

2025 ISSUE

Harriman

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



Reframing the Communist Transition

THE BIG ILLUSION

REFRAMING THE HISTORY OF
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION



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Harriman Magazine

Dear Reader

This issue of the magazine looks back in time, using the gained wisdom of hindsight to reframe how we see some of the events that culminated in Communism's collapse in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Just after these stories were sent off for production, a new event—Donald Trump's election as the forty-seventh U.S. president—reminded us that history is ever-changing, and that one reason we study it is to learn lessons for today. Until he is sworn into office, we can't know what concrete actions Trump will take. But it's certain that the new Trump presidency could have a far-reaching impact in the region, both now and for years to come.



That reality set off some immediate alarms.

"As Ukrainians, we have no say in the U.S. election, but our future depends on who wins it," wrote Olga Rudenko, editor of the *Kyiv Independent*, two days after Americans voted. "If I had to capture the mood in Kyiv, I'd say it's nauseating uncertainty."

Other countries anxious about how a Trump presidency will affect Russian aggression and revanchism will share that uncertainty, including Latvia, whose post-Communist transition is widely seen as a rare democratic success story to emerge from the Soviet collapse. Investigative journalist Inga Springe's account of this period (p. 24) reminds us that the transition was far from smooth, that democracy was not inevitable, and that it remains fragile even in Latvia.

In Springe's piece and the other reexaminations here, we are reminded that the period of euphoria and exuberant optimism that followed the collapse did not necessarily provide a sound basis for comprehending the complexities of the new post-Communist world. As Communism toppled, Western policymakers and academics "could have begun to recognize, contextualize the individual components of this bloc," says Harriman Director Valentina Izmirlieva (see interview on p. 8), whose homeland Bulgaria was part of this process. Instead, many in the West continued to see the bloc as a single, homogeneous mass, she says, though the war in Ukraine has begun to change that, forcing recognition of the need "to reframe our knowledge about the former Soviet bloc and the possibilities of thinking about its components in different ways, to recontextualize them, to reconfigure our mental maps of not just political zones but also of cultural connections."

Hungarian academic Ferenc Laczó echoes Izmirlieva's call for reframing in his essay chiding the European Union for a Western-centric approach to integrating new members (p. 14). And former Moscow correspondent Jeff Trimble tells a compelling tale of one Russian journalist's fall from official grace in 1987, when glasnost, or openness, was too often confused with freedom of the press (p. 20).

Trimble argues that misunderstanding glasnost may have helped bring about Vladimir Putin's repressions, a point underscored by Masha Udensiva-Brenner's profiles of five Russian independent journalists (p. 32). Each of them now lives in exile, their reporting blocked in Russia, where many journalists have been denounced as foreign agents. Donald Trump has warned that some of the news media will be targets in his new administration; he has only to look to Putin for techniques in how journalism, a fundamental pillar of democracy, can be reined in.

Ann Cooper
Editor-in-Chief

A Soviet Army monument in Sofia, Bulgaria, painted over by an unknown artist in June 2011 (top image). Bottom image shows the monument after the paint was cleaned away. (Photo by DIMITAR DILKOFF/AFP via Getty Images)

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Cover image

A visitor peers through a gap in the Berlin Wall on the morning of November 10th 1989, the day after the border opened between East and West Berlin. (Photo by Tom Stoddart/Getty Images)

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Putting Glasnost to the Test

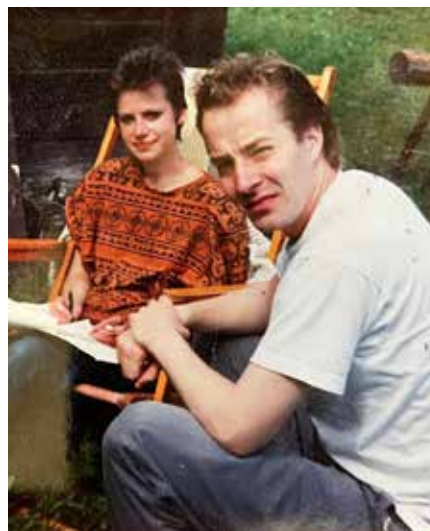
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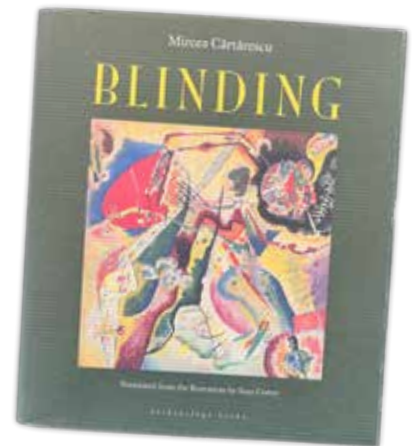
They give you a warning, and then you need to stop doing what you do, otherwise you'll be sentenced, even if you're in exile."

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Harriman Talks

Each academic year we host hundreds of interdisciplinary events with regional experts and members of the Harriman community on a range of issues concerning Eurasia and Eastern Europe. In Harriman Talks, we follow up with some of those speakers about ideas or experiences discussed at the institute.

Writing Literature in Romania: “We Want to Be Free”

BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

Romanian writer Mircea Cărtărescu (the Harriman Institute’s 2024 Writer in Residence) views good writing as an act of channeling. “It’s not you who writes your poetry or prose,” he said during a Harriman-hosted literary evening with his translator Sean Cotter and Harriman Director Valentina Izmirlieva. “It’s your *mind*, which is much bigger than you will ever be. The collective mind, not only Freud’s but Jung’s.”

Cărtărescu, a striking figure with thick black eyebrows, dark eyes, and an aquiline nose, taught a course, “Postmodernism vs. Tyranny: A Romanian Literary Revolution,” during his four-week Harriman residency. It included an examination of the plight of Romanian writers living under Nicolae Ceaușescu’s oppressive regime during the final decades of communism.

Cărtărescu was among them—a leader of Romania’s “1980s Generation,” also known as the “blue jeans generation,” a literary movement that drew inspiration from America’s Beat poets. “We wanted to be like them. We wanted to have courage. We wanted to be anti-system. We wanted to be free,” he said. “Conserving and preserving freedom of mind was the most important for us, because we lived in a prison.”

Then, Communism collapsed in Romania. In 1990, when Cărtărescu was 34, he left the country for the first time to visit New York. “I was parachuted from a destroyed country, a completely destroyed country, to the middle of the Big Apple,” he said. And the culture shock nearly destroyed him. “I became conscious that my whole life before [had] vanished away. It didn’t matter anymore. But at the same time, I could not adapt to a new world.”

Cărtărescu continues to write from Romania but says: “It is not a path I would wish for you. Why would you read and buy somebody from the middle of nowhere? . . . If I had been an Italian writer, I would be much further along than I am now.”

Objectively speaking, though, Cărtărescu is doing phenomenally well abroad. In addition to his 2015 Leipzig Book Award for *Blinding*, an excerpt of which is published on p. 38 of this issue, his novel *Solenoid* (translated by Cotter) won the 2022 *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and the 2024 Dublin Literary Award. It was also included on the *New Yorker*’s list of best books in 2022. But Cărtărescu has published another 40 books, only five of which have been translated into English.

The Harriman’s Writer in Residence program, launched by graduate students in 2013, has brought six of the region’s best contemporary authors to Columbia,



Mircea Cărtărescu. Photograph by Silviu Guiman

introducing them to a wider U.S. audience through public events like the one with Cărtărescu. They range from 2023 International Booker Prize winner, Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinov (2022), to the late Yugoslav-Croatian and Dutch writer Dubravka Ugrešić (2015). Izmirlieva, who has made it her mission to institutionalize the program during her directorship, hopes it will bring many more.

Cărtărescu said he particularly enjoyed teaching at the Harriman. “I had the opportunity to talk about what I love most in this world, to talk about poetry, and they also pay me for it. If they didn’t pay me for it, I was ready to pay them for this pleasure,” he said. ♦



Simon Shuster (left) interviewing President Zelensky. Photograph from the Office of the President of Ukraine



Zelensky's decisions seem to be increasingly guided by a desire to keep the free world from looking away."

“Reporters Are Not Chaplains”: Documenting Russia’s Full-scale Invasion

In April 2024, *Time* correspondent Simon Shuster discussed his newly published book, *The Showman: Inside the Invasion that Shook the World and Made a Leader of Volodymyr Zelensky*, at the Harriman Institute. Masha Udensiva-Brenner reached out to him in September to find out more about Ukrainian reactions to the book and his recent reporting:

UDENSIVA-BRENNER: At the time of your talk at the institute in April, President Zelensky hadn’t read your book yet and the two of you hadn’t been in touch for six months. Has he read it now? If so, how did he react? And how has your relationship with him evolved since?

SHUSTER: President Zelensky read parts of the book that his staff translated for him, but the demands on his time and his limited English have not yet allowed him to read all of it. If all goes as planned, a Ukrainian-language edition should be available by the end of the year [2024]. A handful of his senior aides read the book in English and expressed appreciation. But their responses vary. One said it felt too soon to read the book as a Ukrainian, because the traumas of the war are too fresh for historical analysis. Another said the book made it feel like the invasion’s first year had been preserved in amber.

