukraine, and the European Union, which is illustrated by the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline). It is practicing a foreign and security policy based on arousing fear and generating a sense of uncertainty and unpredictability. It is exploiting the fact that the people of Western Europe and its leaders are afraid of war.
There are many indications that Moscow perceives fear as a political instrument. In 2014, when Vladimir Putin decided to annex Crimea, the question in Poland and the West was, "Where will Russia stop? What will be its next territorial demands?" Both then and today my answer is the same: "It will stop where it is stopped." Blackmail ceases to work if the targeted states and nations show a determination to confront naked force. Effective counteraction by the community of democratic states to the policy of fear-mongering and drawing more and more 'red lines' requires determination, solidarity, and a staunch opposition to blackmail and evil on the part of the leaders of the West. The inviolability of borders and respect for human rights are two pillars of the international order to which all European and world states have committed themselves.

But what must be done to turn these words and declarations into reality?

Each civilization and each region of the world seeks the way to this goal in a way attuned to its unique tradition, culture and mentality. There is no single model that would suit all. In Europe, it proved effective to create structures that grew out of the ideas of Enlightenment and the dramatic history and experience. To this day we invoke the Westphalian order based on the Peace Principles agreed upon after the religious wars that devastated Europe (1648). The next stages in the history of Europe were: the Congress of Vienna (1815), which terminated the period of Napoleonic wars; the Peace of Versailles (1919) after World War I; and finally, the agreements of the Allied States in Yalta and Potsdam (1945) after World War II. They not only closed off the past, but also laid the foundations for a new global system. I am thinking of the United Nations Charter adopted on 24 October 1945, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and many other fundamental acts. The founding fathers of the European Union based their thinking on a simple idea: create such institutions and structures that would preclude war between the major powers on the continent, that is Germany and France. Accordingly, the idea of the Coal and Steel Community was based on the principle of interdependence. This approach proved successful. Note that in Europe peace has never before lasted as long as it does today. All the wars which gradually embroiled the entire continent were generally fought in a quadrangle formed by Prussia (later Germany), France, Great Britain and Russia. After the European Union came into being, an armed conflict between Germany and France became unimaginable. I believe that it is possible to build similar peaceful structures not only in Western Europe, but also in Central and Eastern Europe. Currently it is difficult to talk about democratic changes in Russia, but one day it will happen there as well. Several decades ago, we could not have imagined the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the East to this day it is still a widely accepted claim that the Soviet Union collapsed as a result of a conspiracy and "trickery of the West", the shenanigans of NATO. In fact, the causes were different: the disintegration resulted from a systemic inability to change and reform. There was a growing disproportion between the people's expectations and the government's ability to meet them. It was an economy of a militarized state, prepared for war rather than for life in peace. Today's Russia faces similar problems. Many observers find it difficult to imagine a democratic Russia, but that does not mean that the superpower is doomed to perpetual authoritarianism.

Three decades have passed since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Did you look on those events with hope or fear? Did you think about the triumph of democracy or did you fear an explosion of dormant nationalism and bloodshed?

Hope prevailed. Perhaps it was naïve to think that since the breakup was peaceful, it would be possible to regulate relations between the Russian Federation and the former union republics in a way similar to, for example, what happened between the Slovaks and the Czechs after the civilized 'divorce' of the married couple called Czechoslovakia. Today, after all, relations between these nations are better than they were in the days of coexistence in a common state.
Not long after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as director of SIPRI—the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute—I invited Mikhail Gorbachev, then already a Nobel Peace Prize winner, to give a public lecture in Stockholm in a series in memory of former Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme. I was fortunate to have several personal conversations with him. I took the opportunity to ask him about uncomfortable issues. My impression was that Gorbachev was—and still is—honest, but also to some extent naive. He was ready to back down in a confrontation with his opponents rather than resort to force. But he held and still holds the opinion that the Soviet Union could have been preserved. He even gave me his book The Union Could Have Been Preserved This usage should be consistent, don't we use italics elsewhere and not italics for the names of

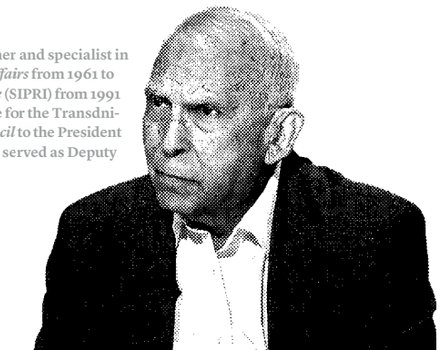
books. (Moscow 1995). He was wrong. This 'union' could not have been preserved without the use of force

The colors changed, but the idea of acting like a superpower towards neighbors and the rest of the world remained.

The same idea guides Vladimir Putin. Russia's foreign policy presupposes—to some extent—the reintegration of the USSR.

I don't think this is Putin's strategy. In his opinion, the former union republics should come to terms with the fact that they belong to the Russian 'sphere of influence'. Let us recall: after the collapse of the USSR, Boris Yeltsin took power in Russia; for the Russian political elite, but also society, it became a challenge to look for a new unifying idea for the Russian Federation. President Yeltsin even appealed to the Russian elite, i.e. scholars and thinkers, to formulate a new version of what he described as the *ruskaya idieya* (Russian idea). Various studies were produced, generally without much value. A unifying idea for a state does not arise on the spur of the moment. The Bolshevik project on nationality relations, for which Stalin was responsible after the revolution, was severely criticized by Lenin as marked with an arrogant attitude on the part of the Great-Russians. After the victorious end of the war with Germany, at a celebratory banquet in the Kremlin (24 June 1945), Stalin gave a toast that may have inspired Orwell before he wrote *Animal Farm* ("All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others"). Russia's special role was explicitly expressed in the Soviet anthem: "Unbreakable Union of freeborn Republics, / Great Russia has welded forever to stand..." This prophecy did not come true. On 25 December 1991, at 7:38 pm, the red flag was lowered over the Kremlin and the tricolour flag of the Russian Federation was flown.
The colors changed, but the idea of acting like a superpower towards neighbors and the rest of the world remained. There is an ingrained conviction in the elite and in society that Russia has a mission to fulfil, not only towards its own people, but also towards other Slavic nations and even the whole world. As is well known, Joe Biden, the US president, did not invite Russia, along with China, Turkey or Hungary, to the Democracy Summit he convened (Washington, 10 December 2021). This irritated Russian commentators. The way they look at it, the American understanding of democracy is an attempt by the 'collective West' to impose its values, rules, norms and principles on the rest of the world; in its extreme version it is supposed to be a "triumph of the LGBT". In search of a new 'Russian idea' to unite the nation and the Russian state, Putin formulated the concept of "moderate conservatism" at the Valdai Club (November 2021). It would be based on respect for "our traditional Russian values", that is respect for authority, the Orthodox faith, and the family as the traditional union of man and woman.
I remember my long conversation with academic Yevgeny Primakov in Stockholm in December 2000. It was behind-the-scenes of the Nobel Prize ceremony for the Russian physicist Zhores Alferov. Primakov was no longer an important state official. He came at the invitation of his friend, the Nobel laureate. We sat next to each other over lunch, and during our casual conversation I asked: "Why doesn't Russia take the democratic path of development?" My interlocutor, after a moment's reflection, said that Russia did not have its Magna Charta Libertatum (1215) or the French Revolution. In Russia, he said, democracy turns to chaos and lawlessness. "With us, democracy can only be controlled from above and carefully dosed with a dropper. Soviet power did not make the society conversant with democracy either. We have no practical experience with democracy. What we do can be called 'sovereign Russian' democracy."
After the collapse of the USSR, the idea of reuniting the East Slavic nations, that is Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, emerged among the Russian elite. This thinking was addressed primarily to Ukraine, if only because of the common roots of both nations stemming from Kievan Rus. Vladimir Putin says that "Ukrainians and Russians constitute one nation." If such a 'reintegration' project were to come to fruition, it would be in essence a realization of the concept outlined by the iconic writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his book *Rebuilding Russia: Reflections and Tentative Proposals*. The future of relations between the conflict-ridden nations of this part of Europe will be determined, however, not by scenarios drawn up by someone, but by the confluence of many factors and events. Life itself will write the script.

ADAM DANIEL ROTFELD
is Professor of humanities, a Polish diplomat and politician and a researcher and specialist in international relations. He worked at the *Polish Institute of International Affairs* from 1961 to 1989 and was Director of the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* (SIPRI) from 1991 to 2002. In 1992–1993, he was the CSCE Chairman's Special Representative for the Transdniestrian Settlement Process. He was a member of the *National Security Council* to the President of Poland and numerous councils and scientific societies. In 2001–2005, he served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and in 2005 Minister of Foreign Affairs.



INTERVIEW
EDUCATION
PRODUCTIVITY
LABOR MARKET

Jiří Švejcar: Continuous Training and Education Raises Productivity

The Czech labor market will have transformed radically by 2030, some jobs will disappear entirely and approximately 330,000 people will lose their jobs, Jiří Švejcar says in an interview with Robert Schuster.

ROBERT SCHUSTER: How is the Czech labour market doing? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

JIŘÍ ŠVEJCAR: Our study focuses on the future development of the market. We already know today that there is a demand for almost 200,000 workers. These figures are based on the data we obtained from career sites. The numbers stated by employment offices are much higher because they are inundated with fake job offers. It is worth noticing that certain sectors show a higher demand for workers than others—such as manufacturing, which has historically been a very strong sector in the Czech Republic. Looking into the future, we have to expect some changes in the economy. There are a number of tendencies that are bound to influence it. We pinpointed ten key trends relevant for the Czech Republic. These include a transition towards "a green economy", a circular economy, a sharing economy, large-scale digitization, automation, ageing of the population, electromobility, a shift from industry to the sector of services and Big data. We made an estimate as to how this will affect the economy. Our starting point was the current two percent growth rate. Based on the trends mentioned earlier, we calculated the impact on productivity and size of the industry sectors. Thanks to this, we know the current structure of professions. Using the database of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, we were able to create a detailed model of its development. What we found out is that by 2030, there will be as many positions to be filled as there are now, but the requirements for the positions available on the labor market will change radically. Our study encompasses the whole of the Czech Republic; it did not differentiate the data based on gender, region or town. The result estimates that in 2030 there will be a surplus of doctors. The study does not take into account, however, that in some regions there has been a higher concentration of doctors while other regions do not have enough of them. There is a great deal of space for improvement of healthcare in some regions. Today's situation is the result of the enormous amount of overtime the doctors are working, which is not a desirable model.

As for the megatrends important for the future of the Czech Republic, in which areas are we doing well, where could we do better and what are our greatest deficiencies?

The environment, green energy, mobility, recycling, circular economy—these areas are still underdeveloped and not much progress is being made there. As for the carbon neutrality goals, we will have to accept them because they are part of the EU regulations and as such are binding for the member states. The businesses that are going to be impacted the most will have to make an effort in that department for another reason—they are part of supply chains in Germany and other countries of the EU. So despite the fact that not much is happening at the moment, this area will definitely have to undergo some changes. Greening of the economy will become a powerful moving force of the future, especially in connection with solar power stations and the price of gas, which is very high at the moment. Then there is the lifestyle trend, which means the economy will incline more towards the service sector and further away from other sectors, such as agriculture or manufacturing. Finally, there are those megatrends where we are able to keep up quite well and which are moving forward. Among these are digitalization, e-commerce, automation, AI and so-called Big Data.

You put an emphasis on employee training and education. How can we make it a more common practice? Your study shows the Czech Republic lagging behind in comparison with other EU states

If we are talking about upskilling, it has been proven by several Nobel Prize winners that there is a direct link between continuous education and work productivity. And I do not mean just education in schools because it applies to any form of continuous education. Even just learning

a foreign language or knitting or learning any other skill. The number of people who regularly undergo training or learn new skills is less than 6%. In the EU it is 11% and in the most successful countries, 25% of people regularly undergo training. I believe that personal motivation is key, but the state can help as well. The most important areas we need to focus on are digital literacy and language skills.
If we look beyond our borders, we can learn of several ways of achieving it.
For example, we can put into law that employers have to provide their employees time off for training and education and we can motivate businesses to offer it as well. We can also establish regulations under which businesses have to report how much time they invest into worker education. This can also play a role in where people choose to work. How much the company cares about your development and how much it helps you prepare for changes that are bound to happen can become one of the major criteria in picking a job along with salary and location. If the company does not care at all, it will limit you or even impede your future development. Many businesses have strong unions and education could become one of the things they fight for. They could, for example, achieve an increase in the company's education and training budget through collective bargaining. There are also provisions focusing directly on employees, including financial bonuses or discounts for courses and classes. You can directly fund the improvement of individual qualifications, provide tax cuts, etc.

Do you know why there is so little willingness to pursue further education in the Czech Republic?

I personally think that it is a combination of two things. On the general level, I believe it is the legacy of Communism. Back then people had a guaranteed job and did not need to educate themselves. The other reason is a bit of a paradox. I think that the high-quality Czech dubbing in movies actually worsens our foreign language skills. It prevents people from encountering English automatically and naturally. Some European countries have managed to integrate a foreign language, especially English, into ordinary life much better. We, on the contrary, have created a little ten-million island of people who speak Czech and who are to a certain extent limited by it.

How common is it for Czechs to feel ashamed or humiliated when they lose their job?

I do not think that people who lose their job are completely paralyzed. A bigger problem is that if they do not manage to find a new job quickly enough, it may take them a year or two. Their employability—their ability to find work quickly—drops rapidly and they lose motivation to keep looking. Another hugely important factor is the employment office. It should provide services focusing on the individuals, to help them develop. We also need to mention that there is a great deal of prejudice that completely lacks any foundation, for example, that employing people from the 50+ age group is a risk because they will not invest enough time or effort into their jobs. This is not true at all. These people no longer have small children, they do not have to take care of anyone and they can focus fully on their job. Offering more part-time jobs would be a tremendous help in getting these people employment. Over the past several years, it has become more and more popular for Czechs to take early retirement. In Western Europe, the percentage of people who work even after reaching the age of retirement is much higher. The reason why they do it is exactly because they can work part-time and can stay in contact with the workplace. We do not really have that here. So it will be a major task for businesses to create the necessary conditions for bringing this into practice. Once they find out how it works, there will be no need for any regulations. Making part-time jobs more common will require much more support from the state either way. In the Czech Republic, people in the 50-60 age group working a part-time job make up 8% of all jobs, while the EU averages around 18%.

The last two years have been marked by the pandemic. People were working from home, schools taught online—all of that strengthened one of the main megatrends of the future. Did the pandemic paradoxically help to speed this process up and push us forward?

I do not think so, because those people who started working from home were people with office jobs and they merely started doing them remotely. It did not improve, however, the digital skills of the overall population in any meaningful way. Besides, the offices stayed open so anyone who wanted to go there in person could do it. What we are missing is a wider awareness campaign to motivate people to start making use of the digital alternatives. One of the reasons why that is not happening is that it remains quite difficult to register into the Portál občana (Citizen's portal) system, which puts a lot of people off.
We know that in approximately 54% of jobs you need some basic digital skills for everyday work. This number will surpass 90% after 2030. We've calculated that more than 2 million people will need training with digital tools. Schools can help us to a degree—that would be some 900,000 people. But there are still more than 1,000,000 people left who will have to learn these skills elsewhere. Some of the training will take place in the workplace and will be provided by the employer, but most people will have to take various courses and learn by themselves. This is already happening to an extent, there is a growing market for these kinds of activities.

