No. 2021

ASPEN Review

ASPEN.REVIEW
CENTRAL EUROPE

9 771805 679005

The World Has Failed: It's Up to All of Us to Fix It

The Generation of Great Hope

About Aspen

Aspen Review Central Europe quarterly presents current issues to the public in the Aspenian way by adopting unusual approaches and unique viewpoints, by publishing analyses, interviews and commentaries by world-renowned professionals as well as Central European journalists and scholars. The Aspen Review is published by the Aspen Institute CE.

Aspen Institute Central Europe is a partner of the global Aspen network and serves as an independent platform where political, business, and non-profit leaders, as well as personalities from art, media, sports and science, can interact. The Institute facilitates interdisciplinary, regional cooperation, and supports young leaders in their development.

The core of the Institute's activities focuses on leadership seminars, expert meetings, and public conferences, all of which are held in a neutral manner to encourage open debate in three areas:

— ***Leadership Program*** offers educational and networking projects for outstanding young Central European professionals. *Aspen Young Leaders Program* brings together emerging and experienced leaders for four days of workshops, debates, and networking activities.

— ***Policy Program*** enables expert discussions that support strategic thinking and an interdisciplinary approach in topics such as digital agenda, cities' development and creative placemaking, art & business, education, as well as transatlantic and Visegrad cooperation.

— ***Public Program*** aspires to present challenging ideas at public events, such as the Aspen Annual Conference that convenes high-profile guests from all over the world to discuss current affairs, and via Aspen Review Central Europe.

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
CENTRAL EUROPE

ASPEN Review

The Generation of Great Hope

No. 2021

ASPEN.REVIEW
CONTENTS

Dear Readers,

On the occasion of our Aspen Annual Conference, it is my greatest pleasure to introduce you to the first and only printed version of the Aspen Review in 2021. Despite transitioning to an online form of publishing, we have decided to bring you a selection of our most exciting and insightful articles reacting to the socio-political events that have moved the world. You can still enjoy a brand-new article on our website on a weekly basis and dive into the political, societal, or cultural insights which our authors provide.

Are we seeing a new generation in Central European politics? Martin Ehl shares his insights as we witness the creation of *The Generation of Great Hope and* reflects on what the best of Central Europe's emerging top politicians have in common. A great example is Zuzana Čaputová, the current President of the Slovak Republic, who brings fresh air, positive values and principles into politics. And who is responsible for the unprecedented struggles brought to us by the pandemic and climate change? We've known that pandemics are possible. We've known that climate change is threatening all of us and that there are ecosystems on the verge of destruction. There's enough blame to go around, says leading futurist Jamie Metzl in an interview with Jakub Dymek.

Brendan Simms, Professor at the University of Cambridge, wonders in his comprehensive article, whether Europe will miss Angela Merkel or not. "We don't yet know whether Merkel will go down in history as the woman who destroyed Europe or saved it", said Hans Kundnani in 2018. The critics are becoming louder and the supporters increasingly falling silent.

Aspen Institute CE is looking forward to remaining committed to opening important topics and bringing positive change to our society. We are proud to be helping with searching for solutions and encouraging dialogue, especially in these challenging times. We will continue with our mission, not only in the form of Aspen Review articles, but also with our wide range of additional programs and efforts.

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

I wish you health, positive energy, respect and courage.

MILAN VAŠINA
Executive Director Aspen Institute CE

Where the Czechs Came From

Czechia (Bohemia) is a small country, but it was not always so. When, after the defeat of the Protestants at the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620, Jan Ámos Komenský took refuge in Leszno in Greater Poland, it was situated all of ten kilometers from the then Czech border. At that time, Silesia, together with Wrocław, belonged to the crown lands of St Wenceslas. The famous pedagogue hoped to return to his homeland soon, but Emperor Ferdinand II Habsburg banished the Protestants forever and distributed their property among foreign mercenaries. Prague became a German city for almost 300 years.

Czech authors of nineteenth century historical novels presented the Habsburg era as a Catholic 'dark age', an era of lethargy which one must shake off. But how to do it? The Czechs were indeed a historical nation, they once had their own kings and state, just like the Poles or the Hungarians, but all that was a distant past. After White Mounta, they became a nation of peasants—they could not count on a cosmopolitan nobility, nor on the Church hierarchy connected to Vienna, nor even on the domestic bourgeoisie, because up until the second half of the nineteenth century they had none. In addition, one third of the Czech population was German, who dominated virtually all the cities, including Prague. So how did the Czechs manage to remain Czechs?

They did not start futile uprisings, that is for sure. And they were quite fortunate. The Habsburgs emancipated the peasants as early as the end of the eighteenth century, and after losing the richest provinces of the empire, Silesia and Lombardy, they made Bohemia, with its ancient traditions of crafts and mining, the industrial base of the monarchy. In 1795, compulsory schooling meant that many of the rural population could read and write,

which did much to further the national cause. In the cities, they were awaited by "wake-up callers", social and national activists, mostly of plebeian origin, who helped them unite around their mother tongue and shared traditions. In the favorable atmosphere of Austrian political culture of the second half of the nineteenth century, the Czechs created the most egalitarian nation in Central Europe. And in 1918, they seized the opportunity, awarded them by history, and won their own state—the only democratic state in the region in the entire inter-war period.

The fascinating history of the Czechs, from the dawn of time right up to the present day, has recently been brought closer to Polish readers by Petr Jokeš, a long-time professor at Wrocław and Jagiellonian Universities, and educator of a whole galaxy of female translators to whom we owe many translations of the latest Czech literature. In his book *The Czechs: A Guide to the History of the Nation and the State*, the author focuses, as in every good historical synthesis, on the issues that proved to be crucial from the point of view of contemporary times. He devotes much attention to the formation of the Medieval Czech state and its special relations with the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (and Germany in general); and Hussitism with its role in the creation of the modern Czech national identity. More than a third of the book deals with the twentieth century, i.e. the time of the Czechoslovak state. All this is told in a competent and accessible manner. The author does not shrink from anecdotes and has an excellent understanding of the expectations of foreign readers. Profiles of the most important figures, boxes on key events, maps and illustrations are also very helpful.

It would be great if this book was also published in English.

ALEKSANDER KACZOROWSKI
Editor in Chief Aspen Review Central Europe

ASPEN.REVIEW
MARTIN EHL

POLITICS
DEMOCRACY
POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Generation of Great Hope

What the Best of Central Europe's Emerging Top Politicians Have in Common

That evening in mid-March 2019 the Old Market Place Hall in Bratislava was filled with joy and expectation. The campaign team of the presidential candidate Zuzana Čaputová picked this venue to celebrate an election victory that had seemed almost inconceivable a few weeks earlier. At 45, Čaputová blazed across the European political sky like a comet, a harbinger of hope that liberal politics in Central Europe was not a completely lost cause.

"What is unique about Zuzana Čaputová is that she brings a fresh air into politics, because she has a knack for communicating values and principles authentically and to appeal to people in a way that is quite unusual." These were the words of Michal Šimečka, vice-chairman of Progressive Slovakia, the party that had put Čaputová forward as its candidate in the presidential election. Just a few weeks later, Šimečka himself, at the top of the liberal list, won a seat in the European Parliament. Nevertheless, only a year later his party failed to win a single seat in Slovakia's parliament, the National

Council. It seemed as if every hope of the Slovak liberals, as well as of a large section of younger voters, had been absorbed by the new President who instantly became a darling of Europe's media. Apart from everything else, this was also because it followed a surge of populism and nationalism and European liberals were looking for new models and a new style of politics. Čaputová seemed to have found a successful recipe for bringing politics back to life.

Four Mayors as Heralds of a Generational Change

She is not alone. The new faces that have emerged and continue to emerge up and down Central Europe herald a generational change after thirty years during which politics in many countries was dominated by a generation associated with the restoration and the building of democracy and capitalism in the aftermath of the collapse of the socialist bloc.

Aged between forty and fifty, these people had the benefit of growing up and studying in countries that were no longer separated from the world by the Iron Curtain and the Internet has been an integral part of their life.

Aged between forty and fifty, these people had the benefit of growing up and studying in countries that were no longer separated from the world by the Iron Curtain or the Berlin Wall, and the Internet has been an integral part of their life, work and politics. They see the rest of Europe as a more natural benchmark than their local, often stale, elites. As a matter of course, they ignore borders and find their role models and partners for cooperation in neighboring countries. The mayors of the four capitals of the Visegrad 4 countries, the generational peers Zdeněk Hřib, Gergely Karácsony, Rafał Trzaskowski and Matúš Vallo, are a good example. Each of them represents, in his own way, a new breed of young politicians in their country, even if their local situations and standing vary considerably.

The cooperation between the four mayors has been, at one level, purely pragmatic. They all needed allies, channels of communication and, first and foremost, money, since they were, or still are, at loggerheads with their national governments. At the same time, they managed to demonstrate that politics, including local politics, could be viewed through optics other than just that of their own, stagnant playground. It is no accident that two of the foursome, Karácsony and Trzaskowski, have come to embody the hopes of

the opposition camps in their respective countries, Hungary and Poland, and the prospect of a defeat of the ruling nationalists and populists. In last year's presidential election, Trzaskowski proved to be a match for the incumbent, Andrzej Duda, who enjoyed his government's support. Having lost the election, he started to build his own power base, realizing that his mother party, the Civic Platform, proved incapable of emerging out of the cul-de-sac of total opposition where it had been driven. "As someone on the left wing of the [Civic] Platform, Trzaskowski speaks up for sexual minorities, promotes public transport and cycling and champions accessible, cheap rental accommodation," the think tank Polityka Insight stated in mid-May, describing how the Mayor of Warsaw had grown his own political camp while remaining a member of Civic Platform. In October 2020, he launched a new movement, Joint Poland, an initiative aimed at attracting young people to politics and to the person of Trzaskowski himself.

Modern Political Campaigns and Centrist Positions

In terms of young and promising politicians, Trzaskowski has a rival, however, in the shape of Szymon Hołownia, who came third in last year's presidential election. In a poll conducted in spring 2021, the new political party, Poland 2050, founded by this former popular TV reporter and writer, defeated all the traditional opposition parties. Hołownia cannot be easily dismissed as yet another potential populist. He has painstakingly built his movement with the help of thousands of activists and many young Poles who, tired of traditional parties, see in him a hope for real change. Hołownia has proved himself adept at running a modern political campaign on the Internet. Building on his TV experience, he has kept regular and lively contact with his supporters via Facebook and, especially in the movement's early days, made considerable use of crowdfunding.

Crowdfunding provides them with money and a relatively loyal electorate. Under the watchful eye of their donors, the funds raised in this way are spent very effectively.

Gergely Karácsony is the most likely candidate for a united Hungarian opposition in the general election scheduled for spring 2022, in which the opposition stands the first real chance in twelve years of unseating Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party. In April, he announced his intention to stand in

the primaries: "We have to offer something better and more inclusive than what Viktor Orbán and his government have to offer," Karácsony stated last year in an interview with *Hospodářské noviny*. Like Trzaskowski, he raises issues that might situate him more at the left or green end of the spectrum, if standard political divisions still applied. In Western Europe, however, this type of orientation has been increasingly common among centrists who place an emphasis on a sustainable economy, accessible housing and environmentally friendly transport. A political scientist by training, Karácsony entered politics as a part of the green liberal movement Politics Can Be Different, and later helped found a similar new party, Dialogue for Hungary. If he stands against Orbán, his main disadvantage would be the fact that he is seen as representing the Budapest elites, which makes him less attractive to voters in the countryside, who tend to favor Orbán.

Like Landbergis, Kurz is also one of the few members of this new generation who favors more conservative ideas and approach to politics, while most other younger politicians are more left-wing and greener.

In the Czech Republic, people pin similar hopes on a new generation and style of politics, represented by the Czech Pirate Party. Back in 2005, if the Social Democrat Jiří Paroubek, who was Prime Minister at the time, had not dispatched police in riot gear to break up the techno music festival CzechTek, the present-day coalition of Pirates and another movement, STAN, would now not be a favourite to win this year's general election, and Ivan Bartoš would not be a serious candidate for the post of Prime Minister. "I went into politics because Mr. Paroubek attacked me with a water cannon and tear gas at CzechTech," said Bartoš, explaining his original motivation for entering politics in a 2019 interview with the portal *Aktualne.cz*.

This was when he realized that in order to effect any change, he has to have a share of power. He says that he does not wish to practice a politics of the past but rather of the present and, indeed, the future. "I want to pursue the kind of politics that will have an impact on the Czech Republic in twenty years' time," said Bartoš in an interview.

Incidentally, the Czech Pirates and Szymon Hołownia's Poland 2050 share a key strategy that enables them to approach politics differently from their colleagues, who are a generation older: making use of the Internet,

including for fundraising purposes, forms an inseparable part of their campaigns. The entry of both these parties into mainstream politics has been significantly boosted by the support of young voters who are thoroughly at home online, and both parties have harnessed it in campaigning as well as fundraising for their political projects. Crowdfunding provides them with money and a relatively loyal electorate. Under the watchful eye of their donors, the funds raised in this way are spent very effectively—even if the sums fall short of the state contributions which political parties in Central Europe traditionally depend on.

A Broader Outlook and a Better Education

The new Estonian PM Kaja Kallas and Lithuania's new Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis represent another type of young politician. What they have in common is the successful political career of their parents or, in Landsbergis's case, grandparents. Kallas has had to fend off critics labeling her the favored child of Siim Kallas, who in 1994 founded the Reform Party, which appointed Kaja Kallas Estonia's first woman Prime Minister earlier this year.

Landsbergis's grandfather Vytautas Landsbergis, on the other hand, is regarded as the father of Lithuania's regained independence. Having founded the opposition movement Sajudis in 1988 and serving as Speaker of the country's parliament from 1990 to 1992, he succeeded in removing his country from the Soviet Union and restoring its independence.

Both Kallas and Landsbergis must thus make great efforts to carve out an identity separate from their parents, especially in the eyes of the voters and political pundits. Although they continue a family tradition, that turns out to be more of a burden. Yet being compared to their ancestors may also make them more eager to prove their mettle as politicians in their own right.

The Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz is also undoubtedly part of this new generation of politicians. He has shown that he is adept at balancing on the edge of populism, adjusting to the moment and centralizing his government's political communications, which are focused primarily on him personally. However, unlike the politicians discussed earlier, at the tender age of 34 he is already a seasoned warhorse. In 2015, while serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs, he had to deal with an influx of refugees, one of the most serious political crises Europe faced after 1989. In May 2021, Kurz,

who burnishes his good image, had clocked up his first scandal, facing accusations of perjury in the Ibiza affair, named after the location of a secretly filmed video that implicated Kurz's former coalition partner, the Freedom Party chairman Heinz-Christian Strache, in an attempt at bribery.

Like Landbergis, Kurz is also one of the few members of this new generation who favors more conservative ideas and approach to politics, while most other younger politicians are more left-wing and greener, even if the classic categorization into left and right is becoming increasingly anachronistic.

This will become apparent later this year in Germany, where the Green Party is expected to score a resounding success, if not outright victory. Their candidate for the post of Chancellor, the keen sportswoman Annalena Baerbock, has only recently turned forty.

Nevertheless, if we were to sum up what this generation has in common—apart from their age and the fact that they have lived most of their lives post–1989—what distinguishes them is a broader outlook and better education than that enjoyed by their predecessors, thanks in the main to globalization. In the case of the postcommunist countries, we are dealing with a generation of politicians who are no longer embroiled in the transformation of property relations and are not lumbered with the legacy of dubious privatizations of recent years. Their political and professional career has taught them how to take on the generation of politicians who entered the political stage following the changes of thirty years ago and who have deluded themselves that they would stay there forever. Their younger challengers are very creative in campaigning and savvy in their use of social media and crowdfunding.

The EU As a Natural Playing Field

Another thing most of them have in common is that they target a younger electorate—millennials and Generation—which has a very different sense about the threat of climate change and the transformation of the financial world following the crisis of 2008 and 2009. Western trends such as the greening of industry, and thus also of politics, have started to seep into Central Europe, albeit later than many may have hoped. And the socialist legacy makes it more difficult to advocate for a return to a greater role of the state in the economy, which the financial crisis imposed. Younger voters are more concerned about the future than the middle and older generations.

This generational shift in Central Europe may have a fundamental impact on European politics as a whole. The western half of the European Union still looks down their nose at its Eastern,—newer and poorer—members, who do not show the same, or at least a similar, degree of understanding for issues that will be crucial in the future, such as the transformation of the energy sector. The advent of a new generation of politicians could change all that.

The western half of the European Union still looks down their nose at its Eastern members, who do not show the same, or at least a similar understanding. The advent of a new generation of politicians could change all that.

This new generation of politicians in Central Europe takes it for granted that the EU is their playing field, regarding it as an instrument for the achievement of prosperity rather than a foe that only imposes regulation and restrictions. That does not mean that there is a shortage of young nationalists in Central Europe who define themselves in anti-EU terms. One look at Poland or Slovakia will rid one of any such misapprehension.

The financial crisis has sparked off a rethink of capitalism and of the role of the state within it. The migration crisis has exposed the strengths and weaknesses of Europe's multiculturalism. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has revealed the full extent of geopolitical uncertainties. And, last but not least, the pandemic has revealed the weaknesses of the welfare state and the healthcare system. All this adds up to the most fundamental political challenge since 1989, which calls for a radically fresh perspective if liberal politics are to survive in Central Europe. The new generation of political leaders faces unprecedented tasks—but then again, no previous generation has been as well prepared for the challenges of its time as they are.

MARTIN EHL
has been working for different Czech print and online media since 1992. Currently he is the chief analyst with the daily *Hospodářské noviny*.

ASPEN.REVIEW
ŁUKASZ GRZESICZAK

POLAND
ORBÁN
SLOVAKIA

Michal Hvorecký: The Change Proved To Be an Illusion

President Čaputová has become a lonely liberal island in the middle of a conservative revolution. It soon turned out that this 'regime change' was hardly any change at all—argues the Slovak writer Michal Hvorecký.

ŁUKASZ GRZESICZAK: Zuzana Čaputová has been the Slovak President for a year and a half. How do you think she changed Slovakia and Slovak politics?

MICHAL HVORECKÝ: President Čaputová is a unique figure not only in Slovak politics, but in the entire region. She stands out through being liberal, green, open-minded, calm and deeply grounded in European values. This has made her very popular in the Czech Republic, for example, where people are joking that their country should be annexed by Slovakia. It is admirable how quickly and professionally she took over her office. She can present herself well, also in the international arena, and she is extremely hardworking. She often mingles with the people, even now at the time of the coronavirus, which, against the background of the chaos introduced by the government, is very reassuring.

I think, however, that her political influence in Slovakia is relatively small. People like her a lot and have great confidence in her, but in my opinion, this is also to some extent due to the fact that she does not have to make particularly important and difficult decisions.

Perhaps this will change with the conflict between the President and the Prime Minister?

Prime Minister Igor Matovič has made her, which may come as a surprise, the main target of his attacks. The government is currently not coping well with the coronavirus, while the President's popularity is growing, so Matovič is criticising her in response. This strategy has, however, strongly backfired against him. The question is how this conflict will develop.

It is also interesting to see what direction the grouping from which the President's party, Progressive Slovakia, originated, will go. They suffered a terrible defeat in the last parliamentary elections, missing the threshold by 926 votes and now have no deputies in parliament. Now their support is at around 5 or 6%, so if they manage to avoid serious mistakes, they may enter parliament in the next elections.

Her greatest success is perhaps the way she communicates with people, in a way never seen in Slovakia before. This can be seen especially in comparison with the current Prime Minister.

The President is not really seen, however, as a representative of that liberal party of Progressives. Many people wonder what will happen if she does not stand for another term, but I think that the people who voted for her in the presidential elections would be unlikely to vote for her in the parliamentary elections.

Why?

Because they do not associate her with any party. It was similar with President Andrej Kiska—he was very popular as a president, but when he founded his own party, he barely managed to enter parliament. Now his party is not doing very well either.

In Slovakia, the president has some independent authority.

You speak of the president's insignificant political influence. Does this mean that Čaputová is not successful as a politician?

No, I would not say that. Her greatest success is perhaps the way she communicates with people, in a way never seen in Slovakia before. This can be seen especially in comparison with the current Prime Minister. She assembled a professional team, she expresses her views with calm and prudence, and that is what people need now. Prime Minister Matovič is an extremely bad leader in this respect—he is happy to attack and criticise people. In contrast, Čaputová gives an impression that she is beyond all that, she does not build her career on attacks, but on calm.

She is also very successful, above all, in the area of justice. Her nominee, Mária Kolíková, is the best minister in the new government. When she took office, she

was well prepared, she already had a reform proposal. Huge steps forward have been taken in the justice system. This is a sensitive point for Slovak citizens, because after the Kuciak case, people had the feeling that Slovakia was no longer a state under the rule of law. Now for the first time since the Velvet Revolution, public life is being cleansed of corruption. And as a lawyer, the President is actively following and commenting on this reform.
Small gestures are also important, for example, her support for culture, like she is doing during the pandemic through buying books in small bookshops or going to small theatres and thanking the actors. These are small but very strong gestures that people appreciate.

Is there anything for which she could be criticized?

I think that foreign policy could possibly be her weak point. It lacks a deeper view of the relations and connections. But these are trifles, overall, we have a very positive view of her presidency as a whole.

With Čaputová's victory, many people saw the declaration of pro-European and pro-democratic changes in Slovakia. Meanwhile, today's Prime Minister is a populist, the far-right-leader Marian Kotleba's people have 8% support, Progressive Slovakia—as you have already mentioned—is not in parliament, and recently you narrowly avoided a new tightening of the abortion law. What has happened?

As I have already mentioned, people did not see Čaputová as a party representative or as some political wing, but rather as an independent personality—a lawyer, an attorney, a fighter, a human rights and environmental activist.

Now for the first time since the Velvet Revolution, public life is being cleansed of corruption. And as a lawyer, the President is actively following and commenting on this reform.

Igor Matovič's victory, on the other hand, was built on a very efficient campaign, in which he responded to the need for change in Slovakia. After twelve years of Robert Fico's rule, Matovič cried out: vote for me, I am the change. People were delighted with him, they trusted his choices as far as his team was concerned, and suddenly it turned out that they voted for Christian fundamentalists or inexperienced evangelizers. The change proved to be an illusion.
President Čaputová has become a lonely liberal island in the middle of a conservative revolution. It soon turned out that this 'regime change' was hardly any change at all, that Boris Kollár [President of the National Council of the Slovak Republic] was perhaps even much worse than Robert Fico—that he was a corrupt and arrogant mobster. Igor Matovič was

an excellent leader of the opposition, but as a representative of the executive power, he does not pass muster at all. Contrary to what he announced, he has completely failed to unite the country towards reforms. At the moment, therefore, the government is a failure. Support for OĽaNO [Matovič's party] is moving towards a historical minimum, their star will soon go out, but members of the former SMER, that is to say, Peter Pellegrini and his grouping, are gloating. In fact, the party does not have to do anything, and its popularity is growing. What I fear most is that after all this people in Slovakia will lose faith in change. Because the current change is a change that nobody wants.