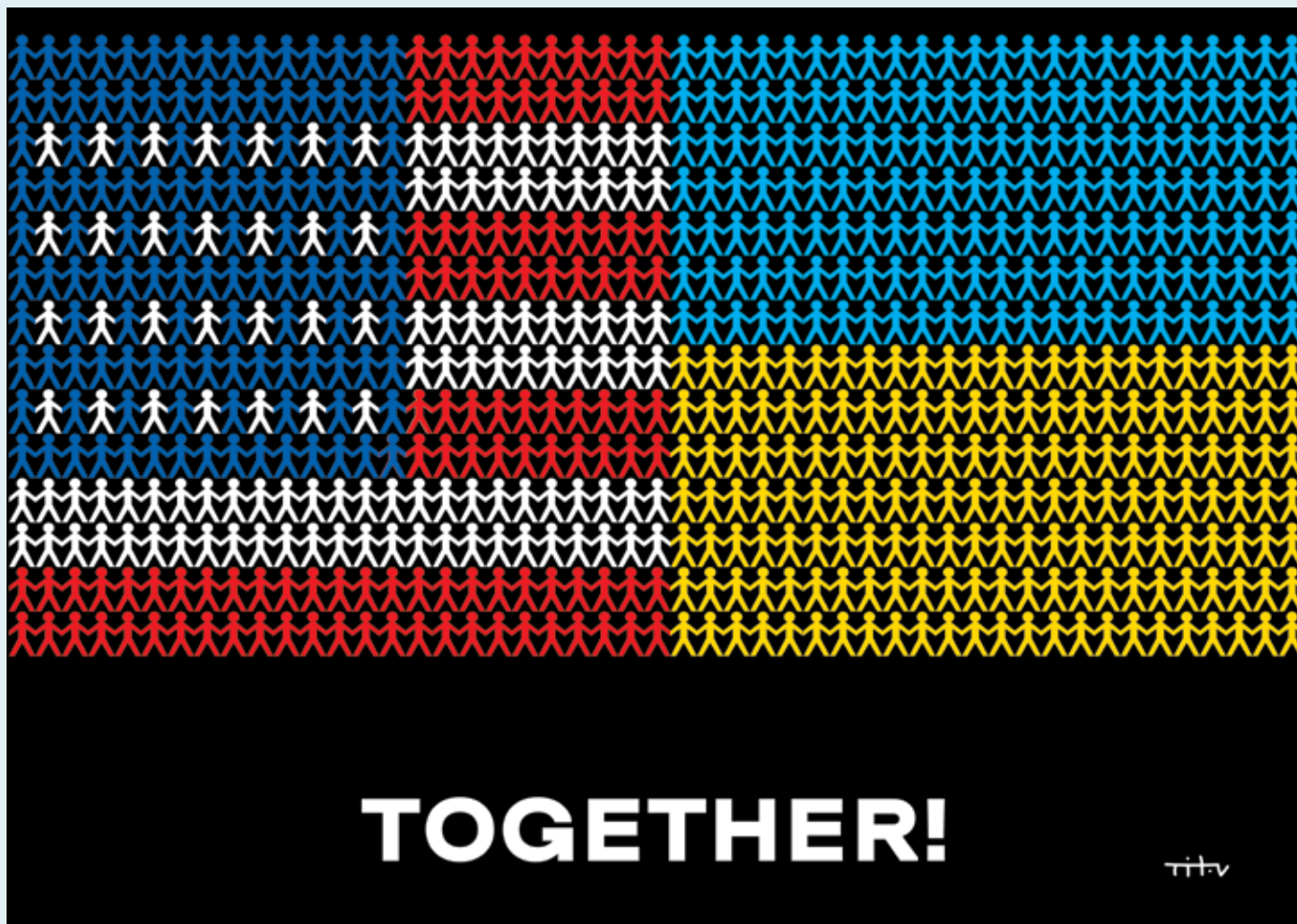
UDENSIVA-BRENNER: During your talk you discussed the tension between your job to report honestly about the war, versus the expectations of some Ukrainians and supporters of Ukraine who want journalists to whitewash stories, in order to uphold war-time morale. Can you talk about specific moments in your recent reporting when you’ve faced this tension and any consequences that may have resulted from it?

SHUSTER: Reporters are not chaplains, and journalism is not a reliable place to look for comfort. Zelensky and his aides understood that. As one of them told me, “You’re unpredictable.” This wasn’t meant as a compliment, but that’s how I took it. Reality is unpredictable, as are the twists and turns of the war. So, my reporting, if it’s honest, cannot be expected to boost morale.

This summer I wrote a feature about the peace process Zelensky is pursuing. It explored both its failures and achievements, and the response from his team was mixed. Some found it useful to see their work under the interrogation lights. Others found it annoying or even detrimental. But they continued talking to me, and whatever the tone of our conversations might have lost in friendliness it gained in mutual respect.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER: Your book is called *The Showman* because of Zelensky’s unique communication strategy, which draws on his acting skills and his experience as a celebrity. How has this strategy evolved over time and what does it look like in the third year of the war?

SHUSTER: As President Zelensky pointed out during one of our first conversations for the book, the world’s attention span is short, and sooner or later people get tired of hearing the same story. Zelensky’s undeniable skills as a communicator and a showman have been an enormous service to Ukraine in keeping the world’s focus on the story of this war. But every day it gets more difficult for him to keep telling that story in new ways. Now, nearly three years into the full-scale invasion, Zelensky’s decisions seem to be increasingly guided by a desire to keep the free world from looking away. ♦



Nikita Titov (Kyiv, Ukraine), "Together!" 2022

Art as a Weapon in the Propaganda War

BY ANN COOPER

While war rages on the battlefield, Ukrainian artists have used their skills to create a nonlethal form of combat.

"Posters right now are a cultural weapon," Olena Speranska told a Harriman audience last fall, in a presentation about *Wartime Posters 2022–2023*, a book she curated with 450-plus posters by Ukrainian artists, graphic designers, and illustrators. *Wartime Posters* showcases images created since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. The posters "work against Russian propaganda," said Speranska, an art curator and social activist from Zaporizhzhia.

Some posters emphasize national culture, threatened by war and Russian disinformation. Others express a fierce defiance: heroic faces of fighters, or an image of hands gripping Molotov cocktails. Many compare Russia and President Vladimir Putin with Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party. A particular favorite among

Ukrainians, said Speranska, features a black swastika on a red background. One arm droops down from the swastika to form the letter Z, used as a patriotic symbol in Russian propaganda.

Combining such strong images with minimal text "can tell much more than news you can watch on TV," said Speranska, who has organized dozens of exhibitions of these war posters throughout Ukraine and internationally (in the United States, some of the posters have been exhibited in New York, Los Angeles and Colorado Springs).

As the war persists, Ukrainians continue to craft their messages in poster art. But Speranska isn't planning to curate another collection. "I wouldn't like to make a second book," she said. "Because we all want the war to stop." ♦

*All the images and credits used are from the book *Wartime Posters 2022–2023* by Olena Speranska.*



*Clockwise from
top-left:*
Zakentiy Horobyov
(Kyiv, Ukraine),
"Mariupol" 2022

Mykyta Shylimov
(Kharkiv, Ukraine),
"Hey, Ruzzians!? Your
'Z' is unstuck!" 2022

Andriy Yermolenko
(Kyiv, Ukraine),
"A United Front!"
2022

Oleg Gryshchenko
(Kyiv, Ukraine),
"Cheers" 2022

ILLUSION

Reframing the Post-Communist Transition in Eastern Europe

IN CONVERSATION WITH HARRIMAN DIRECTOR VALENTINA IZMIRLIEVA

The end of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was a dramatic time of joy, anxiety, and many expectations. Optimism was rampant, and some of the crucial challenges the region would face were largely unforeseen—by those gaining their freedom as well as by Western policymakers eager to expand the global population of market-oriented democracies.

“One by one, countries from the Eastern Bloc said, ‘This is not working for us anymore,’” said Harriman Director Valentina Izmirlieva, in a conversation with *Harriman Magazine* editors Ann Cooper and Masha Udensiva-Brenner. This was the moment when Western policymakers and academics “could have begun to recognize, contextualize the individual components of this bloc,” Izmirlieva said, “but they were accustomed to thinking about them as a homogeneous mass.”

That thinking still persists in some quarters, though Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine has accelerated a reframing, giving greater recognition to the region’s considerable diversity.

The editors asked Izmirlieva to reflect on these changes through the lens of her personal and professional experiences, beginning as a teenager in Sofia, Bulgaria, in the 1970s. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

IZMIRLIEVA: I was part of the generation that grew up in the stale Communism of the Brezhnev era, when nobody really believed in the great Communist future. Nobody believed the empty slogans of the regime’s rhetoric. Being schooled in reading between the lines, our reaction to that was, “Oh, so if they tell us that the West is everything rotten and wrong and cruel and futureless, and we are the great power that brings progress, it must be the other way around. We *know* that we are not the great power. Ergo *they* are the epitome of everything great.”

EDITORS: How much of the outside world did you understand beyond what was happening within Bulgaria?

IZMIRLIEVA: I guess I was raised as apolitical. But then I went to the English language school.

EDITORS: When you were how old?

IZMIRLIEVA: When I was fourteen. That was a place where children of the Communist elite went, through a special quota. The people who entered through normal examination, I think we were about 20 people for a class of 200. There were quite a few people who were children of diplomats, who had lived in English-speaking countries, who had Western goods, magazines. And all of a sudden, I go to school where people have LP records, and I could listen to rock and roll, underground music from the West, and read novels by American writers.



Clockwise from top-left: General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov addresses the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow, 1986. (Vladimir Akimov/Sputnik via AP); A Bulgarian woman holds a portrait of newly elected Communist Party leader Petar Mladenov during a pro-democracy rally in Sofia, 18 November 1989. (AP-Photo/Dusan Vranic); A 1982 school portrait of Valentina Izmirlieva; A protester waves the Bulgarian national flag and an EU flag, during the fourth 'Grand National Uprising'. (Photo by Artur Widak/NurPhoto via AP)

EDITORS: So that kind of gave a little window, a distorted window—a curated window—into the West.

IZMIRLIEVA: We didn't live through the terror, the time when people were imprisoned and sent to camps for just having a particular name or wearing a particular kind of clothes. That was not our political reality. What was most oppressive was the awareness that you were living in a big prison, in which you have certain limited freedoms. But the boundaries of it are clear and very strictly protected. It's in a way like living in a ghetto, right? And within it you have certain freedoms, like freedom of education. Yes, we were fairly well educated—educated enough to understand the cruelty of the limitations.

EDITORS: Can you pinpoint a time or an event where you, for the first time, understood that maybe Communism was going to fail?

IZMIRLIEVA: We didn't believe in anything that they said, certainly didn't believe in the future. But nobody around me believed that the regime would collapse—let alone on its own—that it would collapse in our lifetime.

Izmirlieva left Bulgaria in the summer of 1989 for her first trip to the West at the invitation of the Free University of Berlin.

IZMIRLIEVA: That was right before everything collapsed. I was in Berlin, in West Berlin. I saw the Wall from the other side. I'd seen it back in 1977, my parents and I went to East Berlin on a trip, and we saw it from afar behind the barbed wire. [But in West Berlin] I saw it from its colorful side in August, '89. And I thought this was a part of the planet. It was going to be there forever. And then several months after, it collapsed.

EDITORS: What did you think when you heard that the Wall was down?

IZMIRLIEVA: Honestly, I was much more preoccupied by what was happening in Bulgaria than by what was happening abroad, because it was so sudden and so unexpected, and so exhilarating. One by one, countries from the Eastern Bloc said, this is not working for us anymore. And that was parallel to processes inside the Soviet Union. [Shedding Communism] was yet another experiment without a precedent. Nobody knew how to do it or what it meant. But the immediate experience of it on the ground in Bulgaria, my experience, was just—things that up until yesterday were unthinkable are happening. And this collapse was at every level. The first one was political. All of a sudden, we could go and protest. And we did.

EDITORS: How did your thoughts and your expectations begin to change in that period? There's excitement, but were you also looking ahead like, "Here's what I hope, here's what I think will happen?"

IZMIRLIEVA: We had dreams or illusions. The hopes—now I know that they were largely unrealistic, but they were shared, they were prevalent. And I think that the big hope—or the big illusion—was that we really believed all our problems were linked to the Communist government. And once the government is removed, all our problems will be solved. This illusion is linked to the illusion—because we lived in this Cold War world view of polarities—that the West is the epitome of the promise, and even the miraculous recipe for stability, prosperity, justice, and freedom. We didn't understand freedom very well. I mean, people who have not been free their whole life, how can they understand freedom?

During this period of transition, Izmirlieva worked as researcher for the medieval section of the Academy of Sciences' Institute for Bulgarian Literature. In 1990 she came to the United States on a Fulbright scholarship. Nine years later, she had earned a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago in medieval Slavic studies. Her devotion to the field puzzled American colleagues.