Which professions are endangered the most according to your study? When should the current forty-year-olds expect such changes and start preparing for them?

It's not just about forty-year-olds. The most endangered professions are those, where the majority of jobs will cease to exist. There are almost 1,000,000 of them. One out of three people will lose their job which means that their current education and work experience will not be able to get them a job like today. Factory workers in manufacturing will be the most affected group, a quarter of these jobs will disappear due to automation. Other groups of people who will lose their jobs are certain service providers, such as financial or insurance brokers, which will be caused by digitalization. Automation will also affect retail. Other endangered professions include hairdressers, workers in foundries or lawyers. We expect that 31% of hairdressers will lose their jobs. That's because the schools have been churning out new ones while not enough are leaving for retirement. I am not in favor of massive regulations, so if you want to be a hairdresser, go for it. But you should be aware of the fact that in ten years, there will be 20,000 trained hairdressers more than the market will need. This should be regulated on the level of high schools and vocational schools. Some vocational schools keep accepting large numbers of students even though the demand for these professions is fairly small.

What about workers in car manufacturing? This industry plans to focus mostly on electromobility, which will require a completely different type of worker with different skills than they have now, won't it?

This profession as such is in no danger at all. Car manufacturing will still require workers. But the requirements and the character of their work will change. It should be up to the employers to solve these issues; they have to prepare their workers. These changes will affect a million people.

Many of the things we've talked about need a top-down approach—a government intervention. It is often obvious that governments can't see beyond the horizon of one term of office, but the labor market changes will require a long-term strategy and at least some general agreement. Is it even possible here?

The fact that our state does not have a vision or a strategy, which is something most successful countries have, is a major problem. We should not forget, however, that the last two years have been anything but normal. As soon as the governments had dealt with Covid, the war in Ukraine broke out and ushered in an energy crisis. So I understand that the government focuses on helping people here and now. At the same time, we are witnessing an immense debt ratio; we are more in debt now than we have ever been before. The worst part is that people are beginning to accept it as normal. By the way, raising work productivity, education, higher employment rate—all of that can help us significantly. Its effect on the economy would generate 600 billion Czech crowns in 2030, if we could fill the lack of positions. There are a number of ways to achieve this. But someone would have to come out and say that we need a long-term plan. We've collaborated with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education and others and I believe that they realize how important this agenda is. But to push this through on the highest level and incorporate it into real policy, we will need to generate a great deal of pressure and citizens and voters have to be a part of it.

How much has the war in Ukraine and the influx of refugees impacted the Czech labor market?

That will depend on how many Ukrainians are going to return back home. Looking at history, in crises such as this one, approximately 50 to 70% of people would return. If we apply the numbers to our situation and if we wanted to fill all the vacant jobs, we can conclude that it would be possible to accept and invest into 520,000 people. That is in case only 30% of refugees return to Ukraine. Given how Eastern Ukraine has been devastated, I think that's a likely scenario. It will also depend on us, on how we will be able to integrate them. The most important thing is to find them jobs appropriate to their qualifications. We can often see very qualified people working low-level jobs, which makes no sense. Such a person is unfulfilled and has little motivation to stay. We could amend that by recognizing their degrees and recognizing their qualifications from Ukraine. Then if you add intensive language courses, they could use their qualification in the labor market. We would have to solve a number of practical issues too, for example that the refugees are often women with small children who need to be taken care of, who need a place in schools. The better environment we create for them, the better they feel here, the more probable it is they will want to stay here indefinitely. There are many ways in which this approach will pay off significantly, for example on what they will pay in taxes.

JIŘÍ ŠVEJCAR
is a partner at the Prague office of the *Boston Consulting Group* (BCG). For over forty years he has been working in strategic counselling for top management. Between 2003 and 2015, he worked at *Accenture*, where he led strategy for financial institutions for the Central and Eastern Europe region. Since he started working in the BCG in 2015, he has focused on digital transformations of financial institutions. He is also the head of the digital technologies and data sector. Aside from commercial projects mainly in the financial and energy sector, he also pursues pro bono projects in the social sphere.

ASPEN.REVIEW
JENDA ŽÁČEK

GLOBAL DEVELOPEMENT
ASPEN INSTITTUTE

from
Aspen Institute

Aspen Is People! Ten Years on the Journey in CE

Ten years have passed since Aspen Institute Central Europe was founded. As we celebrated the tenth anniversary this year, one thing became clear to me: the greatest value of Aspen is people. Let's say the Aspenians, the people who have been taking part in some of the programs, the Aspen Young Leaders alumni, the people who took part in Aspen's discussions, those who helped financially, worked in the Aspen team, served on the board, have written for Aspen Review or those who advised. Aspen is people. Aspenians.

A great deal has happened since 2012 when Aspen Institute Prague, later renamed to Aspen Institute Central Europe, was founded.

The South Korean pop superstar Psy presents his hit Gangnam Style. Nelson Mandela dies. Black Lives Matter. The Ice Bucket Challenge. The Russian annexation of Crimea. Malala Yousafzai is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for pushing for the rights to education for everyone. Diverse emojis come to your phone. The global climate change agreement is being adapted in Paris. Greece is announcing bankruptcy. The Brexit Referendum. Donald Trump becoming US president. Amid the international wave of populism and neo-nationalism, Andrej Babiš and Viktor Orbán getting into power in Central Europe. The ongoing decline in trust in the media.

#MeToo movement spread worldwide, followed by Cancel Culture. International attention to WikiLeaks. Snowden's whistle on data protection. Prince William and Prince Harry's royal weddings, Meghan joins the royal family. The rise of the sharing economy, the Internet of things and cloud computing. The first photo of a black hole. AI replacing human jobs. Waves of Australian bushfires. Prince Harry and Meghan quitting the royal family.

The COVID-19 pandemic. The Harvey Weinstein verdict. Worldwide, Avengers: Endgame grossed more money faster than any previous film in history. The stock market crash and the global economic recession. The American election fallout. Further data and privacy issues on Facebook. SpaceX and Jeff Bezos make civilian space travel a reality. Vladimir Putin starts a Russian invasion of Ukraine. One of the founders of Aspen Institute CE and US Secretary of State from Czechia Madeleine K. Albright passes away. 5G networks launching around the world.

This is definitely not at all what happened between 2012 and 2022. It is therefore not easy to put the last ten years of humankind into just a few sentences. But one thing is clear—society is evolving and the Aspen people follow current trends, issues and challenges. And more than that—they try to anticipate the upcoming and be helpful. Just to make Ideas Impacting Society happen as stated in the Aspen claim from the 2018 rebranding.

Over the last decade, the Aspen Young Leader Program joined more than 400 emerging leaders in Central Europe. Dozens of public debates, conferences or other policy meetings took place. These 10 years amounted to reaching hundreds of thousands of people not only in the CE region who got in touch with Aspen, its programs or outputs. People addressed topics such as value based leadership, liberal-democratic values, transatlantic issues or just—in general—the future of our society and the whole (wo)man kind. There were per thousand of Aspen Review articles, interviews, comments and op-eds written by world-renowned authors and thinkers. People were given the space for open and deep discussion, networking of professionals with various backgrounds and inspiration among one other. These are people who represent a diversity of disciplines, opinions and beliefs; people who share openness, faith in a liberal democracy, a desire for a better tomorrow and mutual cooperation while supporting each other on our path.

I would like to express my great gratitude to all those people—Aspenians—I had the opportunity to meet. And as well to those I haven't had a chance to meet. I hope to see them in the next ten years.

JENDA ŽÁČEK
is a freelance brand strategist—consultant, lecturer, and communicator. He helps others with development & strategy, communications & PR and NGOs. He joined Aspen in 2016 and was responsible for overall communications and the rebranding in 2017. Now he is Publishing Editor of *Aspen Review*. In the past, Jenda served as Spokesperson of *Czech Scouting*, Head of PR department and Spokesperson of the Czech Ministry of Agriculture and the Czech Green Party. Today he is freelance. He graduated from the Faculty of Social Sciences at *Charles University* in Prague in marketing communication & public relations, and media studies and is active in the topics of communication & trust studies and media freedom.

ASPEN.REVIEW
NATÁLIA ŠTEFÁNIKOVÁ

TECHNOLOGY
CENTRAL EUROPE
INNOVATION
AYL

Aspen Young Leaders

Actively Seeking Change & Diversity Can be Your Superpower

Natália Štefániková shares her experiences and practices on how to work smarter and how to leverage change to your advantage; be it by seeking collaboration with people who are not like you or by building solutions that enhance people's lives.

We live in a world that changes at lightning speed. Many things that would previously last for decades, only stay relevant for a few months or years.

Although we have strong capabilities to adapt and move forward as a species, we tend to incline towards stability and patterns we are used to. It makes us feel safe and gives us the very pleasant reassurance that what we do and who we are is the right way. Why change anything, if it indirectly indicates that whatever we were doing up until now might not be good enough anymore.

A friend of mine once said, that "the only person who likes change is a baby with a full diaper". It's hilarious, but it's true. Change and accepting differences both require us to step out of our safe and comfy comfort zones, because being open to the fact that not all we do is always perfect is not something all of us are willing to do easily.

I have experienced a great deal of change and have been constantly in situations where I either had to disrupt the status quo or I myself was just the different, the odd one.

It was never easy, often exhausting, but the result was always worth it.

Whether it was my family moving to South Korea when I was 6, or studying abroad in Paris and Vienna as a former "Eastern Bloc" student. It was also not easy to come and drive change management projects in the financial industry as a woman in Turkey or Germany.

What I learned very quickly was to embrace our differences and continuous sustainable change, both happen slowly and they happen step by step. You can force it to some degree, but for it to become sustainable, you need to bring everyone on board and make them part of it. And do not forget to bring yourself on board first.

I have moved back to CEE after over 10 years of living abroad. Me coming back was a coincidence, I had no expectations and I have to say, I am enjoying it extremely. I came back to an environment where there are so many smart, driven and emotionally mature people.

It was never easy, often exhausting, but the result was always worth it.

They are people who want to build amazing things. People who are ambitious, but are not necessarily motivated by profits only and want to contribute positively to the society they live in. The diversity that we currently have in our region is driven by all the different nationalities, backgrounds and values, and the fact that we are so close, historically and geographically, enables us to leverage everything in a very exciting way.

Our region and the way we think provides us with a huge advantage—we not only have a strong and educated workforce that provides us with an extremely stable starting point, but we are extremely motivated to prove that we can be as good, if not even better, than any other Silicon Valley startup. The great thing is that our customers are expecting products and services, whether in business, arts or the public sector, that are of global standards. This is evidenced by how open Czech consumers are towards digital solutions—"The Czech Republic has the most e-shops per capita in the whole of Europe with 45,000 e-shops estimated to be in operation by the end of 2020" and "there are nearly 6 million Czechs who shop online. This means that user penetration in this market is 54% in 2020 and is predicted to reach 65.1% by 2025."

This setup is simply amazing because it enables us to innovate at lightning speed and can be an incredible competitive advantage. So what else do we need? What else should we do to leverage what we have going here?

I have a few practices I do to support and encourage people around me (including myself) to go the extra mile by not necessarily working harder, but rather smarter. It really is not rocket science, but does wonders when it comes to creating a driven, happy and high performing team that continuously improves on the way. I am adding a few references from interesting articles that support these phenomena if you are interested in reading a bit more about it.

Seek Collaboration With People Who Are Not Like You

Acknowledging the fact that you or people like-minded to you might not always know best is the first step. By realizing this, you can start actively searching for team members, partners or suppliers who enrich the process. Whether it comes to building your team or working on a project, the act of bringing more people from various backgrounds, with different skill sets, experiences or opinions always generates a higher quality outcome.

It all sounds lovely and so simple, but it is often quite difficult. It is so easy, being surrounded by people who share your opinions and nod approvingly at all your ideas. In the same way, it is much easier to lead a project where all the team members incline towards the same solutions. All of us probably know how difficult it gets once people start disagreeing and therefore find it difficult to sync up.

It is crucial to see this as an opportunity rather than a source of annoyance. I believe that every single person can foster their own leadership skills and so mitigating situations like these should not only be the responsibility of managers or leadership teams, but of all of us living and working in a successful ecosystem.

Creating an environment that is open to feedback, different approaches and opinions is not easy and requires continuous effort. This can be, however, the distinguishing factor between successful and happy teams vs. the rest.

Creating an environment that is open to feedback, different approaches and opinions is not easy and requires continuous effort. This can be, however, the distinguishing factor between successful and happy teams vs. the rest.

"Companies increasingly rely on diverse, multidisciplinary teams that combine the collective capabilities of women and men, people of different cultural heritage, and younger and older workers. But simply throwing a mix of people together doesn't guarantee high performance; it requires inclusive leadership—leadership that assures that all team members feel they are treated respectfully and fairly, are valued and sense that they belong, and are confident and inspired. Teams with inclusive leaders are 17% more likely to report that they are high performing, 20% more likely to say they make high-quality decisions, and 29% more likely to report behaving collaboratively."

Embracing our differences and leveraging the different strengths each of us bring to the table is the way to go. Build diverse teams, work with the best in class external partners and be open to constructive conversations. Your end product will always end up being better.

Build Solutions That Enhance People's Lives

I love to work and spend time with people who have experienced different things than I have. I am very much an observer and people with different backgrounds and stories fascinate me. Listening to them is not only interesting, but I selfishly like to embrace their points of view and by doing so, challenge my own. This is something I also strongly believe in when working on customer solutions. Bringing in people on the team who are from completely different fields and have absolutely no idea why things have been done for years a certain way is extremely beneficial. These are fresh minds and eyes who ask very valuable questions such as "why are we doing that this way?" or "does this really make sense, will the customer be excited?"

These people look at something that is so familiar to us but they see it in a completely unfamiliar way. This is a huge opportunity for building customer centric products and services!

And this is exactly the reason why when I hire new team members or external partners, I often tend to prefer candidates from completely different industries.

We need to surprise them by creating positive experiences solving problems they have or did not even know bothered them in the first place.

"'Think Different,' said the famous 1997 Apple advertisement. Excellent advice, obviously, to all creators, innovators, and entrepreneurs." It is often, however, not that easy. "Our brains are designed to stop us paying too much attention. This is well demonstrated by the optical illusion called Troxler fading. If presented with a steady image in the area of our peripheral vision, we actually stop seeing it after a while. Neurons stop firing once they have sufficient information about an unchanging stimulus." This phenomenon leads to "our built-in tendency to sink into the familiar way of seeing and experiencing. One way in which great artists, entrepreneurs, and creators of all kinds come up with the insights that enable them to change the world is that they do not see the way most of us do. Their methods teach us that by seeing differently, we can end up seeing what no one else has yet seen. This is how the future is built."

In order to continually delight our customers, this is exactly what we need.

We need to surprise them by creating positive experiences solving problems they have or did not even know bothered them in the first place.

Companies are having difficulties catching up with how quickly customer needs evolve—trust me, I have worked in the financial industry for over 10 years and it never stopped being exciting! If you can stream a show in a few seconds, why should clients be expected to print and send signed documents to banks, insurance companies or government institutions?

The pace is mindblowing and companies that understand that everything they create needs to be based first of all on delighting their customers rather than paying higher dividends are the winners in the long run. If you do not get it right the first time, customers will rarely give you a second chance—a recent Zendesk study shows that today's consumers have higher standards than ever before, and 61% will switch to a competitor after just one bad experience!