In Slovakia the presidential election was won by a woman, in Moldova as well. In Belarus we are witnessing a women's revolution, and in Poland women have also taken to the streets. Does this mean that women's time is coming?

Clearly, something is happening. I think Europe is tired of male leaders along the lines of an egocentric macho—someone like Vladimír Mečiar and then Fico in Slovakia. People have had enough of that. Boris Kollár in Slovakia is of the same ilk. Recently it turned out that two nurses who opposed harassment in a hospital lost their jobs because of him. Public opinion is outraged and fully supports the nurses. One of them worked there for 35 years, she was known and liked, and he had her thrown out just because she did not want to follow his instructions. Kollár is known for having eleven children with ten women—the macho type, an old man who rejects all kinds of feminisms.

People did not see Čaputová as a party representative or as some political wing, but rather as an independent personality—a lawyer, an attorney, a fighter, a human rights and environmental activist.

And while not so long ago he got away with all this and even had a lot of support among young women, a generational change is now taking place and it is no longer like that. It is high time because what Kollár embodies is an absolutely unacceptable type of politics in the twenty-first century. People's views are changing—it turns out that most of them no longer have a problem with civil unions or abortion, it is politicians who have a problem with such things. In addition, young women today are very well organized, they are excellent campaigners, something is definitely changing. Although the participation of women in Slovak politics is still relatively small. We only have 32 female members of parliament out of 150.

Why?

They do not manage to get into parliament. Ironically, under Communism, there had

been quotas, which were abolished as a communist relic in 1989. It seemed obvious then that democracy would bring more women into politics. This did not happen, however, and today their participation in politics in Slovakia is growing very slowly. Nevertheless, it was only 29 female members in the last parliament...

Today, the word 'dziaders' is becoming increasingly popular in Poland. We usually use it to describe an older man who, in public debate, exploits his privileged position over young women. Do you have your 'dziadersi' in Slovakia?

Of course, but probably not to the same extent as in Poland, because the Polish media market is much larger than ours. I immediately thought of Eugen Korda, who works for the weekly magazine *Týždeň*. He is a journalist who has been popular for years. He wrote critically about Vladimír Mečiar, made films about him, and Mečiar even attacked him physically. At the same time, he is a typical representative of 'old school' guys in the style of an egocentric macho.

The public recently learned that he had a taste for disgusting remarks about women—about their legs, their buttocks. It turns out that he made vulgar sexual suggestions to women. This had not come to light for years until one of his victims revealed what happened to her. This triggered an avalanche of testimonies from other women who were victims of his similar sexist attacks, such as harassment and sexual allusions.

It was very interesting to follow the reaction of young and older journalists. The older ones defended Korda and argued that his actions were absolutely normal and that women were asking for it and enjoying themselves. Young female journalists were outraged.

What happened to the journalist?

The disclosure of those events had no effect on Eugen Korda's career, and he did not mend his ways in the slightest. When he is on the Prague metro, he photographs women's legs and continues to publish the photos on his Facebook profile.

I have the impression that Eugen Korda represents a generation that has not understood that the world has changed. I have personally argued with colleagues from his generation who could not understand that this is a problem. It is particularly evident in Slovakia that the older generation of journalists and columnists are unable to understand new current issues, and it is very often the latter that holds power in the media.

Something is happening. I think Europe is tired of male leaders along the lines of an egocentric macho—someone like Vladimír Mečiar and then Fico in Slovakia. People have had enough of that.

How do you look at Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński in Slovakia? Are you jealous of us for having politicians—will you allow me to use a cliché promoted by supporters of the Law and Justice party—who are the only ones able to look after the interests of their nation?

Paradoxically, one of Viktor Orbán's greatest successes is the fact that Slovak nationalists and neofascists love Hungary. They consider Orbán's Hungary as the model.

Paradoxically, one of Viktor Orbán's greatest successes is the fact that Slovak nationalists and neo-fascists love Hungary. They consider Orbán's Hungary as the model and declare that their parties will soon enjoy such support in Slovakia as Orbán in Hungary. Sometimes, however, they hear Orbán talking about Greater Hungary and are outraged that he supports the Hungarian national minority in southern Slovakia. Their love for the Hungarian Prime Minister is quite complicated.

Of course, Jarosław Kaczyński is highly regarded by this fundamentalist part of Slovak politics which looks on Poland with nostalgia.

Of course, Slovaks should look with concern at the actions of Orbán and Kaczyński, but in my opinion, the real danger comes from Russia.

In Slovakia we have a huge problem with the fact that the Russians are simply buying our politicians. An example of this is the former Speaker of Parliament Andrej Danko, who travelled to Moscow more often than to Prague, obtained his doctorate there, and lobbied for Russian interests in Brussels. The same applies to the current Speaker, Boris Kollár. This is where I see great dangers for Slovakia.

As far as Hungary and Poland are concerned, Zuzana Čaputová is firmly on the side of the rule of law in the context of Warsaw and Budapest, and Prime Minister Igor Matovič is holding Slovakia on a clearly pro-European course. It should be recalled, however, that Slovakia is a small country in the European Union that does not possess a strong enough voice to have a significant impact on the direction of European policy.

MICHAL HVORECKÝ

is a Slovak fiction writer. He is the author of books, which have been translated into twelve languages. He is a civil rights activist and regular contributor to culture and politics to various daily papers and magazines in Central Europe. He received his Master's Degree at the University in Nitra. He previously served as a fellow of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. His most recent book is *Tahiti*.

ASPEN.REVIEW
ANNA MAŚLANSKA
ŁUKASZ GRZESICZAK

INTERVIEW
LITERATURE
POLITICS

Radka Denemarková: The Madness of Central Europe

All my titles have sparked strong controversies, and only after sometime did I understand what was going on: I am not Czech enough—says the writer Radka Denemarková.

ANNA MAŚLANKA, LUKASZ GRZESICZAK:
You have always travelled a lot, taken advantage of writer's residencies and journeyed all over the world to literary events. How much has this changed in recent months?

RADKA DENEMARKOVÁ: Last year there were no major changes, I managed to make a few trips. At the beginning of the year I was in Taiwan, and from August to January in Switzerland, as part of the Spycher: Literaturpreis Leuk 2019 literary award, which I received for my "Contribution to the History of Joy". Now I am back in the Czech Republic. Of course, the limitations are troublesome, because travel always helps me see things from a different perspective. The position of a freelance author, who also earns a living from royalties for participating in various events, has certainly changed a lot. The pandemic has also shown that in the Czech Republic, as well as in our whole region, there is no systemic support for artists and culture. On the other hand, in my opinion it's no great change, because working as a freelancer is in fact a permanent crisis. The pandemic is just another crisis that we have to go through one way or another.

Poland has recently received reports of the dramatic epidemic situation in the Czech Republic. Is it really that bad and what do you think is the reason?
The Czech Republic is a model case of a country with problems that were visible before, but now, in the era of the pandemic, they can no longer be hidden. Because the

pandemic is a hard reality—a virus cannot be bribed, brainwashed with propaganda or threatened. And suddenly it has come to light that the government we have is completely indolent.

Our real problem is an incompetent government, headed by a Prime Minister who was a collaborator with the Communist security services and who, as a businessman, swindled millions from the EU.

So our real problem is an incompetent government, headed by a Prime Minister who was a collaborator with the Communist security services and who, as a businessman, swindled millions from the EU. Even his alleged ability as a good manager has not stood the test of reality—it is now evident that he is completely incapable of managing crisis situations. His propaganda is still up and running, however, due to the fact that he has bought part of the media in advance. Consequently, he always succeeds in pushing his own story.

When you are walking along the river and you see someone drowning—you save them. But we are in a situation where the whole nation is drowning. We have a government that believes the Prime Minister's every word—it's not a government but a cult, and Andrej Babiš is not a Prime Minister but a guru. So he stands on the shore with his government and pushes everyone else away so that they drown and only his companies make money. When someone climbs ashore through his own efforts, the Prime Minister takes a picture with him and claims that it was he who saved them.

In addition, Andrej Babiš and Miloš Zeman have completed what Václav Klaus started, they have isolated us from the civilised world. We lack solidarity, we don't even cooperate with the European Union, from which, to make matters worse, we have stolen a lot of money with the hands of our Prime Minister. We are no longer a partner for anyone, no one invites us anywhere—and where else could we go?

To Poland, for example.

Yes, and maybe to Hungary or Serbia. Or to Israel. All this is hard to explain to an outsider—I know, because I tried to tell a friend from Sweden about it. I think it is the same with Poland, it is just as difficult to explain to people from civilized, democratic countries—which of course have their own problems, but at least respect the principles of democracy—why the situation has gone so far in this direction. But, as Mr Hrabal wrote, "if you want to live in Central Europe you can't sober up".

What about the restrictions currently being imposed by the government?

They do not help at all. They are only destroying small businesses so that companies owned by the Prime Minister can make even more money. Those who are moving towards an authoritarian regime

are unfortunately also using the pandemic to achieve that. This is a dangerous situation, because imposing restrictions on the citizens' freedom has already exceeded all limits, we have a hard lockdown, and the number of new infections is not coming down at all. There are no vaccines. But it's always someone else's fault... So I'm afraid that this terrible current situation, where the government should just step down, will turn into another mendacious story.

And you can do things differently after all. I'm very glad that I was able to watch the fight against the pandemic with my own eyes in Taiwan, because otherwise I probably wouldn't have believed it. The government there has a group of reliable advisors, clear information is given every hour, and people believe in it and comply. In addition, the organization is great—at the very onset of the problems there were free masks, there were protective measures everywhere. Such a strategy gives people hope and belief that it will lead to something.

In the Czech Republic, politicians pretend to be saviours, but in fact they use what is happening for their own purposes. It's as if they didn't understand that the time for lying is over. The pandemic has shown that our government is incapable of handling any crisis. If World War III broke out, the government would be completely at a loss as to what to do.

From our perspective, it looks a bit like this: the Prime Minister blames Brussels for the epidemic, Czech politicians break the restrictions they introduce themselves, and you have had three different health ministers in the last twelve months.

It's true, the main problem in our country is that officials don't follow the rules—it's a mentality that we inherited from the previous regime. Babiš, for example, did not achieve anything on his own, he was simply lucky to be born into a family of high Communist officials who stole a lot of money. Such people always feel that they are better than others.

When you are walking along the river and you see someone drowning—you save them. But we are in a situation where the whole nation is drowning.

I call it the "Teplice syndrome"—from a story where one politician's birthday party was held in Teplice and the whole political cream of the crop was there. It all happened at a time when it was already forbidden to organize any collective events, to go to restaurants, nothing. The police inspected various premises in Teplice, but skipped this one. Since this aroused a wave of criticism, the police reacted by violently dispersing children who were sledding on Petřín hill. This is classic mafia behaviour—we can do anything, and those at the bottom can only try to bite us. This level of insolence and crudeness reminds me a bit of the times I grew up in. It's all back.

As for the health ministers—it's also a bit of a psychological issue. Babiš is a man who thinks only about himself, who thinks he knows everything, from health care to education to culture. Who would want to work with someone like that? Only people who are absolutely loyal. Their competence doesn't matter.

In the Czech Republic, politicians pretend to be saviors, but in fact they use what is happening for their own purposes. It's as if they didn't understand that the time for lying is over.

I'm following all this with some curiosity, because I'm stuck in the Czech Republic at the moment when the country has completely fallen apart. But it's also a great misfortune because people are dying; a drama that as a writer I couldn't even imagine. The question is where is it going—elections are coming up, but in the public space we don't have any strong voice, any moral authority like Václav Havel once was. Some say that Babiš no longer stands any chance in the next election, but I wouldn't be so sure.

We also hear that large anti-lockdown protests are taking place in the streets, with speeches by, among others, Václav Klaus, the former president you already mentioned.

This is a different group of lunatics. Our former president, who has connections with Russia, is the guru of all Eurosceptics. He is a man who, in my opinion, should be tried for treason. He has attended several congresses of the neo-fascist German AFD party. He did great harm to our country, for example, by introducing technocratic thinking and economic pragmatism, the dictates of money, after the era of Václav Havel. In addition, he is a narcissist who thinks he knows everything, but has no idea about anything—he is not concerned with the pandemic, but with becoming more visible. In my opinion, he is behaving like a psychopath.

There is also another important factor at play—all these conspiracy theories and nonsense on social media that people start believing in when the government fails and they are frustrated. It doesn't occur to them that this is just brainwashing, which is the work of Russian and Chinese propaganda. And Klaus takes advantage of this—he has years of experience, he knows how to use this information. So I have a feeling that he or his son—who also wants to enter politics—are behaving like people who work for Chinese or Russian money. Because why else would they be doing all this?

Is there anything that the pandemic has taught us?

I hope it will teach us the politics of the human community. If the World Health Organization had pointed out early on that this was a global problem—not something happening somewhere far away in Asia—we would have dealt with the pandemic faster.

And we will still need similar policies, for example in the context of climate change. Besides Taiwan, I like what the Prime Minister of New Zealand is doing. This is an example of a completely new policy, different from all those Babišes, Zemans, Trumps, Kaczyńskis and Orbáns. It is about a new political language, but also about compassion and consideration for others. It is heart-warming to look at her parliament, which includes many women, indigenous representatives, sexual minorities and all of them jointly solving the problems of today's world. The pandemic has shown us that politics can be done in various ways.

It also showed us that such a serious global problem cannot be solved by closing ourselves off in our own country. It cannot be the case that each country pursues its own policy and imposes its own restrictions. This happened in the European Union and it showed us how weak this institution is and that it cannot be built on economic pragmatism alone, without a common vision and values.

The question is where is it going—elections are coming up, but in the public space we don't have any strong voice, any moral authority like Václav Havel once was.

It will accomplish nothing if only rich countries vaccinate their populations, because the virus will continue to grow and mutate. For a pandemic to be defeated, everyone must be vaccinated. So cooperation is necessary and this is what the pandemic could teach us.

Would you say that the pandemic exposed some of our sins? And what would those sins be in the case of the Czech Republic?

Yes, it showed us that since 1989 we have been following the wrong path. The path of neoliberalism, economic pragmatism, a society of self-centred individuals. We lack values: solidarity, cooperation, thinking about others. We have to return to what democracy is about, to equal rights and a dignified life for all, and realize how important access to education, health care, and culture is.

In your books you also write about violence against women. I think this topic has gained a new dimension in the era of the lockdown?

I think, unfortunately, that it has gained an old dimension. Like so many other things. Old thinking has suddenly acquired a space to grow. Like, for example, in October in Poland—I thought I would faint when I heard about the changes in the abortion law. As if we wanted to chase women back to the sixteenth century and reduce their role to giving birth to little nationalists. Control is back, patriarchal patterns of thinking are back, also towards minorities like homosexuals.

The theme of domestic violence has indeed resonated more strongly, in Latin America, for example, it made women take to the streets. Because in an era when everyone is locked up and has all sorts of psychological problems, who does it affect the most? The women, of course, and the children. Mental problems themselves are also a serious issue, especially for children. They have a completely different perception of time than we do, for them every month is like a year, and they need stimulation, contact, group activities, talent development. The time of lockdown is lost for them. So we have a whole generation that will be frustrated. However, Switzerland, which is not a perfect country either, managed to solve this problem—despite lockdown, schools remained open. With many restrictions, of course, but it turned out to be feasible. So maybe the coronavirus has shown us what we are doing wrong and what we should focus on? Maybe there is a cycle coming to an end, after which things need to be different? Perhaps we were expecting some other disaster, but one like that has come.

In your opinion, are writers under any obligations?

I don't think there is such a thing as a writer's obligation—everyone does what they believe in and what they care about in their work. But I also think a writer's talent imposes a duty not to remain silent about the times we live in and about things that affect us all.

In the age of a pandemic, however, I do see a certain obligation—or at least something I require of myself. It sounds trivial, but it turns out to be difficult: not to lie. Because literature today is the only space where we can show everything from a different perspective. We have independent media and the Internet, but it's becoming more and more confusing there.

The pandemic has shown us that politics can be done in various ways. It also showed us that such a serious global problem cannot be solved by closing ourselves off in our own country.

That's why I value the work of Karel Čapek. He is an example of a writer who sensed the danger hanging in the air. Some authors, for example in totalitarian regimes, paid for writing the truth with their lives. But there are also positive examples. After all, the abolition of slavery was largely due to literature. I'm thinking first of all about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was the first book that showed the reality completely differently. The second such writer who showed things from a different perspective was Toni Morrison. This year I was a member of the chapter awarding the Slovak Anasoft Litera prize. There was a book on the list that ultimately didn't get nominated, but it was ardently defended by another member of the jury. It is a well-written text, but the protagonist takes the side of racism and totalitarian thinking, while being smart enough not to say it

outright. A fellow chapter member argued that it didn't matter after all, that Céline had also been an anti-Semite. But Céline was aware that he was an anti-Semite; he said that the worst person he knew was himself. It's not a matter of not using the characters of anti-Semites, fascists, Ku-Klux-Klan members in a novel, but it's about something more dangerous—wrapping it up in some innocent form and giving these people arguments against their victims.

Since 1989 we have been following the wrong path. The path of neoliberalism, economic pragmatism, a society of self-centred individuals. We lack values: solidarity, cooperation, thinking about others.

I think it's especially important in times like these—because it's also the issue of control, politics, the Catholic Church. Even more so because some things can come back. Switzerland recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage—until half a century ago, that is until 1971, Swiss women couldn't vote or even work without their husband's permission. So you can't remain silent.

If so, should a writer, apart from diagnosing problems, also look for solutions? Try to change reality?

Want to change it, I would say. You can't write a book thinking that it will change something—it doesn't work at all. It's impossible to plan what impact our work will have on reality, and that's the beautiful thing about art. But you can try to open your eyes.

Bohumil Hrabal, in his essay *Who I Am*, wrote: "I live exactly as I have lived and as I would live if there were a governor of the Habsburg dynasty residing in the Castle. I have so many troubles to shape myself, so many troubles with my fellow men, that I do not have enough time for any change of political events; I do not even know what those who desire such changes are talking about, for I would only like to change myself." So I guess this is not your vision of writing?

Not exactly [laughs]. Although it is a nice vision. I often say to myself: you have so many other problems in life... But I don't agree with this vision, if only because when we stop being interested in politics, it starts being interested in us. And it does so in such a fundamental way that it affects our most intimate matters and decisions. In my youth I often wondered—like a child trying to understand—why nobody had helped the Jews when they were taken to the death camps. Even friends, neighbours. Their answer was often: "We didn't know where they were being taken." But why didn't it bother them that they were being taken anywhere? You have to react early, while there is still something you can do. Today's Hungary is one example.

Going back to Mr. Hrabal—the perspective is also different when you have no family. For example, I can see how reality influences my children, their lives and minds. Anyway, today he couldn't even go for a beer in a pub!

Does a writer in the Czech Republic bear any special responsibility? In Poland, there is still a belief that a writer should suffer for millions.

Perhaps there are certain expectations that date back to the nineteenth century, to the time of the National Revival. This is the problem of small nations that had to defend their identity. The Czech language was saved with the help of books. The writers from those times, poor things, in a way wrote to order—they carried out a patriotic mission. The nonsensical belief that the writer is the conscience of the nation is a relic of those times. It was strengthened by the events of the twentieth century, the year 1968, when writers pushed for reforms and became politically involved.

In the age of a pandemic, however, I do see a certain obligation—or at least something I require of myself. It sounds trivial, but it turns out to be difficult: not to lie.

But these were mainly men: Vaculík, Kundera, Kohout... Perhaps the new times demand that we introduce the perspective of a human who is also a woman into the public space. To show that it is a voice of equal importance and that it is possible to change the style of politics and communication.

This leads to slightly absurd situations. When I returned from Taiwan, I took part in an online debate as part of the Colours of Ostrava Festival, which had shifted online last year. And since I get distracted by keeping track of the questions that viewers send in, I asked the moderator to pick them. In the end, he chose one lady's question, which was whether I would like to run for president. My first thought: never in my life. I replied that my commenting on politics is something completely different, that everyone should do it, and that writing is also hard work. But I added, just in case: never say never. And then I got a surprisingly large number of messages about it, some group even wanted to raise money for the election campaign.

It just goes to show how much people are missing from politics—so much so that all it takes is for someone to say what they think and people flock to them. Maybe people also see in me a combination of our Czech tradition—after all, we had the playwright Václav Havel as our president—and the hope that Zuzana Čaputová has sparked in Slovakia. But under our current socio-political system a woman would not stand a chance.

Is the fact that you are a writer from the Czech Republic somehow a burden?

Yes... But this realization came only

gradually. Recently, after fifteen years, a new edition of *Money from Hitler* came out and I realized that the book had not received a single positive review in the Czech Republic. All my titles have sparked strong controversies, and only after some time did I understand what was going on: I am not Czech enough.

It's impossible to plan what impact our work will have on reality, and that's the beautiful thing about art. But you can try to open your eyes.

Again, this is the problem of a small nation: we have our traditions, our problems, and if someone ignores them, because after all we are also part of the world, and as artists we can write about whatever we want, it is looked upon badly. There is also an ongoing discussion about how individual countries should be represented internationally, so when I have some success, my compatriots are unable to forgive me.

The other burden, which is actually a joy for me, is language. A burden—because as a Czech writer I am dependent on translators. I have to find a talented, sensitive person in each country who will translate my books. And one more aspect: as a Czech writer, I am always perceived as someone 'from Eastern Europe', with all the clichés attached to it. So I emphasize that I am a 'Czech' writer only in the context of the language, which I will never give up, but I don't feel compatible with my country at all; with the way it is developing, the way people behave here, with its mentality, pragmatism, cynicism, sense of superiority resulting from complexes.

I never wanted to be a rebel, I never wanted to create some parallel world. But I am worried that if the political situation keeps going in the same direction, we will have no way out. We will have to build some world of our own.

RADKA DENEMARKOVÁ
is a writer, literary scholar, translator and screenwriter. She is one of the most popular and awarded Czech authors, a four-time winner of the most important Czech literary award Magnesia Litera. Born on 14 March 1968 in Kutná Hora, she studied Czech and German at Charles University in Prague. She worked at the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences and at the Prague Theatre on the Balustrade (Divadlo Na zábradlí); she has also taught creative writing at the Josef Škvorecký Literary Academy.

ASPEN.REVIEW
JAKUB DYMEK

INTERVIEW
YOUTH
POLITICS
CENTRAL EUROPE

Michal Šimečka: To Counter Populists We Need a "People First" Kind of Liberalism

You have very capable and dynamic young people joining parties on both ends of the spectrum. This means that the younger generation will not only be more open and green than the previous ones, but also more polarized—says Michal Šimečka in an interview with Jakub Dymek.

JAKUB DYMEK: Do you feel confident about the future of liberal democracies in Central Europe?