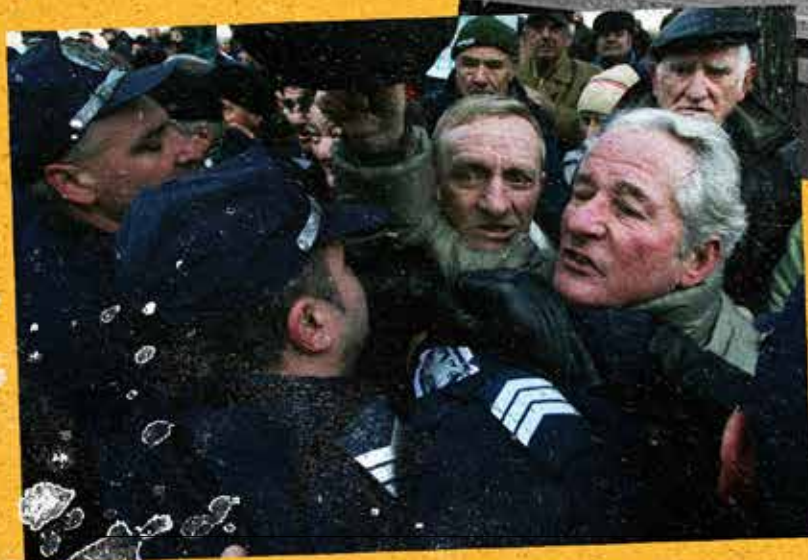
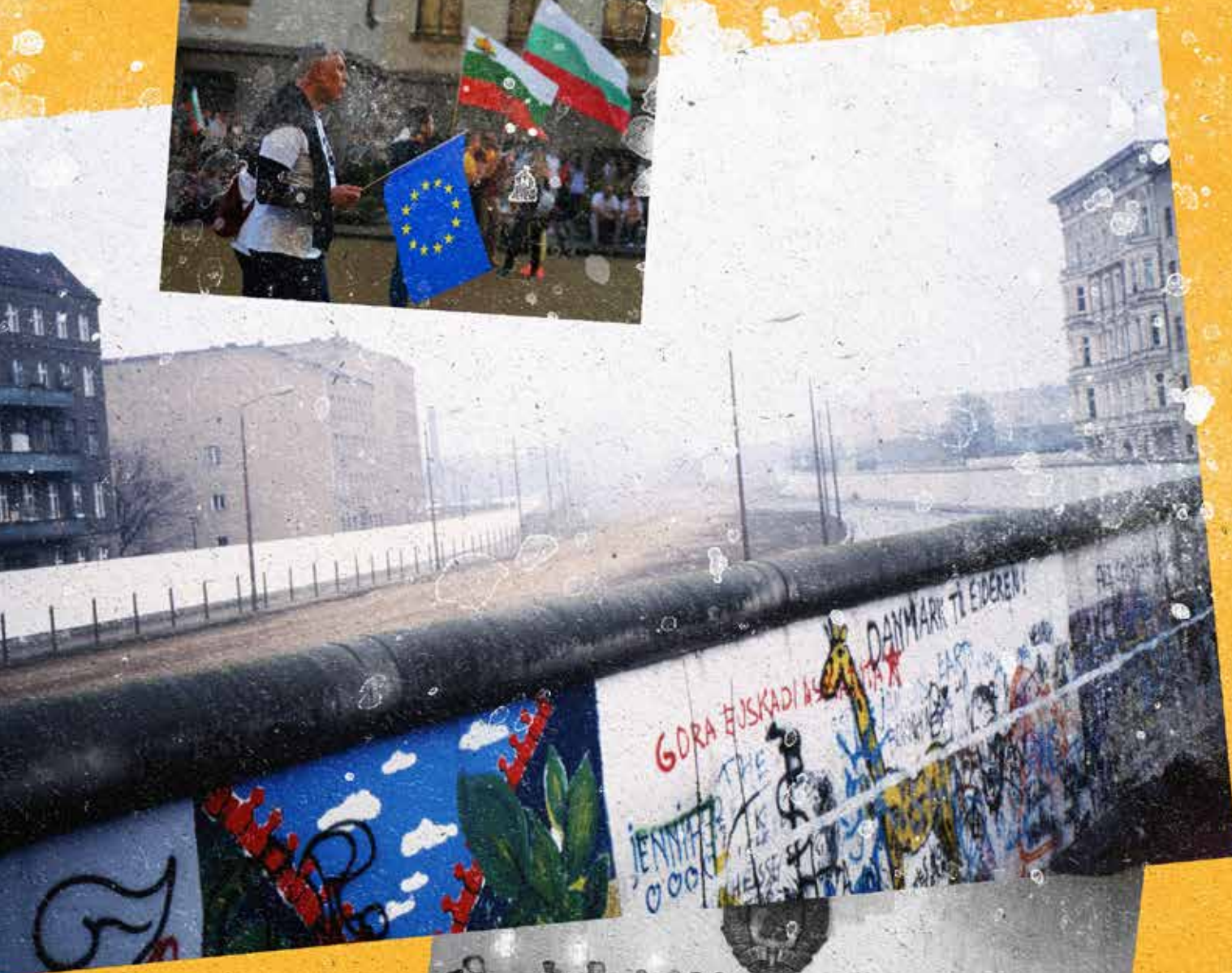
IZMIRLIEVA: What I encountered when I came here was that not only was the Bulgarian lev, the currency in Bulgaria, not convertible into American currency, but my knowledge was not convertible into American currency, either. Nobody was interested about my experiences, about the particular point of view toward the history, the culture, the literature from the peripheries of the Eastern bloc.

EDITORS: Because they were interested in seeing everything through a Russian lens?

IZMIRLIEVA: I had to learn to convert my knowledge, to articulate it, into a language, into a discourse that my Western colleagues, or my Western teachers, are programmed to understand and recognize.

EDITORS: Can you describe that language?

IZMIRLIEVA: I mean, to put it in very simple terms, there was no justification why American Slavists should care about the classics of Bulgarian literature or about Bulgarian medieval culture. I was told point blank: "That was part of your national project in Bulgaria. But you're in America now and nobody honestly cares until you can give a rationale why it is important for Americans to know that, why it matters for us." But what went without saying is the significance of



Clockwise from top-left: Protesters arrive with Bulgarian and EU flags ahead of the fourth 'Grand National Uprising' on October 3, 2020, in Sofia, Bulgaria. (Photo by Artur Widak/NurPhoto via AP); A view taken from West Berlin showing the death strip at the Berlin Wall. (Photo by JEAN-PHILIPPE LACOUR/AFP via Getty Images); Mikhail Gorbachev pays a friendly visit to the People's Republic of Bulgaria. (Yuriy Somov/Sputnik via AP); Policemen scatter pensioners and elderly Bulgarians as they shout anti-government slogans during a rally in front of the building of the Bulgarian Parliament in the capital Sofia, December 14, 2006. (AP Photo/Petar Petrov)

everything Russian, precisely because of this Moscow-focused world view of the Cold War that had valorized knowledge of Russian history, culture, and political life as *a priori* important for Western, and specifically American, national security and international policies. So, any kind of justification inevitably had to be inflected, triangulated through Russia.

EDITORS: When we talked to you earlier this summer, you said something that stuck out: “Lots of mistakes were made in the 90s, and now we are paying for them.” Talk about that in terms of academia, in particular. What were those mistakes? Why did they happen?

IZMIRLIEVA: I had in mind bigger mistakes, not just in academia, and mistakes that were made on all sides. There was an inbuilt, a willful blindness for us, in Bulgaria, in the Soviet bloc, not only about the West, but about what to expect, how to go about building freedom—a certain naïveté about the change of regimes, the fact that the *siloviki*, the security forces in Bulgaria, got fused with organized crime very quickly and redistributed the national wealth, while we were celebrating about freedom, right?

[Meanwhile,] the West had the complacency of the victors who won the Cold War. And that colored the way they not only devised policies, but also the way they thought about themselves. This sense of “We are victors, and we can dictate the rules and the norms,” without much curiosity or interest in understanding this bloc that started falling apart, disintegrated into independent countries. I think between Trieste and the Urals, there were six countries, and all of a sudden there are 23, if I count right. But the Western policymakers and Western academics were accustomed to thinking about this as a homogenous mass. And this was the moment when they could have begun to recognize, contextualize the individual components of this bloc. And I don’t think that really happened.

That bred a lot of resentment, and now we’re paying for it. The rise of the illiberalism and autocracy in Eastern Europe is a direct result from that—the resentment, sense of humiliation even, as Putin would articulate it. The sense of inferiority for Eastern Europeans—who had been already treated not as equal brothers in the Communist brotherhood, but as second-rate citizens within the Soviet bloc—to be treated the same way by the West enhanced old wounds and old resentments.

Then, to come as a scholar to the West and to be told that what you know, and the cultures and histories that you study, are not of the same value as the great Russian culture—reimposing these colonial models, if you will, that the Soviet Union tried to impose on us—is really intellectually offensive, on top of that.

The West should have had more curiosity in us, rather than to assume that all they need to know about us is our willingness to become like them. And to be judged only by whether we check the boxes of compliance.

EDITORS: What do you think were the most important consequences for Bulgaria of this situation, where the West was kind of blind to the fact that this is an individual country that stands on its own?

IZMIRLIEVA: I wouldn’t go that far to say that they were blind that we are an independent country. But the level of knowledge of who we are, what is our history, how we think about ourselves, there was a widespread indifference. And I can talk more about academia than about the circles of policymaking or lawmaking. Maybe it was different there.

But in academia, that was a fact here in the U.S. in the 90s and in the first couple of decades in the twenty-first century as well. And so, we have bizarre results in literary studies. The fact that we know more about third-rate Russian writers than about first-rate Eastern European writers—it’s paradoxical. And it is bolstered by translation policies, publication policies. What is available valorizes what is important, and this vicious circle is perpetuated.

In the wake of Russia’s all-out war against Ukraine, all of a sudden we began to hear complaints: “Oh, we want to have classes about Ukraine, but we don’t know much about Ukrainian culture. And we don’t have sources about Ukrainian studies.” All of a sudden, these lacunas became very obvious and painfully recognized. But that is true, more or less, about all other former Soviet countries in Eastern and Central Europe. In different degrees for the individual countries, but that’s the general trend.

EDITORS: Do you see any change there? Do you see any greater awareness now, within academia?

IZMIRLIEVA: I think that there is a momentum right now, with this push to reframe our knowledge about the former Soviet bloc and the possibilities of thinking about its components in different ways, to recontextualize them, to reconfigure our mental maps of not just political zones but also of cultural connections. It is driven mostly by the war in Ukraine right now, and I hope that we will not lose this momentum to make the bigger, the really significant case about Russocentrism in our studies that affects all other countries, and not just Ukraine.

EDITORS: What more would you like to see Harriman do in this regard?

IZMIRLIEVA: I would like to see institutional structures or sustainable programs established now that will not be contingent on the goodwill of individual leaders. [Structures that] will be there to stay no matter who's in charge and no matter how the political climate shifts. Because it is not in the name of this particular moment that I'm pushing for changes—I firmly believe that it is to the advantage of U.S. policies, and Western policies, to understand better the intricacies and complexities of this whole area that was under the rule of the Soviet Union. In this way we can understand better not only Russian ambitions toward these parts of the world but also processes inside NATO and the EU that include leaders like [Hungary's Viktor] Orbán, for example.