Meaningful digital innovations, which transform old products and services, is the way to go (meaningful being the key word here). Innovate with the clients well-being and preferences always in mind. For example: Should AI answer your phone or chat with you every single time? Hardly the right way. But it definitely makes sense, when you only need help with simple transactional tasks, so that when you really do need to speak to an actual human, you do not have to wait on line for 30 minutes but rather get connected immediately.

Many players are joining the digitalization trend slowly but steadily—"companies currently use artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning (ML) only 12% of the time, according to a CMO Survey. Respondents predict that AI/ML use will triple to 38% over the next three years, with 28% of companies investing in this space in the past 12 months."

The ones fostering a truly meaningful digital innovation mindset will always, however, be one step ahead of the others.

Continuous Improvement Is Always on Your Mind

"Whatever it is, you can become better at it. But here's the thing I know just as clearly as I know you can get better at anything: you will not get better if 1) you don't want to and 2) you aren't willing to feel the discomfort of doing things differently.

Learning anything new is, by its nature, uncomfortable. You will need to act in ways that are unfamiliar. Take risks that are new. Try things that, in many cases, will be initially frustrating because they won't work the first time. You are guaranteed to feel awkward. You will make mistakes. You may be embarrassed or even feel shame, especially if you are used to succeeding a lot."

Sounds wonderful, right?! That's exactly the state we all love to be in. Not.

It is proven that meaningful change and growth only happen once we step out of our comfort zones. Radical innovation only occurs once we are not satisfied with what we have already seen or achieved and seek for new and better solutions. In all areas of life, we have the tendency to eventually get satisfied with how things are done because we often have little to no time to step back and challenge ourselves and others to do better. So what do we do about that?

To sum up—change is inevitable, it is the only constant in life. We can either adapt or choose to be in the driver's seat!

What we try to apply in our team are two things:

1. An initiative is never done only because it is launched. That is just phase 0 and it is only the beginning. Now it is time to collect data, feedback, analyze, test and improve "to infinity, and beyond!" (to steal a quote from the famous Buzz Lightyear of ToyStory). This leads to sustainable and continuous improvement. It challenges you and opens your mind up to always looking for the answer to the question—"Ok, this is great, but what's next?"

2. Having a mindset where you realize that what was just released was good enough for yesterday but might not be good enough for tomorrow is a humbling exercise and this leads to our second approach—do not be so in love with your own work that it ends up limiting your ability to grow and accept new and more enhanced solutions. Whether it is accepting feedback or new proposals on how to add to what you did, or it is about looking to work with external partners who are top performers in their fields. Working with the best (because you are capable of admitting that it is most probably not always you) and being open to be challenged are incredible ways to open yourself up to solutions that could never happen otherwise.

Well that is it I guess. And as I am not that good at conclusions, I asked a few friends to help out a bit:

To sum up—change is inevitable, it is the only constant in life. We can either adapt or choose to be in the driver's seat!

To become the driver, we should always allow ourselves to fail, because once we get out of our comfort zones, that is when growth happens. Innovation powered by diverse skills and opinions is important for businesses to survive in today's marketplace and remain relevant.

So, what are you going to do to foster innovation and drive change?

Ok, speaking of innovation... the few lines you have just read were written by two open source AI text generators, Simplified.com and Frase.io, and all the illustrations in this article were created by Dall·e2, a machine learning model developed by OpenAI to generate digital images from natural language descriptions. Not too shabby, right?

We invite alumni of the Aspen Young Leaders Program to present their projects, thoughts and inspiration in Aspen Review. Aspn.me/AYLP

NATÁLIA ŠTEFÁNIKOVÁ
has had the opportunity to work in start-ups, global businesses, various industries and markets while managing her own or cross-functional teams. These experiences as well as her background formed by roles in marketing, project/program management, operations, and sales granted her a broad perspective resulting in the ability to identify and execute creative business solutions. Natália believes that one of the keys to successfully driving change and having an impact is to lead by example and successfully influence relevant stakeholders while leveraging everyone's strengths. She is currently working as a director of customer experience at *Direct pojišťovna*. For almost a year and a half, Natália worked in Dublin at *Groupon* as global customer retention and engagement manager.

ASPEN.REVIEW
ZUZANNA
LEWANDOWSKA

SOCRATES
AI
ROBOTICS
HUMANITARIANISM
AYL

Socrates Seminar

Who Will Shape the Brave New World?

Should we build artificial intelligence just because we can? The technological race has become a strategic battlefield in the geopolitical war over global hegemony, says Zuzanna Lewandowska, social entrepreneur, NGO executive and co-founder of initiatives around education and ethical leadership in Poland.

In 2004 The Facebook emerged from a Harvard dorm room. Before dropping 'The' from the name and going global, Facebook was truly (whether Mark Zuckerberg likes to admit it or not) an iteration of Facemash—an app where campus students could rank their female peers based on their attractiveness. Could any one of us have predicted back then that, just a decade later or so, social media would become a key influence in shaping national elections, not to mention Russia interfering with all the big social media to manipulate the US election results and the Brexit referendum?

Technological progress speed-lightened the transformation of the world as we know it, from the world-wide-web a while ago, to metaverse today. Time will show what comes next. Superhumans? Maybe. This rapid revolution definitely raises questions at to who should be responsible for determining the path to our global progress—and whether we really had the chance to think about it. And progress is a game of geopolitics. Where you live determines if you have access to the Internet (40% of the world population are still offline—and it is not the Anglo-Saxon hemisphere), to cutting-edge technologies (the same, for now).

Should fundamental decisions about the future of our planet be in the hands of democratically elected governments, or are they increasingly dictated by business decisions made by large corporations? And if so, is it any good? Some public intellectuals, like Jeremy Riffkin (The Third Industrial Revolution) or Steven Pinker (Enlightenment Now) are known for having added a lot of optimism into the 'bucket' of possible scenarios for the future, by envisioning technology as a means to build a Brave New World. But that was all a while ago, that is, when nobody took seriously a grander scenario where the Western supremacy was questioned by anybody. Today, we have China rising to power, and Russia fiddling with global security after Yalta. Douglas Rushkoff writes in Survival of the Richest about how tech gurus are building luxurious bunkers to hide themselves in case of a doomsday scenario—to a large extent the effect of technologies they helped develop—and they are willing to pay big fees to be consulted on how best to do it.[1]

The relationship between governance, business and technology is a topic of today. And that's a good sign. Leading think-tanks and conferences on government and innovation, such as Davos, DLD, and others hold panel discussions on the future of technology. No exception to this is Aspen Institute, which holds Socrates Seminars where invited CEOs and cross-industry leaders have an opportunity to discuss some fundamental questions about the future. A few weeks ago, I was invited by Aspen Institute CE to take part in such a Socrates format held near Prague, and this article briefly presents my main observations and reflections—being far from an industry expert—taken from this laborious and fascinating two-day discussion.

Will the growth of technology further add to the divide between the rich and the poor, or is there rather a chance that 'singularity' will bring us global prosperity and peace, as Carl Sagan would have loved it?

They are outstanding scientists and engineers who are the authors of advancements made in the field of artificial intelligence, robotics, quantum physics, achievements in the field of biotechnology and other developments. At Harvard Medical School, Dr. David Sinclair, a biologist who is a professor of genetics, is pioneering aging research and confirms that aging can already be reversed in mice and to some extent in humans. He himself admits to

using some of the drugs he had developed, he is 54 and looks 34. Sinclair's revolutionary achievement might help us fight Alzheimer's and other diseases, but also creates an enticing doorway to engineering humans towards immortality.

Robots Instead of Humans?

Advances in space exploration are increasingly in the hands of private visionaries, rather than states, and this is no longer a sci-fi scenario (like the story in the Apple TV series For All Mankind), in which a private company can help us go to Mars, courtesy of Elon Musk.

Slow but steady advancement is also being made in robotics. "We're far from making human robots," I hear from my friend Limor Schweitzer, who is the CEO of the robotic company RoboSavy. It would take about a decade to recreate the complexity of a human hand in a robot, and it would take much longer to recreate the large and fine motor skills of the entire human body. So, robots are not going to replace humans anytime soon. But basic robots are already replacing people in tasks such as simple warehouse logistics at mega-companies like Amazon and Zalando.

As most experts agree, sooner than later, autonomous cars will help eliminate deaths caused by driver errors. Eliminating this mistake [in two years in the US only] would save as many lives as the country lost in the entire Vietnam War.[2] But this technology will also eliminate the millions of people who support their families as drivers. Certain changes seem inevitable, you may say. Are we giving enough attention, however, at the state level to dealing with the ramifications of technological advances by providing job transition programs to those most affected? Will governments keep the pace with these changes, or are big tech corporations in the driver's seat—shall I say—for good? And to what extent should corporations assist nation-states in managing the social consequences of their industrial revolutions?

The Technological Race as a Strategic Battlefield

The big question, finally, is who will win the geopolitical AI race. "Whoever runs artificial intelligence in 2030 will rule the world until 2100," notes Indermit Gill, senior analyst at Brookings in his article, in which he refers to Vladimir Putin's statement that "the one who becomes a leader in this sphere will be the ruler of the world."[3]

The renaissance of AI, which we can observe in recent years in the increasingly broad usability of the technology, will—in the next few years to come—dramatically change the world as we know it. In a recent interview at TransformX conference, Eric Schmidt (Ex Google CEO) and Alexander Wang (CEO and founder of Scale AI), both stressed the sense of urgency in the AI industry. "It is important for people, companies but also governments to realize the speed in which this technology is moving and fundamentally embrace the fact that they have to reinvent themselves in a new paradigm or someone is going to make that new invention" (Wang).

As Shmidt observes, today the advancements in AI are made either by big tech companies, or by well-funded startups. This means that there are many large companies who will miss the bus, and there are many reasons why they do not apply or develop AI, like they have not been able to incorporate these new modalities, planforms, data models into their existing data flows. In a few years, these companies are likely to become obsolete.

And in many ways, some countries may as well. The technological race has become a strategic battlefield of the geopolitical war over global hegemony. We see a growing dependence of NATO on tech companies in maintaining an advantage over technologies owned by authoritarian regimes. In Ukraine, we see how access to advanced technology can increase the chances of a smaller nation to stand up against a super-state. Also unprecedented was how a private technology company (SpaceX) helped change the rules of the game during the war by donating 20,000 Starlink satellite units to Ukraine.

The US ban on advanced computer microchips in China has escalated the trade war between the world's two most powerful economies, in an attempt to jeopardize China's ability to power its AI technology. The whole world is holding its breath as we see unfolding some possible scenarios of escalating the global rivalry in the South Pacific. And if it comes to it, who will win?

So, whether we like it or not, arguably, the future of humanity is today in the hands of a few private individuals.

And because super-advanced technologies, whose short and long-term effects are simply unknown to us, are at the center of this global shift, they may be equally a blessing or a curse—they may help put the fire down,

1) Douglas Rushkoff "The super-rich 'preppers' planning to save themselves from the apocalypse". The Guardian, September 4, 2022. www.theguardian.com/news/2022/sep/04/super-rich-prepper-bunkers-apocalypse-survival-richest-rushkoff

2) Peter Hancock, "Are Autonomous Cars Really Safer Than Human Drivers?" Scientific American, www.scientificamerican.com/article/are-autonomous-cars-really-safer-than-human-drivers/

3) Indermit Gill, "Whoever leads in artificial intelligence in 2030 will rule the world until 2100". Brookings, January 17, 2020. www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/01/17/whoever-leads-in-artificial-intelligence-in-2030-will-rule-the-world-until-2100/

4) Lorenzi Jean-Herve, Berrebi Michael; "L'Avenir de notre Liberte (2017)", Polish translation: Przyszłość naszej wolności. PIW. 2019.

or on the contrary, they will become responsible for threatening the future of humanity. If today we (the Western world) are somewhat 'ok' with the fact that technology developed by the West is defining the way in which we grow as societies, then ask: would you be equally ok if highly advanced AI was in the hands of China? But this means that we should build AI not only because we can, but also because we have to. And we have to do it fast. The anthropocentric vision of one planet for all—one humanity—may be fading away for good as an utopian wish.

Indeed, the key to all of the above questions is whether it is possible to create global leadership in navigating technological transformation. In a fascinating book, The Future of our Freedom[4], French economists Jean-Herve Lorenzi and Michael Berrebi ask directly: Who should be responsible for deciding which direction humanity will go? Because technology is neither good nor bad. It is ambivalent.

The way in which China approaches the subject of individual liberties, data protection, human privacy, and other subjects that present a completely different gravitas in China than in the West, show us how this culture could navigate AI and how it could use it.

And these are some of the big questions that we discussed at the Aspen Seminar. If it was entirely up to us, how would we propose to lead the development of artificial intelligence and other super technologies? Should they be regulated only by markets, by public-private partnerships or by an especially appointed international organization? How would we mitigate some of the possible social costs of this transformation? Finally, should AI be the property of all mankind, and if not, where would this lead us?

A Human-Centric Approach Is Not Just Black and White

Moral issues lie at the heart of any historical change. The caveat is that there is no unifying morality that binds all of humanity. If our choice is to develop human-centered technology (as proposed by some of my fellow Aspen Seminar panelists and with whom I personally deeply agree), as part of Western culture, we have a general understanding of what values would become fundamental to this effort. But "human-centric" can mean many different things in different cultures.

When I was a child in the late years of communism in Poland, there was a popular joke: "In the Soviet Union, everything is done with man in mind. And that man has a mustache and lives in the Kremlin". Decades after Stalin, we wouldn't be especially surprised to hear that same joke about Putin. Today, Russia, despite Putin's ambitions, is still relatively behind in the global AI race. But China is the first runner up after the US. In his recent efforts, its new president Xi Jinping leaves no doubt in the eyes of the international community that China is gearing up to dethrone the US as a global superpower. We can only speculate if the theatrical manner in which his predecessor, the 79-year-old Hu Jintao, was escorted out during the closing ceremony of the Communist Party Congress, was part of that grand PR scenario.

The potential benefits of advancing super technologies like AI are unparalleled. They can push humanity into novel territories by increasing productivity and helping balance demographic challenges of the future, eliminating human error through automation, assisting in complex data-driven decision making, and many more. But it is our responsibility to ask questions about all the potential avenues this revolution can take us, including its harmful flip-sides.

And if it is not us, individual members of society, who will make ultimate decisions about the final result of this fast-pace change, then at least we should be proactive in how we can remain part of the conversation. In spite of its intense development over the recent years, technology is still a means to provide us with answers. For now, at least, it does not replace us in asking ethical questions. This is our task. One quote by Socrates comes to mind: "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new". One way to do it, as Socrates teaches, is by asking the right questions.

This article was published thanks to author's participation in Socrates Seminar held by The Aspen Institute CE. AspenInstituteCE.org/socrates

ZUZANNA LEWANDOWSKA
is the co-founder and supporter of several initiatives around executive ethical leadership, lifelong learning and higher education. She served as media NGO executive at the *Gazeta Wyborcza Philanthropies*—a non-for-profit arm of the largest daily newspaper in Poland—*Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Przekrój Foundation*. She was public and media relations manager for clients such as the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, the Council of Europe and the European Commission. As a consultant in Boston, she worked on implementing public policy reforms on behalf of state governments, including *Obamacare* and helped bring public consulting services to Europe. She is a graduate of Cambridge University, Lancaster University and Warsaw University.