MICHAL ŠIMEČKA: Pretty much. It'll be harder, for sure. The corona crisis had made general conditions for liberal democracies worse, but on the other hand, the gravest risks have not actually materialized. There was a genuine scare that the autocrats and would-be autocrats would seize power and exploit the uncertainty. This dark scenario has not, however, yet materialized.

Several things have hurt liberalism and democracy in Central Europe. The epidemic was not handled well, with some exceptions. It was not the best example of how to utilize the state and its resources. The pandemic did not necessarily inspire confidence in the liberal-democratic state. The second reason is of course economic uncertainty. Last year was not especially generous for liberals and democrats in our part of Europe. We do have, however, vigorous new parties in all countries of the region, young populations with diverse views and interesting political coalitions reshaping political scenes. So on balance, the picture is not as bleak as one might think.

Do you still think that terms like 'populist' or 'extremist' are still as relevant as they used to be? Parties considered

populist and insurgent, like Fidesz in Hungary or PiS in Poland, are poised to be the longest ruling political factions in their countries post 1989. What was previously considered marginal is the political mainstream of today.

Yes, both Poland and Hungary are not the typical case of populist movements getting into power and then, soon after, being voted out of power because of their incompetence. These parties are much more skilled in exercising power than people thought ten years ago and they are doing their maximum to stay in power for as long as possible. This is especially true for Hungary where the government shapes the election laws, making it increasingly difficult to actually win against them.

There is an international understanding that runaway capitalism and globalization have to be contained—by the state, by putting common goods and public interest on the pedestal again.

What is more important is that these parties have canonized and monopolized a certain kind of conservative politics which combines the redistributive role of the state with a traditionalist vision of society and nationalist attitudes towards Brussels and the West in general. This, unfortunately, has become a mainstream ideological position. Bits and pieces of this can be seen everywhere, where there are attempts to elevate Central and Eastern Europe as somehow a more 'normal' alternative to corrupt and weak Western Europe. And these attitudes will outlast the parties that promote them today. This to me—as a liberal—is a worrying bit.

What kind of liberalism would be most efficient in your opinion to counter this proposition?

This goes back to the question of who our opponents are. Poland may be a prime example of how new conservative parties promoted family oriented and redistributive social policies. They have moved to the left on economic affairs to quite an extent. In the meantime, the world has moved away from the neoliberal consensus as well, which is visible, for example, when you look at the conclusions of the recent G7 summit. There is an international understanding that runaway capitalism and globalization have to be contained—by the state, by putting common goods and public interest on the pedestal again, returning to a 'people first' kind of politics. Any liberal party, any liberal movement and any possible future for liberalism must take this into account.

One could argue that until recently the EU was itself instrumental in forcing neoliberal and austerity policies on its members.

The economic crisis we are experiencing because of the pandemic has obviously changed that, but I would say that this par-

adigm had been dented first by academics and later by broader changes in public perceptions of the market and laissez-faire policies. The European Rescue Fund and all the emergency measures are an obvious manifestation of that. But even before, there was enough readiness to embrace that kind of change. Inevitably more and more people are seeing that we cannot do without social cohesion, without investing in people and reducing inequalities.

How are changing demographics influencing this landscape in your opinion?

Speaking from Slovakia, I can say that obviously the younger generation disapproves of this status quo and you can see how high a number goes to radical parties on both ends of the spectrum in simulated elections in high schools. This of course means not only big gains for liberals and progressives, but also for fascists. The same is true for young politicians: you have very capable and dynamic young people joining parties on both ends of the spectrum. So what this means is that the younger generation will not only be more open and green than the previous ones, but also more polarized.

Data—at least in Poland—shows that this younger generation is indeed more liberal, progressive and tolerant, but at the same time not egalitarian. It looks more like a shift towards individualism, not a drift towards the left.

A whole generation of young people in Slovakia have moved westward—to Bratislava or abroad. But they've left their parents behind. And because of that I believe, they are acutely aware of the disparities and regional divides.

I don't have the data and I'm ready to stand corrected, but my gut tells me it's not the case everywhere. A whole generation of young people in Slovakia have moved westward—to Bratislava or abroad. But they've left—both metaphorically and quite literally—their parents behind. And because of that I believe, they are acutely aware of the disparities and regional divides. For some, maybe, their own success will translate into more libertarian politics—but in general, this is the generation not so far divorced from the harsher realities of small towns and villages.

Speaking more generally about inequalities, you cannot leave the pandemic out of the picture. Europeans witnessed many new types of inequality and divisions—who gets to hospital sooner, who is taken care of, who gets to work and who gets paid leave, how fast you can get care to your loved ones and who you have to call to help them. These are the types of inequalities that our citizenry witnessed with their own eyes and that the liberals have to take care of.

The idea that right-wing governments in Central Europe will lose to liberals is often based on the assumption that they will run out of legitimacy, because of their disregard for law and civil liberties. But what if this doesn't happen and recovery money from the EU, conversely, will only bolster their ratings?

Of course, every government with money to spend is more credible [laughs]. Regarding the corrupt governments though, what you will obviously see is that some of the money is inevitably going to be misspent. Because that's how these operations work: there will be embezzlement and football stadiums built in the villages where the relatives of the government cronies rule. There were enough instances already where EU money was used to finance oligarchs. And ultimately I believe this will work against them. Because corruption is the easiest factor, so to speak, it is easiest to mobilize people and a popular movement against government corruption.

It's all nice and easy, to talk about how the legal system is being undermined, the media are put under pressure. But in the end these are abstract values, that do not necessarily translate into votes for the opposition.

It didn't help out Viktor Orbán for example.

Well, obviously we'll see. It also depends on what the European Union will do. Will conditionality of funds, the rule of law mechanism, be implemented. And I think it should. The next Hungarian election will be a true test—can this government be unseated in free and fair elections? Some think it's already impossible. That the playing field is already this uneven. But what is certain is that government corruption remains the most powerful rallying cry for the opposition.
It's all nice and easy, to talk about how the legal system is being undermined, the media are put under pressure and civil liberties are under assault. But in the end these are abstract values, that do not necessarily translate into votes for the opposition.

To what extent should this pressure be applied from Brussels?

I think they should go further than they've gone so far. It's good we have the conditionality regulation, we shouldn't be afraid to use it. There's a legitimate interest in that. Obviously there's no reason for funding increasingly undemocratic regimes—be it in Hungary or elsewhere. The whole of the EU has an interest in protecting its common values. We already see the consequences of the fact that the courts in Europe would not recognize decisions made in Polish courts. It's dangerous territory, because the whole idea of the single market is based upon the assumption that the whole of the EU is a unified legal space. Whatever decisions we're making are binding as long as we all

believe the law will be respected and that representatives of national governments are democratically elected.
At the same time, partners and neighbours have to show solidarity with each other. Civil society in Czechia or Slovakia has to show that they support Polish and Hungarian citizens, and vice versa. Even if their governments are at odds. We had a similar situation in Slovakia in the 1990s when our Prime Minister threatened Slovakia's European perspectives. But then our neighbours and friends in other countries didn't turn their backs on us. So we owe Poles and Hungarians the same—we believe, as the whole of Europe does, that their place is among other members of the European commonwealth and it is in our best interest to work together to ensure that.

What you're saying is that good neighbourly relations shouldn't fall prey to governments actions in the Visegrad Group?
Of course. The Visegrad project should be maintained precisely because one of the things it does is maintaining good relations between countries, societies, including cultural exchanges and cross-border projects. This is invaluable. Of course bilateral relations are difficult at the moment: Polish-Czech, because of the Turów coal mine dispute, Slovaks and Hungarians are at odds because of other issues... At the same time governments should not be afraid to speak against transgressions of the rule of law.

Why?
Because it signals, for example, for Poles and Hungarians, that we are with you in the struggle for democracy. This is the kind of policy I'd like to see in a country like Slovakia.

Because when one country breaks the rules, it hurts the broader community beyond this particular country?
Yeah, of course it hurts the broader community of nations—be it Visegrad or the European Union as a whole. I feel this way strongly because as a member of the European Parliament I'm there not only to represent my constituency in Slovakia, but in some way I have to represent all European citizens.

MICHAL ŠIMEČKA
is the vice-chair of RENEW Group in the European Parliament and the vice-chair of the Progessive Slovakia party in his home country. Born in 1984, he was an academic and lecturer before entering politics. He holds a doctorate from University of Oxford.

ASPEN.REVIEW
ZBIGNIEW ROKITA

INTERVIEW
POPULISM
DEMOCRACY

Piotr Pogorzelski: People Want New Faces

Young Belarusians will continue to go to Polish or Lithuanian universities. I am not convinced, however, that this will foster democratization—says Piotr Pogorzelski in an interview with Zbigniew Rokita.

ZBIGNIEW ROKITA: **The average Belarusian or Ukrainian is 41 years old, and when the USSR collapsed, they were 11 years old. The vast majority of citizens of these countries barely remember the Soviet times, they were children then. We often quote these figures with hope, but at the same time most Belarusians were also children when Alexander Lukashenko came to power. What is the significance of this?**

PIOTR POGORZELSKI: On the one hand, it is true that young Belarusians do not know any other Belarus than the one ruled by Lukashenko and they have adapted to life in a system where power is continuously held by the same man. As for Ukraine, young Ukrainians grew up in a weak state, they are taught that many things can and even should be achieved with a bribe. This is the knowledge their parents passed on to them. At the same time, they don't have the burden of fear of a state apparatus for which an individual is nothing. And this is a huge plus. It is particularly visible among young Belarusians, where this fear is greater, because Alexander Lukashenko made sure that contemporary Belarus is in some ways a copy of the Soviet Union.

Finally, from yet another perspective, these Ukrainians and Belarusians know what is happening in other countries and know that things may be different. Their first source of information is not—as in the case of older people—television, but the Internet media.

Which television are you talking about?

In the case of Ukraine, it is of lesser importance, as the TV broadcasting does not differ from the Western one, but in the case of Belarus the differences are very big. The older generation, if they watch TV, first of all watch not Belarusian but Russian channels. Thus, Belarusians learn more about how people live under Putin than under Lukashenko. However, many elements

of the message are similar in Belarus and Russia, e.g. the paradigm that stability is the most important thing and that changes should be avoided, because they lead to chaos and wars, as in Ukraine. There is also a very elaborate message about the security forces, their great importance in maintaining this stability, and about the everyday violence, even symbolic—e.g. in families where the man is lord and god, and the woman is primarily expected to smell nice, take care of the children and cook dinner for her husband. All this is present in Russian TV series, which are fortunately much less popular in Ukraine, if only because access to Russian channels is blocked on cable TV.

The perception of this country has changed. I remember how twenty years ago Belarusians used to refer to Moscow as their capital. But today young people identify more with their country, they don't remember another one.

The young are taking to online media more often, but the question is what kind?

According to 2018 data, Belarusians turned to Google and the Russian equivalent of Facebook, Vkontakte, in that order. Then was Tut.by—a popular news and entertainment website recently shut down by the authorities. It was a watershed when a Belarusian product defeated such runet powers such as Yandex or Mail.ru. Thus, by destroying Tut.by, Lukashenko again throws Belarusians into the hands of Russian propaganda.

As for Ukraine, despite the fight against Moscow's influence, Russian popular culture is still hugely popular. You can block TV, but not the Internet anymore. Look at the list of the most popular music on Ukrainian Spotify. Despite the war with Russia, Ukrainians are most likely to listen to Russian musicians—not Russian-speaking Ukrainians, but specifically performers from Russia.

History has taught us that Internet use alone does not lead to a democratized audience. Maybe the migration destinations of Belarusians will tell us something about them?

First of all, they migrate to Russia. However, the perception of this country has changed. I remember how twenty years ago Belarusians used to refer to Moscow as their capital, they still considered themselves a province of the Empire. But today young people identify more with their country, they don't remember another one, although they are part of Russian culture, of the Russian information space. Belarus is also integrated with Russia in many spheres, including the Commonwealth of Independent States, so it is easier for Belarusians to work in Russia than in the European Union.

And when protests began in Belarus last year, did Belarusians who fled the country also decide to go to Russia?

Some did, but they quickly realized that it was a bad idea.

Because?

A person wanted by Minsk is automatically included in the register of those wanted in Russia. So, there were cases when Belarusians were arrested in St. Petersburg or in other Russian cities.

In Poland I also spoke with Belarusian migrants who did not leave for political, but for social reasons—they wanted to emigrate anyway, and the protests and the backlash only accelerated their decision. It was important for them that if they were to go somewhere, it would be to a country where it was much better—so they usually chose Poland or the Baltic countries when going to the West.

Let me repeat, I am not talking about political emigration. Look at the companies from the well-developed Belarusian IT sector. Recently, they have been moving to Ukraine, Lithuania or Poland, because there is too much authoritarianism in Belarus and their interests are threatened. It is just too much for many people to be arrested for a couple of weeks for leaving a TV cardboard box on a balcony because it is in white and red colours [a reference to the white-red-white Belarusian flag, an alternative to the official state flag, perceived as a symbol of opposition - ed.] This is an authentic story. It is very easy to become an enemy of the regime, even against your will.

Can a young Belarusian be apolitical living in his country? Is it possible to say "politics does not interest me, I want to live safely and run my business".

There is no full economic freedom in Belarus, there are extensive control institutions, large state-owned enterprises dominate, largely relying on subsidies from Russia or from the state budget. Yes, you can have a carpenter's workshop or a cafe, but there are not many small initiatives in Belarus anyway—people are simply afraid.

Afraid of what?

If a business starts to flourish, the government will take an interest in it. There will be endless inspections and proposals to hand over the company to particular people.

I have heard it more than once from Belarusians—we would like to open an ice-cream parlour or a hairdressing salon, but if we are successful, if we open a branch and then another, the government will turn up in the shape of, for example, the tax or sanitary inspectorate and will start to make things difficult. The glass ceiling hangs very low.

This is how it works, the government tries to squeeze as much as it can out of business. That is why Belarusians are stifled and afraid to show initiative. I remember how

they behaved in August 2020. I saw how much creativity these people have in themselves, how Minsk and Grodno revived during the demonstrations connected with the elections. It looked like lifting the lid from a boiling pot—clouds of steam shot out.

There are other potential fields of conflict with the authorities. If you have a child and send it to kindergarten or school, there will be a 'presidential corner' (portrait of the President, quotes, constitution, etc.), state ideology, May 9 celebrations, etc. Now the regime plans to have a 'social-military educator' in every school.

Belarusians are not broken, but they are wondering if they should go out and risk getting fired because of it. And if your boss is a dedicated Lukashist, it's possible.

What will he do?

This is supposed to be a man who makes sure that children are loyal to the state ideology, and since it is increasingly militarized, we have this 'military' component. In every major Belarusian company there is an ideology officer who actually keeps an eye on employees to check whether they are conspiring against the state and whether they are obediently celebrating the 1st and 9th of May and, of course, the 8th of March (Women's Day). In short, it is difficult to escape from politics in Belarus.

Talking about school again, it is also important that electoral commissions are located in schools and are staffed by teachers and headed by principals. So you are sending your child to a school that is headed by a man responsible for election rigging.

And what is the risk for a Belarusian 20-year-old who decides to go to a demonstration against Lukashenko in Grodno or Mogilev?

He risks at least a 15-day arrest or a heavy fine, and possibly torture. And if they find on his phone, for example, a comment 'stupid' under a post with a photo of militiamen, he may go to prison for 2 years. A student can be expelled from university for showing up at a demonstration. And if he has children, the authorities can take them away and send them to an orphanage.

And is the Belarusian revolution still going on?

There are no longer as large protests as before, but remember how much Belarusians risk by taking to the streets. Some see Lukashenko as an occupation regime and want to wait him out. Belarusians are not broken, but they are wondering if they should go out and risk getting fired because of it. And if your boss is a dedicated Lukashist, it's possible. Not to mention those employed in the government sector. Belarusians continue to oppose the authorities, but the price of taking to the streets is enormous.

Last summer it seemed that the barrier of fear had been broken.

Not quite. An acquaintance from Minsk told me that at work even her friends were afraid to talk openly about politics, to tell what someone did at the weekend and so on. The fear was strong even when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets, let alone now, when fear has driven them back home, and the resistance is mostly virtual.

Or maybe the protests only happened because of the generational change and the young fuelled the demonstrations?

Generational change is important, but class reasons were also important. There were many middle-aged, middle-class people among the demonstrators—they are successful, they earn good money. These people can go on vacation all over the world, they eat well, but they would also like to have a President who has not ruled them for almost 30 years and who is not an embarrassment, who does not tell them stupid things like that the coronavirus should be cured with vodka and riding a tractor—which is what Lukashenko said at the beginning of the pandemic. These people made their demands known. The protests escalated because the authorities made a mistake.

What was it?

In the first days, the regime's response to the demonstrations was too brutal. Shooting people, beating them, catching passers-by who were going to the store—this infuriated Belarusians. It was similar with the Maidan in November 2013—if the students had not been beaten, everything could have gone downhill and perhaps the Revolution of Dignity would not have happened. In both cases, however, the authorities responded brutally, but the protests in Belarus lacked proper organization. The Lukashenko regime is more oppressive than the Yanukovych regime was. Belarusians had no experience with mass protests, they didn't know how to run them. There were also no NGOs, cultural and educational institutions.

Are there young Belarusians who are not in opposition, but support Lukashenko?

Of course, and not just a few. Many young people belong to Lukashenko's youth group, the Belarusian Republican Youth Union. Some of them are careerists, but some of them feel in their element there. They hear at home from their elders that things were better under the USSR and Lukashenko provides us with a substitute for those times. And the young believe in it at the later stages of their lives.

So among young people there are not only oppositionists and apolitical ones, but also people committed to Lukashenko.

Of course, but we can't be more specific, because we don't have any reliable sociological studies.

We don't have them since 2016, when NISEPI, the last independent opinion poll center, had to leave the country.

Exactly, and now we have to rely on either state surveys or online surveys. However, we see the involvement of young people in pro-regime organizations, it is undeniable.

Look at the Kaliningrad region—a huge percentage of Kaliningraders have Schengen visas, they go to Poland, to Germany, and what? Has Kaliningrad become more democratized? No.

Why are the leading Belarusian journalists protesting against the regime so young? NEXTA's founder Sciapan Puča is 22 years old, Raman Pratasevich is 26 years old, and Belsat journalists Kaciaryna Andreyeva and Daria Chulcova, imprisoned for over six months, are 28 and 24 years old respectively.

Perhaps the point is that a Belarusian journalist takes a lot of risks in this profession, he or she is quickly confronted with political pressure, and when you are young, you have less to lose and are more ready to take risks. Besides, your head is full of ideas that you want to implement, and you see that the regime doesn't allow you to do that. An example from recent weeks: the closing down of the Tut.by website. Was it a political website? It was, but it also published a lot of interesting information: what kind of car to buy, how to fish, what to grow on your dacha, and so on. And now the regime is destroying all that—so even as a journalist, and even more so as a young one, you cannot just write about nice cars or new fishing rods. So you start criticizing the regime and you become a political journalist. After the rigged elections in August, there were a lot of journalists who, for example, dealt with sports and left the state media because they couldn't stand what the authorities were doing. Hence, these people moved to the Internet and started channels in Telegram where they were free.

I also have such an intuition. Belarusian journalists hover between activism and journalism. Let's go back to students. Lukashenko recently announced that Belarus will not recognize the diplomas of some foreign universities. He said: "Someone wants to go abroad to study. Poles, Lithuanians and others are inviting them. There is no problem. Tomorrow we will give them tickets, let them go. If they want to study there, they will be brainwashed there. (...) They will offer us their help as a fifth column. We cannot allow it." Nevertheless, many Belarusians come to Vilnius, Krakow or Warsaw to study. Could Poland and Lithuania become a Belarusian Piedmont?

In Belarus, you get expelled from university for applauding or singing a song, so it is clear that young people will continue to

go to Polish or Lithuanian universities. I am not convinced, however, that this will foster democratization and that you always transfer some experience gained abroad to your country. It is not enough to see what it is like somewhere. Look at the Kaliningrad region—a huge percentage of Kaliningraders have Schengen visas, they go to Poland, to Germany, and what? Has Kaliningrad become more democratized? No. Even polls on the perception of the Russian government there do not differ from the Russian average. Besides, the protests in Belarus were not a clash between a pro-Western street and a pro-Russian regime. It looked completely different. Russia is observing what is happening in Belarus with concern, it cannot afford another nation close to Russia, after Ukraine, breaking away from Moscow and demonstrating that it is possible to build a pro-Western democracy far from Russian tutelage.

Tens of thousands of Belarusians and Ukrainians already study in Poland, and hundreds of thousands work here. Doesn't this pose a brain-drain threat for local societies?

Yes, there is a risk that these people will not come back. On the other hand, if Belarus democratized or Ukraine achieved economic success, some of them would surely come back. Living abroad is not easy, you are generally a second class citizen, especially in such a mono-ethnic country as Poland. There, you will always say that your English or math teacher is nice, but at the same time you will emphasize that she is from Ukraine. It is more difficult for Ukrainians or Belarusians to make a career in Poland; besides, some of their diplomas are not recognized in the European Union.

Ukraine is for them a hope that the revolution in Belarus may be successful but, at the same time, it reminds them that chaos and war may be the price for the uprising, especially since Ukraine has been presented as a failed state.

And how do young Belarusians see Ukraine—is it a symbol of a successful revolution for them?

Ukraine is for them a hope that the revolution in Belarus may be successful but, at the same time, it reminds them that chaos and war may be the price for the uprising, especially since Ukraine has been presented in the Belarusian media as a failed state for years. At the same time, Lukashenko was very popular among Ukrainians, he was able to sell himself well—as a politician providing stability, regular pension payments and good roads. The Belarusian image was so good that it even happened that Ukrainian products were packaged as Belarusian. Volodymyr Zelensky also built good relations with Lukashenko.

Lukashenko hosts peace talks on the Donbass war, also at the highest level. I think, however, that Belarusian political refugees will think twice before leaving for Ukraine, as they were sometimes caught there by Belarusian-Russian services.

Yes, there have been cases when political enemies of the regime are safer in the European Union. It is more difficult to kidnap someone in Poland and take him to Belarus, because the border is tightly controlled. It is easier to kidnap him from Ukraine or even Lithuania. What we said at the beginning is also important: that the Ukrainian state is weak—despite huge progress in the security sphere, it is still easier for the Belarusian services to operate there than in the West.

In Belarus, meetings of various committees and commissions look like meetings from the late Brezhnev times.

And was the Revolution of Dignity and the war with Russia a formative experience for young Ukrainian men and women?

For many it was, but not only for young people. Sometimes it was a bigger shock for the older ones, who suddenly realized that what they had believed was not true—for example, that Russia was not a brotherly nation. That is, there are people who reformatted themselves as adults. The war also meant consequences in the cultural sphere, for example—a lot of Ukrainian quality products appeared, this considerably changed the environment of growing up.

But let's remember that there is always a large group of people who are not impacted by the war, who don't know anyone who died, who was fighting. They watch the casualty figures on TV, but they feel like they are watching the weather forecast for some other region of the country.