EDITORS: Long before the [full-scale war in Ukraine] you proposed re-examining Slavic study or the former Soviet Union through the region of the Black Sea. Can you talk about that?

IZMIRLIEVA: Slavic studies is a grandchild of German Romanticism and Russian imperialism, to put it crudely. It's predicated on fraternity of languages. We can see, with the Russian ideology in the making right now, how pernicious it is to push unity of language as a common ground for political unity. So, I think it is time for Slavic studies to rethink the rationale for doing what we're doing and shift its focus from shared identities toward exploring the territory they shared with other non-Slavs and how it has shaped their history, identity, ideas about the future, and their culture, broadly defined.

I'm not naïve. I understand it is not easy and probably not even possible to change administrative structures in universities. It's not just the Slavic department that is based on language families. But it is useful for Slavists to recontextualize what they are doing in alternative frameworks. And the Black Sea framework is one such alternative that I find useful for my research and for my own thinking. ♦



Left: a childhood photo of Valentina Izmirlieva.

Right: Izmirlieva's school building in Sofia, the First English Language High School in Sofia.

REFRAMING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION HISTORY

A Hungarian academic
reexamines the relationship between
Eastern and Western Europe.



BY FERENC LACZÓ

I WAS BORN “BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN” IN THE FINAL DAYS OF THE SOVIET EMPIRE.

I grew up in Budapest during a predominantly liberal, seemingly post-ideological age when, as political scientist Ivan Krastev remarked in a recent interview, the future seemed to be “right next” to us. I currently teach contemporary history, with a focus on Eastern Europe, in European Studies and in liberal arts programs at Maastricht University in the Netherlands. My personal trajectory is thus inextricably linked to the transformations symbolized by the year 1989 and the European Union’s “big bang enlargement” some two decades ago—when twelve countries with more than a hundred million people, the vast majority of them East European, were added to the EU practically overnight.

In recent years, I have been trying to make sense of this enlargement, including the misconceptions, misunderstandings, and various tensions between East and West that have continued to shape Europe. Each year, I am confounded by how little my students, who typically arrive in my classroom after a decade-and-a-half of education in West European countries, seem to know about East European politics and cultures—and just

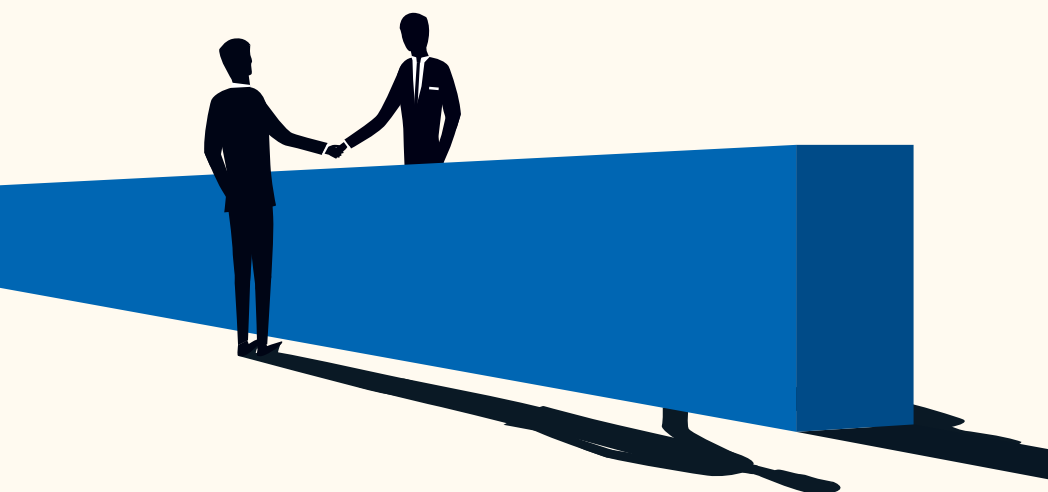
how “normal” some of them consider their own ignorance. My own teaching position at Maastricht University, in the southern Dutch city where the EU was founded in the early 1990s, was created in the mid-2010s partly because the curriculum in European Studies was considered too Western-centric. Various forms of this imbalance in educational curricula persist across large swaths of Europe, and they are only a microcosm of a much larger problem: two decades after an apparently successful enlargement process, many East Europeans believe they have remained second-class citizens. With only one of the largest 500 companies in the EU headquartered in the East and none of the top hundred universities being based there, it would be hard to deny that their suspicion has some basis in fact.

It may therefore be high time to consider the place and roles of Eastern Europe and East Europeans in the history of European integration. I am convinced that a more robust understanding of this history could substantially improve relations between countries and peoples across Europe’s now much-less crucial,

but quietly persistent, East-West divide. And it may be urgently needed to give transnational democracy a second chance amidst the current rise of illiberal forces.

THE PREDOMINANCE OF Western-centric assumptions in the mainstream historiography of European integration should perhaps be unsurprising, given that the predecessors of today’s EU originated exclusively within Western Europe and did so in the context of the Cold War. Yet, this context already points to a much more defining role that the continent’s Eastern parts have played. In fact, Eastern Europe has taken on numerous significant, and still largely underexplored, roles in connection with European integration since World War II.

During most of the Cold War, Eastern Europe acted as a rival against the currents of modernity in the West. In the late years of that conflict, it became an increasingly involved, if quietly desperate, partner. During the post-Communist transition, it acted much like a pupil trying to imitate its (Western) mentor as best as it could. And then, into the early



“THE LATE COLD WAR YEARS MELLOWED SEVERAL ONCE-FIERCE RIVALS OF THE WEST INTO MORE ACCOMMODATING PARTNERS ONE ‘COULD DO BUSINESS WITH.’”

twenty-first century, it turned into a neoliberal experimental ground and engine of renewed economic growth. In more recent years, East European member states of the EU — Hungary above all, but Poland as well — have been viewed by many in Western Europe as “internal others” once again after their governments took authoritarian turns.

Let me briefly elaborate on each of the roles listed above. If Eastern Europe — the part of the continent that came to belong to the Soviet sphere only after 1945 and which now largely overlaps with the EU’s “newer member states” — at first explicitly rejected the “capitalist West,” its vision of modernity nevertheless remained greatly inspired by

images of Western development. The fierce competition between the two halves of the continent at the time was not only about growth rates and production levels. In the face of the challenge from the East, West Europeans understood that they needed to make mass politics safe for liberal democracy and the market economy by introducing elements of planning and extending welfare provisions. In the immediate aftermath of the launch of economic integration under Soviet primacy in the East, they developed new forms of economic integration with some transnational elements.

The late Cold War years mellowed several once-fierce rivals of the West

into more accommodating partners one could “do business with.” Ironically, even extreme authoritarianism did not preclude these arrangements: Romania under Nicolae Ceaușescu’s tyranny was a pioneer in developing Western ties as it joined the International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and even entered into trade agreements with the European Communities (the predecessors of the EU). The Ceaușescu regime’s harsh repression during the 1980s was in fact connected to his fanatical commitment to repaying Western loans; the latter required forcibly lowering local consumption levels, which predictably generated societal discontent and in turn led to further surveillance and crackdowns.

The increasingly pragmatic Hungarian party state, on the contrary, remained massively indebted by the late 1980s and became ever more heavily dependent on West German loans in particular. In their quiet desperation, Hungary’s reformist leaders even proved willing, months before the opening of the Berlin Wall, to negotiate the free exit of East German refugees from the country’s territory. This was a bold act that helped catalyze the swift collapse and unexpected disappearance of their former ally in East Berlin.

THE PEACEFUL END to the Cold War, the national independence and liberal democratic turn of the largest parts of Eastern Europe, the swift unification of the two Germanies in 1990, the establishment of the European Union via the Maastricht Treaty by 1992, and the preparation of detailed plans to enlarge the newly founded union eastward in 1993, were all part of the same historical moment.

The plan to enlarge the EU to include post-Communist Eastern Europe proved crucial for Europe as a whole. At that point the European Union was West European in all but name, and it had to confront the challenge of how to make post-Communist countries conform to its standards. It needed to determine specific entry requirements. This raised some fundamental questions: What qualified as a “consolidated democracy”? What constituted “the rule of law”? What did a functioning market economy look like? And, what qualified as a competent and reliable state

“AMIDST THE CURRENT RISE OF ILLIBERAL FORCES ACROSS LARGE PARTS OF THE CONTINENT, A PROPERLY HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EAST-WEST RELATIONS... MAY BE URGENTLY NEEDED.”



apparatus? The revolutionary changes associated with 1989 soon made the “new East Europeans” into eager pupils hoping to be admitted into the highly distinguished club of their former rivals. This turned out to be the hour of the EU’s “transformative power” (Heather Grabbe) as it managed to impact domestic policies of East European countries via its conditionality for membership.

I will never forget the large billboards in Budapest promising, in a style unmistakably inherited from the former regime, that “Europe” was going to be “built here.” During that roughly decade-and-a-half, Europe tended to be depicted in “accession countries” as prosperous and peaceful, free and solidaristic. There appeared to be little difference between the self-presentation of the EU and its mainstream perception among us, model pupils. This was before reality came

to bite East Europeans once again, as it so often had in the past. It is that naïve idealization of “Europe” in the 1990s — a rather mysterious entity possessing many desirable qualities that we East Europeans clearly lacked but to which we, confusingly enough, were also meant to belong — that defined this period in East European history.

But, almost as soon as they started to enthusiastically plunge themselves into their European future, East European states began to exhibit several ambiguities. They were visibly proud of their newly gained — or just regained — independence, yet eager to integrate into a European project that was intent on “pooling sovereignty.” They opened up economically yet often remained narrowly nationalistic in their political and cultural outlooks. They sought foreign capital and would uncritically accept Western advice on

how to become more like the West.

However, some would end up instead as experimental cases during what Philipp Ther aptly called the second, more radical wave of neoliberalism. A stark example of this neoliberal wave was when some Eastern European countries reintroduced flat taxation — the Baltic states (1994–5), Slovakia (2004) and Romania (2005) — a break with a whole century of consensus around progressive taxation in Europe.

By trying to copy what they understood as the Western model after 1989–91, East European countries thus came to exhibit in sharper form some of the basic tensions that characterized Western Europe at the time as well — tensions between deepening economic interconnectedness and the reproduction of key features of the nation state system, between the new realities of transnational integration and influential visions

when the financial crisis and the harsh austerity measures imposed in its aftermath quickly reversed many of the gains.

If during the transition period the West appeared like a wise teacher with a long track record of tangible success, opportunistic East European politicians could now more credibly depict it as arrogant, self-serving, or even misguided. Such disenchantment often reignited old resentments. It soon made influential actors question whether trying to imitate the West remained prudent. The most notorious among them, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, went as far as to openly challenge whether playing by the liberal democratic script still benefited his country. A crisis of de-democratization and the rule of law soon followed.