ASPEN.REVIEW
MÁTÉ MESTER

AYL
ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY
TECHNOLOGY
DIGITALIZATION

Aspen Young Leaders

Why We Need a Green Digital Revolution

The digital revolution has brought the enormous potential to change our economies and societies. With its growing role in our lives, however, so has grown the effect of digital services on the environment. If we do not act carefully and if we do not act now, the digital transformation may not just fail to save our planet, but even speed up its degradation.

While I am still one of those kids fascinated by technological development, digital transformation and connectivity, I am also concerned about the impact they have on our lives.

I remember seeing the first very clear sign of technology becoming more and more immersed in our lives in the early 1990s when I saw my grandfather learning to use a personal computer to be able to keep up with trends. Witnessing how technology enabled so many opportunities for him quickly taught me the importance of digital transformation in our lives and had a clear impact on how I excelled later in life. Whenever I tell my kids about technology now, however, I need to also mention its impact on the climate.

The Earth is warming. If current trends continue, its average temperature could be 2.8–3.2°C higher by the end of the century (Desjardins, 2020, 62–63; Climate Action Tracker, 2021, 4). We feel the impact of this ourselves when experiencing unforeseen heat waves and dryness in Europe, as occurred both this and last summer. Reports show that humanity is on the verge of becoming unable to reverse climate change (IPCC, 2022) and we need to act now, preferably by choosing sustainable actions that do not limit the economic, social and environmental opportunities of future generations (Brundtland, 1987).

Digital services, however, are usually not taken into account when it comes to our green actions. This should change in the future. Here is why.

In societies with high awareness of these risks, environmental sustainability has suddenly become an immense part of our life choices: we buy greener products and services, including paying even more for them if they are more climate-friendly (such as cars and refrigerators, and we are changing our life habits (commuting less or working remotely) or collecting our waste to ensure that it is recycled.

Digital services, however, are usually not taken into account when it comes to our green actions. This should change in the future. Here is why.

The digital sector is growing at an unprecedented rate, shaping our economies and societies. Global data consumption is expected to triple in the next 5 years by growing on average 25% each year (Ericsson, 2022 June). This not only forecasts the huge growth of digital services but predicts the enormous connectivity infrastructure underlying them. The 6G vision, for example, envisages a large-scale autonomous network system, covering space, air, land and water (Matinmikko-Blue, 2021). This has at least two implications for environmental sustainability.

The Good: the Enabling Effect

Unlike many other industries, digitalization enables the green transformation of entire industries, economies and societies (the so-called "enabling effect"). Connecting all people and things could already reduce global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 15–20%, a volume that is itself ten times higher than the sector's own emissions (BEREC, 2021, 3). Other studies suggest that the digital solutions already available could reduce global carbon emissions by 15% (Malmodin & Bergmark, 2015, 44). By adopting 5G technology, for example, the most polluting industries could reduce their carbon footprint by up to 50% by 2030 (MIT, 2021, 14).

In light of this, one could argue that we should definitely encourage the extensive deployment and use of digital services, solutions and systems that can streamline resource-heavy and energy-heavy products and processes to support the much-needed green transition.

The Bad: the Rebound Effect

Although digital is one of the most energy-efficient industries (Malmodin & Lundén, 2016, 217), its carbon footprint is becoming burdensome and there is a genuine risk that the digital transformation will trigger a "rebound effect". This means that despite the energy and material savings, already present in the industry, the rapid growth in data traffic and new applications (blockchain, IoT, metaverse) will only further increase the overall energy consumption and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of the sector (Canfora et al., 2020, 259; Skouby & Windekilde, 2010, 13).

While in the early 2000s, the digital sector was responsible for 1% of global GHG emissions (Beton et al., 2008, 13; Sutherland, 2009, 63), today, this could be as high as 4% (BEREC, 2022). Around 12-24% of these emissions are attributable to networks, 15% to data centers and around 60-80% to devices (BEREC, 2022, 5). The carbon emissions from smartphone use alone, for example, account for 15% of total emissions, including the 32 kg of raw materials that are needed to produce a 2-gram microchip (BEREC, 2021, 3). With the same trajectory, the industry's GHG emissions could rise to 14% of the global value by 2040 (Belkhir & Elmeligi, 2018).

If we do not act now, the digital transformation may not just fail to save our planet, but even speed up its degradation.

The Ugly: the Lack of a Clear Policy

Given its potential key role, the digital sector is destined to receive greater attention from policymakers when it comes to environmental sustainability. The problem is the how: as this is a new challenge, we need to start almost from scratch. This raises several problems.

First, we do not know how to measure the impact. Energy and operational efficiency are at the core of the digital and connectivity industry, therefore most players have dealt with environmental sustainability for a long time. Despite this reality, we lack a single, agreed methodology for monitoring environmental impacts at the industry level. There is also no definitive knowledge about the impact of specific digital services and individual consumption patterns on the environment (although good practices can be found, such as the inclusion of the carbon footprint of current consumption on the bill) (Sutherland, 2009, 72; Ericsson Consumer & IndustryLab, 2020; French Parliament, 2021). As an extra layer of complexity, the scope of the digital sector also varies greatly in the different methodologies (digital sector, ICT or electronic communications sector).

If we do not act now, the digital transformation may not just fail to save our planet, but even speed up its degradation.

Second, in a highly fragmented arena, we do not have a clear vision or policy guiding us on how to act. Environmental sustainability is, on the one hand, influenced by different levels of regulation (international organizations, industry initiatives, standards, EU, and national regulations) and there are many examples of parallel initiatives. On the other hand, since most sustainability problems require complex actions across industries, the digital industry is usually subject to both general (e.g., European Green Deal) and specific policy tools (e.g., ITU standards). Finally, up until now, sustainability has been almost absent from the direct regulatory environment of the digital and connectivity industries.

Both industry players and regulators may find it challenging to choose correct and coherent actions in the current policy environment, therefore if they act, they do it on their own, which may further increase the heterogeneity of policies and decrease predictability.

The Implications: the Need for a Green Digital Revolution

Currently, people justify not caring much about the environmental impact of the digital services they use because of the huge positive impact they have on their lives.

For the digital revolution to truly achieve its purpose without negative climate impact, however, it has to be green by design and by nature.

Digital is becoming the industry of all industries, growing into all aspects of our lives, or even beyond, if we count the metaverse. The underlying infrastructure needs to be at the forefront of the green transition to ensure that we do not reach a tipping point: when the overall energy consumption and GHG emissions of the sector start to exceed the benefits (the rebound effect).

To avoid the rebound effect, we need a policy shift to make environmental sustainability an important factor in the development and use of digital and connectivity services and infrastructure.

The good news is that policy is expected to change in the coming years, at least in the European Union. The European Commission has launched a number of dedicated industry initiatives, such as the Digital Decade package of proposals (European Commission, 2021), which include environmental sustainability as a priority regulatory objective. Regulators have also begun to develop monitoring methods and map possible regulatory actions (see ARCEP, Traficom, BEREC and related projects of the European Green Digital Coalition and the call for a Green and Digital Transition in the EU) (BEREC, 2022). So there is hope.

We still need a specific system that allows us to understand the climate footprint of the digital services we use and make informed choices based on such data (similar to the energy label system of the electronics or GHG emission levels of cars). It will still take years, however, before we have a single harmonized metric system and dedicated policy actions based on it in the European Union, if at all.

Therefore, we also need to change our mindset as consumers to speed up the green digital transformation, preferably by choosing sustainable actions that do not limit the economic, social, and environmental opportunities of future generations.

At an individual level, there is so much we can do to decrease our digital climate footprint. Data suggests that sending one email less per day only in the UK could save over 16,433 tons of carbon a year—the same as 811,522 flights from London to Madrid or taking 33,343 diesel cars off the road (OVO Energy, 2019). We may also consider, however, repairing our digital devices instead of buying a new one (unless the new one is significantly more energy efficient), recycling devices through trusted programs or operators, and choosing operators that operate their networks by using green energy. And finally, everyone can raise awareness of the issue just by spreading the word (or this article).

The general principle of sustainability applies here as well: if everyone does just a little for the future, we can make a significant impact. We hope to see more coordinated steps in the policy and industry actions of the digital sector, as well as at least some minor changes in the actions of consumers.

For the digital revolution to truly achieve its purpose without negative climate impact, however, it has to be green by design and by nature.

If we succeed, an environmentally sustainable digital future might become reality in 20 years from now. As a result of a common European policy, the environmental impact of the digital sector will be visible to policy-makers, industry players and consumers. Based on this data, regulation will incentivize (or as a last resort require) companies to ensure green operations. Policy is expected to spark increased green consciousness of users, including introducing green labeling of certain services or companies. Climate-neutral networks and operations will become a standard in the digital sector, including the (re)use of materials and other resources. This might lead to a higher degree of consolidation of the underlying infrastructure with fierce competition at the service level, in which the environmental sustainability score of the service (or the company) will play a greater role than today. With more innovation required to stand out from the crowd, companies will introduce solutions that offer climate-positive operations. Therefore, we might be able to avoid the rebound effect. Hopefully, we will not be too late.

If we do not act now, the digital transformation may not just fail to save our planet, but even make it fail faster.

We invite alumni of the Aspen Young Leaders Program to present their projects, thoughts and inspiration in Aspen Review. *Aspn.me/AYLP*

MÁTÉ MESTER
is driving policy-making and strategy in the fields of connectivity, technology and the Internet. Over the course of his career, he designed and supported various projects of major industry actors: he was directly involved in EU policy-making, helped telco companies provide or launch new services in 20+ CEE countries, contributed to government strategies in Hungary and advised providers on infrastructure development and spectrum, thus enabling Gigabit Internet, 5G or IoT. With 12+ years of experience as a regulatory expert, he is active in policy-making groups and has been focusing recently on awareness raising through events targeting the younger generations. He is currently leading MSpire, a group of regulatory and strategy consultants, as well as project managers specialized in the industry.

ASPEN.REVIEW
JENDA ŽÁČEK

STARTUP
INTERVIEW
CENTRAL EUROPE
AYL

Aspen Leadership Award

Michał Tarnowski: Central Europe as a Niche for Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship can be a successful business and positive change to society. It is a great idea for startup models in CE. Are entrepreneurs able to help solve social issues? How civil service can be made a space where young people can thrive and use their talents for great social impact is discussed by the Aspen Leadership Award awardee Michał Tarnowski in an interview with AR publishing editor Jenda Žáček.

JENDA ŽÁČEK: You are involved in the start-up, edu-tech and NGO scene in Warsaw with a specific focus on civic education. How do you think about the young Polish generation's interest in democracy, public affairs and things around them?

MICHAŁ TARNOWSKI: I truly think this is a very interesting question, because one of the debates—when we talk about what is happening to democracy—is also how the problems resonate with youth and if young people are involved in these discussions at all. There is an interesting paradox that can be observed in Poland. There is, on the one hand, a rise of various initiatives that are run by youth touching upon social and public matters, which is great. On the other hand, if you look at the data, you do not see a significant shift in the political engagement of youth. This is puzzling because you have many more leaders and many more people personally involved, but in the context of the entire society you do not see the same process.

How do you feel about it? Is there social change ahead?

It is great that there is a young generation of people that want to get involved, but I do not believe that this is sufficient to drive social change. Having leaders and educating them—as for example Aspen Institute does—is great, but for their ideas to resonate with people you need a larger audience. So while there are interesting things taking place when it comes to political engagement and public interest by youth, the trend is not clear and I am a bit worried.

But I guess you have an idea how we might handle this...

One of the things we are doing as a civic knowledge academy is trying to tackle this problem, because it starts at the schools. You have civic education, which is this obligatory subject about civic knowledge and it should encompass both the explanation of how our state works but also encompass civic education. This subject is quite often not interesting for students and it does not fulfill its role of educating citizens.

This one subject probably will not shift this topic in general. Wouldn't it be more appropriate to incorporate the topic of civic education and democracy transversally in the entire educational system?

There are definitely tools that you could use to teach these matters, not only in classrooms but also for example in how schools operate. It is apparent at times that schools undertake this idea of becoming a democratic school and actually taking this seriously; they are becoming democratic in a meaningful way. They gather all sides and all stakeholders, so you have parents, teachers, school management and students all working together with certain committees, holding assemblies, discussing school matters and actually agreeing on school matters in a democratic way. I believe this is a great way to promote certain values of democratic behavior.

And further...

I also believe that the way schools should work is to be structured in a way that inspires people to develop an interest in civic education and independently foster this interest, so they can, for example, follow this field as a career path or even just learn more. I also think that it is just as important to get people into mathematics. It is just as important to have a place, a lesson, a time, where students can become inspired to learn more about the country they live in and about the political system they operate in. In the larger scheme of things, I would try to structure the way we educate students so it is less oppressive and more focused on inspiring them. If students can grow inspired and become interested in the public sphere and politics it is a great role for schools to play.

Well, that's the mission of Akademia Wiedzy Obywatelskiej which you founded, right?

We in fact see the topic of civic service creating the public policy or professional functioning of a state, which is something that is rarely mentioned in public debates. Second, these topics are not at all understood by the audience. As a result, citizens do not demand change with regards to these issues, because these issues are not perceived as important to them. Our primary goal is to change this, to work for better civil service and the understanding that civil service is an important thing.

How will you do this?

We try to change the grand scheme of things that we are facing, we try to identify different areas in which we can attempt this change and then we find appropriate tools for working in these areas. We also believe that if we want to promote civil service as a space where young people can thrive and can use their talents for a great social cause with huge social impact, civil service also needs to be transformed. It has to be a place that provides these people with a pleasant environment. Although we are currently facing a situation where we can promote civil service as part of a whole system and as a potentially very interesting place for an employee, the way it is managed and the way it employs people is very old-school and tends to frighten young people and put them off. So, we are trying to change this step by step—by constructing an internship program that will work in a way that understands young people's needs and provides a bridge between those interested in doing things in the public sphere and institutions with the biggest impact.

It is just as important to have a place, a lesson, a time, where students can become inspired to learn more about the country they live in and about the political system they operate in.

At the Civic Bootcamps you get young people together and meet politicians to talk in person and discuss things. Do you think that such a place could somehow bridge the fragmentation of society?

Not necessarily to be honest. I think there are other ways to do it and this is not the best way to tackle polarization. There are some parts of the bootcamp that allow it and some parts that do not. On the one hand, I think that we have somehow struggled to attain a good balance of applicants from different sides of the political spectrum, because of the way we function in these bubbles—not only on social media but also in terms of the institutions we cooperate with and rely on when promoting the application. It was a challenge for us to ensure that the representation of ideas among the participants was even. So, to make a meaningful change we have to strive next year to achieve a much more even distribution of ideas between the participants, because mostly we have people with liberal views, but the representation of people with conservative ideas was low. We are focused on civil service, because one of the ways to bridge the polarization is to find some common topics that we can agree on and discuss. It is apparent that when we talk to politicians in Poland, the mission of civil service resonates with both sides. We managed to successfully invite people from all sides and people generally understand this idea and found it worthy, so I find this thinking and talking about civil service to be quite an interesting topic to bridge the gap and get people together.

Do you find it difficult to run an NGO in Poland, compared to running your business or social entrepreneurship?