Why are Ukrainian politicians so young? In 2019, 42-year-old Zelensky became President and 35-year-old Oleksiy Honcharuk became Prime Minister. Many more examples could be quoted.

This is the basic difference between the Belarusian and Ukrainian elite—in Ukraine, there are many young and middle-aged people in power, because Ukrainians want new faces. They see that these people can offer new, interesting approaches, that the old ones have already been there and haven't changed much, they think, "Maybe the young ones will succeed?". In Belarus, meetings of various committees and commissions look like meetings from the late Brezhnev times. This has an impact on what actions are taken. For a long time, Minsk relied on television as the main medium and missed out on the moment when the Internet gained importance. Their social media activities today are clumsy, coarse propaganda.

Things are different in Ukraine.

The revolution caused a shift in the elites, the older ones left, the younger ones came, and when Zelensky talks about the Internet, he knows what he's talking about and proposes solutions like the "State in a Smartphone" program. When you look at the Ukrainian government or parliament, you generally see people in their thirties or forties. It's more like the country's supervisory board than the central committee.

This is the basic difference between the Belarusian and Ukrainian elite—in Ukraine, there are many young and middle-aged people in power.

And can young Belarusians feel disappointed with the West because the West has never made them any promises, never invited Belarusians to join Western structures?

There are many programs for young Belarusians who want to study in Lithuania or Poland. As of August, Warsaw has been receiving political refugees from Belarus and it is hard to accuse the authorities of doing too little. Poland, as a member of the European Union, also wanted local border traffic with Belarus, but the Belarusian parliament, fully dependent on Alexander Lukashenko, has not ratified the agreement for many years. The regime did not want people to be able to leave the country so easily. The European Union also created the Eastern Partnership program, but while Moldova, Georgia or Ukraine have benefited from it, Belarus is hardly involved in it. What more could the European Union do? Cart all Belarusians away from their country? Or NATO—if the Belarusian army is integrated with the Russian army, joint exercises or intelligence cooperation become impossible, because whatever you share with them will immediately be in Moscow. You cannot integrate with a country that does not want integration.

PIOTR POGORZELSKI
is a journalist for the Polish TV station Belsat, author of the podcast Po Prostu Wschód [Simply East], and a long-term correspondent for the Polish Radio in Kiev.

ASPEN.REVIEW
JAKUB DYMEK

POLITICS
INTERVIEW
PANDEMIC

Jamie Metzl: The World Has Failed—It's Up to All of Us to Fix It

We've known that pandemics are possible. We've known that climate change is threatening all of us and that there are ecosystems on the verge of destruction. There's enough blame to go around—says leading futurist and OneShared.World founder Jamie Metzl in an interview with Jakub Dymek

JAKUB DYMEK: If we were to play the blame game, who's the first to be blamed for the coronavirus pandemic?

JAMIE METZL: Oh, there's enough blame to go around. Number one though is squarely on China. Whatever the origins of the pandemic are, in the critical few weeks, when it could have been suppressed the easiest and in the quickest of ways, the Chinese authorities, primarily in Wuhan, did everything they could to silence the whistleblowers and cover everything up. They then systematically destroyed evidence and prevented WHO authorities from coming to Wuhan for nearly a month! And as a result of this catastrophic failure, what could have been a stove fire, had become the fire that lit the kitchen first and the whole house eventually.
There is also a very open question about the origin of the pandemic...

...and we will come back to that. But who else is there on 'the list of culprits', as you see it?

The United States failed in many ways but a few particularly stand out. Domestically, our government didn't ring the alarm bell and launch an emergency response soon enough. Instead of leading a response, President Donald Trump pushed an incredibly damaging disinformation

campaign that undermined our response and undermined trust in our health professionals and government institutions when it was the most essential. But the US failed globally as well: let us remember it was the US that had played the leading role in eradicating smallpox, fighting with Ebola and other pandemics. Over decades, the world has come to rely on a smart and strong US global response to crises like this. When that did not happen this time around it created a dangerous vacuum.

I'm a WHO adviser and big believer in the mission and work of the WHO, but it failed here too.

The US had played the leading role in eradicating smallpox, fighting with Ebola and other pandemics.

Why did WHO fail in your opinion?

It didn't sound the alarm early enough. It could have sounded the alarm earlier, but we need to ask why. The WHO is not mandated to have its own full and independent surveillance mechanism, so it is forced by design to rely on the information provided by the states. Garbage in, garbage out. When China provided so much untruthful and partial information to WHO, that certainly hampered WHO's ability to sound the alarm. In the ideal world, WHO would have sent early responders to Wuhan immediately. And certainly WHO wanted to do that, but they weren't allowed to visit Wuhan or even given visas for nearly a month—while China was destroying samples silencing internal voices of dissent. All of this is just one manifestation of a bigger problem. We live in a world where sovereign states, especially powerful states like China, have the ability to block this kind of investigation. The question we have to ask then is what kind of global health authority do we want and need to effectively fight pandemics like these and better address other global public health crises. Lastly, we have to acknowledge that the world has failed. We've known that these pandemics are possible. We've known that climate change is threatening all of us and that there are ecosystems on the verge of destruction. We've known of so many global problems that remain unaddressed as the risks grow.

Did you watch HBO's *Chernobyl* perhaps?

It's funny, because I didn't watch it when it was originally released, but I am right now.

Many people when it came out have concluded, wrongly I think, that this is a show about a particularly undemocratic, authoritarian, Soviet problem—that such a chain of bad decisions, misinformation, negligence and poor judgement would be something impossible in a free and open society. And yet here we are.

No political system has the monopoly on righteousness. On the COVID-19 crisis,

we have an authoritarian system, China, that failed in the first phase and then massively improved its response. And we have the US, a free and democratic society, albeit one that had lurched dangerously towards populism, that responded poorly. Some of the countries that performed best in response to COVID have as different political cultures and system as New Zealand and Vietnam. We cannot take it for granted that one system is inherently better when it comes to such crises. We've got to learn from each other but also make sure we deploy our best societal values to address crises like this.

You've written in your CNN piece some time ago, that the national governments have failed us precisely because of what we pay them to do. Would you care to elaborate?

Sure, but let me take a little step back first. Human species have not always organized in the form of a nation state—it was only after the Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia that a number of European leaders collectively decided that national states would be how we organize our life. And through European dominance and colonialism this system was exported and implemented in a big part of our world. That system proved unstable over time, culminating in two world wars. That is why in San Francisco in 1945 we created this whole overlay of the UN and associated bodies designed to temper the excesses of the world of competing states. But because these institutions were created, funded and controlled by states, they were unable to fulfil the visions of their founders and framers.

The question we have to ask is what kind of global health authority do we want and need to effectively fight pandemics like these and better address other global public health crises.

And we're back to nation states again.

Yes, this is why we live in the world of nation states. And when they become too strong again the problem arises: the reason we didn't have a WHO empowered to respond effectively to this crisis is because we've hired our national representatives to take care of our national interests, and that is what they've done even at the expense of our collective interests. That same paradigm exists with climate change, weapons of mass destruction and mostly every other global issue. Up to this day we are unable to balance our narrower and broader interests in a way that might better optimize our well-being.

However, an idea for a supranational global government is inherently terrifying for a large part of the population. Even peaceful and benevolent institutions such as the EU generate plenty of resentment. How do you propose to promote even more multilateralism

and globalization, given how popular the populist reaction to these things had become in the last couple of years?

Firstly, let's say this out loud: I'm against a global government, at least for now. Many people advocating for this are reaching out to me, but I always tell them I think it's a bad idea. It took two world wars for people to realize that we needed a new structure to complement our world of states. Creating an entirely new global government from scratch is a bigger step than is possible at this stage, and trying too hard would detract us from fixing the systems we already have. We also have no guarantee that any new 'global government' would be any safer and stable than what we have today—and plenty of arguments that it could be even less stable.

I believe that an idea for a new global framework, however could spread and adapt like a virus, but hopefully without killing its host. And this idea that I propose is the mutual responsibilities of our deep global interdependence. Every organization and government in the world can and probably should still advocate for its own constituency and citizens, but these organizations have to incorporate in their DNA an idea that we have to balance our narrow and particular interests with our broader collective interests.

Our species went very rapidly from small bands of roving nomads to a global society with a capacity to transform or end whole life on earth, but we haven't come up with politics to match. And this mismatch is what we need to address in a very practical sense.

I believe that an idea for a new global framework, however could spread and adapt like a virus, but hopefully without killing its host.

As we know from history, such models required some kind of hegemony or imperial power nonetheless. What to do about the fact that China today is actually trying to remake international bodies to work in China's favor?

China has big aspirations, maybe the aspiration to replace the US as some other form of hegemon. If our world continues on thus road, we will all be worse off in the end, including whoever wins this battle for hegemony. China is not on board—just as the US under President Trump wasn't—with the model of shared responsibility that I'm advocating for. But China has a lot to lose if we don't tackle collective issues like climate change and global pandemics. There's a self-interest argument to be made here about why we need to come together and solve common global problems.

Since you've mentioned it already, I have to ask. You have been an early and vocal proponent of the thesis that the novel coronavirus had originated in a Chinese lab. Why do you insist on that?

There's this famous quote in Casablanca, where Rick is sitting in his bar the night

after his lost love Ilsa happens to walk in, heartbroken and says "of all the gin joints, in all the towns in all the world, she had to walk in mine".

Of all the places in all the world, where a deadly bat coronavirus broke out, Wuhan is the only one level-4 virology institute in China that had a study studying coronavirus, including the most closely related viruses to SARS-COV-2. The lab has a very bad safety record. Then there's this massive cover-up operation where whistleblowers are silenced or imprisoned, samples and records are is destroyed, and international investigative efforts are undermined. Occam's razor certainly makes me believe the lab leak hypothesis is the most credible explanation. I've compiled the evidence on my jamiemetzl.com website so people can judge for themselves.

Do you believe it is a bioweapon?

No, nothing of the sort. But it also seems unlikely that it was some sort of natural jump from the wild. If it were, we would likely see some evidence pointing to that. With SARS in 2003 it was relatively easy to trace all the jumps. Here, not at all. And this virus emerges fully adapted for humans. There is, I am guessing, a 10-15% chance this is something that happened in the wild, but the lab hypothesis seems much far more probable to me.

I've been calling repeatedly for a fully transparent, unrestricted, international forensic inquiry into every possible hypothesis about the origins of the pandemic. And this would require full access to Chinese samples, data, records, and scientists. I'm worried that the investigation by WHO, mandated by the UN, has so far not met these standards.

The cover-up could have taken place regardless of the origin of the virus, so the fact of it would not in itself be an argument supporting the 'lab-origin' hypothesis.

It's also not a defense against it. If there's no lab access and records have been destroyed, you cannot say that gets China off the hook. It means we need a thorough investigation. There's over a million dead, trillions of dollars of economic costs. We need answers so we can better understand and address COVID-19 and prepare for the next pandemic.

And we need to be honest about the role of power politics here. If this pandemic had started in Congo or Chad, what would have happened?

These countries would be forced into compliance.

Absolutely. We cannot pressure China like we could Congo or Chad, but neither can we just go as if this is business as usual. This was a fully avoidable pandemic and China has a lot to answer to, just like the US has a lot to answer to. We have to look at everything.

How and why do you think this lab hypothesis has gained so little traction in mainstream science publications then?

I don't want to make any wild conspiracy theories here, but certainly people I know in the scientific community are afraid of taking this risk of discussing alternative explanations publicly. Some of the most prominent scientists in the world have told me privately they believe a lab leak is the most likely but don't want to put their careers at risk joining a toxic debate where there is only limited evidence available. Science is data driven—so in the absence of any meaningful data, arguments like this necessarily become more speculative. Because the Trump administration and the Chinese government politicized this science, many researchers are afraid of being compromised in one way or another. Most journalists rely on scientists as essential sources for these kinds of stories and often cannot write stories without them.

I'm not saying I know everything. I don't. I would love to be wrong and find that the virus did not escape from a lab and China behaved perfectly responsibly. If this is the case, let them fully open their records so we can see for ourselves.

And regardless of the answer about the origin of the virus, we still have to take care of our environment, address ecosystem destruction, and fix the other biggest problems that made this pandemic possible. Whatever the origins, we still need to strengthen WHO and global pathogenic surveillance and shore up public health infrastructure in the poorest countries and to help vulnerable populations the world over. We need to do all these things while asking the tough questions.

This quest is so much harder, because genuine conspiracy theorists have also promoted the same idea of the virus' origin from the very beginning.

This is a big challenge, but even a broken analog clock tells the right time twice a day. I try to put these things aside and as with everything in life, apply my best analysis based on information that I have. The only way we're going to know if we're right or wrong is this transparent and international investigation. We have to prioritize transparency, openness, and accountability and make sure we don't align ourselves with any forms of racism or intolerance.

Do you think ideas of globalization, free trade and a market-oriented world order took a hit in 2020?

Definitely globalization is not ending and free trade is not ending, but the world is certainly shifting, virtualizing as we overcome certain dimensions of distance. Supply chains are being reconfigured and some of the physical infrastructure in manufacturing would be moved geographically closer to one another. It could be we won't have one globalization, but maybe we're going to have two globalizations with two competing competitive ecosystems,

one centered around China and the other the US. Both will be global in a way and there will be some overlap between them. Others will need to figure out how to position themselves relative to these poles.

I believe—and many actual experts in the field of psychiatry and psychology agree—that this virtualization of our existence brings with it a creeping crisis of anxiety, depression and suicide.

Human beings have a biological need for physical human companionship. And now we are fulfilling part of that need through these virtual connections, but, biologically, we need more physical contact. We're not virtual beings. But we will be increasingly more virtual in the future. And we are going to adapt to this reality that will become... well, *the reality*. Our future will be a hybrid between virtual and physical, but it will be far more virtual than our ancestors could have imagined and we will get used to that.

If we had taken our roaming nomad ancestors from their prairies and steppes and put them in modern apartment buildings, they would have gotten incredibly depressed. It may be just that the modern generation is going through so rapid a transformation from a more physical world to a more virtual one that it is discombobulation for us. We may be the transitional generation because we're in a position where we can still compare these two worlds. It could very well be that the younger generation will just see this as the new normal? Maybe they will compensate for our physical company needs in other ways. There's very little that is absolutely fixed in what it means to be a human.

It could be we won't have one globalization, but maybe we're going to have two globalizations with two competing competitive ecosystems, one centered around China and the other the US.

But the psychological toll of isolation is real.

For now. Again, people born into this reality won't compare this to our previous reality. Pre-COVID times had their psychological toll as well. Most of us were not referencing some pre-industrial world, thinking "we're really depressed now, wouldn't it be better to be nomads?" The broader context of our lives for most people is just a non-negotiable reality.

Meaning what?

I live in New York City. I don't spend much time negotiating whether cities exist. Past generations may have. But now I just live in a city and this is it.

And with technology and virtuality it is increasingly the same—is what you're saying? OK, let's dwell on it just a little more.

I know you're strongly against romanticizing the past, which some people do. But this particular age we live in has brought us an exponential change. In the way we communicate, we conduct our daily chores, how we meet people. Even how our romantic and sexual life looks is dependent on on-line technologies. Times of great technological progress and great uncertainty tend to produce tyrants and demagogues of the worst kind. You are not bothered by that?

We're in a period of exponential change. Unless we destroy the world with nuclear weapons, a human induced climate disaster, or some other means, we will always now be in a period of exponential change because of the super convergence of technologies. That is disorienting for people because our brains came of age in the savannas of Africa, where our ancestors survived thanks to very practical and linear thinking. We are going to have to adapt to a level and speed of change that juxtaposes against the biology of our brains.
These revolutionary technologies can very clearly be abused. That's why we all have a huge responsibility to educate ourselves and others about where our societies are headed and what kind of world we're building so we can join the process of figuring out the best individual and collective paths forward. In my opinion democratic societies are in better positions to do that than non-democratic ones. But to do that, these societies need to work. Denmark, for example, has the very thoughtful framework for national consultations on complex issues. My work on the future of human genetic engineering also calls for collaborative efforts to make sure our most cherished values can guide the application of our most powerful technologies. Small groups of experts and elites making decisions for everybody will inevitably agitate people and not work. If somebody comes along and puts a name on that agitation—like Donald Trump did—people will follow him or her, whether this analysis is right or wrong.

You do not believe in the moderation of that exponential change?

I do not, because it simply is not possible. It's too hard to slow technological change. Better to create strong ethics and governance systems to make sure it is used in ways that optimize benefits and minimize harms.

So if that's impossible and there are worst- and best-case scenarios where are we headed? What is the worst-case scenario?

Extinction.

And the best?

All of us, particularly those currently the most vulnerable, thriving in this post-scarcity, technologically advanced, connected society is certainly the best. Everything

These revolutionary technologies can very clearly be abused. That's why we all have a huge responsibility to educate ourselves and others about where our societies are headed.

and anything in between are possible. These technologies don't come with their own build in value system. We have to provide that. There's a real danger of a widening technological divide, with haves and have-nots, a where technology is used to oppress people as in Xinjiang, China today, and where most powerful technologies are used in abusive ways. On the other side, there are incredibly wonderful applications of technology: preventive and predictive healthcare, mitigating risks from early stages of life, technologies that will help us live living longer, safer, and more creative and innovative lives.

But the trajectory we're on is...

Right now, we're on a dual track. There are lots of amazing uses of technology that are helping us but we're also seeing a dangerous trajectory of rising populism and all kinds of technology abuse. If we don't want to be on that second path, now is also the moment to redouble our efforts. This is why I and people from over 115 countries are advocating for a new global framework based on the mutual responsibilities of interdependence. Our movement is called OneShared.World and we hope people will learn about and join us. In many ways, it feels like we're all at a historical juncture equivalent to 1918, where the framework we're going to choose will determine the future of the world in the most profound of ways.

JAMIE METZL
is a leading futurist working at the intersection of technology, healthcare, social change, and geopolitics. Metzl is a Singularity University faculty member, a Senior Fellow of the Atlantic Council, and Founder and Chair of the global interdependence movement, OneShared.World. He serves on the World Health Organization expert advisory committee on human genome editing and advises organizations, countries and corporations worldwide. His most recent book is *Hacking Darwin: Genetic Engineering and the Future of Humanity.* JamieMetzl.com

ASPEN REVIEW
ANNA ZAMEJC

INTERVIEW
TECHNOLOGY
PUBLIC SPACES

Tammy Westergard: Bridging the Digital Divide with Libraries and Upskilling

People's labor being replaced by robots—a threatening myth calling for companies, institutions and society to focus on sharpening the skills of individuals. Libraries are therefore adapting to the twenty-first century by becoming a modern destination to learn and acquire new skills and provide opportunities to bridge the digital divide, as Tammy Westergard shared in an interview with Anna Zamejc.

ANNA ZAMEJC: Are public libraries still relevant in the digital age?

TAMMY WESTERGARD: Absolutely. Public libraries are part of the public space, just like parks and other places. We are not sent there, it is specifically a place where we all belong and a cornerstone of democracy. In the digital age, public libraries are more important than ever because they provide opportunities to bridge the digital divide. When we go to the library, we see people using digital tools and we can just watch them from a distance to get some level of comfort and then we can try ourselves. In fact, we first learn to read and then we read to learn for the rest of our lives. Especially with technology, it's a moving target all the time. Our industry 4.0 has just accelerated the requirements for digital literacy, just as a part of everyday life.

So how is technology changing the ways libraries operate today?

We don't typically check our books out from the librarian anymore with the help of a card in the inside of the book jacket. We take items from the library using self-checkout. Libraries are in fact adjusting in the exact same ways as work and home environments do: by embracing technology and automation in order to gain efficiency.

There are conveyor bells and robots that help sort books and get them back on the shelves as that kind of human labor can be more efficiently and productively done with machines. And the other role of libraries is not necessarily to be a passive place for people to go to in order to access information, books, pictures or audio files. Today, libraries are also a place where people go to learn as they help facilitate life-long learning and provide training in terms of gaining marketable skills.
Finally, libraries are also leveraging technology, by using virtual reality tools and 3-D printing. All of these things can be found in the library and are a normal part of operations.

The role of public libraries in the twenty-first century is clearly evolving, yet many people still perceive them in a traditional way as a place to check out books and find a quiet area to read. So how to break those stereotypes and how can modern libraries reach out to the skeptics and best engage the entire communities?

Libraries can also play a huge role in civil society as a place where we can convene and learn from each other, have conversations within the neutral space of a library. I think one of the reasons that libraries are so important is that we all belong there.
One of the challenges in our societies is to meet people where they are. People who come to a library have an information-seeking need and so it is the right place and the right time for them. So maybe the question is different, maybe it is how do we share the good news about what is available at the library so that others who are not coming to the library are inspired to do so as well? That antiquated notion that a library is some kind of a dusty book circulator has to be dispelled. We all understand that the digital world is now everywhere. If we compare bridging the digital gap to achieving literacy, the library is an obvious answer—that's the place to go to develop those digital skills.

What are then the leading examples of modern-day public libraries in the US and what makes them truly unique?

I think it's the librarians themselves and the leadership that is coming out of a library. Because not every community has the resources to have a fancy building.
It's also all the libraries that are really trying to meet the needs of their communities. And in the digital age, those that bring tools to partnering schools and classrooms. Oftentimes, school libraries are very underfunded, especially in the United States. The public libraries typically have more resources than school libraries do, so it becomes an area of focus for the public library to know exactly what the classroom needs are within the schools that the community serves and help the teachers get opportunities to learn how to work with different technologies.
In Nevada, we actually launched a pilot project using virtual reality tools. I made a call to public libraries that wanted to be

At the end of the day, the Internet is vast and it is dark. And so libraries are really like the lighthouse of the Internet. When people are lost and looking for things online, your instinct is to try and find the library online.

a part of an early program and the only requirement was that they would find science teachers within their jurisdiction to take this content into the classroom and help advance a specific learning goal. The librarians would then create those relationships. And that's exactly what they did, they connected with the teachers, they found out where they were at within their lesson plans. It was a tremendous success. And that was just a small pilot program in Nevada. California did the same thing in over a hundred libraries, taking it out into the community.

Beyond collaborating with schools, who else do modern libraries work with?

Libraries really work with any member of the community. The library in Písek, which opened a few years ago, provides an excellent example. It's based in a five-floor retrofit building, it has an observatory on the roof and a kitchen where the community is invited to hold multicultural groups, talk about food and cook together. There are instructional classrooms in the library (using VR goggles), there are youth services and preschool activities.

So, the actual partner is everyone in the community that wants to use the facilities. And one of the things that is great about having it organized in a library is that the librarians are not necessarily the subject matter experts in the instruction. It is the community partners that are stepping in, sharing their messages, achieving their goals—all under the umbrella of the library.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your work? With social distancing and lockdowns, it was no longer possible to focus on physical gatherings and interactions.