The concentration of power has assumed a particularly acute form in Hungary for well over a decade. Poland, too, experienced democratic backsliding, and, in milder forms, so did Slovenia and Bulgaria. Currently, there are also growing concerns that Slovakia under Robert Fico's premiership might soon follow in the footsteps of Orbán's Hungary. This multinational political-legal crisis has in turn revealed just how little EU institutions can do to protect, let alone promote, liberal democracy in struggling member states. Tellingly, Hungarian scholars András Bozóki and Daniel Hegedüs even started to wonder whether the EU was enabling, rather than constraining, illiberal regimes in its midst.

Illiberal regimes in Eastern Europe may have repeatedly been depicted in recent years as constituting "internal others" intent on subverting common EU norms and values from within — whereby West Europeans have admittedly also revived some of their long-standing skepticism regarding the maturity of those "new Europeans." East European illiberal actors may also be said to be holding up a mirror, or rather a mocking glass, to the supposedly buried but undead dark sides and prejudices of the West. After all, the heated debates surrounding the rise of illiberal regimes within the EU have brought to the fore a deeper polarization between two self-understandings of the West: as a liberal and progressive project, on the one hand, and as a rather exclusive cultural — or supposedly even racial — community, on the other.

CURRENT INTERPRETATIONS OF Europe's East-West relations tend to focus on the achievements and shortcomings of the "Europeanization of Eastern Europe" since 1989. As I have aimed to show in this short essay, relevant East-West dynamics have been much more multifaceted than often assumed. A more nuanced perspective on these dynamics can help us reveal just how profoundly the relations to Eastern Europe have impacted the European project as a whole — through various hopes and fears, and through diverse strategies stretching from rejection all the way to incorporation.

It was the fierce rivalry with the Communist East after 1945 that motivated West Europeans to make extensive state interventions and develop generous welfare regimes. That rivalry was also among the factors motivating the launching of new, transnational forms of economic integration in the Eastern half of the continent. The remarkable mellowing of several East European rivals by the late 1980s decisively shaped the end of the Cold War, which soon led to the launch of an ambitious agenda to simultaneously deepen and broaden European integration and form the European Union. It must be viewed as ironic, then, that the basic tensions that resulted from Eastern Europe's swift remodeling along Western lines in those years foreshadowed those of Western Europe in the early twenty-first century — a time when the emboldened illiberal challengers from the East further sharpened the already polarized self-understanding of the West.

Amidst the current rise of illiberal forces across large parts of the continent, a properly historical perspective on East-West relations — on the crucial, if often underestimated role of Eastern Europe in the history of European integration — may be urgently needed. Such a more nuanced perspective may even be necessary to give transnational democracy in Europe a second chance.

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of national sovereignty. Since then, such tensions have only come to shape West European politics more. Ironically enough, the eager imitator ended up foreshadowing the future of the imitated.

WHEN IT COMES TO East-West dynamics in the two decades since the EU's "big bang enlargement," the 2008 financial crisis and the decline of democracy and rule of law standards within member states were especially important.

The crisis, which demonstrated that EU membership was no guarantee of increased prosperity, did much to dispel the naïve belief in the West's superior wisdom. What made things even more disorienting for East Europeans was that the painful neoliberal restructuring they had gone through in the 1990s and early 2000s had finally started to pay off



PUTTING GLASNOST TO THE TEST

HOW A U.S. JOURNALIST HELPED CREATE A VICTIM OF GORBACHEV'S "OPENNESS"

BY JEFFREY TRIMBLE

In 1987 I was in my second year as Moscow bureau chief of *U.S. News & World Report*, dashing from story to story along with the rest of the international press corps as fascination with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's still-emerging, ambitious perestroika (restructuring) reforms swept the globe.

Glasnost—most often translated as “openness” or “transparency”—was perhaps the most impactful reform of that era. It was certainly the most exciting one. No topic was off limits for open discussion in the media, Gorbachev insisted back then. Soviet newspapers, radio, and TV brimmed with reports of day-to-day life as it actually was (pretty dismal) and uncensored coverage of government policies. Many taboo issues were finally opened for discussion: Stalin's era of terror, the bureaucracy and corruption in the Soviet state machine, even the seamy sides of Soviet life such as crime and prostitution. Academics and scientists, dissidents, and average people were for the first time allowed to debate the Communist hierarchy. Books, films, and theater performances banned by previous regimes were finally published and shown.

“Without glasnost there is no and cannot be any democratization, or political creativity of the masses, or their involvement in ruling,” Gorbachev said in 1986, adding later that year: “People need the truth, the whole picture . . . Now, as never before, we need more light, so that both the party and people would be able to know everything, so that we no longer have so-called ‘dark corners,’ where mold could spring again.”

As the glasnost wave intensified, I was given a unique opportunity to put Gorbachev's pledge to the test—and in doing so, I helped to ignite a scandal that vividly demonstrated what glasnost was, and what it was not. Glasnost was often portrayed as an unprecedented, exciting, dynamic period of flourishing public debate and media pluralism in the USSR—but, as I discovered in the heady early period of reform, that definition applied only so long as the narratives supported Gorbachev and his policies.

And looking back, I believe that the broader failure to recognize the fundamental difference between glasnost and true freedom of the press contributed to the short-lived era of press freedom before and after the Soviet collapse and to the long era of Putin repression that followed. Had Western leaders better understood, perhaps they would have been more restrained in pushing Russia to adopt shock therapy and other hurry-up approaches to revamping society to be more like the West. Too many well-intentioned international initiatives failed when they hit Russian realities and actually contributed to what became resentment and bitterness toward the West.

Photo illustration by Two by Sixteen uses the following images:

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (Photo by Dyson/Mirrorpix/Getty Images)

A Soviet-era broadcasting tower in Moscow (istock.com/Mordolff)

Film strip (istock.com/Pgiam)

Old television (istock.com/FotografiaBasica)

Dot Pattern (istock.com/cundra)

State Kremlin Palace (Jaunt and Joy on Unsplash)

“IT’S NOT EASY for a foreign correspondent to cover the Soviet Union outside Moscow,” I observed in *U.S. News & World Report* (October 19, 1987), in a sweeping cover package headlined “A New Revolution: Can Gorbachev Save a Failing System?”

“Trips are hampered by red tape, and huge areas are off-limits to foreigners,” I continued. “The result: Few firsthand reports on how Mikhail Gorbachev’s revolution is playing in the hinterlands. But recently, in an unprecedented collaborative reporting effort, I visited seven Soviet cities with Dmitri Biryukov, foreign editor of the Soviet magazine *Ogonyok* (“Little Flame”). We covered more than 9,100 miles—a distance roughly equal to 3.5 trips across the continental United States.”

Earlier that year, I had worked out a deal with Biryukov and his editors at *Ogonyok* that I saw as both an experiment and an opportunity: Dmitri and I would travel around the USSR and each of us would write his own article about the experience, for publication in *Ogonyok* and *U.S. News*. Then, the plan envisioned, Dmitri and I would take a similar, cross-country reporting trip around the United States, again with our individual accounts published in both magazines.

The *experiment* was to test the Soviet leadership’s stated commitment to glasnost. Would *Ogonyok* in fact publish my impressions of Gorbachev’s USSR and perestroika, warts and all? The *opportunity* was that the imprimatur of *Ogonyok*, one of the USSR’s most progressive, pro-reform media outlets, would smooth travel connections and open doors across the country that had long been closed, and in many cases had never been open at all, to foreign journalists. *Ogonyok*, a once-staid weekly news and features magazine, had become a glasnost leader. Copies flew off newsstands, with seemingly no-holds-barred revelations that tested the boundaries of openness and fascinated and titillated millions of readers.

The magazine was under the patronage of Alexander Yakovlev, head of the Communist Party’s Propaganda Department, a member of the ruling Politburo, and one of Gorbachev’s closest advisors. Yakovlev, a former ambassador to Canada, was a leading reformer and considered to be glasnost’s patron saint.

Biryukov, a 32-year-old reporter two years my senior, well-educated, urbane and with good command of English, was of the pro-Gorbachev generation of Soviet “golden youth.” His family connections high in the elite smoothed his journalistic rise and provided a “*krysha*”—“roof,” literally—that afforded a measure of protection against any official pressure on his bold reporting. “We are working on enthusiasm and adrenaline,” Biryukov told *Time* magazine earlier in 1987, describing the breakneck pace and far-reaching reporting conducted by glasnost-enabled Soviet journalists.

Dmitri and I spent a whirlwind three weeks traveling from the Baltics to Ukraine and across the plains of Central Asia and Siberia. Among our travel stops: a co-op video café in Odesa that screened “Tom and Jerry” cartoons in the morning and Western, adult fare in the evening—employees made twice the average Soviet wage and the directors dreamed of turning it into a Ukraine-wide chain; a collective farm in Moldova whose iron-willed elderly female director was exploiting loosened state regulations to establish more efficient work teams that produced higher crop yields, and earnings; a Buddhist temple on a wind-swept plain outside Ulan-Ude (Siberia), where a newly-minted priest cautiously described increasing official tolerance of religion; and a sold-out new play in Leningrad about the lives of sex workers in the USSR where an on-stage prostitute dropped her skirt, lowering herself onto a client. We had frank conversations at every stop, with ample complaints accompanying the success stories.

I wrote my article in standard, third-person journalism style, letting the scenes and characters we encountered tell the story of how perestroika was playing away from the Soviet capital. There was no effort by *Ogonyok* to tone down or cut unfavorable observations. Dmitri wrote his article in first person, and in his narrative, he often observed my reactions to our experiences. He mused, for instance, about how I might react to a just-completed public opinion poll we were told about in Novosibirsk that indicated 30 percent of the city’s population favored perestroika, 50 percent were neutral, and 20 percent were against it.

Glasnost at its best, right? Except . . . no.

Our stories (headlined in *U.S. News* “From Riga to Siberia: The reforms outside Moscow” and in *Ogonyok* “From the Baltics to Baikal” (От Балтики до Байкала) appeared in October in *U.S. News* and in early November in *Ogonyok*, on the eve of the seventieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. At that time daily broadcasts and speeches by Gorbachev and other officials extolled the successes of perestroika and claimed total public support for the reforms. Against this rosy backdrop, Dmitri’s casual mention of the poll describing the lukewarm Siberian reception of perestroika landed with a crash.

Vitaly Korotich, the crusading editor of *Ogonyok*, described in his memoirs what happened right after the article’s publication: a furious Yakovlev called him demanding Biryukov’s immediate removal from the magazine’s editorial board and a reprimand from the magazine’s Communist Party organization.

I wrote my article in standard, third-person journalism style, letting the scenes and characters we encountered tell the story of how perestroika was playing away from the Soviet capital.

Yakovlev later told Korotich that, after reading the article, Gorbachev himself had called him at dawn, shouting about an “anti-party conspiracy” in Siberia. A commission from the party’s Central Committee was dispatched to Novosibirsk “to clarify the question of the harmful deviation emerging there.”

Biryukov was publicly humiliated and ousted from his position. *Ogonyok* published a retraction stating that Biryukov had made up the data—no such survey had been conducted in Novosibirsk. “Distortion of factual data is a crude violation of the most important tradition of the Soviet press – to state truthful information,” read the retraction. “Only undeviating observance of this principle allows the press to increase its role in the work of perestroika.”