I find running both—for-profit organizations and NGOs—relatively easy in Poland in a sense that I find both society and the broader establishment quite open to new ideas. For the last two years, we have received a great deal of trust from the people in organizations that have been around for quite a long time and we have been able to build relationships with experienced institutions such as EFC Foundation (Roman Czernecki Educational Foundation). I also think, however, that we are capitalizing on a trend of hundreds and hundreds of young people who are extremely active and want to make a change and who are looking for vehicles to make this change come about. In our civic knowledge academy, we did not even push for recruiting new people, because we don't have the management capacity. Despite this fact, our teams have grown a great deal and every week we have someone new contacting us if they could join us, not just by participating in an event but by co-creating it in a team.

Being honest about what kind of curve you are maximizing with your activity and the fact that you have managed to do something beneficial for society, while maximizing the profit curve, is amazing and great from the social perspective.

Speaking of social entrepreneurship, was Steve Jobs a social entrepreneur? Since he was loved by millions and also hated by millions, his actions pushed society towards changes. So was he in your eyes a social entrepreneur?

Well, I cannot be sure, because I am interested in what kind of equilibrium and what kind of situation he was facing and was trying to change. I understand that his area of change was that people can use computers and can have access to technology with the goal of earning money through selling the technology in an

accessible way. I do realize that the social impact of having access to technology which he had was truly great and he has definitely done a great deal of good for society. Although it may be a side effect, being a social entrepreneur is also a certain mindset. Being honest about what kind of curve you are maximizing with your activity and the fact that you have managed to do something beneficial for society, while maximizing the profit curve, is amazing and great from the social perspective. I realize there are a lot of counter-arguments from the social perspective. Part of social entrepreneurship is who you are and what you want to do and what kind of curve you are maximizing. Based on this understanding, I would not view Steve Jobs as a social entrepreneur, but would instead perceive him as a very successful entrepreneur who managed to have this great innovation that had this enormous impact on society.

To me, a good understanding—not in an academic way but in more of a personal way—of social entrepreneurship and the values I attach to are something that need to remain your guiding light.

Sometimes social entrepreneurship can be seen as just a fancy way of labeling a normal business or maybe a kind of greenwashing.

It can very often be masked this way and is similar to CSR in a sense that, yes, we want to be socially responsible and have good PR in line with what people are currently thinking. It is a good challenge for what you are asking now, because if you want to foster business organizations built on the idea of social entrepreneurship there is scope and there might be a temptation for many people to lose the social part of the project at some point. One of the explanations behind this is operational—we have set up an organization where we want to foster goals—a business goal and a social goal. Then you use external funding—be it from a VC, be it your own money, be it from an angel investor and imagine you are starting to scale. You might be facing these choices—we are employing a new person, so what is going to be their main area of focus? Will they be more involved in a team growing more on the business side or in a team working on our social aspects? This person is going to cost your company and you have to decide how you are going to spend these costs and which goal you want to foster. I think quite a few organizations might start giving up at this point and I believe this is a choice we will be facing in the future. To me, a good understanding—not in an academic way but in more of a personal way—of social entrepreneurship and the values I attach to, are something that need to remain your guiding light. Either you stick to them, and you are serious about it or just at some point it is not going to happen.

Is social entrepreneurship a way forward in Central Europe? How do you picture this process?

A number of regions and countries are looking for types of activities that could define them and obviously one of the biggest things that lots of countries, regions and cities are striving for right now is the great promise of a unicorn—of a one billion dollar start-up. Everyone would love to have a unicorn and countries are comparing themselves with other countries who have raised many unicorns, which has become such a huge symbol. Lots of decision makers, lots of institutions and the public have bought into this narrative. For some reason it is very important to produce as a society an entrepreneur that can construct a startup getting two hundred million dollars from some California based VC and they then get an evaluation of one billion and everyone thinks that this is splendid.

Sounds like you don't like unicorns...

I usually try to challenge this idea. If something is broadly acknowledged then something is probably wrong or at least there is a challenge to be made. We have to think about how we want to define our region in the sense of what kind of success stories we want to have. This is probably more of a dream than a specific goal as of now, but shifting the attention may be slightly different from purely business oriented dreams. Central Europe is the region of social entrepreneurs, people that care about society, which is widely known as a place where social entrepreneurs can thrive, where there is a lot of knowledge and where people can foster these ideas.

Can you imagine a space where heavy industry is replaced by social entrepreneurship in Central Europe?

No, no. That would be just stupid. The smaller countries might find it useful every now and then to, as opposed to dominating the whole market on a whole sphere, find their own niche. I am not trying to suggest that we get rid of coal and replace it with ten young social entrepreneurs. If we look at different areas of how business develops or trends develop around the world, the startup scene is of course large, it receives a great deal of attention and people get very excited. What I am trying to suggest for Central Europe is that it is quite reasonable to find a niche to position ourselves as leaders and specialists in a sub-area of the whole startup world. You can have a discussion as to whether it is better to be a world center of gov-tech or maybe we should be the leaders of green technologies, of biotech. My argument would be, because I believe that social entrepreneurship is a great idea, that it should be applied to startup models because they allow for a lot of pivoting, a lot of restructuring of business models and a lot of experimenting. This could be one of the things we as a region could promote and focus on.

Do you see this just as a niche we as Central Europe could use or do you see special kind of skills or a historical context as to why we, as Central Europe, should be good in social entrepreneurship?

In countries where there is less trust of decentralized institutions in which we tend to organize things with some skepticism towards central institutions, the idea of mutual and self-help is something that could resonate with people. Paradoxically, the lack of trust toward central institutions which I am trying to change, could be used for the benefit of promoting social entrepreneurship: the ones that could help solve the social issues are the entrepreneurs themselves.

How should the national states foster social entrepreneurship?

One thing is channeling money towards the projects. Lots of projects rely on the funding either directly from central and state intuitions or indirectly from the EU. I do know that this kind of funding is always very structured—it is all very formal, based on very strict guidelines. You have all different steps and levels of state organizations that funding has to go through and there are always tons of documents. You need to fulfill very specific requirements.

There is a major threat. Once you start looking for social entrepreneurship ideas and you start funding them, you end up having hundreds of people that suddenly become social entrepreneurs. The truth is the idea does not resonate with them, it is just a way of getting money for their business and I don't think the state institutions have the capacity to do the right screening.

What I am trying to suggest for Central Europe is that it is quite reasonable to find a niche to position ourselves as leaders and specialists in a sub-area of the whole startup world.

And education?

Apart from this, there would definitely be some educational work to be done earlier as if you are trying to incubate these sorts of ideas and supporting social entrepreneurship ideas, favoring them in the stage of early incubation, which is something that could be promising in the short term. This is the stage of development of a new startup, of a new company in which you can have some influence; on the way they think about it and also you can evaluate the ideas and see if people are genuine about their social goals. The infrastructure is in place either way because most of the countries have this understanding that we have a dream and that we want to have a unicorn. It is not as if we are building a whole new infrastructure from scratch, but it is a change in our paradigm of thinking.

A year ago you were granted the Aspen Central Europe Leadership Award, what does it mean to you?

In full honesty the award really pushed me into rethinking my style of leadership and me as a leader. I was a bit overwhelmed when I realized the gravity of the award. I took it seriously and it was taken seriously by my friends. I had a bit of imposter syndrome. It gave me a big burst of confidence and then it gave me a big burst in actually doing my work better.

When speaking of leadership—how do you perceive it? How do you apply leadership to yourself and your colleagues?

I think a great deal about trust between me and my coworkers and co-leaders. Everything I have done so far was done with my co-leaders, out of all my projects which I haven't led anything entirely solo—be it business projects or NGOs. I always co-lead it with some friends and these relationships, based on profound trust, made it possible. Working and talking about trust is always transparent, because I can see significant change between working in an environment that very much revolves around trust and working in an environment where talking about trust was not really present. I see a significant difference when it comes to how we communicate with each other and how openly we communicate. I genuinely try to take a great deal of responsibility for my team and ensure they trust me and rely on me. Then it becomes difficult because I think a lot about how they feel in the company and if their tasks meet their expectations. This is especially the case in an NGO where no one gets paid, and there is a great deal of expectation management. It is also a bit easier, we all work for a mission we believe in and make sure everyone understands it.

The Aspen Central Europe Leadership Award is bestowed annually to young emerging professionals with outstanding achievements in active promotion of responsible citizenship, values-based leadership, innovations or innovative policies with a positive societal impact in Central and Eastern Europe.

MICHAŁ TARNOWSKI
describes himself as an entrepreneur both in the business and in the nonprofit organisations world. He worked on improving access to higher education as the director of *Project Access Poland*—an NGO that provides pro bono educational consulting to Polish high school students from underprivileged backgrounds. He co-founded two educational platforms: *Nativated.com* and *Nauczeni.pl*. He is currently developing *Akademia Wiedzy Obywatelskiej (AWO)*—an NGO which aims at transforming civic education in Poland. His team is running a nationwide project *WOS Masterclass* within which they invite top Polish politicians, academics and public sector professionals to act as teachers and prepare online classes for teenagers, which they distribute among over 500 schools. The NGO also organizes the *Civil Bootcamp*—an event for 40 high school students aimed at raising future value-driven leaders in the public sector.

ASPEN.REVIEW
JITKA RUDOLFOVÁ

DISABILITY POLICY
NGO
CZECH REPUBLIC

Reshaping Disability Policy: We Will Get Off Our Wheelchairs, if Necessary

Over 11,000 people with disabilities are still permanently housed in institutionalized care type homes in the Czech Republic. They live there despite the fact that the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified thirteen years ago and despite the recent ruling by the Czech Constitutional Court, according to which housing services for people with disabilities should be provided in as little a restrictive setting as possible. Jitka Rudolfová, an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, is fighting for change through a specific nonprofit advocacy group—Alliance for Individualized Support.

Simply put, the Czech Republic has no grand nor opulent staircases leading to its legislative buildings. The House of Representatives building has such a nondescript ground entrance that it is easily missed; the seat of the Senate is admittedly surrounded by a beautiful garden, but you would look for an equally notable entrance in vain. The buildings of the executive branch are no better in this regard.

As such, Czechia doesn't have a single staircase which could be crawled up on with as much effectiveness as was done in March of 1990 by a group of disabled activists on the American Capitol Hill. At the time, around sixty of these individuals gathered under the shiny white building and got off their wheelchairs (or alternatively tossed away their crutches) and launched themselves up the 78 steps, so that lawmakers at the top would be alerted of both the physical and societal barriers, which people with disabilities have to overcome each day. This unique civil protest strongly contributed to the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990—a law which makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of disability and guarantees protection from such discrimination.

What the person, whom the government itself declared completely dependent on the help of others, is supposed to do in the remaining 19 hours in a day is not discussed.

Reasons for crawling in the Czech Republic

I would crawl too. There are many reasons for it. Over 11,000 people with disabilities are still permanently housed in institutionalized care type homes in the Czech Republic. They live there despite the fact that the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* was ratified thirteen years ago. And despite the recent ruling by the Czech Constitutional Court, according to which housing services for people with disabilities should be provided in as little a restrictive setting as possible. This means that the services should provide their clients with a chance at leading, or as close to as possible, a normal life. However, it is the reality for many of the clients of these institutions that a normal life is a distant dream.

I would get off my wheelchair for the current form of government's financial aid for people with disabilities, from which they—on the off chance they do not have any interest in living in an institution—are supposed to purchase social services. Even with the highest degree of support, the money provided can buy a maximum of 5 hours of assistance per day.

What the person, whom the government itself declared completely dependent on the help of others, is supposed to do in the remaining 19 hours in a day is not discussed.

In all honesty it is simply assumed that such a person would either move into one of the aforementioned institutions or obediently live with their parents, who assist their child until utter exhaustion.

The need for crawling is also provoked by the constant need for proof of a person's disability. Despite the fact that the state sends me monthly checks for my disability pension (it even supplied me with an ID confirming that my disability is in fact real) I still have to prove my health situation over and over. Why? I have no idea, the nature of my disability has not changed for 30 years.

One voice for all

There is no staircase to crawl up, however. And even if there were one, the question remains whether it could have the same dramatic impact that it once had in the US. That's why I've placed my hope in a much less radical way of fighting for change—a nonprofit advocacy group. Because if anyone has a realistic chance of upholding the interests of people with disabilities in our Central European basin, which compared to overseas functions in a more corporatist manner, it's definitely *Alliance for Individualized Support*. In the end, my dream of a Capitol protest took on the form of a position on the Alliance Administrative Board.

The Alliance formed two years ago as a project of a few Czech non-profits, which represented various segments of people with disabilities or which directly provided specialized care. In order to make an impact on the longterm stagnation in the improvement of care and support provided to the target population they developed the idea of an umbrella organization, which through its sheer size and high level of expertise became an impossible-to-ignore player in the creation and redefinition of social policies on a national scale.

It happens anyway. In some regions and especially in remote and isolated locations, being institutionalized is the only alternative of social care.

The idea of centralized and unified representation of people with disabilities quickly took off, and more and more organizations joined it. Currently, The Alliance is a collective of 40 organizations (those founded by patient groups, parent groups or those providing professional services) and works closely with another 20.

Like every respectable organization that's just starting out, The Alliance first delved into an analysis of the issues to solve. Foremost, it has focused on areas in which the social care system fails the most catastrophically, in regard to the real needs of people with disabilities. For the purpose of its work, The Alliance has focused most closely on people whose disabilities aren't easily compensated with equipment or aids, and who, as a result, are more dependent on the support of other people. It's this group of people that most often falls through the cracks in the system and also the one that most often finds its members in demeaning and restrictive living conditions. Apart from people with disabilities, The Alliance also focuses on their families, whose members (predominantly women) often fill the roles of caretakers for decades, without any way to step out of this position with a clear conscience.

Where there is a need for change

On the basis of in-depth analysis and with insight into tried and tested policies implemented abroad, The Alliance's analytics team defined three key areas of social policies where reform would significantly improve the quality of life for people with the highest need for support, and their families. These are: accessibility of services, a fair assessment of needs, and a coordination of social support and care.

The first area has to do with 11 thousand clients with disabilities persistently committed into institutionalized care. It is evident that fully institutionalized care has, beyond any doubt, its place in the mix, yet people with disabilities should have a choice in where and with whom they live. The Czech Republic has, in its ratification of the UN Declaration, specifically committed itself to making sure that people with disabilities "are not forced to live in specific environments."

It happens anyway. In some regions and especially in remote and isolated locations, being institutionalized is the only alternative of social care.

Often, these places are completely lacking in social services which are provided at home (personal care) or people commute to (day care or week-long-stays, auxiliary and relief services). It's because to this day the state does not do anything to make sure that all of its regions guarantee an access to these specific types of services which are designed to offer the least restrictive, yet often most effective types of care.

A fair assessment of care needs is related to the unfortunate way the allocation of financial aid is structured. Its amount is currently derived off of a normative account of everyday actions, which a person in a home setting is not able to perform on their own, and not on the actual amount of care and support which they need. Nor does the assessment account for the social situation in which a person is living.

And so it happens that a person bound to a wheelchair, who lives alone and without support cannot eat, dress, or even use the bathroom, has to make do with a maximum of 5 hours of assistance a day.

On top of that, the current system is rarely able to deal with people, whose physical condition does not prevent eating, dressing and going to the toilet, yet realistically need to be taken care of in even the simplest of tasks, as they are autistic or have an intellectual disability.