That's a great question. At the end of the day, the Internet is vast and it is dark. And so libraries are really like the lighthouse of the Internet. When people are lost and looking for things online, your instinct is to try and find the library online. And all the libraries in the US and here in the Czech Republic have digital versions of themselves. So you can get electronic cards and you are able to access the data bases. One of the ways the libraries in Nevada and elsewhere pivoted to serve families and their children was offering online story times through Zoom. Libraries were putting up their new digital programming and engaged with communities in real time. Then they would record their sessions and put them up on Zoom. So, in other words, we met people where they were online. We would also make books available and people could come by into

the parking lots and pick their things up. We did in a hybrid way just like the rest of the business world.

What kind of projects are you currently working on?

I am focused on administering large portions of a 13.8 million USD grant the State of Nevada was awarded through the US Department of Education. There is 5.3 million USD that are large library pieces of this 13.8 million USD grant. And essentially, what it is doing is leveraging a career information database that is in the state of Nevada and all the libraries within the state have access to it. I like to call it a match.com for job seekers and employers.

This database is licensed to all the public libraries in the state of Nevada. So what that means is that every Nevadan has access to that service where they can create an account, explore various career options, and find ones that may match their interest and skills. Then, the system will help identify where learning gaps are and from there recommend training programs which could be achieved in weeks, not years.

So, when individuals find their way into those training programs which can be completed in a short period of time, these become quick and vast doors into upskilling and getting back to work. Often times into a whole new career.

The need for that kind of literacy for individuals to be able to understand the labor market is really vast.

Because it is hard to understand, it is hard to keep pace with change, relative to what skills and abilities industries really do need right now. And as libraries kind of step into that space, I think that's going to create at least some sense of an opportunity to understand what skills you need to continue to sharpen as an individual so that you are not going to be replaced by the robots. Because that's the myth that robots are going to take all of our jobs.

But the McKinsey Institute said in February this year that some 45 million Americans would lose their jobs by 2030, an increase of 6 million compared to its previous estimate of 2017. So maybe we should be afraid of robots at the end of the day?

No, because what it means is that there will be different kinds of jobs. It doesn't mean that there isn't work. There is plenty of work to do. But we have to learn that our co-workers are co-bots. And in many ways, if you think about it, it's Thomas Friedman, the New York Times reporter, who described it best. He talked about the convergence of globalization, climate crisis and technology change as these large rivers that cover the whole planet are converging, becoming wider and deeper. So the opportunity is to learn to navigate that wide water and to move over it faster. At the end of the day, using machines and using technology help us do that. We don't want to think of it as artificial intelligence, we think of it as an intelligent assistant. So instead of

AI it is IA. And as intelligent assistance that is the hallmark of digital literacy and of being able to recognize that the job that I had was just an inefficient way to get the task at hand complete. Now I—as the worker—have to continue to upskill and I have to see how I am going to use an intelligent assistant in order to advance the bottom line of the business and also to solve problems.

The Internet of things is driving connectivity globally, so it is really allowing business to operate much more efficiently, much more cooperatively and in ways that are going to tread lighter on the planet. Especially with things like 3d printing so that you can print things from sustainable materials just in time and reduce warehousing costs. Or how smart sensors when they are connected to an entire system can measure productive maintenance so that the machinery within things lasts longer. There are a lot of ways the jobs of the past are just being reinvented into the jobs of the future.

But as you mentioned, that requires constant learning. It all sounds great at the systemic level, but for an average individual who may not have the time, the energy and motivation to continue learning all their life, what can be done? Is unemployment inevitable for people who are not able to keep pace with technological change?

We don't want to fear technology. In fact, it is the thing that is going to help us solve problems and to live efficiently and sustainably in this world. I honestly think that one of the ways it can be done is for employers to embrace the library as the center of lifelong learning.

When employers work with libraries to help the librarians shape the collection and the kinds of information that are available to the community, then they all become part of an ecosystem.

Businesses do not operate in a vacuum. What is business? It's solving a problem or meeting some kinds of needs. So when the business sector wants to make itself understood to the community and the community members have an understanding of what the labor market is and what their role is within those opportunities and that system, then it all becomes like a bicycle gear and works together.

Instead of seeing the library as this sort of antiquated, old, nice to have thing, it is actually a have to have.

For younger people, it may be easier to replace new technologies and fit into these new dynamics because they are growing up with fast-changing modern, innovative tools. What about the elderly, older people, how could libraries, as a middle-man between the communities and business, help people overcome this fear of technology?

That's a great question and libraries do this all the time by making technology available to the public. It does go back to the role of the leadership within the libraries and the

library professionals that are working there. When the Internet first appeared in mainstream society, it was libraries that had computers where people could set up e-mail accounts. And there was plenty of pushback at the time from some librarians who basically said what do you think we are? Some post office? It didn't make sense to them why people would set up e-mails in their libraries. The point of that is to think about how long ago it was.

Now you cannot find libraries without computers. Libraries are distributed throughout the world and the network is dense. In fact, I've recently learned that the Czech Republic has the densest network of libraries of any country in the world.

When you think about that, all those libraries have roofs, they have bathrooms, doors, chairs, computers and Internet connectivity. That right there is a quantum leap in terms of distributing what opportunities are everywhere. So libraries have not only been an access point to the Internet, but we also bring technology to the forefront and we make it available for people to use it. As I said before, whether it is teachers who don't have the same resources within their schools—they can come to the library and the librarians empower them, or adults can come to the library just to get a sense of what it is all about. And that was actually the big area of focus using virtual reality tools in three states in the US: California, Nevada, and the state of Washington.

How could governments best support public libraries? What advice would you offer to policymakers to make libraries a truly engaging public place?

One of the most exciting things I've learned is that in the Czech Republic there was a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education to have libraries be a part of instructional training, an education site, and not so focused just on cultural activities. It's going to be a really key opportunity because I think it will unlock funds from the EU that are also focused on that.

In the US, we have the Institute of Museum and Library Services that is the federal arm of libraries. There is funding allocated to each of the fifty states based on the population formula and it goes through the state libraries which makes it accessible either in state-wide programs or competitive grant opportunities for libraries.

A similar model could be followed here in the Czech Republic. Allowing the upskilling and the re-training dollars that might be funneled through the Labor Office to make their ways into libraries could make a real difference. I've recently learned that the library of Písek was contacted by the local Labor Office to reserve some of the instructional space for about 80 hours a month to do that thing in IT. In other words, it looks like some of this is already making its way through the ecosystem here in the Czech Republic. Putting together further programs that actually facilitate a similar partnership will ignite what is already going on.

What skills, beyond keeping pace with innovative changes, will be needed in the future job markets and how could libraries help harness them?

Most librarians think about skills in the framework of literacy which includes numbers, science, digital literacy, financial literacy, and cultural and civic literacy. They all form twenty-first century skills that will help the employers with the bottom line. There are various competencies that fall underneath those things, like computational thinking, understanding the Internet of Things, and how to problem-solve.

What do you envision libraries will look like in five years' time? What will be their key mission?

My definite answer is the mission of libraries will remain the same. When you think about the great library of Alexandria, it was the center of knowledge and this is not going to change. The fact that libraries are a safe, trusted place to go will not change either. And that in itself is good news. As we continue to wrestle with our challenges, the library is the human organism, it is the heart. People will count on the library to continue its role in making information accessible to everybody.

So in five years' time, my hope is that with regards to this myth of robots taking over the world, the libraries will continue helping individuals understand what their role is on the labor markets, helping identify and bridging the skills gap.

But we do need funding. When librarians go to the city council meetings to defend their budget, everyone is competing for money. And sometimes firefighters will say to the mayor, well, if your house is on fire, Mr. or Ms. Mayor, who do you want to show up, the librarian or the firefighter? Well, the librarian can now say, when your democracy is on fire, who do you want to show up? The firefighter or the librarian? It's the access to information, the access to opportunity and the belief that we can solve the problems that are going to cool this flame that is currently overtaking the world.

TAMMY WESTERGARD

is a Nevada State librarian. Her passion is to help people get better jobs with real wage growth and she believes there's no better place to do that than in libraries. She has previously served as an administrator of the Nevada State Library, Archives and Public Records Division.
Since becoming a librarian, she has launched the first-in-the-country programs in libraries to help people level up their skills for free and take their place in the twenty-first century economy. In 2020, the Nevada Library Association named Tammy Westergard, Librarian of the Year.

Vaccine
COVID-19
0.5
1.5
2ml

Change Needs People, Not Papers

ASPEN.REVIEW
SYLWIA PIEKARSKA

SCIENCE
PANDEMIC
ECONOMY

Aspen Young Leaders

COVID-19 has brought together a wide range of scientists, policymakers, and businesses in an unprecedented fashion. Just like neighbors who barely responded to one another's greetings in the past, with the surge of the pandemic, they have begun to exchange far more than minimal gestures of empathy. The shared awareness of the ubiquitous presence of the virus has fostered unusual partnerships. It has opened multidimensional dialogue, giving us in all probability the greatest lesson in decades on agility in the decision-making process. The dust of the pandemic's outbreak is slowly falling, revealing a looming question—how to preserve the business-academia-policy triangle?

Data can't make it on their own (yet)

In April 2020, half of the world's population had been asked or ordered by their governments to stay home. The lockdown may have brought back country borders. At the same time, it has united us in an incredible feeling of uncertainty. And this is something both extraordinarily usual and unbearable for politicians.

At that time, humankind wondered "what would happen," and the answer partially came from mathematical epidemiologists. The mathematical models they developed were supposed to predict the virus' spread and solve the biggest question for policymakers. If introduced, how might the safety measures limit the pandemic outbreak?

While we were all trying to understand what "the basic reproduction number" is (you probably recall the abbreviation: R0), similarly in governmental offices, the temperature was rising. Decision-makers desperately needed facts to back up their decisions.

To make an accurate model, you need solid entry data, which reflects the reality as much as possible. And it has been tough to get such data at that moment, not to mention that in the spring 2020, we were only about to start learning about the COVID-19 disease. On top of this, scientists must have anticipated and assumed a number of aspects of other people's behavior, such as acceptance for safety measures and mobility.

Back at the beginning of 2020, was it all new to scientists? No. Was it new for most policy and decision-makers? On that scale—yes.

Most politicians were about to discover an obvious fact for academia. Even the best model is only a simplified representation of reality, not a crystal ball. And data cannot make it on its own. To be able to make the most of these models, decision-makers needed to acknowledge the findings.

Possessing a 200 page report means nothing. Change may be based on this paper, but there are people who make it. Someone has to be skilled in communication and often brave enough to share this information. Governmental officials also have to be open and have the empathy and willingness to understand the message.

Policymakers in the optimism trap

After a few months of complete lockdown and a somehow too-long-winter, Europe sighed with relief with the first summerish days of 2020. Almost everywhere, the numbers of positive tested patients were falling as quickly as our masks. Everyone was eager for good news and ready to receive "the new normal" rhythm back in their lives.

The future was about to prove us horribly wrong, with the second, third and fourth waves of the pandemic just around the corner. But what could be heard from many politicians reflected people's hopes: "the pandemic is over."

At the same time, many scientists warned about abandoning all the safety measures too soon. With this, the great breakdown in academia and policy worlds became clearly visible. What had been only the beginning of a great war for one, the others claimed as their success and declared a winner.

Most politicians were about to discover an obvious fact for academia. Even the best model is only a simplified representation of reality, not a crystal ball. And data cannot make it on its own. To be able to make the most of these models, decision-makers needed to acknowledge the findings.

Back in the summer of 2020, there was a great deal of magical thinking in politics. "If everything goes right...", "if we will have a vaccine...", "if...". Numerous statements about the combatted virus have been the consequence of this thinking. This is a reflection of something called the "optimism trap" or "optimism bias.". It has been defined as a cognitive bias that makes someone think that they are less likely to fail than others.

In many countries, the consequences of becoming trapped in optimism were devastating, leaving healthcare systems unprepared for the second surge of the pandemic.

But does it mean that scientists are bulletproof from positive thinking? Certainly not.

Let's make science and politics

What has been unique for many of us was the fact that suddenly we became more than familiar with tens of healthcare experts. And I am positive that for many of those experts, this has also been a unique experience. If it weren't for COVID-19, they wouldn't have been exposed to the media all that much.

Many of them would not have been exposed to politics as well. And there is more than an "optimism trap" that lays a shadow on this cooperation.

You may recall that having data does not mean being able to make use of it. There is a significant difference between the "evidence for science making" portfolio and the needed evidence for policy-making.

The major obstacle to tackle seems to be a completely different perception of time. Over the year, something incredibly slow for politi-

cians might progress with breakneck speed in the eyes of scientists. Businesses may have already started to prepare for the change based upon this evidence.

If this time machine gets faster, as is still the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, another dimension comes into the game—quality.

You may recall that having data does not mean being able to make use of it. There is a significant difference between the "evidence for science making" portfolio and the needed evidence for policy-making.

Gathering data for the work of science is a structured and well-documented process that requires a great deal of time and a complex methodological approach. When these resources are at stake, the quality of the data becomes poorer from the scientific point of view. They may still, however, provide insights into trends and light the road for policymakers. They can initiate change, which in many cases provides society with access to the newest scientific achievements and the best-in-class technologies.

Are time, quality, and policy-making relationships doomed to failure? Not necessarily. But it is highly dependent on understanding each other's needs and priorities, acknowledging the mutual borders of compromise and expectations.

Go green when fueling the discussion

"Every two weeks, one of the world's languages disappears, along with the human history and cultural heritage that accompanies it", Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated in 2018 on International Mother Language Day. Language apparently holds that much information about ourselves, and apparently, the business-academia-policy triangle often does not speak a common language. Why not look for what we do have in common?

This was a shared vision of the pandemic's end, which has fostered many multisectoral initiatives and out-of-the-box collaborations over the last few months. Tech giants shared mobility data with governments to track peoples' traffic in cities better, FMCG companies introduced know-how on communication to a mass audience via apps, and the MedTech industry was the one to co-develop with authorities testing strategies. They all represent-

ed different businesses but sat for months in the same strategy room, being somehow dependent on one another's input.

Many of these projects were far from being perfect. Some even painfully exposed the darkest sides of relations between business and politics. Although some might scoff at the utopian vision of harmonious, cross-sectoral cooperation in the business-academia-policy triangle, oriented purely on problem-solving, but one can also try to make it happen, at least more frequently.

A range of personal, cognitive, and even logistic skills are needed on each side of the table to make it work. This will require stupendous effort. The business-academia-policy triangle is dependent, however, on a great deal of the emotional and behavioral fuel which comes in. So likewise, when someone chooses green energy for its homeland and business, it might also go green when fueling the discussion.

And this goes far beyond speech. Although the pandemic proved the power of science, it also revealed how vulnerable it could be. Reflecting on multiple conspiracy theories budding around the vaccines against COVID-19 brings to the spotlight the shredded trust which people have in science.

Breaking the ripple effect of ubiquitous fake news may be one of the utmost challenges that the business-academia-policy triangle faces. As long as the massive emotional impact of any kind of change will not be accepted as an indispensable upshot of every decision—or policy-making process, it will make the road even more rocky.

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

SYLWIA PIEKARSKA

works as a Health Economics & Market Access Manager at Boston Scientific. Before that, she worked as a Public Policy Manager CEE in Becton Dickinson (BD). She oversees stakeholders' relations and addresses public burdens of high societal relevance in the MedTech sector. She engages with several industry organizations and NGOs to strengthen transparent partnerships in business & policymaking. Prior to that she managed a number of Public Affairs and Public Relations projects as a consultant and worked in public administration. A graduate of the University of Warsaw, Institute of Political Science (2013). Sylwia is an alumna of the 'Aspen Young Leaders Program 2018' by Aspen Institute and the '30 under 30' program by AmCham.

ASPEN.REVIEW
BRENDAN SIMMS

POLITICS
EU
MERKEL

Will Europe Miss Merkel?

"We don't yet know", the analyst and German expert Hans Kundnani wrote in 2018, "whether Merkel will go down in history as the woman who destroyed Europe or saved it". Three years on, we may be closer to the answer. The critics are becoming louder and the supporters increasingly falling silent. Merkel, says the prominent liberal Princeton political scientist Jan Werner Mueller, "survived by avoiding politics whenever possible and history won't judge her kindly for it". The left-wing sociologist Wolfgang Streeck sees her as a postmodern politician with a premodern, Machiavellian contempt for both causes and people.

The distinctive Merkel method, which impressed most but also infuriated many, has been to triangulate between competing forces, and generally do no more than the bare minimum, at the latest possible moment. In the words of her biographer and *Spiegel* deputy-editor-in-chief, Dirk Kurbjuweit, "she waits and waits to see where the train is going and then she jumps on the train". This approach has characterized not merely her domestic policy, but also more importantly for our purposes, her European strategy. In terms of rhetoric, Merkel has usually privileged constraint over room for maneuver. Her favourite word is 'alternativlos', the contention that a particular choice is not in fact a choice.

Merkel's continent-wide popularity over the past five years was based partly on a general belief that she had steered Europe out of the Euro crisis, partly on a left-liberal enthusiasm for her migration policies.

Perhaps the best known and most sustained example of the Chancellor's modus operandi has been the agony of the Euro. The escalating sovereign debt crises in Spain, Italy, Portugal, the Irish Republic and especially Greece, following the financial collapse of 2008, represented a mortal threat to the common currency. It was also an opportunity to complete the political

union necessary to underpin the Euro, or at least to establish a common fund to shore it up. Merkel showed no interest in the former, demonstrating a complete lack of vision, and opposed the latter as long as she could. It took the commitment of ECB chief Mario Draghi to 'do what it takes' in support of the common currency to stabilize the situation. Though Chancellor of the most powerful state in the Eurozone, Merkel did not lead, she followed.

The Pressure to Change Course was never quite enough

Likewise, she was slow to grasp the growing belligerence of Vladimir Putin's Russia. The cyber-attack on Estonia in 2007 met with no response. A year later, she was one of those blocking an accession plan for Ukraine and Georgia at the NATO summit in Bucharest. This emboldened Russia to launch its attack on Georgia not long after. Then, in 2014, Putin annexed Crimea and intervened in Eastern Ukraine. This time, Merkel did react with meaningful economic sanctions, but she was very slow to authorize the necessary increase in German defence expenditure, which still lags well behind its alliance commitments. Above all, Merkel refused to cancel the controversial Nordstream projects, pipelines bringing energy directly from Russia to Germany, which are regarded as deeply threatening to the security of Poland. The pressure to change course, though substantial, was never quite enough to trump countervailing domestic economic interests.

More recently, some of these positives have become negatives. Whatever one makes of Merkel's decision to admit the refugees, there can be no doubt that it fuelled populism within European countries.

What is often forgotten, though, is the extent to which Merkel sometimes made very radical and unexpected decisions. The first sign of this was in 2011. After the Fukushima disaster in Japan, Merkel announced unilaterally that Germany was bailing out of nuclear power. That same year, she refused to join the NATO coalition intervention to prevent Libyan dictator Ghaddafi from massacring his own population. This was a major step for a country which set such store by alliance solidarity. (Admittedly, Germany was not the only country to act thus over Libya, so did the otherwise NATO-loyal Poland). Then in the fall of 2015, Merkel allowed about a million, mostly Syrian refugees, to settle in Germany, effectively giving them access to the entire European Union.

An oasis of stability at a time of global populists?

Merkel's continent-wide popularity over the past five years was based partly on a general belief that she had steered Europe out of the Euro crisis, partly on a left-liberal enthusiasm for her migration policies, and partly on a sense that she represented an oasis of stability at a time of acute global populist challenges. Her personal dignity in the face of Trump's insults and bombast was indeed inspiring. In Britain, many people, especially those who had voted to remain in the European Union, contrasted Merkel's calm style with the apparent bumbling of Prime Minister Boris Johnson. At the start of the Coronavirus pandemic, this sentiment found its most vivid expression in the veteran journalist John Kampfner's book *Why the Germans Do it Better* (2020).

Merkel was one of the most prominent protagonists of the failed policy of economic engagement with China, which was based on the mistaken assumption that it would lead to political liberalization there.

More recently, some of these positives have become negatives. Whatever one makes of Merkel's decision to admit the refugees, there can be no doubt that it fuelled not merely populism within European countries, but also greatly increased tensions between them, deepening the divide separating the eastern and western halves of the union. As for the pandemic, Germany is now struggling to cope with the 'third wave', its vaccination programme is stuttering, and suddenly it is the much-derided British who are ahead.

Meanwhile, the greatest challenge to face the west, that of the PRC, emerged on Merkel's watch. Though she was in good company—for example with Britain's David Cameron and George Osborne—Merkel was one of the most prominent protagonists of the failed policy of economic engagement with China, which was based on the mistaken assumption that it would lead to political liberalization there. This helped to drive Germany's manufacturing boom. A blind eye was turned not only to the growing military challenge in East Asia but also to the grievous human rights abuses of the regime. This has now come back to haunt Germany, as it faces calls from Washington to uproot Huawei from its critical infrastructure and calls for EU sanctions over the treatment of Uighur Muslims grow.

Merkel left Macron in the Rain

Whether we will miss all this when the Chancellor stands down later this year, if she stands down, depends very much on two questions. First, what were the alternatives to Angela capitalization is very inconsistent with the sub-titles 2005-2021? Secondly, who will her successor be? We know the answers to the first and have a shrewd idea about the second.

More generally, it is unclear whether Merkel, who has genuinely tried to combat the forces of extremism, did not ultimately encourage them, although unintentionally.

Merkel was by no means as 'alternativlos' in Germany as we have come to think in retrospect. To be sure, Merkel captured the Chancellery by beating SPD leader Gerhard Schröder. He was certainly a much weaker candidate, a sympathiser with Vladimir Putin who now actually chairs the Russian energy giant Rosneft. She was re-elected after besting the SPD's Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who was also a good deal 'softer' on Russia. She then defeated Peer Steinbrück, who was in many ways more of a hawk on foreign policy, supporting the Libyan intervention and something like Eurobonds to shore up the common foreign policy. Likewise, when she crushed Martin Schulz in the most recent federal election, her challenger was certainly the more ardent European, and he was no slouch on Russia either. So in the last two contests, at least, there was a viable 'alternative' to Merkel from the point of view of those who—like the present author—would have wished for a more robust policy towards Russia and a more whole-hearted commitment to the political unification of our continent.

Moreover, the real problem was the way in which she blocked genuine European alternatives to her cautious policy. This was most vividly demonstrated by her treatment of the new French President Emmanuel Macron. When elected, he was buzzing with ideas for the transformation of the EU and the creation of truly 'European Sovereignty'. There were practical problems with his vision to be sure, but it was by far the most important show in town the continent had seen for a decade, if not longer. Macron's idea of a common budget for the Eurozone would have been, for example, a big step towards a united Europe. Even allowing for unforeseen delays in forming a German government after the 2017 election, Merkel's response was shameful. She left Macron in the rain for so long, and avoided giving

him a concrete reply to his reform proposals, that the bedraggled French President was eventually overtaken by domestic protests. Today, unless he can make some sort of radical recovery, he is sadly a busted flush in European politics. Merkel simply wore him down. Perhaps she did not mean to, but she did.