Korotich went on to describe how they hid “the unfortunate Biryukov in the depths of the information department,” for the duration of the following year.

In fact, the “distortion of factual data” was by cowed party officials and *Ogonyok* editors, not by Biryukov. The survey *had* been conducted and the results—lukewarm support for perestroika—were just as Dmitri reported. My own notes confirm this (though the detail didn’t make it into my story for editorial reasons), and I learned only recently from a declassified State Department cable that a senior Soviet agriculture official had quoted the same survey in a meeting with U.S. diplomats in 1989.

After his ignoble dismissal, Dmitri and I lost touch. His successor, Artyom Borovik, discouraged me from contacting Dmitri. It was better, Borovik insisted, for Dmitri to lie low without foreign contact—particularly with the co-author of his misfortune—until the storm blew over. Dmitri made no effort to reach me, then or later, and I followed his lead. I assumed—rightly, I hope—that Dmitri’s *krysha* of highly placed relatives and friends would shield him from real, long-term harm. I received no inquiries or complaints from Soviet officials about the incident.

Borovik, another member of the “golden youth” who had published remarkably frank reporting from Afghanistan about the Soviet military and political debacle there, eventually traveled to the United States with the assistance of *U.S. News* and reported



Looking back, I conclude that glasnost, launched as a Kremlin-controlled effort to further Gorbachev’s ambitious reform drive, backfired badly in its intended aim.

for *Ogonyok* in a much scaled-down version of what Dmitri and I had planned to do. Given lingering caution at *Ogonyok*, I did not travel with Borovik, so only his reporting appeared in the Soviet weekly.

LOOKING BACK, I conclude that glasnost, launched as a Kremlin-controlled effort to further Gorbachev’s ambitious reform drive, backfired badly in its intended aim. The policy ultimately stimulated dissatisfaction not only with the Soviet leader and his reforms, but with the entire construct of the Soviet system—thereby hastening the historic collapse of Communism and the demise of the USSR in 1991.

And yet ghosts of glasnost lingered, first into the “wild west” 1990s when Russia’s media landscape opened up and there was a burst of genuine pluralism that foundered amid economic hardships and dominance by oligarchs. After Vladimir Putin came to power at the very end of 1999 efforts began to get the media, and media owners, back under control. Borovik, whose edgy investigative reporting after leaving *Ogonyok* often took aim at the Kremlin, died in a suspicious plane crash in 2000. But even today, glasnost lives on, through pluralistic political, social, and media environments in many of the former socialist/Communist

countries and institutions such as independent Russian NGOs and media outlets that operate in exile.

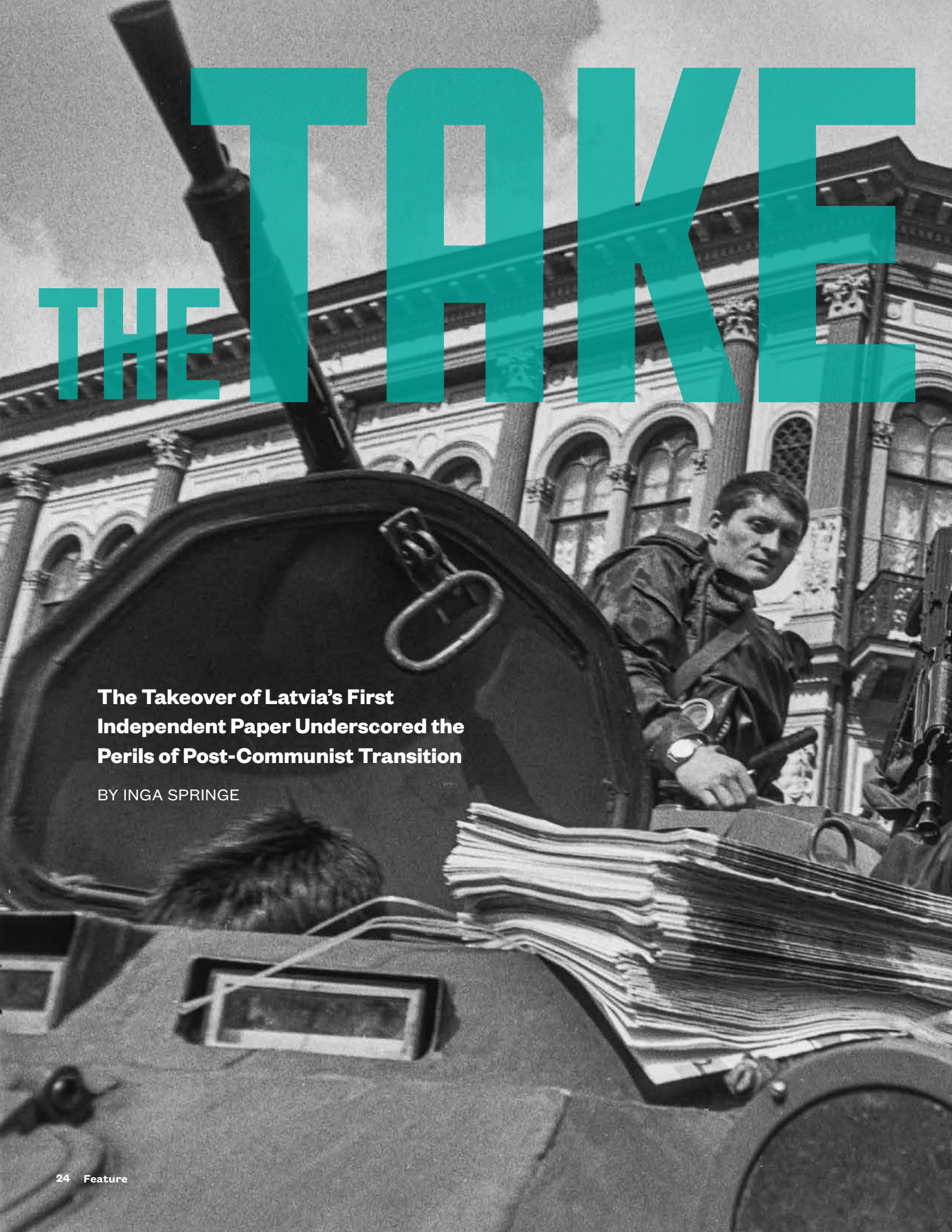
In his account of our trip around the USSR, Dmitri wrote that he would like to see stereotypes dissolve, and the media “not to raise walls through mutual reproach and accusations . . . We must find new points of contact. They are needed for trust, cooperation and, most important, mutual survival.”

During a historic moment of excitement, promise, and optimism about the future of the Soviet Union, Dmitri dreamed big. But that moment soon passed, as Gorbachev’s reforms stalled, and the USSR began to rip at the seams.

Jeffrey Trimble was Moscow bureau chief of U.S. News & World Report magazine from 1986 to 1991. He is an affiliated lecturer at Ohio State University and chairs the board of directors at Eurasianet, an independent news organization based at the Harriman Institute. His Substack blog is “Ghosts of Glasnost.”

The author drew important details for this article from “The Birth of Russian Media” (“Рождение российских СМИ”), compiled by researcher Nataliya Rostova. And he thanks Allan Mustard, retired Foreign Agriculture Service officer, for sharing the declassified cable. ♦

THE TAKE



The Takeover of Latvia's First Independent Paper Underscored the Perils of Post-Communist Transition

BY INGA SPRINGE

OVER





IN AN OCTOBER MORNING IN 2009, Pauls Raudseps, head of the op-ed section at Latvia's leading newspaper *Diena*, knew it was his last day. Conflicts with the paper's new owners had been mounting for weeks. The owners wanted significant budget cuts, cuts that *Diena's* editorial team saw as a threat to the integrity of their journalism. They suspected the new owners were linked to some of the local oligarchs whose shady dealings had been exposed by the paper. In a meeting with the new owners' representative, Raudseps and the editor-in-chief were told they were "suspended." Both chose to resign instead.

For Raudseps it was a grim climax to what had begun two decades earlier as an exhilarating political adventure. In 1990, as the Soviet Union crumbled, he had arrived in Latvia, armed with a Harvard degree in Soviet history and a commitment to helping his parents' homeland restore its independence. It had been a time of great hope and political ferment, and Raudseps' bilingual skills made him invaluable for communicating the independence movement's goals to foreign correspondents. His Western views on news would also help shape *Diena* (meaning *The Day* in Latvian), the first professional daily newspaper in the Baltics.

Based in Riga and founded by the pro-independence government in 1990, *Diena* set new journalism standards for post-Soviet Latvia. Opinion was separated from news, a rigorous ethics code was enforced, and *Diena* articles sought to hold public officials accountable—all a sharp break with the propaganda sheets that masqueraded as newspapers in the Soviet Union.

But that morning in 2009, Raudseps realized the *Diena* founders had lost—not to the Communists, as they once feared, but to local oligarchs. These oligarchs were a force unforeseen

Previous page: In August 1991, when hard-line Communists attempted to overthrow Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet special forces and armored vehicles moved into the center of Riga, the Latvian capital. *Diena*, the newspaper founded by pro-independent Latvian leaders who opposed the coup attempt and sought freedom from Soviet rule, was handed out to the soldiers. Photo: Jānis Deinats

Left: Pauls Raudseps and Sarmīte Ēlerte, who created the blueprint for *Diena*. Photo courtesy of Pauls Raudseps

in the heady first days of true independence after the Soviet collapse in 1991. But as Latvia transitioned into a democracy, they had accumulated wealth and political power.

For years, *Diena* had investigated and exposed their shadowy operations and corruption. However, during the global financial crisis that began in 2008, as the newspaper and the rest of Latvia struggled, the oligarchs struck back.

A few months before Raudseps began his final day at the paper, a man in a white BMW had arrived at *Diena's* offices. He brought news that the Swedish Bonnier publishing house, which owned a controlling majority in the paper, had now sold it. The buyer's identities were concealed behind offshore entities.

And now, on that October day, the paper's top editors were forced to leave. Raudseps packed his belongings in his glass-walled office as a lawyer for the new owners watched. Outside, *Diena's* journalists observed in silence. Raudseps' wife, Dace, a veteran journalist and *Diena's* weekend magazine editor, quietly wept.

"I knew this day would come," Raudseps reflected years later. "But there's still bitterness. The Swedes should have at least offered us the chance to buy the paper instead of selling it out to the oligarchs. They would never have done something like this in their home market."

Latvia and its Baltic neighbors Estonia and Lithuania—now all NATO and European Union members—are often heralded as success stories of post-Communist transition. *Diena's* journalism helped cement this success in Latvia by exposing corruption and promoting transparency. Not all former Soviet republics have fared so well. Independent media struggle for survival in most of them, in part because democracy and the freedoms it implies have never taken root. Some former Soviet republics still operate under outright authoritarianism.

But even the Baltic success stories are not unblemished democratic victories. In Latvia, for example, despite aggressive media reporting on economic corruption, oligarchs who grew rich in the early years of independence continue to wield outsized influence on the national stage. One of their most important victories came in 2009, when *Diena* fell into the grip of oligarchs, underscoring that even the strongest symbols of democracy can face setbacks.