The need for better coordination between care and support might sound a bit banal compared to the other two areas in need of improvement, but it's not. The Czech system for care and support of disabled people is desperately confusing and completely user-unfriendly. It is codified in 66 laws and regulations, which currently operate with 4 different definitions of a person with medical disabilities.

Besides that, the system vigorously tests who has the legitimate claim for financial aid. It requires from its beneficiaries over 50 documents, proofs and forms. Yes, sometimes repeatedly. The clashes with this bureaucratic juggernaut take up both the time and energy of disabled people (and those who care for them); time and energy that is sorely needed elsewhere. No advisory service, which would help with orientation in the system, or perhaps even help arrange for care tailored to the needs of each person, exists.

Action in the right moment

The Alliance recently presented the results of their findings on the Senate grounds before crowds of politicians, civil servants, and experts on social policy—with resounding success. It showed which changes are essential to enact in the system, so that people with disabilities and their families can lead better lives. The Alliance's suggestion come at a time, when there is a real chance of passing a new social care bill—the one piece of legislation that affects the target population the most.

Now it is necessary to marshal enough political will to reform the whole spectrum of policies, rules and regulations affecting social care.

Alliance is determined to enter and support all the necessary negotiations in various political arenas, be it on the government or local level; to enact a real qualitative change in the support system of citizens with disabilities and their families. On the off chance that the negotiations were to fail there is always a possibility of getting off the wheelchairs and tossing the crutches. In the end a suitable place would be found, despite the lack of a legendary staircase.

JITKA RUDOLFOVÁ
has studied sociology and public policy. She was active in the *Fund of Further Education* and *People in Need Foundation*, among others. She has been an occasional advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. She has been confined to a wheelchair since birth.

ASPEN.REVIEW
DARIUSZ KAŁAN

POLITICS
HUNGARY
UKRAINE
ÓRBAN

A Hungarian Pro-Moscow Course?

Putin's Russia is a model of governance, but not a geopolitical reference point for Hungary states Dariusz Kałłan. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was reluctant to believe that Putin would attempt a full-scale invasion of Ukraine and in the heat of the campaign, he had to face uncomfortable questions about his own relationship with Putin, he says.

Eight hours—this is how long it took the Hungarian authorities to admit that Ukraine was a victim of Russia's aggression. This was done by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in a video published after 1 pm on Facebook after the equivocations of his Foreign Minister. "This morning Russia attacked Ukraine militarily,"[1] the Prime Minister said and immediately outlined his government's position: "Hungary must stay out of the war conflict. For us, the safety of our citizens is the most important thing, so under no circumstances will we allow soldiers or military equipment to be sent to Ukraine through our territory. Of course we will offer humanitarian aid."

For Orbán, the war came as a double shock. First, there is no indication that he knew it would happen. Like many observers, despite warnings from the US and British intelligence services, he was likely reluctant to believe that Putin would attempt a full-scale invasion. In early February, already after the tension between Russia and Western countries had escalated and more than 100,000 Russian troops were waiting on Ukraine's eastern and northern borders, he traveled to Moscow to talk with Putin about bilateral relations.

Second, the war inevitably changed the dynamics of the campaign ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled for April 3; elections that, due to six major opposition parties joining forces, a two-year-long coronavirus pandemic and run-away inflation, were assessed as the most difficult for Fidesz, Orbán's nationalist party, since returning to power in 2010. In the heat of the campaign, Russia's aggression and the surprising resistance of Ukrainians meant for Orbán that he had to face uncomfortable questions about his own relationship with Putin.

East Winds

At a press conference held four days after the election, Orbán dated the sources of his opening to Russia to 2008: "[At the Bucharest summit] it was decided that the West did not want the Ukrainians and the Georgians to join NATO. At that point, I understood that a brand new era was coming [...] We launched a new Russia policy, at that time I reached out to President Putin, so around 2009. I understood that Russia was going to be part of the European security architecture with a new border being created separating the world of NATO from that of Russia, and in between there was going to be a system of buffer states: Georgia to the south, Ukraine to the east." [2]

The geopolitical logic—about the peaceful coexistence of two worlds separated by a neutral zone—was reinforced with economic arguments. According to the investigative journalism center Direkt36, György Matolcsy, Orbán's economic advisor and current head of the Central Bank, spelt out a theory about the rapid development of the East, which after the economic and financial crisis of 2008 "will take the place of the West in global politics."[3] This was the origin of the concept of the "eastern opening," sometimes called the "east wind doctrine" after the catchphrase used by Orbán in November 2010: "Hungary sails under the western flag, but the wind of the world economy blows from the east." [4]

1) www.facebook.com/orbanviktor/videos/4902338833184110

2) twitter.com/BalazsOrban_HU/status/1512022376334053377

3) www.direkt36.hu/en/orban-jatszmaja/

4) index.hu/belfold/2010/11/05/orban_keleti_szel_fuj/

Since the onset of Fidesz rule, Hungary has sought to strengthen contacts with countries in the broader East: from Russia, Turkey, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf to the Far East. The Prime Minister's office, especially Orbán's close advisor Péter Szijjártó, has been involved in the implementation of this policy, and provided it with even more momentum after taking over the foreign ministry in September 2014. A few weeks before his arrival, the ministry was renamed the "Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade"—and this is a good illustration of the priorities of the eastern opening.

Unlike in the 1990s, when Fidesz, influenced by its own dissident experience in dealing with non-democratic regimes, prioritized the promotion of human rights and civil liberties, the bulk of diplomatic efforts were directed at gaining sources of investment and developing trade relations. Although the new eastern policy was a departure from Orbán's practice and language, it was in line with the foreign policy of Fidesz's predecessors. The turn to the east was initiated by the post-communist governments, which in the first decade of the new century built up a strong network of contacts, mainly with China and Russia.

The continuation and then strengthening of this trend can be explained not only by the increased significance of the East on global markets or the problems of Hungary weakened by its 2008 economic downturn, but also by political calculation. Changes initiated by Orbán in his country were criticized by EU institutions and led to an unprecedented cooling of relations with the USA during the presidency of Barack Obama. The dialogue with countries from the East was easier: they did not expect any specific solutions in economic policy and were not interested in constitutional reforms. They often received Orbán with honors, while many leaders in the West treated him with disdain.

The effects of the eastern opening are best measured by economic statistics. In 2014, sales of Hungarian goods and services to non-EU countries accounted for 21 percent of exports; seven years later, they had grown by only two percentage points.[5] The foreign trade balance with Asian countries is still negative.[6] However, exports to the most important partners, i.e. China, Japan, Turkey and India, roughly doubled between 2010 and 2021, and even tripled in the case of some other countries (South Korea, Qatar).[7] In contrast, the value of exports to the country to which Orbán has paid most attention, Russia, has shrunk over the same period. It is not even in the top ten of Hungary's trade partners.[8]

Russia: Secret Investments and Inspiration

Under the rule of the post-communist Ferenc Gyurcsány, Hungary—in the opinion of the analysts of the think tank ECFR—belonged to the group of "friendly pragmatists".[9] The authors pointed out that the bilateral agreements Budapest made on gas imports and storage, in the hope of becoming Gazprom's hub in Europe, helped to undermine the EU's Nabucco pipeline. "While they are not active promoters of Russian interests within the EU system, they tend to oppose actions which they fear might irritate Moscow. They take full advantage of the opportunities offered by Russia's economic growth," they wrote about Hungary and other pragmatists. At the same time, Hungary supported a stronger EU role in the post-Soviet region.

Orbán went further than his predecessors, but so did other countries such as Germany and France that were expanding their network of business contacts with Putin's Russia. In addition to economic benefits, there was the idea, promoted by Chancellor Angela Merkel, of involving Russia—considered a difficult but pragmatic partner—in as many economic and energy interdependencies as possible, so that breaking them would become unprofitable for both sides. Merkel saw this as a guarantee of peace in Europe—and no event, neither the war in Georgia, nor the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass, nor the attempts to liquidate Putin's domestic opponents, undermined her belief in this theory.

Orbán is among the proponents of maintaining relations with Russia on a business-as-usual basis. There is a difference, however, between him and Gyurcsány on the one hand, and Germany or France on the other. As András Rácz, an expert on Russia, pointed out, Putin has not really taken steps to build soft power in Hungary; this was not helped by the lack of a common border, linguistic proximity and positive past experiences. Yet, Rácz points out, attracting the Hungarian public was not at all necessary. For the Kremlin, "in terms of gaining influence, it focuses almost exclusively on the Hungarian political and economic elite, at which it has been remarkably successful in recent years."[10]

Orbán has deepened the Hungarian energy dependence on Russia to a degree unmatched by his predecessors. Russia supplies around 95 percent of imported natural gas;[11] its supplies jumped by 29 percent between 2016 and 2019, according to calculations by the Polish Economic Institute (PIE), a record increase in the EU.[12] The contract signed last year commits Hungary

5) www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/kkr/hu/kkr0016.html

6) www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/kkr/hu/kkr0008.html

7) www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/kkr/hu/kkr0007.html

8) www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/kkr/hu/kkr0059.html

9) ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECFR-02_A_POWER_AUDIT_OF_EU-RUSSIA_RELATIONS.pdf

10) www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/authoritarian-ties-case-russia-and-hungary

11) www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2021-09-29/new-hungarian-russian-gas-agreement

12) pie.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/PIE-Raport_UE-niezalezna-od-Rosji-1.pdf

to receiving 4.5 billion cubic meters of gas for 15 years through the TurkStream pipeline—the southern equivalent of Nord Stream connecting Russia to Turkey via the Black Sea, thus bypassing Ukraine.

Russia is also the source of 60-65 percent of the oil processed annually by the MOL group, an oil and gas processing company,[13] and an important provider of bituminous coal; its supplies increased by a record-high 98 percent between 2016 and 2019, according to the PIE. For Budapest, it is not independence but price that is crucial: the reduction of energy prices for households (rezsicsökkentés) contributed to Fidesz's victory in the 2014 elections and to this day are being pitched as one of its greatest achievements.

Unlike in the 1990s, when Fidesz, influenced by its own dissident experience in dealing with non-democratic regimes, prioritized the promotion of human rights and civil liberties, the bulk of diplomatic efforts were directed at gaining sources of investment and developing trade relations.

The investment that met with the biggest media headlines was a 2014 contract with Rosatom for the—incessantly postponed—expansion of two nuclear units at the Paks power plant for a loan of 10-12 billion euros; one of its subcontractors is Lőrinc Mészáros, Orbán's childhood friend and the richest Hungarian on the Forbes list. For his role in the project, the University of Debrecen awarded Putin with the honorary title of Honorary Citizen. Budapest also bought 2 million Sputnik V coronavirus vaccines, which have not been approved by the EU, and invited the International Investment Bank, accused of espionage, to Budapest.

The investigative journalism center Direkt36, which has been exploring Russian penetration in Hungary for years, found that Putin's men bought permanent residence permits in Hungary (along with Schengen visas); this includes Sergey Naryshkin, head of the Foreign Intelligence Service.[14] Another investigation found that the Russians had hacked the IT system of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry headed by Szijjártó, who late last year was awarded the Order of Friendship by his Russian counterpart "for the development of Hungarian-Russian relations".[15] "Hungarian diplomacy has virtually become an open book for Moscow," the journalists write.

The true nature of Orbán's relationship with Putin is unclear. The number of concessions to Russia and the frequency of the meetings—they have met twelve times in twelve years—makes some analysts speculate that Russia has some discrediting materials on Orbán. There is no evidence, however, for this. The conjecture is fuelled by the secrecy veiling the biggest projects, namely the extension of the gas deal and the loan for the expansion of the Paks power plant. If blackmail is not involved, it seems likely—because a similar mechanism is at work in the distribution of EU funds[16]—that the overpriced and non-transparent projects are designed to bring profits to businessmen linked to Fidesz.

Orbán and Putin share the opinion that business should be dependent on political power, which is to be strictly hierarchical and concentrated around the leader. Common beliefs extend, however, to other issues as well. In his famous 2014 Băile Tuşnad speech, in which he outlined the concept of the "illiberal state," Orbán mentioned Russia—along with China, Turkey and other countries—as a development model for Hungary.[17] His fascination with Putin's effectiveness has been reflected in his actions. Orbán reduced the independence of control institutions either by abolishing them or putting loyalists in charge; enforced an electoral law favorable to Fidesz; and created a close-knit oligarchy that took over most of the media. And the media have turned into a propaganda machine using Russia-like anti-Western and confrontational language.

Orbán has deepened the Hungarian energy dependence on Russia to a degree unmatched by his predecessors.

As Rácz stated, however, Putin's Russia is a model of how to govern, but not a geopolitical reference point. Despite its belligerent rhetoric, Hungary has not once blocked EU sanctions on Russia. It even hesitantly joined in the expulsion of Russian diplomats after the attempted poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter, even though, as another Direkt36 investigation showed, it removed only one diplomat and it was done in agreement with Moscow.[18] Orbán also makes sure that Russian interests are counterweighted by other influences. Two controversial Chinese projects have appeared in Hungary: the Fudan University campus[19] and the Budapest-Belgrade railroad line. Germany retains its dominant position in the economy anyway: in 2019 it accounted for a quarter of Hungarian exports.[20]

13) www.portfolio.hu/en/business/20220412/what-would-happen-to-hungarys-mol-if-russian-oil-stopped-flowing-539063

14) www.direkt36.hu/en/putyin-gepezetenek-tagjai-kaptak-magyar-papirokat-orbanek-kotvenyprogramjaban/

15) www.direkt36.hu/en/putyin-hekkerei-is-latjak-a-magyar-kulugy-titkait-az-orban-kormany-evek-ota-nem-birja-elharitani-oket/

16) balkaninsight.com/2020/12/08/how-eu-fraud-schemes-work-in-orbans-hungary/

17) budapestbeacon.com/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/

18) www.direkt36.hu/en/latszolag-osszeugrottak-a-magyarok-es-az-oroszok-a-szkripal-mergezes-miatt-de-a-hatterben-valami-mas-tortent/

19) www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2021-04-26/kontrowersje-wokol-budowy-kampusu-chinskiego-uniwersytetu-w

20) www.oeconomus.hu/irasok/a-nemet-magyar-gazdasagi-es-kulkereskedelmi-kapcsolatok/

Ukraine: the Far Abroad

In line with the basic assumption of the eastern opening, Orbán has been developing trade relations with Ukraine, Hungary's largest neighbor—between 2010 and 2021, Hungarian exports grew by nearly 150 percent[21]—but never considered it anything more than a buffer zone or—in his own words—"something" between Hungary and Russia—"we may even call it Ukraine".[22] With weak historical ties, Hungary's policy towards Ukraine has been subordinated to two other factors.

"Hungarian diplomacy has virtually become an open book for Moscow," the journalists write.

One is the prioritization of Russia, Hungary's major partner in the east, whose interest in Ukraine contributed to keeping Orbán away from what the Kremlin views as its "near-abroad".[23]

At times, this prioritization has manifested itself in a manifestly dismissive attitude toward Ukraine. In 2014, the year of the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in Donbass, Orbán first demanded autonomy for the Hungarian minority, and then—three days after meeting with Gazprom's CEO—shut down the reverse pipeline transporting gas to Ukraine for four months. Shortly thereafter, during a freeze in Russia's contacts with the West, he received Putin in Budapest as the first EU leader in nine months.[24]

A second factor casting a shadow over the relationship are the rights of the Hungarian minority. Numbering more than 150,000, they make up about 10 percent of the population of Transcarpathia, Ukraine's westernmost region. Hungarians have their own organizations, properties, schools, media, a theater, monuments and streets, and in some towns, administrations derived from their community. The proximity of the border with Hungary, however, and Kyiv's lack of financial support for Hungarian-language schools means that they—especially the younger generation—are poorly integrated into the Ukrainian community and have a poor command of the Ukrainian language.