No Signs of Radical Changes after the Elections in Germany

There is no guarantee that whoever follows the Chancellor in the CDU will be any better. Her designated successor, the North Rhine Westphalian Minister President Armin Laschet, shares Merkel's calm temperament, to be sure, but is softer on Russia and China than she is. Nor is there any sign that he would do any of the radical things which are necessary to shore up the European project. It is hard to see him as an improvement.

More generally, it is unclear whether Merkel, who has genuinely tried to combat the forces of extremism, did not ultimately encourage them, although unintentionally. Her migration policies led to a substantial increase in far right sentiment. She did too little to tackle the Hungarian and Polish governments over rule of law issues. The danger is that these forces will achieve their breakthrough after the Chancellor's departure, perhaps with the election of Marine Le Pen in the French presidential election 2022.

So whatever our frustrations with Angela Merkel, we should be careful what we wish for. The last word should perhaps be left to Yanis Varoufakis, one of the most prominent victims of her austerity policies. "She was a catastrophe", says the former Greek finance minister, "and she will be missed because who comes next will certainly be worse".

BRENDAN SIMMS
is Professor of the History of European International Relations at the University of Cambridge and President of the Project for Democratic Union, which advocates a full political union of the eurozone on Anglo-American constitutional principles. His research focuses on the history of European foreign policy. He has written a variety of books and articles on this subject. He is the author of *Europe: The Struggle for Supremacy, 1453 to the Present Day* (Penguin Press, 2013) and *The Longest Afternoon: The 400 Men Who Decided the Battle of Waterloo* (Penguin Press, 2014), which is about the King's German Legion as prototype for a future European army. | Photo: Ede and Ravenscroft

ASPEN.REVIEW
EDWIN BENDYK

GLOBAL ECONOMY
PANDEMIC
DEVELOPMENT

The Great Acceleration

The strongest vector shaping post-pandemic reality in Europe and the United States will be green modernization. Many years of investment in new energy sources, batteries, information technology to enable coordination, and finally the development of ICT networks are finally beginning to make a systemic impact.

The pandemic will stay with us for a long time, even if the health threat is gone, argue the authors of the report "The Covid Decade" produced this spring by the British Academy. Let's take their words seriously, but without panic—it is not the first time in history that "everything needs to change, so everything can stay the same" and life is back to normal.

There is no return to the normality understood as the state before the pandemic, although we are longing for full concert halls, shopping malls and restaurants. Of course, we will go back there, but more and more often these returns will be accompanied by questions as to whether a lifestyle based on unlimited consumption of leisure, space, and material and symbolic goods makes sense. For some, growing ecological awareness will be an increasingly important source of doubt, while for others, it will be the trauma of the pandemic and a subconscious fear of human contact. Still others will discover that the essence of a good life is conviviality—sociability practiced locally, among friends and acquaintances.

It is impossible at this time to predict how social sensitivity and imagination will change as a result of the Covid-19 experience, the economic crisis, and reports of further global threats posed by the climate crisis, environmental destruction, and other accelerating macro-processes that have been reported for years. For Central and Eastern European societies, the most significant challenge is the demographic shift. The pandemic death statistics have highlighted and reinforced the fundamental message that demographers have been conveying for some time—the time of extinction has arrived and the balance of deaths and births has tilted toward death. And it will stay that way, even when the virus stops killing. But at the same time, contrary to the hopes of cynics, coronavirus affecting mainly the elderly has not rejuvenated societies, and extinction is and will be coupled with aging. The complex consequences of the demographic dynamics were brilliantly captured by Ivan Krastev in an essay published last May in the French magazine Le débat. Krastev described the mechanism of a combination of detrimental processes that in the end lead to the erosion of the foundations of liberal democracy and at the same time preclude the opportunity to break out of the vicious circle. The declining share of young people in the social structure translates into their declining political significance—after all, democracy is about the aggregated power of votes.

Undoubtedly, the strongest vector shaping the post-pandemic reality in Europe and the United States will be the green modernization.

A Complex Demographic, Social and Spatial Context

The young respond with escape strategies, choosing emigration (in November 2020, 64% of Poles aged 18-29 declared the desire to leave and work abroad, according to a survey conducted by Ipsos for Oko.press), a refusal to participate in the political system or radicalization of attitudes. At the same time, right-wing populists are gaining ground, consolidating their electorate under the slogan of defending endangered traditional values, with their collapse having allegedly caused a moral and demographic crisis. Such a diagnosis, politically effective in terms of the logic of staying in power, leads to counter-effective solutions: persecuting LGBTQ communities, curbing women's rights and anti-immigrant rhetoric resulting in a lack of immigration policy at the government level.

As a result, young people receive a signal confirming their choices, although intergenerational conflict is not the only dimension of the growing social conflict. There is also the territorial dimension resulting from tensions between the cities and the countryside. Nor can we forget the conflict of lifestyles which arises from class differences and leads to a different coding of challenges such as climate change and the necessary responses to it. Representatives of the popular class are willing to give up foreign vacations and airplane flights, because they never made use of this offer in the first place. The urban middle class sees the solution to the problem in a ban on burning coal and waste, because they can afford more ecological solutions.

This complex demographic, social and spatial context should be kept in mind when analyzing other, non-social macro-trends that determine the future.

The European Green Deal announced in 2019 is coming of age through being transformed from an idea into a set of legal frameworks, strategic goals and strategic funding programs. Increasing greenhouse gas emission reductions to 55% by 2030; Horizon Europe supporting research and development with 95.5 billion euros; the Reconstruction Fund with clearly defined pro-climate priorities; and the new budget perspective clearly show the direction that European Union countries have chosen.

The Paris Effect

A similar direction was chosen by the United States after Joe Biden assumed the presidency, and the new line was confirmed by the climate summit organized by the new President on the occasion of Earth Day. The U.S. confirmed its return to the Paris Agreement and its readiness to fight for the leadership role in the necessary and inevitable green technological and economic transformation.

Can anything stop this process? It seems that the critical mass has already been exceeded, as pointed out by the authors of "The Paris Effect" report. It was published on the fifth anniversary of the Paris Climate Agreement and summarizes the developments from the past five years. It turns out that, contrary to the voices of many sceptics complaining that the Agreement is toothless, the process of change for climate has entered the stage of systemic acceleration. In 2015, it was predicted that no sooner than in 2050 electric vehicles would account for more than 50% of overall sales, but today experts estimate that it will happen two decades earlier. Electric cars are

expected to be cost-competitive with internal combustion cars by the middle of this decade. The electric Dacia Spring, launched by Renault, is a perfect illustration of this acceleration, as it shows that the transformation has embraced the mass market, that is the most popular segment.

The Paris Agreement was an important stimulus because it provided a signal for regulatory action at the government level, which in turn translated into changes in the strategies of capital investors.

This is just one example of a general trend resulting from the logic of new technology development. Many years of investment in new energy sources, batteries, information technology to enable coordination, and finally the development of ICT networks are finally beginning to make a systemic impact and change is accelerating.

The rising cost of carbon emissions means an increasing risk of investing in fossil-fuel based power generation, so investors are withdrawing 'dirty' assets from their portfolios. Since it is increasingly profitable to invest in new technologies, the inflow of money for research and development is growing, so technological change is accelerating and new solutions are becoming cheaper faster.

An Evolution with Unexpected Consequences

The pandemic has only accelerated many of these trends, which can be summed up by stating that we are indeed seeing the end (or at least the beginning of the end) of the age of oil, the most important fuel of modern times. BP announced at the beginning of the pandemic that "peak oil demand" had occurred, meaning that humanity had passed the breaking point in terms of appetite for oil. Now the demand for oil is only expected to decrease. Even if not all energy market analysts concur with BP's claim, almost all of them agree that such a breakthrough will occur in this decade. And an important reason for it is the acceleration described above.

When the pandemic broke out, sparking off a recession, car companies cut back on microprocessor orders. Electronics companies rebounded by serving the growing demand for computers and electronic devices driven by home learning, work and entertainment. By the end of 2020, demand for cars returned, but there was a shortage of production capacity, meaning a shortage of microprocessors. Car factory production lines came to a standstill, and the problem is far from solved.

It also came to light that the most advanced electronic circuits are produced by just three companies: American Intel, Korean Samsung and Taiwanese TSMC. TSMC dominates and cannot keep up with investments in production capacity—today, the cost of building a factory, capable of producing the most advanced microprocessors, may exceed $20 billion. This is not, however, the end of the story. Only one company in the world, the Dutch ASML, produces the photolithography equipment necessary for 'printing' the chips. The semiconductor crisis has revealed a fundamental aspect of modern civilization—its extraordinary complexity, requiring an incredible concentration of knowledge and capital. Are we still able to manage this complexity?

The search for a way out of the semiconductor crisis will provide a partial answer to this question. And it will determine the opportunity presented by the great acceleration described earlier, which was best described in systemic terms by Carlota Peres. The Venezuelan-British economist explores the logic of technological revolutions. Looking at contemporary capitalism, she found that humanity was structurally at a similar point in time to the 1930s and 1940s. It was an era when the accumulation of technological progress, accelerated by World War II, found practical application in the new post-war social and economic model. We remember it under the name of the welfare state.

The climate movements, which are most active among young people, have become increasingly radicalized by scientific reports pointing out that the climate crisis is growing worse. They accuse politicians of acting too slowly and too timidly, and call for radical action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Deep Institutional Reforms Are Needed

The current acceleration and accumulation of technological change over the next decade or so should lead to a green/information technological revolution that may provide the foundation for a new socio-economic model. It may or may not, because technological change alone does not guarantee the right direction for social and economic change. Deep institutional reforms are needed, but they require an adequate quality of politics. Is it available for us?

It would seem that the aforementioned illustrations of the European Green Deal and ecological transformation in the USA should make us say 'yes' to this question. And indeed, they bring hope, but also many concerns,

This acceleration also has some completely unexpected consequences. The most surprising and disturbing of them is the semiconductor crisis, that is, a shortage of microprocessors necessary to produce not only computers and smartphones, but also cars, washing machines, and even, as the Washington Post revealed, automatic dog-washing booths.

stemming from the socio-demographic processes described earlier, which can produce undesirable developments. The biggest concern is the possibility of using green modernization as a political wedge by populist politicians. This threat is revealed by the study of the London-based think-tank Counterpoint published in the report *Green Wedge. Mapping Dissent Against Climate Policy in Europe*.

This is not just a matter of fuelling resistance against closing down coal mines and power plants, but a more complex mechanism is at play here.

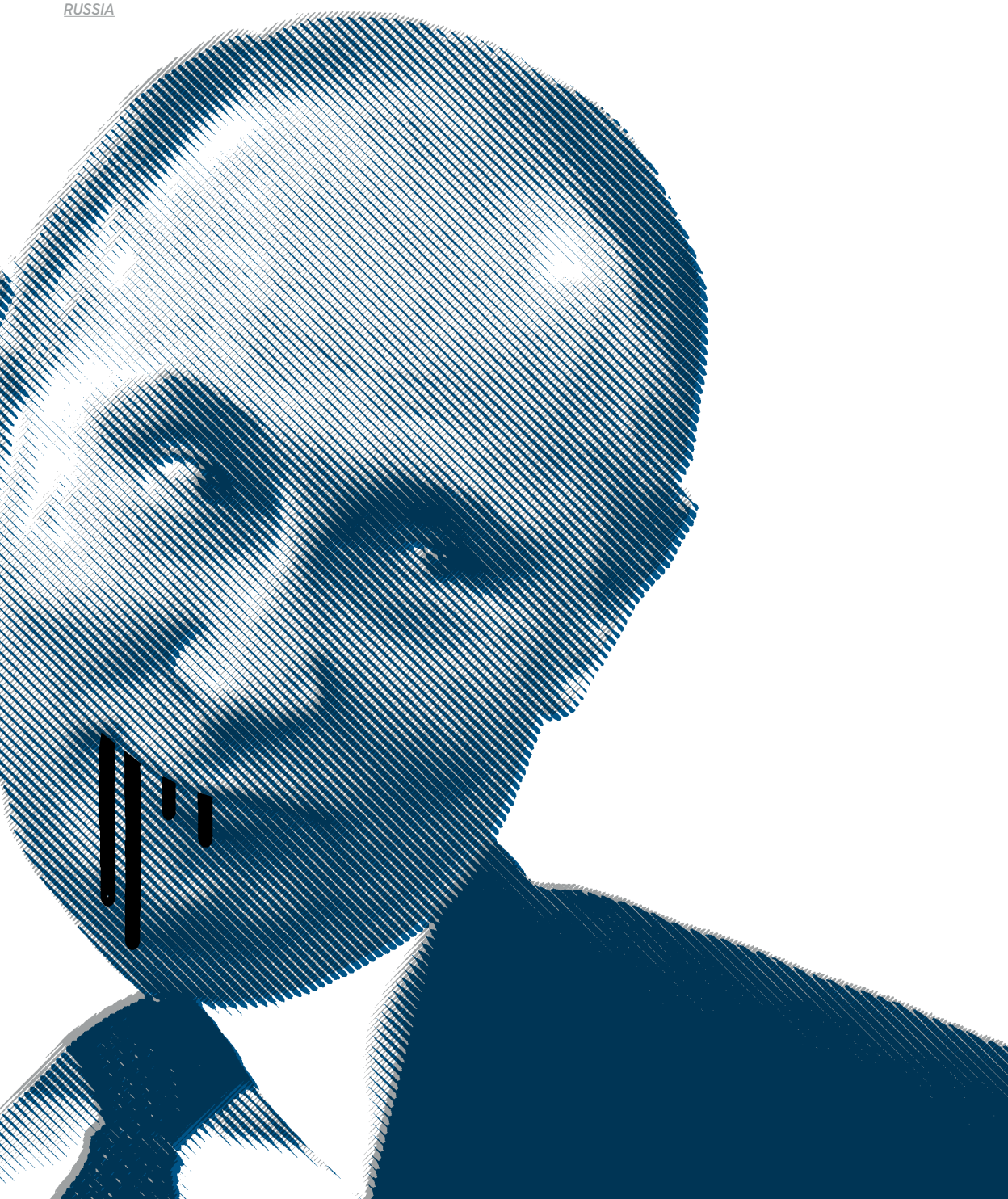
This is ideal fuel for forces posing as the voice of common sense, in defence of traditional lifestyles and freedom, especially if the electorate of these forces, due to their demographic structure, is not directly interested in the distant future.

This is how we reach the starting point. The future depends on whether we can find a way to break out of the destructive logic of accelerating socio-demographic change to take full advantage of the potential of systemic acceleration in the technological and economic dimensions.

EDWIN BENDYK
is the president of the Batory Foundation in Warsaw, a commentator for the *Polityka* weekly, and the author of numerous books, the latest of which is *W Polsce, czyli wszędzie. Rzecz o upadku i przyszłości świata* [In Poland, or Everywhere. On the Collapse and Future of the World] (2020).

ASPEN.REVIEW
JAKUB DYMEK

INTERVIEW
CHINA
RUSSIA



Mark Galeotti: Putin Is No Supervillain

We overplay Russia's strengths and at the same time misunderstand its motivations. If we believe that Putin doesn't want anything, but to stab us and watch us bleed, we fail to see the real perspective of what the Russians are about—says Mark Galeotti in an interview with Jakub Dymek.

JAKUB DYMEK: "We need to talk about Putin and how the West gets him wrong" one of your recent books argue. Who is 'the West' here and what exactly does it get wrong when thinking about today's Russia?

MARK GALEOTTI: True, there's no single perspective on Russia. Societies in the Eastern part of Europe, former members of the Soviet Union or Warsaw Pact, tend to look at today's Russia as an inheritor of all things Soviet and all of USSR's ills—some of which are absolutely relevant today, but some not. And this is one instance where the West can be wrong about Russia. On the other hand, one of the many unfortunate things that happened during Trump's presidency was that Russia became abstracted as just another aspect of American domestic policy. It became a sort of touchstone—if you were opposed to Trump, everything was Russia's fault. If you were a Trump supporter, you had to go all the way to exonerate everything that Russia does. And this is the place where we are.

That we use foreign entities and actors, a whole mythology surrounding them and the symbolic value of invoking, for example, Soviet Union, just to express a view on an issue?

Russia is enough like us—their culture, what their cities look like, their history—being essentially a European country, that we have a tendency to think about them as an extension of 'us'. That we never have while thinking about Saudi Arabia, China or Korea... So the question is, what do we get out of thinking about Russia like that?

What Putin wants more than anything is some kind of a deal, a Yalta 2.0. Obviously not to regain the territories that were handed to Russia, but to be treated as an equal, to be granted certain rights in that sphere of influence.

We're in the 'uncanny valley' type of situation?

Yes, looking at somebody who is quite like us, but not enough like us. And this is something we have trouble dealing with. Because we can't accept them on their own terms. We've accepted for example that China is China. And how we respond to that will depend on self-interest and everything else. But whatever we want from them, we have moved beyond expecting that China will have the same values as we do. With Russia however, we still continue to project our hopes and fears on them. We fall prey to all kinds of delusions because of that, from believing that they're actually not that bad to, on the other hand, thinking of Putin as a movie supervillain, a James Bond type evil genius...

Was the previous decade, spanning between an Obama–Clinton 'reset' with Russia to the widespread assumption that Russia is actively subverting American elections, crucial in that regard?

In many ways the previous decade was a period of recovery from the 1990s, another transformative decade, when we forgot that there was this big country called Russia. Back then, we didn't care what happened in Russia, because we didn't believe that it could have any consequences for us...

And with the advance of new communication technologies, that changed quickly.

And because of what Russia was doing! Because in the 1990s Russia could not influence the West in any way besides maybe collapsing. What were we worried about with regards to Russia in the 1990s? Gangsters, loose nukes, stolen technologies... all of them symbols of state failure. Today conversely, what we're worrying about is an overly competent, aggressive, controlling state with influence and the power it projects. Again, clearly compensating for what we've neglected before.

"No one benefits from renewed demonization of Russia" you've written recently. So while we're at it, why exactly doesn't anyone benefit from this rhetoric?

Russia is absolutely in an aggressive phase. Whether it is because Russia feels threatened or because there's some other motive – it doesn't really matter, because it is nevertheless unpleasant to be on the receiving end of the aggression. But we have to remember, this is not the superpower it used to be and despite quite successful efforts to modernize its army, it's not the Red Army resurrected we're facing here.

So what is the problem then exactly?

The problem with the narrative that posits Russia as an existential threat to the West is that it actually empowers Putin. Part of this whole game is that there are constituencies in Europe and the US that will say something along the lines of: "we dislike Putin, but he's too dangerous, so we have to make some kind of a deal here". This is the thing. Because what Putin wants more than anything is some kind of a deal, a Yalta 2.0. Obviously not to regain the territories that were handed to Russia, but to be treated as an equal, to be granted certain rights in that sphere of influence, to recognize Russia's sovereignty within the post-soviet space with the exception of the Baltics perhaps. To create a sphere of Russian rightful influence. He'd love that. And—let's put it straight—it would be an absolute disaster on many levels to do that. It would be a betrayal of the countries in question, a betrayal of the whole western post-Westphalian order, saying that countries have certain rights and sovereignty. And finally it would not appease Putin, but rather embolden him and the nationalists. But there are people who would contemplate some kind of a deal with Russia, precisely because they think it is too dangerous not to have a deal. That's why I think it doesn't help to demonize Russia. We overplay Russia's strengths and at the same time misunderstand its motivations. And I'm not saying to understand all is to forgive all. But if we believe that Putin doesn't want anything, but to stab us and watch us bleed and that he does it with some sort of sadistic satisfaction, we fail to see the real perspective of what the Russians are about, what they can and cannot do, and therefore what is the way forward for us in the West.

What we see now is that Biden's administration has some of the hawkishness of the language still, but at the same time, they realize that Russia is not that important. We're obviously not going to see any 'reset', that's certain.

What you are also saying in your piece is that the Russian state reacts to what its leaders perceive as slights, humiliations and affronts from the West. That many of the things happening

between the Russian leadership and the West are also aimed at, shall we say, domestic consumption?

Right! When Putin first came to power, he presented Russians with a certain contract. "You stay out of politics. You let me and my guys run the things and in return you'll get better conditions of life in basic physical terms than you've ever had. These conditions will improve so you'll know that you and your kids will have a better life in the future." And frankly these were attractive terms for most of the Russians straight out of the disastrous decade of the 1990s. So Putin can, with a veneer of constitutionalism, run a soft-authoritarian state. And most Russians were fine with that, because he was delivering on his side of the bargain.

Up to a time, that is...?

Now of course there's a widespread sense that this social contract has been broken. And it pre-dates COVID. Even Crimea and the sanctions. It's a feeling of squandered opportunities. Russia could have done all these different things to diversify its economy, but instead it relied on an assumption the money is never going to run out and instead we're going to spend it on immediate goodies: the military, keeping the population acquiescent or letting Putin's cronies embezzle to their heart's content.

Now that social contract doesn't work. And what Putin is trying to do is develop a new one: "look, times are hard. But what you have to understand is that the world hates Russia and it hates Russians. We're a beleaguered fortress and therefore all we can do is pull together." This is a very negative message and frankly not one I believe resonates very well with Russians.

It's such a powerful myth though! It touches the symbolic weight of World War II, the *Pobeda*—victory cult—and calls for national unity in the face of foreign aggression.

Sure, Russians are still immensely proud of the heavily mythologised Great Patriotic War. 20 millions Soviet citizens died to save the world, save civilization itself from the Nazi menace and so on.... On this level it still remains somehow relevant. And basically every Russian applauded the re-taking of Crimea as well, horns blaring and celebrations were real.

But at the same time Moscow still denied any involvement in the Donbas region. Who are they lying to? Us? No, we are not going to be swayed by this and admit, how—"oh, gosh, how badly!"—we were wrong about Russia and how we've been deceived by our own propaganda. No. They're lying to themselves, the Russian population, that is. Why? Because there's no real constituency for foreign adventures. The same with Syria. The reason Russia used the foreign mercenary organization, Wagner, to do a lot of heavy lifting on the ground, is that the Syrian operation was sold to Russians as very much an arm's-length technowar. That there would be only Russian planes striking

through the heavens and such-like. "Your Ivan Ivanovich doing his national service is not coming home in a zinc box" was the message the authorities were trying to convey. "This is not another Afghanistan." Russians do not care, they have no desire, to—let's say—build a base in Tartus in Syria, when their local school is still falling apart and has not been rebuilt. And while Putin is pushing this narrative, it is clearly a central part of his propaganda campaign, I think we're seeing the real limitations of this to the contemporary Russian population. They're not really the generation of the battles of Leningrad and Stalingrad.

I want to come back to something you've said earlier, of Russia being a part of US domestic policy now. Democrats act and speak like they have all the incentives in the world to punish Russia and go after everybody they see as 'Trump enablers' and 'influence agents'. Is that for real though or is just posturing for the benefit of the media and voters? Because in the past few years we've witnessed a sort of realignment in the US foreign policy where democrats have moved to the right on Russia and generally in the direction of 'hawkishness'.