IN THE LATE 1980s, as political liberalization under Mikhail Gorbachev sparked change in the Soviet Union, the country's three Baltic republics—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—seized the moment. Despite the risks of police brutality, people took to the streets in a movement known as the Singing Revolution. Their independence movement sought to regain freedom for the Baltics as sovereign nations, after nearly fifty years of Soviet rule.

"I lived in the Soviet Union; my TV and radio were full of Communist bullshit. But when the first opportunity came to regain freedom, my grandfather's stories about independent Estonia were much more powerful," says Estonian media pundit Raul Rebane. "In the Baltics, people were ready to sacrifice everything, even life, for independence."

For Latvians, independence had a special urgency. The Soviet Union had intentionally relocated Russians and other Soviet citizens to Latvia to work in factories and on collective farms, and by the late 1980s, native Latvian speakers were only 52 percent of Latvia's population of 2.5 million people. Continued Russification could make Latvians a minority in their own land. Without independence, there was a widespread fear Latvia might not survive as a nation.

That was all part of the message that young independence activist Sarmīte Ēlerte took with her when she visited the United States in 1989.

Ēlerte, a founder of the pro-independence Latvian Popular Front, was tasked with meeting members of the 100,000-strong Latvian-American community in order to "convince the exiles that these changes must be supported," she recalls.

That's how Ēlerte met Pauls Raudseps, at a dinner in New York organized by a local Latvian. Back then, Raudseps was a young Harvard graduate. His parents had fled the Soviet occupation of Latvia as children in 1944. Both eventually resettled with their families as refugees in the United States; that's where Raudseps' parents met, years later, as university students. They raised Raudseps to be fluent in the Latvian language and culture. At the New York dinner, where Ēlerte described the exciting new independence movement in Latvia, Raudseps asked Ēlerte what he could do for his parents' homeland. Ēlerte's answer: "Come and help the Popular Front."

Ēlerte, who had started her career as an editor at a Soviet cultural magazine, was in charge of the Popular Front's information center. Raudseps' bilingual skills would be welcome in the Front's office, which was a must-stop for foreign journalists writing about the independence movement.

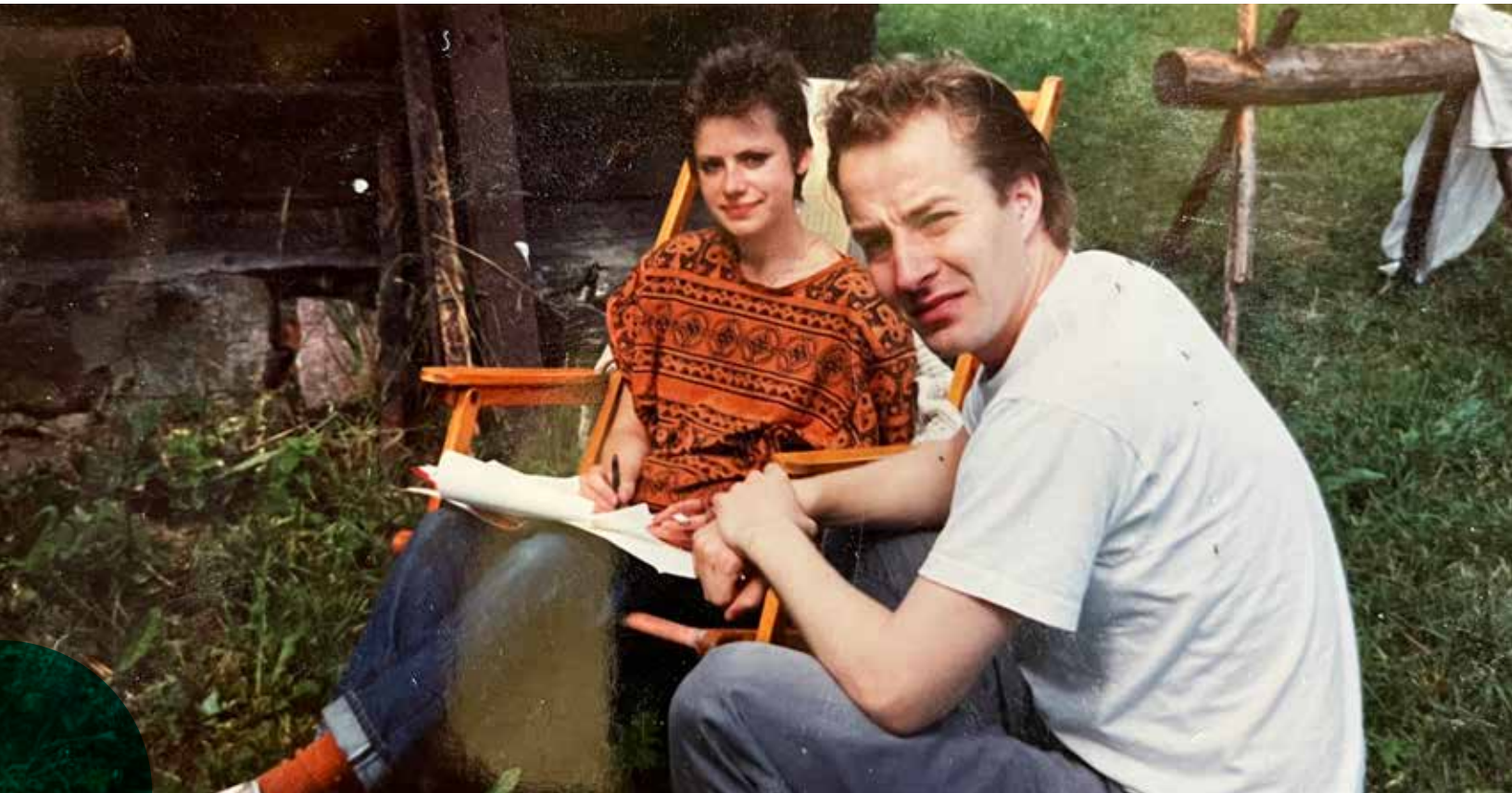
Raudseps accepted Ēlerte's invitation, moving to Riga in 1990 as the Baltic push for freedom gained momentum and helped ease Soviet-imposed restrictions, such as prior censorship of media.

"When I arrived in Latvia, censorship had ended," Raudseps recalls. "Yet there was no real newspaper. I was shocked when Lithuania declared independence on March 11 [1990], but a significant article about it appeared only a week later."

"It was a rude awakening to how naïve we were. Our goal was to transform Latvia into a democratic, free-market society. We assumed everyone on our team shared that vision."



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Soviet Latvian “news” coverage bore little resemblance to that of Western media at the time. Most newspapers served as little more than propaganda for the Communist Party and its leaders. Articles consisted of slogans and personal opinions rather than objective reporting. Trustworthy journalism, defined by fairness and neutrality, was absent.

The Popular Front’s leaders realized they had a media problem. They had won parliamentary elections in March 1990, but they were taking office in a country whose media outlets were stuck in Soviet practices; for example, parliamentary leaders, eager to make changes, couldn’t get their newly adopted laws and decisions published in a timely manner.

With their newfound political power, the Popular Front leaders decided to launch a new paper. Though government-backed at first, it had a mandate to report independently, and in 1992 the paper was privatized (employees initially held a majority of the shares, but the Swedish Bonnier publishing house owned 49 percent, a stake that it increased over the years).

Journalists at Soviet Latvian newspapers couldn’t be trusted to create an independent paper, so the Popular Front turned to Ēlerte and Raudseps, neither of whom had typical credentials for the job.

In her job at the Soviet cultural magazine, Ēlerte had often battled to sneak content past the censors. Raudseps, an avid reader of *New York Times* and *Boston Globe* articles, had no newsroom experience at all — unless you count the day he spent shadowing a *Globe* editor in preparation for creating *Diena*.

Ēlerte and Raudseps quickly got to work. In the summer of

1990, they retreated to a country house in Latvia and developed a blueprint for what became the newspaper *Diena*. Unlike its Soviet predecessors, this paper would separate news from opinion, like the *Globe* and the *Times* did. Page one would prioritize the most significant stories, and articles would be written in an inverted pyramid style, telegraphing the important news at the top before filling in details and context.

Next came the task of assembling a news team. Again, veterans of Soviet media were not welcome. Ēlerte and Raudseps instead solicited students with no prior journalism experience — but, presumably, a more open mind about learning to report using rigorous journalistic standards. Applicants came from law, economics, and journalism faculties at Latvian universities. One early hire was a firefighter by day who wrote fiction by night; he went on to become one of *Diena*’s most respected political columnists.

The first issue of *Diena* came out in November 1990. The front page highlighted local news about a tax system threatening government stability, along with Latvia-related analysis from Moscow and Washington about proposed Kremlin reforms. It also noted the upcoming resignation of UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and featured a lengthy interview with Laima Vaikule, a Latvian pop singer well-known in the Soviet sphere. The stories brought a new urgency and a real news sensibility to Latvian media.

Left: Sarmīte Ēlerte and Pauls Raudseps in the summer of 1990, when they developed the blueprint for *Diena*.

However, the Soviet mentality and corruption still lingered. About a year after launch, *Diena* managers discovered the head of the business section had accepted a bribe from a local company to write a favorable story about the business.

“It was a rude awakening to how naïve we were,” Raudseps recalls. “Our goal was to transform Latvia into a democratic, free-market society. We assumed everyone on our team shared that vision.”

The business editor was swiftly dismissed, and to head off further incidents, Raudseps drafted *Diena*’s first code of ethics. It included strict prohibitions on accepting gifts or special treatment from sources. And it emphasized that “truth is our primary goal,” instructing journalists that any mistakes they made needed to be quickly acknowledged and corrected.

BY THE TIME THE SOVIET UNION collapsed, *Diena* was growing in stature as the three Baltic states sought a single goal: reintegration into Europe.

“Everything seemed possible,” said Ēlerte. “The question wasn’t *if*, but *when* we will be part of a modern Europe again.”

“When” turned out to be 13 years later—that’s how long negotiations dragged on before the European Union and NATO finally welcomed the Baltics into membership.

The lengthy timetable was unforeseen in the early days of independence—a period that, in retrospect, Ēlerte calls a time of naïveté. The paper she led as editor-in-chief shared in that naïveté.

Diena also shared the Baltic countries’ political goal of rejoining Europe and Latvia’s political goal of securing the withdrawal of Russian troops from their now-independent state. At the time of independence, 50,000 to 60,000 Russian military personnel were stationed in Latvia. Some of them remained, post-independence, until a breakthrough in 1994, when U.S. President Bill Clinton helped persuade Russian President Boris Yeltsin to withdraw all remaining troops.

Before the final agreement was signed, though, local intellectuals opposed a provision allowing retired Russian military personnel to stay in Latvia. They argued that the continued presence of the

Russians would pose a persistent threat to Latvia’s independence. *Diena*, by then the country’s most popular newspaper, stepped in with strong editorials calling for the agreement’s ratification despite the allowance for military retirees to stay on.

Raudseps recalls the paper’s message: “If we don’t sign, we won’t get a better deal—and we might not get anything at all.” The agreement was signed.