Dialogue between the two countries radically deteriorated after the Ukrainian parliament passed a law in 2017 that restricted minority language instruction to early childhood education with several other laws requiring Ukrainian to be used in most aspects of public life, scheduled to come into force in subsequent years. Targeting the Russian language as part of derusification efforts and attempting to reinforce Ukrainian national identity, the new legislation backfired on Hungarians. In response, Budapest blocked meetings of the Ukraine-NATO Commission and accused Kyiv of nationalism and extremism; in the opinion of the head of Orbán's chancellery, the language law was "semi-fascist".[25]

Relations with the neighbor would have developed better if not for the Maidan Revolution. The pro-Western course taken by the administration of Petro Poroshenko, and later Volodymyr Zelensky, resulted in the attempts of derusification of the public space and the educational system, and the dilution of decision-making centers as a result of decentralization and deoligarchization. Maintaining the status quo ante with influential oligarchs and a regime dependent on Moscow and not interested in constraining minority rights would have created a favorable ground for building relations, including economic ones. In this sense, the interests of the EU and the U.S., who were intent on drawing Ukraine into their sphere of influence, and the Fidesz elite were not fully identical.

One might be tempted to speculate that with strong political and business ties, conflicts over the rights of ethnic Hungarians would be hushed down by both sides, as they were in the relations with Serbia. The situation of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina and the different interpretations of the events of World War II were the subject of neighborly talks until the coming to power of the Prime Minister and then President Aleksandar Vučić. After a personal relationship between him and Orbán was established, these conflicts disappeared from the agenda. For the pragmatic Orbán, minorities—financed by Budapest and equipped by Fidesz with a simplified path to Hungarian citizenship and electoral rights—are one of the pillars of electoral support on the one hand, and an instrument of pressure on neighboring states on the other.

Despite its belligerent rhetoric, Hungary has not once blocked EU sanctions on Russia.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine came at a time of tense relations between Budapest and Kyiv. Orbán's reaction was similar, however, to that of 2014, when the dialogue was correct. On the one hand, it manifested itself in routine assurances of support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and tacit approval of sanctions, and on the other in efforts to maintain economic cooperation and not isolate Russia.

21) www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/kkr/hu/kkr0007.html

22) mandiner.hu/cikk/20160229_orban_kell_valami_magyarorszag_es_oroszorszag_koze

23) www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/kkr/hu/kkr0007.html

24) www.reuters.com/article/hungary-putin-visit-idUSL5N0VR4RQ20150217

25) hvg.hu/vilag/20190222_Ukrajna_elfogadhatatalan_hogy_Gulyas_felfasisztanak_nevezte_az_oktatasi_torvenyt

26) www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/04/07/right-wing-populism-thriving-hungary-france-serbia-lepen-orban/

In both cases, phrases about impartiality were used, the co-responsibility of Russia and Ukraine was implied; in both cases the primacy of ethnic rights of Hungarians was emphasized, which in the conditions of war fitted the Kremlin's narrative. The only difference was that in 2014 Orbán's mild business-like reaction was shared by the majority of other EU states, while eight years later it made Hungary rather isolated within the union.

Neutrality as the Key to Victory

The question remains as to why Orbán has not changed this course—and this despite pressure from the West and the enormity of Russian crimes, including the murders of Ukrainian civilians in the suburban town of Bucha, which were revealed on the eve of the election. The shortest answer is that he did not need it in any way. Years of flirting with the Kremlin have convinced him that—despite the public's general distance from Russia and the distaste of a few people around him for the memory of the 1956 Revolution—it has no impact on electoral preferences. Many supporters, even if they view fraternizing with Putin with distaste, rationalize it as something that at least brings the benefit of energy price cuts.

Orbán, at first taken by surprise by the war, quickly and efficiently adapted the dynamics of the election campaign to it. He formulated a kind of doctrine of neutrality. By opening the borders to refugees from Ukraine and declaring that he supports that country's efforts to join the EU, he was fulfilling his basic allied tasks and not upsetting the unity of the West. At the same time, however, he communicated to voters that "this is not our war" and "Ukraine is not fighting for our freedom." In practice, this doctrine manifested itself in harsh opposition to the transit of arms through Hungarian territory and, together with Germany and several other countries, the imposition of sanctions on the Russian energy sector. This maneuver had three objectives.

Orbán, at first taken by surprise by the war, quickly and efficiently adapted the dynamics of the election campaign to it.

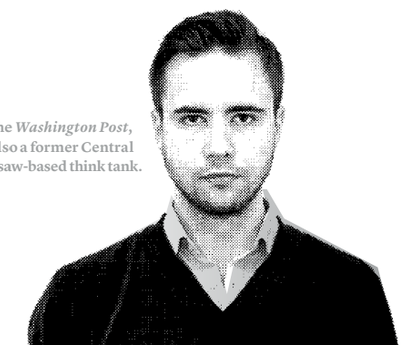
First, to prevent a break-up with Putin. The propaganda and Orbán himself firstly equated Putin and Zelensky in responsibility, passing over the crimes of the former, and later openly presenting Zelensky as a dangerous warlord who had provoked the Russians. This was largely an ambition-driven response to Zelensky's taunts, who publicly demanded more decisive action from Orbán. On the night before the election he even called him "virtually the only one in Europe to openly support Mr. Putin".26 Generally, the point was that the Hungarian elite believed that the war would quickly end and things would return to their normal course of doing business with Moscow over Kyiv's head.

Second, Orbán avoided something that has always come hard to him, that is, admitting he was wrong.

Second, Orbán avoided something that has always come hard to him, that is, admitting he was wrong. During the campaign, this could have cost him a lot. Criticizing Putin would have meant questioning his own foreign policy of the past decade and admitting that he had dragged Hungary into a web of dependence that was above the norm even for the asymmetrical nature that inevitably characterizes Russian-Hungarian relations. Had the polls shown that Hungarians expected a slight change of course, the pragmatic Orbán might have sacrificed a loyal foreign minister. He believed, however, that with the help of propaganda and his own rhetorical efforts in the campaign, he would be able to format the voters accordingly.

Third, Orbán could present himself as a beacon of reason, not so much in the context of Putin's actions, but of the opposition leaders who joined the Western chorus of indignation. This is how a new electoral slogan was invented ad hoc: "peace and security," with Orbán appointing himself its guardian. Anyone who expressed support for Ukraine was labeled a supporter of war. The six-party opposition bloc could not find a response to this. It was unable to successfully promote the narrative that Orbán was a 'traitor' who had hampered Hungary with humiliating ties to Adolf Hitler's spiritual successor. In this way, Orbán turned a losing situation into the key to electoral victory.

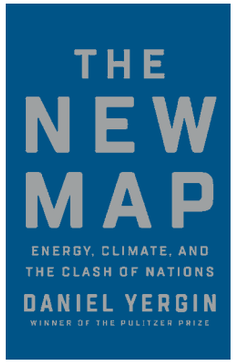
DARIUSZ KAŁAN
is a journalist covering Central Europe for magazines such as the *Washington Post*, *The Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *Balkan Insight*, among others. He is also a former Central Europe analyst at the *Polish Institute of International Affairs*, a Warsaw-based think tank.



ASPEN.REVIEW
PRZEMYSŁAW
WIELGOSZ

ECONOMY
CAPITALISM
ENERGY

Don't Look Under your Feet



The New Map
Daniel Yergin
Translated by Paweł Cichawa
Post Factum Sonia Draga, Katowice 2021

In his monumental book, Daniel Yergin promises to draw new maps of energy, geopolitics, climate, and chart a roadmap to a green transformation. But in fact, his New Map: How Energy is Changing Geopolitics represents the beaten paths on which the imagination of our economic and political elites is stuck.

In Adam McKay's celebrated film *Don't Look Up*, the media, politicians and visionary businessmen combine their efforts to make as much money as possible from a meteorite heading toward Earth, and squander the chance to avoid a collision and the annihilation of humanity in the process. In the real world, when faced with the looming climate crisis, the same coalition is suggesting more or less the same thing, except that we shouldn't look beneath our feet. Let's not look at the degraded human habitat, the desolate land and poisoned water, let's not succumb to ecological emotions, let's think positively, and preferably let's engage in constructive analyses of the geopolitical puzzle, technological wonders and planetary engineering. This is the responsible way forward. This also seems to be Daniel Yergin's idea.

In his comprehensive book, this American consultant to the oil industry, winner of a Pulitzer Prize for his 1991 book *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power*, reflects on the future of the energy sector, the rivalry between the superpowers in this area, and possible exit strategies from the current impasse (in which, as an optimist, he probably does not fully believe). The road leads from America's shale revolution to Russia's regeneration and China's awakening, and the framework encompasses almost the entire world—from Middle Eastern pisaks to the turbulent waters of the South China Sea to the greenest enclaves of California. So Yergin's work has tremendous scope, and what's more, the author's writing talent cannot be denied, which makes it a great read.

Until There Is Oil (Again)

The beginning of the book resembles the plot of another film directed by Paul Thomas Anderson in 2007, *There Will Be Blood*. The picture telling the story of the beginning of the oil fever in nineteenth century Texas could be a great blueprint for Yergin's story of the shale revolution in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The difference is that in *The New Map* everything has a happy ending. In Anderson's picture, the pioneer of the American oil industry, played by the excellent Daniel Day Lewis, pays a huge price for his successes, and a large part of the cost is borne by the people around him, as he destroys his closest ones and loses his friends. In Yergin's story, the shale pioneers are more likely to smile. Some, in keeping with the "rags to riches" myth, move seamlessly from making hamburgers to fracking and raking the profits in.

Exaggerated? Only a little.

It has given, however, the US energy self-sufficiency and the position of a world leader in the production and export of oil and gas. This was enough for the melancholy mood stemming from the depletion of resources in the first years after 2000 to give way to a new vision of an unlimited oil boom.

The enthusiasm, fuelled by billions in profits, lasted for several years. The author gladly allows himself to be carried away by it, which allows him to downplay the objections of environmentalists and numerous public protests. Huge consumption and pollution of water, methane emissions and increased frequency of drilling (resulting from a rapid decrease in the profitability of wells), along with high financial costs (to make shale extraction profitable,

a barrel of oil has to cost over $50), have made fracking a controversial technology from the very start. It has been banned in several states and countries. Yergin mentions this criticism, but only when listing the obstacles (irrational as he suggests) on the way to the shale Eldorado. Incidentally, throughout the book the author casts environmentalists as the brakes on progress and development. He seems to adhere to the principle that the enemy of green doctrinaires is my friend, when with disarming frankness he compliments the far-right Brazilian president, writing that under Bolsonaro hope has finally returned to the country.

The shale revolution that erupted around 2008 did indeed produce quite a few fortunes, although it gave much less prosperity and jobs than the author suggests—only 30 thousand in a sector employing over 4 million people in the US.

Old Obsessions of New Geopolitics

And perhaps the most predictable. In analyzing global energy and economic interdependence, the author follows the old route laid out by American neoconservatives. He also succumbs to many of their ambitions and obsessions, with rather bizarre consequences.

It must have taken a lot of hard work to mention Dick Chenney (Halliburton), Condoleezza Rice (Chevron), Donald Rumsfeld, and George W. Bush (Arbusto) only in passing in an extensive chapter on the role of the Middle East on the global energy map. The effort must have been even greater in the light of the fact that a large part of the analysis is devoted to the destabilization of the region in the last two decades, to which these foursome strongly contributed to. Yergin succeeded in doing so, although one has to admit that it came at the price of crossing the border of seriousness. This is how we should evaluate the fact that writing about the war in Iraq and its tragic consequences, including Syria, he makes the Iranian general and chief of foreign operations (the so-called Quds Force) Qasem Soleimani the main culprit.

It stops being funny, however, if we realize that such a vision of the Middle East is shared by a large part of the American political class which is stubbornly pushing for war with Iran. Blaming General Soleimani, or even the entire government in Tehran, however, for the American defeat in Iraq, the rise of the Islamic State, the war in Syria and Yemen, the revolution in Bahrain, Hezbollah's strong position in Lebanon and Israel's troubles is absurd enough to undermine the credibility of Yergin's geopolitical analyses. Especially when this is coupled with the very forgiving tone in which he writes about Saudi Arabia and the role played by Riyadh in the region.

Making Money on the Climate Crisis...

Describing the shale revolution and the return of the US to its position as a leading oil producer, Yergin uses language reminiscent of rallying speeches at oil industry conventions in Texas. Later on, the tone seems to change, but this is only an appearance, because despite the fact that his nearly 600-page book is supposed to chart the world's energy future, the author devoted barely 100 pages to climate destabilization issues.

Apparently, Yergin feels best on familiar ground. Traditional oil mining, pipelines, tankers, OPEC negotiations, geopolitics of great powers and oil and gas corporations are his element. This is where he feels confident, and neither the role of expert nor spokesman for the sector 'suits' him best. He doesn't have much time for climate issues. In fact, the real—social, environmental, economic, public-health, political—consequences of global warming do not interest him. He mentions the need for a New Green Deal, but we don't learn what we risk if we don't implement it.

The geopolitical rivals of the United States seem to play a similar role on the international plane to that played domestically by environmentalists. This is the most traditional of Yergin's proposed "new maps".

He doesn't have much to say about the impact of global warming on geopolitics either. He focuses on the future of energy in the new environment, but it's hard to shake the feeling that Yergin's plan boils down to "everything has to change to stay the same". How else to explain the claim, delivered in earnest, that the oil and gas sector has to be the engine of the green transition? Or the focus on the promise of new technologies like Tesla's electric cars or the expansion of gig economy business models represented by ride-hailing apps like Uber or Lyft? Yergin presents a belief, typical for many representatives of the business and political class, in the power of technology to solve the climate issue and allow us to get richer. He shares this belief with Bill Gates, for example, but in both cases it seems to be a red herring.

...or Maybe Get Out of it?

After all, both men can't think of any social solution to the climate issue. Meanwhile, all indications are that in this area the technological transformation will only be an addition to the transformation of society. Incidentally, the latter seems literally within reach.

To see that, it is enough to compare the USA and the EU countries. It turns out that energy consumption in the US per capita is twice as high as in Europe (300 megajoules per year against 150 megajoules). And we are talking about two advanced and closely related capitalist economies!

The conclusion is that the energy Europeanization of the United States would have a much better effect than the visions of flying cars on the application. Less emissions from now on is quite possible, and certainly in the USA. Why play—as Bill Gates did—with geo-engineering utopias or complicated technologies of CO_2 sequestration resembling the ideas from *Don't Look Up* when we have ready and tested solutions under our feet? Such as good public transport and rail transport? Of course, their implementation and widespread use will have significant costs, but these costs will be political.

Transformation of the economic model, based on mass individual consumption, into one that is more based on collective consumption and replaces private services with public ones (while changing the form of their financing to one based on contributions) seemed unlikely until recently. We have become too accustomed to leasing SUV-s, TV sets on hire purchase, cheap flights and buying new shoes six times a year. In addition, everything common, collective and public smacks of socialism. At a time when the conventional wisdom was that it was easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, mentioning the public sector must have evoked a smile of pity from serious commentators.