True, Democrats in Congress have taken over the foreign policy agenda, both because they've believed that they should be tougher and also because they believed Russia should be punished for hoisting Trump on them, which is I believe frankly, a lot of scapegoating. In reality, the Democrats fielded a candidate who did not have a lot of cross-party support and they've had a lacklustre campaign—and they've got stung for it.

The Kremlin is in my opinion totally non-ideological. It's nationalist and so forth, of course, but it doesn't have any creed to which it tries to convert people.

But what we see now is that Biden's administration has some of the hawkishness of the language still, but at the same time, they realize that Russia is not that important. We're obviously not going to see any 'reset', that's certain. But apart from pushing some key points in bilateral relations with Russia, like nuclear arms control and reduction, this administration is much more concerned with rebuilding relations with Europe. Add China to the mix and you see Russia as very much the inconvenience, not the archenemy and competing superpower. You have a White House that is not tempted to go after another reset, nor it is interested in dealing with Russia when it can avoid it.

In that light, what do you think about Amnesty International's decision to strip Alexei Navalny of the 'prisoner of conscience' title?

I think this was a disastrous blunder. Of course Amnesty has all the right to give or not give this very special recognition to

whoever they want. But to label Navalny and later withdraw it was a really problematic message. Which absolutely gave the Kremlin and its allies all the talking points they needed. Amnesty knew who Navalny was. He wasn't trying to hide his views from the public. This is precisely part of the problem, because Navalny, unlike Western politicians, doesn't hide from controversy. He admitted to saying what he said, and did so openly. So Amnesty acted not because some new facts appeared, but because of an orchestrated campaign to try and pressure them. With social-media and new information technology, it is really easy to astroturf something like this, to create the appearance of a grassroots movement of horror and shock about what's going on. When in fact it's essentially a small number of exceedingly vociferous fellow travellers of the Kremlin or at least people who for ideological reasons are willing to give Putin a pass.

So you don't think it was only the 'woke' activists after all?

I think to a large extent they were the ones who were cultivated. The Kremlin is in my opinion totally non-ideological. It's nationalist and so forth, of course, but it doesn't have any creed to which it tries to convert people. As a result, it's actually able to influence people with it's campaigns a lot more freely than the Soviet Union ever could. What we do see is how the Kremlin can guide, manipulate, encourage and amplify radicals on every side of the debate. Left, right, ultracapitalist types, anarchists, you name it... If people are dissatisfied with the status quo, someone somewhere thinks, how can we weaponize these guys? And this is what I think happened in this case.

China forcefully entered this equation some time ago. I am wondering how Europe is going to adapt and triangulate between Russia and China, seen as both partners in trade and competitors or even adversaries on the world diplomatic stage, where they challenge the liberal-democratic model itself?

China, especially in the last year, has flipped the switch and entered a new mode of competition. The 'wolf-worrior' diplomats have been given free reign, there's a new kind of pride and need to assert their position on the world stage. I've heard from a Chinese diplomat, it was two years ago, that China's still 'too apologetic' about its strengths. Well, we can safely say it has stopped being apologetic and tries to capitalize on that.

Obviously in this context, policy towards Russia is very important. On the one hand, Russia displays very warm rhetoric around their cooperation with China. The thing is though we have to recognize how much more China matters to Russia than Russia matters to China. China needs Russia to the extent it's useful when it comes to the irksome elements of what they see as western dominated global order. Russians are the icebreakers—they will plunge headfirst into

polarizing conflicts and disputes, stir some chaos, and eventually China will try to sail serenely through the gaps of ice that the Russians have created.

But, on the other hand, it's really hard to see any real affinity. China is doing Russians no favors. Russia, when it comes to their military planning and exercises, is willing to include the Chinese for show, to generate headlines in the West, while in fact their competition remains unchanged.

What does Europe do knowing all this?

Well, I'd be very surprised if in ten years time we'd be especially bothered about Russia. Either way, there will be some kind of limited reform—not wholesale democratization, because Putin and his kleptocrats really do have this hawkish worldview—that would accommodate today's middle-aged, post-ideological members of the ruling class. They want to have some *modus vivendi* with the West. We're talking about people for whom the ideal model was the early 2000s, when leaders could talk tough about nationalism, but Russia was thoroughly integrated into global economics, global commerce. That is not a perfect scenario, but a Russia we could live with. While looking at the same time horizon, by 2030 let's say, I don't see China going off our radar in any meaningful way. Quite the opposite! That's what we have to balance. In terms of strategic dependence, China scares me a lot more than Russia does.

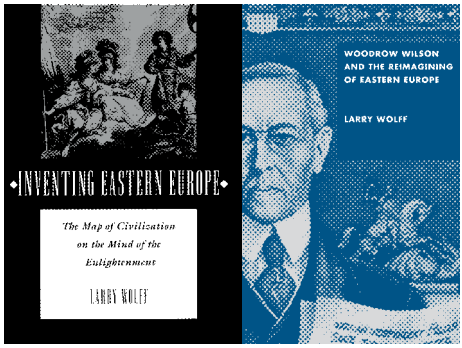
China needs Russia to the extent it's useful when it comes to the irksome elements of what they see as western dominated global order. Russians are the icebreakers—they will plunge headfirst into polarizing conflicts.

MARK GALEOTTI
is the director of the consultancy *Mayak Intelligence*, and an *honorary professor at UCL SSEES*. He has written numerous books about Russia, its history, security issues and organized crime. His most recent include *We Need to Talk about Putin* (London, 2019) and *A Short History of Russia* (New York/London 2020). His writing, podcasts and commentary can be found on *"In Moscow's Shadows" blog*—inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com.

ASPEN.REVIEW
ANNA SOSNOWSKA

CULTURE
EU ENLARGEMENT
EASTERN EUROPE

Larry Wolff's Eastern Europe



Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment

Larry Wolff

Stanford University Press, 1994

Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe

Larry Wolff

Princeton University Press, 2020

Introduction

Over his more than 30-year-long academic career, Larry Wolff has written many books about how the West met Eastern Europe in different eras. In late 2020, the Central Europe Library of the International Cultural Centre in Kraków, Poland, published *Wynalezienie Europy Wschodniej. Mapa cywilizacji w dobie Oświecenia* [original title *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization in the Mind of the Enlightenment*] translated by Tomasz Bieroń. Around the same time, Wolff published his latest book *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe*. In the more than 25 years separating the original publication of *Inventing* and *Woodrow Wilson*, writing fashions

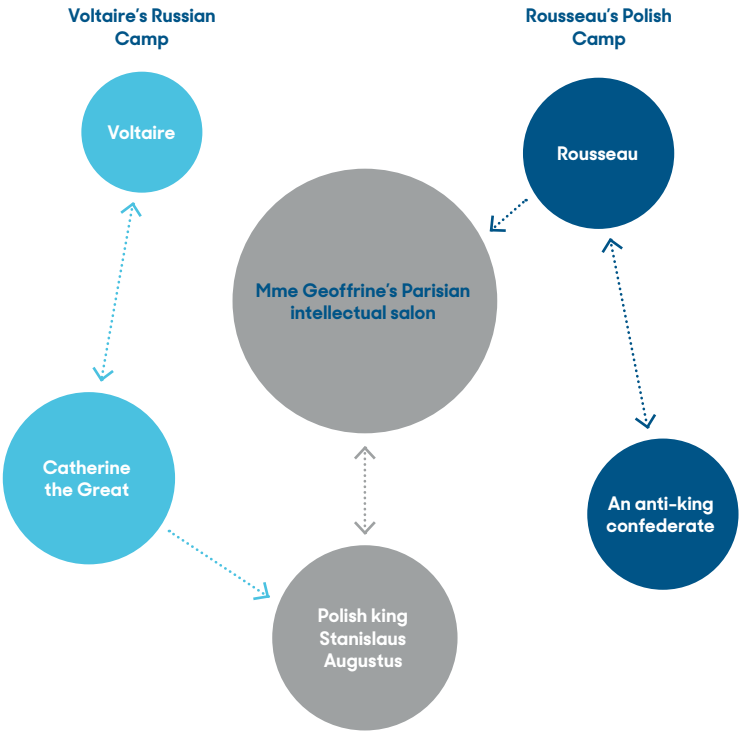
among historians have changed and Wolff has carefully followed them. He has shifted his position from that of a scholar struggling for recognition in the mid-1990s to an authority in Central European history today. What does Wolff's work tell us about Eastern Europe's past and its relationship to the West? What picture of the region emerges from the historical documents analyzed by Wolff and from his comments, interpretive decisions and omissions?

Both books portray Eastern Europe as a region inhabited by people without political or personal agency; people of exuberant emotionality, prone to either masochistic subservience or arrogant megalomania; a region of contrasts between scrofulous peasants and sumptuous palaces in the late eighteenth century, between eminent artists and intellectuals (Ignacy Penderecki and Tomáš Masaryk) and villagers smelling of barns. The messages of the two books are slightly different. While *Inventing* tells the story of how French, Italian, English, and German travellers and intellectuals sketched an image of Eastern Europe in the age of the Enlightenment, *Woodrow Wilson* depicts an American politician/president who, along with his French and British colleagues, drew actual borders on the map of the region and agreed on constitutions for the countries here.

Inventing Eastern Europe

The book *Inventing* analyzes Eastern European impressions, reflections, diaries, letters, memoirs and essays by Western European travellers, diplomats and intellectuals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as the writings of Rousseau, Voltaire and Herder. This book set itself two detailed tasks: 1) to reconstruct the borders of Eastern Europe as they formed in the minds of eighteenth-century Europeans, and 2) to reconstruct the image of the areas considered to be Eastern Europe at the time.

Wolff's analysis of the documents led him to the conclusion that the concept of Eastern Europe was formed precisely in the age of the Enlightenment, with its characteristic need to measure, order, classify, and create hierarchies, an age full of adoration for progress and modernity, faith in civilisation, and the imperial and increasingly organized expansion of Europe. The political geography of the Enlightenment (with an unclear position for Greece, the cradle of Western civilization after all) ranges from the western borders of the former Commonwealth to Siberia. The main common feature of this



vast area and its culture was, according to eighteenth-century observers, its position on the scale of progress and civilization, with its maximum marked by Enlightenment France and its minimum by Barbaria, that is Turkish and Tartar Asia.

In the first few chapters, Wolff presents a static Enlightenment image of filthy houses in a state of decay adjacent to lavish palaces and serfs submissive to their masters. As the author argues in the introduction, this image persisted unaltered in the Western European imagination, as Churchill's post-Yalta rhetoric was to testify.

Today, 25 years after I read the book for the first time, I find chapters 5 and 6, where Wolff analyzes Voltaire's writings on Russia and Rousseau's on Poland respectively, most interesting. These chapters demonstrate the strange and fascinating relationship between Eastern European politicians and French intellectuals. In the showdown between Tsarina Catherine's Russia and Stanislaus Augustus' Commonwealth, Voltaire supported Russia and the Tsarina, while Rousseau supported Poland and the patriotic Bar Confederation, which accused the King of being subservient to the Tsarina.

Wolff asserts that in the second half of the eighteenth century, the crisis and subsequent partitions of the Commonwealth were the favourite subject of salon discussions in France. Parisian intellectuals and their fan bases treated the Polish case as an opportunity to test their political projects.

The figure below demonstrates the influence of Eastern European politicians and French intellectuals and Parisian salons as Wolff discovered it. I dream of a series in the style of *The Great* or a movie in the style of Catherine with Helen Mirren, where this political-salon game would be depicted. The power of personal emotions and intellectual skirmishes guarantees a full-blooded story.

Wolff asserts that in the second half of the eighteenth century. Parisian intellectuals and their fan bases treated the Polish case as an opportunity to test their political projects.

Wolff argues that Stanislaus Augustus was still in love with Tsarina Catherine when she, having installed him on the Polish throne, pushed him away. He also analyzes the lifelong correspondence between Stanislaus Augustus and Madame Geoffrine, the sponsor of one of the most important intellectual salons in Paris in the second half of the eighteenth century. According to Wolff, several volumes of Voltaire's history of Russia and his decades-long correspondence with Catherine were the result of the philosopher's admiration for the German-born Russian ruler and the hopes he placed in her. And Rousseau's *Considerations on Polish Government* (1772) was said to owe much to a certain Bar confederate, an enemy of Stanislaus Augustus and Russia.

Cultural criticism, practiced in the form of discourse analysis of a geo-cultural region, is a very well established method. It derives from Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*, first published in 1978 and reissued many times. The work provides an in-depth picture of the development of reflection and attitude towards the Orient, a concept that, according to the author, "has made it possible to better define Europe (the West)—as an opposite image, ideal, personality, experience". (Said 1991). Analysing European fiction, ethnographic and linguistic studies, as well as political (colonial) activity and economic exploitation, Said tried to reproduce, and in so doing, to expose, "a style of thinking based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between East and (mostly) West". (Said 1991: 25)

Following in Said's footsteps, Wolff attempts to present an analogous picture of the geographic and cultural creation of Eastern Europe. Wolff follows Said when he argues that just as the Orient was invented by nineteenth-century English and French colonizers and equipped by them with mysteriousness, slowness, sensuality and magic, Eastern Europe was born in the minds of Enlightenment adventurers traveling east of the Prussian border.

The Romantic gazing at the mirror of the Orient consisted of expeditions into the mythical past, into the irrational depths of culture. Therefore, the Arab social present was an obstacle to such expeditions.

Confronting Wolff's book with Said's *Orientalism*, however, demonstrates that Eastern Europe during the Enlightenment was not treated as the Orient, not even as a small one. After all, in Western eyes it was never deserving of expeditions, philological research, religious studies, poems and novels, or finally military endeavors comparable to those launched against the lands of Arabia, India or China. Wolff's arguments, claiming that Eastern Europeans were prototypes for the Oriental Other, that the same qualities were attributed to them, only to a lesser degree, that Eastern Europe was a small and less distant Orient, distasteful, hostile, alien, only slightly more similar to the West than the Orient proper, are not convincing.

The Romantic gazing at the mirror of the Orient consisted of expeditions into the mythical past, into the irrational depths of culture. Therefore, the Arab social present was an obstacle to such expeditions and was ignored in Orientalist discourse. Eastern Europe, on the other hand, was an ethnographic, human mirror for European travellers. Its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century present (not mythical history) was important as a form of primitive social life, backwardness, or, like for Herder and his Romantic successors, a place of innocent communal idyll and a mirror of a social, not mythical, past. It was not the destination of Romantic pilgrimages or a source of inspiration.

Orientalist and Eastern European discourses have different histories and have gone through different phases. The Orient is a Baroque invention, and the Orientalist discourse has passed all the stages of Western fascination (utilitarianism associated with the initial phase of colonial conquest,

Enlightenment scientific classification, Romantic self-exploration in cultural myths up to modern anthropological research and American expert studies). Eastern European discourse, on the other hand, began in earnest, as Wolff shows, in the Enlightenment, passed through a folk-ethnographic phase during the Romantic period, and resounded more intensely only during the Cold War.

Wolff does not attempt to go beyond the analysis of representations and cultural constructs, does not go beyond the text, does not try to take a look at the situation on the ground and offer an opinion about the relationship between the content of Enlightenment discourse and the reality of the time. He asserts that his book is not about Eastern Europe. But reducing analysis to discourse and giving discourse the status of the sole creator of social reality is a gone-by fad. Therefore, after 25 years, the most interesting aspect of *Inventing* is not Wolff's quasi-orientalist interpretation, but the lengthy and detailed quotations from travellers' accounts and especially the thinkers' ideas about our region.

Pushing the Ottoman Empire out of Europe, its weakening and ultimate disintegration were a foregone conclusion from the very beginning of the work on the postwar map of Eastern Europe.

Woodrow Wilson and Reimagining of Eastern Europe

The second book is actually not a work on Eastern European history either. It is a book about Woodrow Wilson and how the leaders of the countries that won World War I drew new national borders in Eastern Europe. One of the most evocative visions Wolff presents is of President Wilson (who never visited Eastern Europe) standing with a binocular on his nose and, looking at maps spread out on a table, planning the division of the region and its new borders. Wilson, Wolff claims, "invested his moral and diplomatic authority in those geopolitical balances of the new states as they emerged, creating a radically new map of postwar Eastern Europe" [233].

Woodrow Wilson is a more traditional book in form, in keeping with current trends in historiography. The book has a very clear thesis, and presents a very definite interpretation of the Versailles' origins of Eastern European small nation-states in Eastern Europe. This time, Wolff's research had a very different purpose than in *Inventing*. Here his interest is focused

on the influence of social actors on actual politics—the principles, boundaries, constitutions, and laws organising the real lives of tens of millions of Eastern Europeans—establishing a new international order on the ruins of the Eastern European empires after World War I. The sources for this book were chosen in a special way—related to Wilson's pre-Westphalian biography and to Wilson's opinions, interactions, contacts, statements and calculations during the crucial years of the formation of the post-Versailles map of Eastern Europe.

The creation of Poland, unlike all other Eastern European countries, required gluing together three regions with different political traditions and overcoming the resistance of three different empires.

Wolff's new book presents Eastern Europe, from the times of World War I and the Versailles Conference, as an area whose fate and, in particular, borders were sketched by the world leaders of the era: the American President Woodrow Wilson, the British Prime Minister Lloyd George, and the French Prime Minister George Clemenceau. In this view, local actors, with their uprisings, legions, armies, political movements and associations, and finally political will, economic interests, and individual destinies played a negligible role in the emergence of nation-states in post-Versailles Eastern Europe.

A general view of the process of shaping the map of Europe after World War I points at these Big Three actors, of whom Wilson is the most important. We also see minor actors competing for their attention and affection by writing letters and soliciting personal meetings. Alongside the pianist Ignacy Paderewski, who became Poland's first Prime Minister and Foreign Minister in 1919, we see the Queen of Romania—both of whom irked Wilson with their constantly being late, though the countries they represented were ultimately the great beneficiaries of the new borders.

The Turkish delegation was classified as a bunch of lying dimwits, and the Communist Prime Minister of Hungary was clearly seen as a Jew. Tomáš Masaryk influenced Wilson indirectly, but strongly, through his published works and press-reported lectures to Czech and Slovak communities in the US. We also see American social actors—the American Jewish Congress with Rabbi Stephen Wise and the American Jewish Committee with Louise Mar-

shall, Colonel House, Lippmann and Cobb, who prepared a detailed report on interethnic relations in Eastern Europe for the White House and Wilson.

What is striking about Wolff's analysis is the absence of Eastern European immigrant groups in the United States as a distinct social actor. Wolff suggests, however, that immigrant groups rather shaped Wilson's image of Eastern European people as humble, hard-working and plain than treated as potential voters for whom the concession had to be made overseas in their homeland. In Wilson's mental map, Wolflf seems to assume, Paderewski and Masaryk represented not only Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks in their prospective countries, but also immigrants in America. The final decisions, however, were to be made by "the reasonable arbiters of the peace conference" [183]. When debating the status of Danzig as a free city, Wilson tried to convince Clemenceau and Lloyd George that Poles "must accept the solution that we judge reasonable" [183].

Wolff also convincingly shows how Wilson was guided by anti-Turkish resentment in his decisions, associating Islam and the Ottoman culture with violence and despotism. In this sense, pushing the Ottoman Empire out of Europe, its weakening and ultimate disintegration were a foregone conclusion from the very beginning of the work on the postwar map of Eastern Europe. Already during the Versailles Conference, this resentment took the form of an anti-colonial, anti-imperial sentiment and turned against Germany and Austria-Hungary. The small, generally Slavic, nations of Eastern Europe were to have the right to self-determination in order to free themselves not only from the Asian cruelty of the Ottomans, but also from the autocratic supervision of Germany and Austria and the cultural domination of Hungary and Italy. The decision was therefore taken to break up Austria-Hungary as well, and the principle of national self-determination became the guiding principle organizing the postwar order.

Later still, the Big Three saw that the same principle should also protect ethnic and religious minorities within the newly formed nation states: Germans in Czechoslovakia and Poland, Hungarians in Czechoslovakia and Romania, Jews in Poland and Romania, and Ukrainians in Poland. Eastern European constitutions, recently celebrating their centenary, were thus equipped with minority protection clauses at the explicit request of the Big Three. As a result, the minority rights provisions in Eastern Europe were modelled on the American Declaration of Independence. The states would

be obliged to "accord to all racial or national minorities within its jurisdiction exactly the same treatment and security, alike in law and in fact, that is accorded the racial or national majority" and no member of a minority was to be "molested in life, liberty or the pursuit of happiness" [Footnote 59].

Finally, Wolff makes an interesting observation that during the Versailles Conference the Big Three viewed Poland as a small and weak version of Imperial Russia, eager to turn from a victim into an oppressor. This megalomania was also supposed to have prevented the Polish delegation from appreciating what a great effort it was for European societies to create this particular new country. The creation of Poland, unlike all other Eastern European countries, required gluing together three regions with different political traditions and overcoming the resistance of three different empires.

The Great Powers expected gratitude and compliance from the nations of Eastern Europe and Poland in particular as its creation required mapping intervention in three and not one of the former empires. Poles were seen as too bold and aggressive in their claims. British Prime Minister Lloyd George, one of the Big Three believed that "The Poles had not the slightest hope of getting freedom, and have only got their freedom because there are a million and a half of Frenchmen dead, very nearly a million British, half a million Italians, and I forget how many Americans" [213] Therefore, Wilson tried to convince his partners that "We must not allow ourselves to be influenced too much by the Polish state of mind. I saw M. Dmowski and M. Paderewski in Washington, and I asked them to define for me Poland as they understood it, and they presented me with a map in which they claimed a large part of the earth" [183].

Conclusion

Just as *Inventing* is not a history of Eastern Europe during the Enlightenment, *Woodrow Wilson* is not a history of Eastern Europe during and just after World War I. In both books we get a picture of how Western actors perceived Eastern Europe, and in *Woodrow Wilson* also how they shaped it. Common to both books is the focus on Western mapping of Eastern Europe, mental and intellectual in *Inventing*, and actual, political, on the ground in *Woodrow Wilson*.

Although they concern different eras (the Enlightenment and the early twentieth century), subjects (intellectuals and politicians), and re-

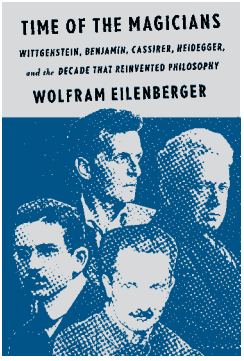
search objectives (reconstructing the image of Eastern Europe in the eighteenth-century West and documenting the contribution of the American President Woodrow Wilson to the creation of small nation-states in Eastern Europe), both Wolff books contain or imply common conclusions. Eastern Europe had no control over its borders in either the late eighteenth century or the early twentieth century, nor did it have control over its image in the intellectual salons of Paris, nor could it influence key Western politicians through prominent intellectuals and artists. Both the borders and the image were shaped by powerful, influential—intellectually, socially, politically—actors from the outside, often those who had never been to Eastern Europe, such as Voltaire and Rousseau or Wilson and Lloyd George. Both the perceptions in the nineteenth century and political organisms in the twentieth depended on the personal experiences, encounters, and friendships of influential Westerners with Eastern European locals. These shaped ideas about the local culture of interpersonal or intergroup relations between the rulers and their subjects, about the political needs and psychological inclinations. Both works are in this sense very important for local Eastern European historians and even more important for local politicians and for all of us who often have an inadequate, that is too great, sense of political agency.