After all, we can already see that different social models and consumption cultures have different ecological burdens.

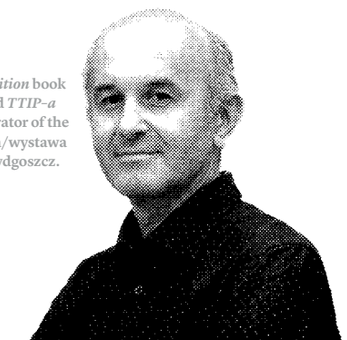
Change is surely not only necessary, but also possible. After all, there is powerful potential for reducing emissions and energy costs in Europe itself, as, for example, the current boom in oil and gas markets is due not only to Russian aggression in Ukraine, but also (and above all) to the consequences of the pandemic crisis and the EU's ill-advised energy deregulation, which has put supply and prices at the mercy of the whims of stock market investors (otherwise much appreciated by Yergin). However, if the EU treated its territory not as a minefield for profits of large corporations, but implemented a coherent energy policy in an economic system encompassing 450 million people, it would gain not only access to cheaper and more rational energy, but also an appropriate weight in negotiations with suppliers. Because those will have to be conducted in the coming decades anyway.

Today, two years after governments and the EU shut down the capitalist economy at the dawn of the pandemic with a single snap (only to turn it back on again a few weeks later), we know that one economic model or another is a product of political will and economic interests.

How (Not) to Eat Apples

Yergin is right when he argues that the global economy is unlikely to be freed from fossil energy any time soon. The green transition will not fall from the sky. It has to take time and cost money. He is wrong, however, when he concludes that green energy should be treated as just another segment of the market energy mix and its share should be gradually increased (with the support of governments and market demand), while at the same time ensuring a decent increase in profits for shareholders of 'green' companies (e.g. Elon Musk). It would be much more sensible today to consistently use fossil energy for a radical energy transformation. As it happens, we have reached the point where energy production itself has become too energy intensive. And if we seriously want to reduce the Energy Growth Rate from Energy Investment (EROEI), then public imagination is probably much more necessary than painting capitalism green, as proposed by Yergin and many of his ilk, who would like to eat the apple and keep it.

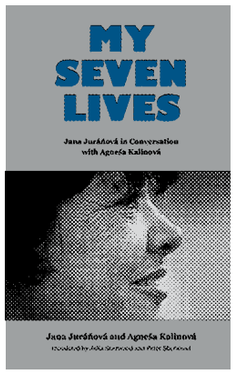
PRZEMYSŁAW WIELGOSZ
is editor-in-chief of *The Library of Le Monde Diplomatique—Polish edition* book series. Author, co-author and editor of several books, recently issued *TTIP–a Transatlantic Trap* (2015) and *The Dictatorship of Debt* (2016). Co-curator of the exhibition *Refugees. Present—¿Absent* presented in gallery księgarnia/wystawa in Krakow, he cooperates with the Polish Theatre (Teatr Polski) in Bydgoszcz.



ASPEN.REVIEW
BENJAMIN
CUNNINGHAM

CZECHOSLOVAKIA
BOOK REVIEW
COMMUNISM

History in Color



My Seven Lives: Jana Juráňová in Conversation with Agneša Kalinová
Translated by Julia Sherwood and Peter Sherwood
Purdue University Press, 406 pp

Nearly 100 years after her birth, Agneša Kalinová's story serves as a bridge to an entirely transformed Central Europe. The book is divided into seven sections, each corresponding with the journalist's so-called 'lives' and her memories bring color to what might otherwise appear as black and white images. In a conversation guided by Juráňová, and translated for English speakers by the Sherwoods, Agneša's personal account of events helps tell the story of twentieth century Central Europe—states Benjamin Cunningham in a review of My Seven Lives.

Plenty of books pretend history is some kind of Hollywood film. There are good guys, bad guys—and, yes, they are usually guys—action sequences and sudden plot twists. You have heard the stories. Winston Churchill does battle with Adolf Hitler as the rest of the world watches. An intransigent Nikita Khrushchev bangs his shoe on a desk at the United Nations. A few years later, Ronald Reagan gives a speech and the Berlin Wall magically crumbles.

So-called Titoists, Trotskyites, and bourgeois nationalists were the first to go. As of the spring 1951, the Soviets directed Prague to root out supposed Zionists—a code word for Jews.

Caricatures of famous figures shape our views of historical events, but they don't do much to explain what it was like to live through them. We can learn something about the Velvet Revolution from the likes of Václav Havel, but what ever happened to that greengrocer he once eloquently wrote about in "The Power of the Powerless"?

The not quite world famous, but far from average, Slovak journalist and critic Agneša Kalinová falls somewhere in the middle. Though she may not be among the most consequential people in the history of Czechoslovakia, if the book-length interview "My Seven Lives" is any indication, she could be among the more interesting. Newly translated into English by Julia and Peter Sherwood, the text unfolds as a conversation between the publisher Jana Juráňová and the journalist Agneša Kalinová. Adding to the intrigue is that Julia Sherwood, or Julka as she is called throughout the text, is Agneša's daughter.

The language is smooth enough to make it feel like the entire talk had actually occurred in English. The book is divided into seven sections, each corresponding with Agneša's so-called 'lives': early childhood in the First Czechoslovak Republic, World War II and the Holocaust, the postwar Stalinist consolidation of power, the Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact invasion, Normalization, a 12 year period in exile and, finally, the rebirth of a democratic Czechoslovakia and the formation of an independent Slovak Republic.

Born in 1924, to a Jewish family in Prešov, Agneša's story is doubly unusual for English language readers. Not only does it recount life in Slovakia during a period where Czech narratives predominate, but Kalinová's early roots in especially overlooked Eastern Slovakia. In Agneša's telling, pre-war Prešov was populated by cultured bookstores, movie theaters and

frequent visits from touring orchestras and theater companies. Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks, as well as orthodox and reformed Jews, mingled with one another. "This colorful mix of people coexisted in the city in peace and, at least, apparent harmony," she recalled.

As war approached, Agneša was forced to flee her hometown and shelter in a Budapest convent, where she managed to survive the Holocaust before returning to Slovakia. Contrary to the prevailing narrative, anti-semitism did not necessarily retreat with the Nazis, and in one illustrative anecdote Agneša recalls beginning work at the weekly newspaper Kultúrny život when the the infamous Slánský trial of 1952 began.

Through it all, Agneša continued to write, with a renewed focus on film. As she traveled to attend film festivals, she met journalists from abroad—developing a cosmopolitan sensibility that might have otherwise been difficult in Bratislava.

As Soviet security advisors asserted more direct control over the Czechoslovak StB in the wake of the war, political purges accelerated.

So-called Titoists, Trotskyites, and bourgeois nationalists were the first to go. As of the spring 1951, the Soviets directed Prague to root out supposed Zionists—a code word for Jews.

Even Rudolf Slánský, the Communist Party's second-in-command, was not immune.

"Everyone knew Slánský was an atheist and that neither he nor his father had ever claimed to be Jewish, so all that talk of his 'Jewish origin' was obviously an explicit reference to his non-Aryan racial origin," Agneša recalled. "They might just as well have applied the tried-and-tested Nazi model of the Nuremberg laws, and said that he was of Jewish race, since all four of his grandparents had been Jewish."

A spate of similar arrests followed, and the resulting trials were broadcast on the radio between November 20 and 27, 1952. Eleven of the fourteen accused in the Slánský trial were Jewish. The indictment alone took three hours to read, with the defendants accused of being "Trotskyists-Titoists-Zionists, bourgeois nationalists and enemies of the Czech people," alleged to be working "in the service of American imperialists and under the leadership of Western intelligence services."

All fourteen were convicted. Three received life sentences. The rest were executed. In a surreal twist, the Communists argued that the Slánský episode showed their love for Jewish people. "Normally bankers, industrialists, and former kulaks don't get into our party," Czechoslovak President Klement Gottwald said. "But if they were of Jewish origin and Zionist orientation, little attention among us was paid to their class origins. This state of affairs arose from our repulsion of anti-Semitism and our respect for the suffering of the Jews."

Spring in Bratislava

Given the earlier years of anti-semitic insanity, Agneša does seem as if she were particularly shocked by the Slánský trial itself, but soon enough she learned the role that cultural critics like herself might be expected to play in this new system. "[W]riters, people in the arts and politics, scholars, and academics competed with each other in spewing out declarations that condemned the 'dangerous and perfidious traitors' Slánský, [Vladimír] Clementis, and others, and distanced themselves from them in righteous indignation," she remembered. "We in Kultúrny život also had to publish these—as we called them —'responses.'"

These were difficult days, and Agneša recalled muddling through. Coping, even surviving, was effort enough. "Never before and never after did we throw such splendid parties as in the years following the Slánský trial," she said. "We would fix some nice food, listen to music, and dance. We played records on the gramophone—new pop songs, older jazz tracks. There was nowhere to go out in those days, but we were young and wanted to have a good time. So we had these parties through the most horrible times."

Within days, Laco and Agneša fled to Austria in what became a dry run for a more permanent emigration. But Laco believed that Czechs and Slovaks might yet resist the occupiers—so he decided to go back.

By then, Agneša was married to another Slovak public intellectual, the writer Ján Ladislav Kalina (or Laco as she calls him throughout the book), and they had a daughter (the aforementioned Julka). Although it would take a number of years, it would gradually—and temporarily—get better in Czechoslovakia.

Through it all, Agneša continued to write, with a renewed focus on film. As she traveled to attend film festivals, she met journalists from abroad—developing a cosmopolitan sensibility that might have otherwise been difficult in Bratislava.

The family made their way to Munich. Agneša got a job working at Radio Free Europe. Laco signed a contract with a German publisher, for a second, more politically charged, edition of his joke book.

The changing leadership at Kultúrny život worked to "carve out a little more freedom of expression" and this paralleled liberalizing trends elsewhere in Czechoslovak society. In 1963, Kalinová interviewed Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Her work as a film critic took her to San Sebastian, Bologna, Milan, Venice and Greece. "Even today people sometimes still tell me that I was privileged because I was able to travel, but I really resented the fact that the ability to travel and poke my nose outside our backyard should be seen as an act of generosity," Agneša told Jana Juráňová. "I was permanently furious at the regime for making it difficult for me to travel."

Agneša was preparing to go to the Venice Film Festival when the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. As a half-million troops (Russians, Poles, East Germans, Hungarians, and Bulgarians, with Romania refusing to take part) started entering Czechoslovakia at 1:00 a.m. on August 21, the Czechoslovak government made a radio announcement. The invasion "took place without the knowledge of the government," but they urged people to "remain calm" and not to "resist the advancing armies, because the defense of the state borders is now impossible."

Agneša watched the invasion from Bratislava. "Down the embankment, just a stone's throw from our block, there were tanks rolling past," she recalled. The next day, Agneša walked the streets. "A tank stood on the corner by the Pravda publishing house, a soldier sat at the steering wheel unperturbed, looking at the people who shouted at him alternately in Russian and Slovak, asking what he wanted, what they came for."

Within days, Laco and Agneša fled to Austria in what became a dry run for a more permanent emigration. But Laco believed that Czechs and Slovaks might yet resist the occupiers—so he decided to go back.

Agneša considered staying in Austria with Julka, but ultimately returned to join her husband. "[D]eep down I've never stopped thinking that emigration would have been the right decision, that we should have gone through with it and left everything behind, despite the deep bonds that tied me to life in Slovakia, in Bratislava," she said.

Enough is Enough

In the period of *Normalizácia* that followed, Laco lost his job. Somebody broke into their apartment and the couple later found a listening device under their floorboards. When a neighbor tuned their radio, in hopes of listening to an Austrian radio broadcast, they inadvertently picked up a live feed of Agneša and Laco talking. "Deep holes had been dug in the concrete and in the hollow lay this Bakelite device about the size of a man's palm, and four long cables," Kalinová recalled. Rather than destroy the device, Agneša and Laco decided to keep it in place so as to avoid alerting the authorities. Thereafter they would speak with caution in their own home. And yet, that was not enough.

In February 1972, Laco and Agneša were arrested anyway. As international journalism organizations took up their cause, Kalinová was released in time for Easter, but Laco was left to linger in prison for a full year—damaging his health and, perhaps, contributing to his premature death a few years later. Laco's biggest transgression seems to have been publishing a book, "One Thousand and One Jokes." Never known for their sense of humor, the average apparatchik no doubt took offense to jokes like:

One man runs into a friend of his and says, 'I have known you for 10 years and I have been wondering about the same mystery for the full 10 years.'

'What's the mystery?' The second man asks.

'Who wears your shirts when they're clean?'

Still reluctant to leave their home country, the family muddled along for several more years. But when Julka was blocked from attending university, they decided it was finally time to go. "So one day I just said: I want to get the hell out of this place, I can't stand it here any longer," Agneša recalled. "I find it oppressive, all these slogans and propaganda everywhere, it's everywhere on the radio and television, I just can't take it anymore physically. It's beneath my dignity to stay here and be treated like this."

The family made their way to Munich. Agneša got a job working at Radio Free Europe. Laco signed a contract with a German publisher, for a second, more politically charged, edition of his joke book.

He began writing comedy sketches for Bavarian radio, but soon fell ill. “It wasn’t until much later that we learned that loss of taste was a typical symptom of liver disease,” Agneša recalled. “But his problem was even worse.” Laco had a tumor in his large intestine, and in 1981, he died.

Julka studied in Germany while Agneša’s role at Radio Free Europe grew—her “distinctive voice, instantly recognizable” as interviewer Juráňová puts it. The last of Agneša’s seven lives began in 1990 and ran to 2014, when she died just shy of 90 years old. Following the Velvet Revolution “every meeting” felt like “a joyful reunion,” Agneša said.

Nearly 100 years after her birth, Agneša Kalinová’s story serves as a bridge to an entirely transformed Central Europe. Born in the First Republic, Agneša met current Slovak MEP Michal Šimečka, when he was just a toddler. Her memories bring color to what might otherwise appear black and white images. As detailed as any primary documents, personal as any memoir, this book is far more than the sum of its parts. In a conversation guided by Juráňová, and translated for English speakers by the Sherwoods, Agneša’s personal account of events helps tell the story of twentieth century Central Europe. Stalin makes a cameo, but does not get any more attention than he deserves.

After the Velvet Revolution, Agneša made her first trip back to Bratislava in January 1990. Traveling from Munich via Vienna by car, she drove the final stretch on her own. After dropping a colleague off in the Austrian capital, she was left alone with her thoughts. “I was so worked up I couldn’t contain myself in the car,” Agneša recalled. “I was glad that I haven’t driven alone because having a passenger forced me to pretend that I was cool about it.”

Still tense, Agneša arrived to her hotel, presented her passport to check-in, and the receptionist said: “Welcome, Mrs. Kalinová, how is Julka?”

BENJAMIN CUNNINGHAM
writes for *The Economist*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and *The American Interest*. He is an opinion columnist for the Slovak daily *Sme* and a PhD candidate at the University of Barcelona.

ASPEN
Review
Central Europe Reloaded

Annual No.
2022

ASPEN.REVIEW
PARTNERS

Dušan Šenkypl

Jan Barta

David Holý

Uršula Králová