ANNA SOSNOWSKA
is Assistant Professor at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw, Poland, author of *Explaining Economic Backwardness. Post-1945 Polish Historians on Eastern Europe.*

ASPEN.REVIEW
BENJAMIN
CUNNINGHAM

CULTURE
HEIDEGGER
PHILOSOPHY

Casting a Spell



Time of the Magicians: Wittgenstein, Benjamin, Cassirer, Heidegger and the Decade that Reinvented Philosophy

Wolfram Eilenberger

Penguin Press, 418p.

As he crossed the border into neutral Spain and caught a glimpse of Portbou's crescent shaped beach, Walter Benjamin thought, for just a minute, that he might really escape the Nazis and find his way to the United States.

In one way or another, Benjamin had been on the move for decades: Germany, Switzerland, France and Italy. For a good many years he thought about moving to Jerusalem. In 1931, Benjamin fled Germany for France. Three years later, the Nuremberg Laws stripped all German Jews of citizenship, leaving Benjamin stateless. By June 1940, Paris fell to the Nazis and he headed south. Though he didn't speak English he hoped to make his way through Spain to Portugal and, eventually, across the Atlantic.

After an arduous journey through the Pyrenees, by 25 September 1940 Benjamin was exhausted. And his sense of relief upon entering Spain proved short-lived. Border guards soon told his traveling party that they would be deported back to France the next day. Though General Francisco Franco's Fascist state was not a formal combatant in World War II, friendly relations with Germany meant they had no interest in aiding and abetting Jewish refugees.

Once back in France, Benjamin was sure to be turned over to authorities allied with the Third Reich. Overnight, in a bout of despair, he took a deadly dose of morphine. His friend, Arthur Koestler, likewise tried to kill himself, but somehow survived. The next morning, when Spanish police changed their mind, Koestler and the rest of the group were allowed to continue on to Lisbon. Benjamin's body and his suitcase, containing two shirts, a watch, a pipe, an X-ray and a manuscript (the latter went missing), were left behind.

"Fascism attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relations which they strive to abolish," Benjamin wrote in his 1935 essay *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. "It sees its salvation in granting expression to the masses—but on no account granting them rights."

In other words, Benjamin argued, Fascists stripped politics of substance and instead transformed it into an elaborate performance. Along with increased economic inequality, heightened multipolar competition, revived anti-semitism and questions about democracy's ability to respond fast enough to new challenges, it is no wonder that recent political theatrics have spurred all manner of comparisons to the interwar years.

But the similarities go even further. Like at present, life in Benjamin's time felt as if it were speeding up. Back then it was mass transit, radio, telegraph and previously rural peoples migrating into cities. Today, it's social media, torrents of images and the ability to easily move ideas, information, money and people across the globe. Benjamin wondered about the way urban life blurred art and advertising, music and noise. As social life moves online today, philosophical essays, pornography, a passage from the Koran, a sponsored blog and a video of one person hitting another in the groin with a golf club all qualify as 'content'.

Along with looking at Benjamin's journey as a thinker, *Time of the Magicians* author Wolfram Eilenberger probes the lives of interwar intellectuals

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger. In focusing on their development between 1919 and 1929, Eilenberger argues that their work in those years set the tone for the century to come.

Sensory Overload

The book proceeds chronologically and each of the nine chapters jumps between the four philosophers. Contextualized explanations of their work blend with narrative from their everyday lives. While all lived and worked during the same era, there is little direct interaction, save for one famed debate between Heidegger and Cassirer in Davos, Switzerland that is considered a seminal live event in the history of ideas.

Harvard based philosopher Peter Gordon's entire 2010 book, *Continental Divide*, is dedicated to the Davos debate and includes a transcript of their entire exchange. In the *Time of the Magicians*, Eilenberger uses it as a tool to tie together otherwise disconnected thinkers and frame the rest of the story.

Even more than the actual content, the time and place—Davos in 1929—of the encounter symbolizes the end of an epoch and foreshadows the cleavages set to tear Europe apart in the coming years. Heidegger would go on to join the Nazi party in 1933, while Cassirer would be forced to vacate his position at the University of Hamburg and flee to the United States. Now the scene of annual elitist confab, Davos was also the setting of Thomas Mann's groundbreaking 1924 novel *The Magic Mountain*.

"Cassirer and Heidegger mirror with an almost uncanny precision the ideological struggle between [Magic Mountain characters] Lodovico Settembrini and Leo Naphta," Eilenberger writes.

The founder of *Philosophie Magazin*, and host of a show on Swiss public television, Eilenberger has a way of explaining complex philosophical arguments in a simple way. He has written nine books in German. His latest, published in 2020, reprises the format of this book to detail the lives of four female philosophers: Simone de Beauvoir, Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil and Ayn Rand. *Time of the Magicians* first appeared in German in 2018, and is Eilenberger's first book translated into English. In addition to the biographical tidbits about these important thinkers—and all of them are interesting characters—"Time of the Magicians" makes many of their important ideas accessible to a wider audience.

Eilenberger does an excellent job explaining, for example, some of the major arguments in Heidegger's near impenetrable 1927 book *Being and Time*. Eilenberger selectively quotes from an otherwise difficult read, connects each passage with expository sections in his own words and gives the reader a chance to breathe by weaving it all together with stories of how this weighty tome was written.

As social life moves online today, philosophical essays, pornography, a passage from the Koran, a sponsored blog and a video of one person hitting another in the groin with a golf club all qualify as 'content'.

"In terms of content, at the center of Heidegger's intellectual journey lay the exposure to the meaning of a single question: the question of being, or more precisely, the sense of being," Eilenberger writes.

Heidegger was a disruptive philosophical force who rejected Descartes' idea that the world can be viewed objectively—that a person might sit back and observe things as a neutral outsider. He coined the term *Dasein*, which is imperfectly translated as "being there," or "being in the world." For Heidegger, both human beings and objects must be understood in relation to the things around them. People alone are capable of asking what defines *Dasein*, but many inanimate objects are also imbued with a kind of spirit called "readiness-to-hand" *[Zuhandenheit]*.

"The less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become," Heidegger writes. As Eilenberger helpfully clarifies "the essence of this equipment lies in its use," and thus it is impossible to understand the essence of a hammer by merely looking at it laying on a table.

While there is more to Heidegger's argument than can be expounded here—or in *Time of the Magicians* for that matter—Heidegger generally worries that modern culture, and the philosophical tradition dating from Descartes that created a false division between observers and the observed, means human beings no longer understand the way they relate to the world or themselves.

"Not only was the meaning of the 'sense of Being' either consigned entirely to oblivion or rendered taboo, but *Dasein* itself became blind to the actual sources and foundations of its relationship with Being, and hence did not in the end become a meaning of life," Eilenberger explains.

The Power of Myth

The book's sections on Wittgenstein and Cassirer are equally engaging. Born into a wealthy family, with a virtual monopoly on steel throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Wittgenstein renounced his inheritance as a young man. He studied at Cambridge, but left in 1913. Then he joined the army and fought in World War I. Later he taught elementary school in rural Austria. He returned to Cambridge as a fellow in 1929. As Wittgenstein had never completed his degree, administrators allowed him to submit his groundbreaking 1921 book *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* as a PhD dissertation instead.

"Don't worry, I know you'll never understand it," he told his examiners—including analytic philosopher Bertrand Russell—when he turned in the manuscript.

Heidegger was a disruptive philosophical force who rejected Descartes' idea that the world can be viewed objectively—that a person might sit back and observe things as a neutral outsider.

Cassirer is probably the least known of these four intellectual giants. Around 15 years older than the rest, in Eilenberger's telling he represents the last of the old guard thinkers from the early twentieth century. During the two week 1929 colloquium at Davos, Cassirer spent much of his time suffering from the flu in his hotel room. In the meantime, Heidegger—the next big thing in philosophy—was busy schussing down the nearby ski slopes.

But a century or so later, Cassirer's philosophy is undergoing something of a rebirth. Routledge recently released a new English translation of his seminal three volume work, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (with a forward by the same Peter Gordon who wrote the aforementioned *Continental Divide*). Cassirer contends, rightly, that human beings are not entirely rational beings. "Cognition does not master myth by exiling it beyond its borders," he writes. In a recent essay on Cassirer in *The New York Review of Books*, the critic Adam Kirsch notes his work shows that "even in a scientific age, people are prone to magical, mythical thinking."

While Nazi mythologizing of fictional concepts of ethnic purity would force Cassirer to flee his native Germany, present day hysterics deny climate change or imagine Soros orchestrated conspiracies everywhere. Such irrational ideas take hold amid a similar atmosphere of disorientation. Whereas rural populations once struggled with what it meant to be human as they

moved to the fast-paced cities in the 1920s, contemporary life breeds stress amid adaption to the confounding speed and cacophonous distractions wrought by digital technologies.

While Nazi mythologizing of fictional concepts of ethnic purity would force Cassirer to flee his native Germany, present day hysterics deny climate change or imagine Soros orchestrated conspiracies everywhere.

And thus the tension between the need to ground civilization in reason, and the necessity to question what might be lost by rigorously applying science and logic to each and every aspect of daily life remains. Repulsive as Heidegger's personal politics were, his concern that humanity might strip itself of its essence in pursuit of so-called progress feels as relevant as ever. A microwaved dinner sure is an efficient, scientific way to deliver calories, but does it not lack some of the intangible qualities of a traditional, collective meal?

"Man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct," Heidegger writes in his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*. "This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself... In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, meaning his essence."

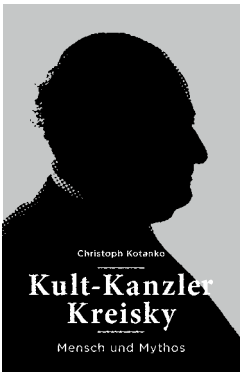
Much like in 1929, in 2021 the Cassirer-Heidegger debate remains inconclusive.

BENJAMIN CUNNINGHAM
is the author of the book *The Liar* is forthcoming by Public Affairs in 2022. He is an opinion columnist for the Slovak daily Sme and a PhD candidate at the University of Barcelona.

ASPEN.REVIEW
ROBERT SCHUSTER

CULTURE
AUSTRIA
MYTH

The Kreisky Myth Endures Thirty Years On



Kult-Kanzler Kreisky. Mensch und Mythos
Christoph Kotanko
Ueberreuter, 2021

In recent years, every time people have looked back at the 'good old days', their recollections have been tinged with nostalgia for the 1970s. This was a period when Austria was, for the first time, generally seen to have taken first significant steps out of the shadow of its big northern neighbour, West Germany. The economy was thriving, unemployment was low and general prosperity was on the rise. Austrian politicians were notable for their confidence in conducting a foreign policy rooted in the country's neutrality, which was guaranteed by the world powers that had emerged victorious from World War II. This was underpinned by the desire to turn Vienna into a place where the democratic West could meet the Communist East, and representatives of the rich North would encounter their opposite numbers from the impoverished South.

Much of this was due to the figure of Bruno Kreisky, Austria's Chancellor at the time. Following his first election victory on 1 March 1970, he remained at the helm of government for the next thirteen years, presiding over four cabinets. No matter how Kreisky's political legacy is viewed by his sympathizers or adversaries, they generally agree that throughout these thirteen years Austria underwent an enormous change and a shift towards becoming a modern European society.

Bruno Kreisky joined Sweden's Olof Palme and Germany's Willy Brandt as a member of the closely observed "Social Democratic troika" which led the global movement of non-communist left-wing parties.

As for Kreisky himself, June 2020 marked another important anniversary: thirty years since his death. This confluence of round anniversaries probably explains the publication of several new books about Kreisky in Austria. They include the volume by the journalist Christoph Kotanko, for many years the editor-in-chief of the daily *Kurier* and currently head of the Vienna desk of *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, a newspaper published in Linz. His book is an attempt to view the figure of the Chancellor through the optics of the present day, a time when much that seemed commonplace in Kreisky's days seems almost unimaginable.

Most astonishing of all is the fact that he managed to keep the position of head of government for thirteen years. Throughout this period, his Socialist Party of Austria (SPÖ) ruled alone, without a coalition partner, having commanded over 50 per cent of the vote in several consecutive elections. For the sake of comparison, in the most recent general election in the fall of 2018, SPÖ garnered just over 21 per cent and counted itself lucky to have held on to the number two spot among the Austrian parties.

Its electoral successes in the 1970s ensured for SPÖ the position of one of the most important Social Democratic parties in Western Europe, hard on the heels of its counterparts in Germany and the Scandinavian countries. As a result, Bruno Kreisky joined Sweden's Olof Palme and Germany's Willy Brandt as a member of the closely observed "Social Democratic troika" which led the global movement of non-communist left-wing parties. Tensions between the rich North and the poor South, the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa, the conflict between Israel and the Arab

World, and the efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament—these were the issues in international politics that the troika regularly commented on.

Kotanko's book is not an attempt to offer a coherent biography of Kreisky, of which several have been written before (those looking for a book of this kind will find one among the copious references at the end). Nor does he try to provide a detailed analysis of every decision taken by Kreisky's government. Instead, he summarizes the facts that have made the longest-serving chancellor in the country's postwar history so unique that he is still used as a point of reference, even by politicians at the right-wing end of the political spectrum, who could not stand him back in the day. Arguably, no one has questioned the key reforms his cabinets pushed through in the 1970s. They include the democratization of the school system which also opened up access to education to those in the lower ranks of society and involved measures such as the provision of free textbooks and covering the cost of school buses, things that are these days taken for granted. Among further reforms that he introduced are changes to the civil code and family law which enshrined equal legal rights for men and women. Most notably, it was the liberalization of the law on abortion, an issue on which Kreisky had originally adopted a 'neutral' position to avoid jeopardizing the newly achieved truce with the influential Catholic Church—until leading women politicians in his party pushed him to change his mind.

Kreisky was a very accessible man whose phone number never disappeared from Vienna's phone directory. Any fellow citizen could ring him and Kreisky is said to have spent hours talking to them on the phone.

President's Preface

It is already clear from the book's introduction that the author will treat the object of his interest with kid gloves, reserving any criticism for what is unavoidable. When he does deal with Kreisky's shortcomings, he never goes beyond what has been said before. So much so that the reader might detect, right from the start, a whiff of an 'officially authorized' work, since the preface has been penned by no less than Kreisky's long-standing party and parliamentary colleague and later the country's President, Heinz Fischer, a kind of "walking chronicle of Austria's social democracy". The mere fact

that Kotanko asked him to write the preface suggests that far from being overly critical the book will add a further piece to the mosaic of Kreisky's mythology.

A similar bias is apparent when we look at the public figures Kotanko chose to interview for his book. For the most part, they are people who worked most closely with Kreisky: his long-serving secretary Margit Schmidt, his chef de cabinet Alfred Reiter, and the chief of protocol at the cabinet office Ernst Braun. In contrast, the sole 'independent' voice in the book is that of the recently deceased grand old man of Austrian journalism and chronicler of postwar Austria, Hugo Portisch. It would have been worth approaching some of Kreisky's former adversaries who are still with us, such as the former leader of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and his 1970 election rival, Josef Taus.

Thus, the picture that emerges from the accounts of all of Kotanko's interviewees is very similar: Kreisky was a very accessible man whose phone number never disappeared from Vienna's phone directory. Any fellow citizen could ring him and Kreisky is said to have spent hours talking to them on the phone. Journalists, whose questions he willingly answered after government meetings and not only then, were similarly in his thrall. That helped him bridge the gulf that used to exist between politicians and the journalistic profession while, on the other hand, laying the latter open to the charge of lack of objectivity.

One of Bruno Kreisky's greatest strengths was his television presence. He mastered this new mass medium, which in the 1970s became accessible to broader audiences, with greater skill than any of his contemporaries. Especially in the runup to elections, he employed it to great effect to win over undecided voters, who made a key contribution to his triumphs.

Right at the start of his book, Christoph Kotanko articulates a few basic theories as to what, he believes, made Kreisky a remarkable politician. The first is the assertion that he was the only Chancellor who still had roots in the old monarchy and had been active in politics during the first and second republics, and that the impact of his decisions is still felt in the twenty-first century.

His second contention is that Kreisky would not have been so successful if his conservative predecessor Josef Klaus had not embarked on the path of reform. For one thing, he left Kreisky a balanced budget, and he also oversaw the

reform of public broadcasting, thereby profoundly changing the character and quality of political discourse in the country. Ironically, Klaus was not adept at using the new media while Kreisky proved himself a master of them.

Kreisky always managed to remain independent of his own party by never becoming its paid employee and avoiding any other kind of material dependency.

Kotanko's third argument is that Kreisky always managed to remain independent of his own party by never becoming its paid employee and avoiding any other kind of material dependency. This brought him into conflict, especially in the early years of his party chairmanship, with a number of professional party functionaries, particularly those representing the powerful unionist faction, who still viewed politics through the lens of class struggle.

And, fourthly, even long after his death, Kreisky has remained a point of reference for many politicians irrespective of their party.

Nevertheless, it is a rare and distinctive political figure who is free of contradictions and Bruno Kreisky was no exception. In his case, this starts with his background. Born into an affluent assimilated Jewish family, his political roots went back to the young Social Democrats who fell, at least initially, under the spell of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. When all political parties, including the Social Democrats, were banned in Austria after 1934 under Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss's Austrofascist regime, for a while Kreisky landed up in prison. He shared this fate with members of the illegal Nazi party who had been involved in several failed coup attempts. Some of his biographers believe that this shared experience of persecution under the Dollfuss regime explains the leniency he showed to former members of the Nazi NSDAP in later life, often excusing their behavior by saying "everyone is entitled to make a mistake". During his time as Chancellor, he quite deliberately downplayed any new information showing that one of his government ministers or a top politician had been involved with the Nazi regime.

His attitude to aristocracy was similarly ambivalent. In the 1960s, in his capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs, despite being a Social Democrat he greatly valued contacts with members of the aristocracy, keeping many of

them in the diplomatic service. Furthermore, he allowed them to continue using, in their official capacity at the ministry, their old titles even though these had been officially abolished when Austria became a republic in 1918.

An Ambivalent Relationship With His Own Roots

Like many authors writing about Kreisky before him, Kotanko too regards his subject's relationship with his Jewish roots as a key to the Chancellor's personality. On the one hand, he had never shown particular pride in it, a fact that may be connected to his rather privileged background. He was keenly aware of the prevalence of anti-Semitism in Austrian society as well as in his own party. "They will never accept a Jew," he is reported to have said on several occasions to those who tried to persuade him to stand for the leadership of SPÖ. During the 1970 election campaign, the then Chancellor, ÖVP's Josef Klaus, went as far as to put the slogan "A Real Austrian" on his posters in what was a clear wink towards Kreisky's Jewish background. In addition, it was meant to suggest that instead of governing in accordance with Austria's interests, Kreisky would follow the script of the international socialist movement.

On the other hand, this did not prevent Kreisky, after he became Chancellor, from making active use of his Jewishness in his foreign policy in the Middle East. Hugo Portisch told Kotanko that one of Kreisky's closest friends was the Austrian Jewish industrialist Karl Kahane. Kahane regularly let Kreisky use his private airplane for trips to the Middle East where he met with Arab leaders. This was repeatedly criticized by Israeli officials who could not understand how someone with Kreisky's background could cultivate contacts with the Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat, regarded as a terrorist by Israel's political elites.

Kreisky's ambivalent attitude was even more apparent in his later years in his disagreements with the 'Nazi hunter' Simon Wiesenthal, founder of the Jewish Documentation Centre, who had helped, among other things, to track down the main architect of the Holocaust, Adolf Eichmann. However, Wiesenthal was also behind the uncovering of the Nazi past of several of Kreisky's ministers. Kreisky increasingly nursed a grudge against Wiesenthal, which eventually turned into open hostility. He often insinuated that Wiesenthal, who had been held in several concentration camps during the war, could not have survived, for example, without collaborating with

the Nazis and spying for the Gestapo. Their disagreement eventually ended up in court, where Wiesenthal was awarded damages. Kreisky never paid, however, prompting Wiesenthal later to make the sarcastic comment: "He preferred to die rather than make the payment ordered by the court."

Kreisky's ambivalent attitude was even more apparent in his later years in his disagreements with the 'Nazi hunter' Simon Wiesenthal, founder of the Jewish Documentation Centre, who had helped, to track down Adolf Eichmann.

A number of Austrian journalists, still under the spell of Kreisky's personality and his style of communicating with them, tended to side with the Chancellor in his disputes with Wiesenthal. This attitude, along the lines of "what is the point of revisiting history and reopening old wounds" helped delay the process of Austria's coming to terms with its Nazi past. Very few journalists were capable of treating Kreisky with genuine critical distance.

Thus, in its way, Christoph Kotanko's book demonstrates that the fascination with Kreisky can endure for decades after his death.

ROBERT SCHUSTER
is the managing editor of Aspen Review Central Europe. He was the editor-in-chief of Mezinárodní politika monthly from 2005 to 2015, and a correspondent of Austrian daily Der Standard in Czech Republic from 2000 till 2012. He is a foreign correspondent of Lidové noviny daily since 2015, where he covers news reports from German-speaking countries. He is a regular guest in commentaries broadcast by Český rozhlas Plus.

ASPEN Review

The Generation of Great Hope

No. 2021

Partners


Bakala
Philanthropy


direct
pojišťovna


ABB


e·on


AT&T


Google


avast


HOME
CREDIT


BCG
BOSTON
CONSULTING
GROUP


Microsoft


Bubenik
Partners
PARTNERS TO LEADERS


ŠKODA


Coca-Cola HBC
Česko a Slovensko


ČESKÁ
spořitelna


VIGO Investments

PUBLISHED BY

Aspen Institute Central Europe
Palackého 1, CZ 110 00 Prague
Aspen.Review@AspenInstituteCE.org
AspenInstituteCE.org
Year IX
Annual No. 2021
ISSN 1805-6806 (Print)
ISSN 2570-6217 (Online)
—
Photos without credit: Aspen Review Archive

The western half of the European Union still looks down their nose at its Eastern members, who do not show the same, or at least a similar. The advent of a new generation of politicians could change all that.

MARTIN EHL

Something is happening. I think Europe is tired of male leaders along the lines of an egocentric macho—someone like Vladimír Mečiar and then Fico in Slovakia. People have had enough of that.

MICHAL HVORECKÝ

At the end of the day, the Internet is vast and it is dark. And so libraries are really like the lighthouse of the Internet. When people are lost and looking for things online, your instinct is to try and find the library online.

TAMMY WESTERGARD

Undoubtedly, the strongest vector shaping the post-pandemic reality in Europe and the United States will be the green modernization.

EDWIN BENDYK