The long negotiations with the EU and NATO were certainly not anticipated in the heady early months of Baltic independence. But that process proved beneficial for Latvia, as the Western organizations mandated institutional changes to address deep-rooted, systemic issues. Throughout those years, *Diena* was there, covering in detail the complexities of European integration. The paper praised the United States as a crucial ally, even when other Western nations were skeptical of Baltic aspirations. It also editorialized in favor of Europe’s demands for reforming Latvia’s economy and democratic development.

In September 2003, when Latvia had to make its final decision on joining the EU, *Diena* was unequivocal, using its front page as a graphic editorial. On the day of the EU referendum, page one featured a giant yellow dahlia and the word “yes.” The final result: 67 percent of those who voted supported EU membership.

AS LATVIA MODERNIZED, its wealth grew. *Diena*’s founders could feel it in their personal lives. Raudseps and his family took regular trips to Paris and other European capitals, while Ēlerte became a regular operagoer in Austria and built a home near a white-sand beach 30 minutes from Riga’s capital.

But while part of Latvian society could embrace a more luxurious lifestyle, many Latvians couldn’t. Almost half a million emigrated in search of better economic opportunities—especially after the country joined the EU, giving Latvians and residents of the other Baltics the right to move and seek work throughout the union.

For years, Latvia had one of the highest income inequality rates in the EU, according to Eurostat data. By the early 2000s, the World Bank identified “state capture”—a form of corruption where a small elite manipulates government policies for their own benefit—as a key factor behind Latvia’s social inequality and growing public dissatisfaction with politics. These persistent, Soviet-era practices eventually would contribute to *Diena*’s downfall.

“Everything seemed possible.
The question wasn’t *if*,
but *when* we will be part of
a modern Europe again.”

“These were middle-class people. They came not for personal gain, but to support justice and democratic values.”

DESPITE THE LONG AND ARDUOUS NEGOTIATIONS with the EU and NATO, Latvia’s political integration into Europe turned out to be a smoother process than its efforts to establish a stable market economy.

In Latvia, corruption persisted, a hangover from the Soviet era that was reinforced by ongoing ties to Russia and other autocratic countries. In the late 1990s, Transparency International gave Latvia a dismal score of 2.7 out of 10, signaling pervasive corruption. By comparison, neighboring Estonia scored 5.7.

Transparency’s assessment came amidst political turmoil in Latvia. Social inequality was high, and a major bank collapse in 1995 wiped out many people’s savings. Meanwhile, populist forces were gaining ground, and attempts to form a stable, pro-Western government were failing.

Enter businessman Andris Šķēle, who had privatized several food-processing companies and amassed wealth that made him one of the country’s richest oligarchs. In 1995, Šķēle was nominated to become prime minister. *Diena* had serious concerns about his business practices but decided to back him on the editorial pages due to his support for NATO and EU membership.

“We didn’t have much choice,” says Raudseps, “otherwise we would fall back where Georgia and Ukraine were.” (Both countries were in considerable political turmoil at the time.)

Between 1995–2000, Šķēle served as prime minister three times. In 1998 he formed the People’s Party, which won parliamentary elections and held power even when the party founder was no longer in office.

More than a decade after *Diena*’s initial endorsement, Šķēle’s party was still in power—but *Diena*’s stance had changed dramatically.

The change culminated after the prime minister from Šķēle’s People’s Party had attempted to remove the head of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB), which was investigating some of the country’s business elites and the awarding of state contracts.

The political threat to the anti-corruption office was covered widely in Latvian media. But the coverage didn’t stop the prime minister, who announced the dismissal of KNAB’s head in September 2007. The action was so alarming that Catherine Todd Bailey, then the U.S. ambassador to Latvia, broke diplomatic norms by asking, in a public speech: “Will Latvians let the state become the playground of a few individuals where they line their own pockets?”

Sarmīte Ēlerte remembers being “stunned” by the brutality with which Šķēle’s party pushed the dismissal forward. A friend called her and said, “Sarmīte, do something.” The next day, Ēlerte told her colleagues at *Diena* she wouldn’t come into the office. Instead, she began calling her network of artists and cultural figures, urging them to join a rally outside Parliament.

Three weeks after the firing, more than 5,000 people heeded that call. They gathered in the rain to protest, marking the start of what became known as the “Umbrella Revolution.”

“These were middle-class people,” says Ēlerte. “They came not for personal gain, but to support justice and democratic values.”

Within two months, the prime minister from Šķēle’s party was forced to resign, largely due to *Diena*’s influence.

BUT THE NEWSPAPER’S INFLUENCE would not last much longer. By the late 2000s, Latvia faced a double blow: the global financial crisis and a downturn in the print media sector. *Diena*, like many independent outlets, struggled with layoffs and financial losses.

Then came Bonnier’s decision to sell *Diena*. Bonnier, the Swedish publishing house and majority owner, had been a key shareholder since *Diena* transitioned to private ownership in 1992, increasing its stake over the years and expressing support and admiration for *Diena*’s journalistic achievements and profitability.

Ēlerte, who had left *Diena* a couple of years before the sale and eventually went into politics, said she believed a change in Bonnier’s management was a factor in the sale. “The older generation respected our achievements,” she says. “The younger one wasn’t interested.”

“I took it as a stab in the back. To me, this was the most terrible professional betrayal,” says Nellija Ločmele, the editor of the *Diena* publishing house at the time of the sale.

Bonnier’s leadership never fully explained why the company sold *Diena*, nor is it clear that Bonnier knew the new owners had links to Latvian oligarchs, as was revealed years later. Publicly, they framed the deal as a management buyout: a former business manager of *Diena* was the new owner’s representative, according to Bonnier. However, that manager had left *Diena* by the time of the sale, and he offered vague and shifting responses when journalists asked who the real owners were.

Then, in 2011, Latvia’s anti-corruption bureau, KNAB, launched an investigation, secretly recording conversations between an oligarch, Ainārs Šlesers, and his associates in a hotel room over a period of weeks or more. The tapes revealed discussions about which journalists at *Diena* should be dismissed, who should replace them, and how the newspaper could be leveraged to sway upcoming elections.

In 2017, the recordings were leaked to the media, exposing the oligarchs' wish to take revenge on *Diena*, which had reported extensively on their questionable dealings over the years.

Diena's reporting included investigations of Šlesers, a former transport minister who used his government position to advance private business interests in Riga's Freeport. And it included investigative reporting on Aivars Lembergs, also heard on the recordings, for profiting from oil deals with Russia. The recorded conversations between Šlesers and Lembergs also made clear that Šķēle, the three-time prime minister, now with the wealth and power of a full-fledged oligarch, was connected to *Diena's* new ownership; Šķēle was the subject of a series of articles written by this author while working at *Diena*, detailing how he built his business empire by privatizing the state food industry and acquiring millions of Euros worth of state land and property at bargain prices. Though the recordings revealed connections, the exact structure of *Diena's* new ownership was never made public. Public records only list proxies, not the investors behind them.

"I believe that was one of the oligarchs' big wins—to destroy *Diena*," says Ločmele, who thinks they bought the paper to exact revenge on its journalists and silence further reporting on their business dealings.

After ousting experienced editors and witnessing nearly a third of the remaining staff walk out in protest, the new owners attempted to turn *Diena* into a political mouthpiece. Instead, under a weak professional team and management with little understanding of media dynamics, *Diena* lost most of its audience and today exists as a marginal newspaper with no impact.

However, the spirit of *Diena* has endured. Journalists who left after Bonnier sold the paper have gone on to become leaders in Latvia's media landscape. One serves as editor-in-chief at Latvian Public Radio. Pauls Raudseps, Nellija Ločmele and other members of the former *Diena* editorial team launched a successful weekly magazine *IR*; it's the outlet that in 2017 published the leaked conversations between the oligarchs behind Bonnier's sale of *Diena*. And the author of this story, a former member of *Diena's* investigative team, founded an award-winning nonprofit investigative journalism center, *Re:Baltica*. The center conducts deep investigations on Russia's influence operations, money laundering, and crucial social issues in Latvia.

That legacy reflects the resilience of *Diena's* journalists, who contribute to a vibrant media environment in Latvia. The country ranks among the top nations in the world for press freedom—Reporters Without Borders puts it in 12th place, above all the countries that were once part of the Soviet Union except for Estonia (which ranks 6th; Russia, by comparison, ranks 162nd).

This freedom is supported by a robust legal framework that upholds journalistic independence, fulfilling one of the important promises of Latvia's hard-won freedom. But challenges—to Latvia and to its media—certainly persist. Though the record on corruption has improved over the past three decades, it's still a prime focus of investigations by Latvian media, and too often, the wrongdoing they expose goes unpunished. Despite investigations by journalists and anti-corruption officials, only one oligarch—Aivars Lembergs—has been sentenced to four years in prison for financial crimes. But he is still free, awaiting a final verdict by Latvia's Supreme Court.

For the media themselves, the challenges are similar to those facing journalism in other democratic Western countries: diminishing public trust and ongoing economic hardships.

Like its Baltic neighbors Estonia and Lithuania, Latvia has achieved its initial goal of integrating into Europe and securing a place in NATO. Yet even for the Baltics, democracy remains fragile, a reality underscored by the ongoing war in Ukraine. Russian disinformation, picked up and spread by populist politicians, is a particular problem for three small countries that feel threatened by their Russian neighbor.

"In 2003 [before joining the EU] and 2008 [the year of the financial crisis] everyone complained that times were tough," says Estonian media expert Raul Rebane. Still, "We, the older generation, compared life to the Soviet Union and were happy, while the younger ones compared it to Luxembourg and were not happy."

Rebane says Russia's assault on Ukraine has brought a shift in thinking. "It's clear that the war in Ukraine has sharpened our understanding of what we have and what's at stake," including the free press that has covered the past three decades of independence and reunion with Europe, he says. "Independent media is crucial for democracy."

Inga Sprinģe is an award-winning investigative journalist and co-founder of The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism Re:Baltica. Sprinģe previously worked at Diena when it was Latvia's leading newspaper. She was a visiting scholar at the Harriman Institute in 2018. ♦



Latvia's "Umbrella Revolution" in 2007 was supported by *Diena* and led to the prime minister's resignation. Photo: LETA

THE KLEBNIKOV FELLOWS:

Learning to Work from Exile

BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

U.S. journalist Paul Klebnikov was living in Moscow and investigating the criminal networks of Russia's business elite as the editor-in-chief of *Forbes* Russia when he was gunned down outside his office in July 2004. His murder remains unsolved, but his legacy lives on at Columbia, where, according to his widow, Musa Klebnikov, he often conducted research for his stories. In 2011 Musa Klebnikov partnered with the Harriman Institute to start the Paul Klebnikov Russian Civil Society Fellowship. With her generous gift, the institute has brought a total of ten independent Russian journalists for three-week residencies at the Harriman, where they meet with members of the U.S. media and audit classes at Columbia Journalism School. "The hope is that they will come away with an impression of a different kind of journalistic environment," Klebnikov told me during an interview in 2019.

Since the fellowship's inception, the Kremlin's crackdown on independent media has intensified, and, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, most

Russian independent journalists fled the country. In this new context, Harriman, together with Klebnikov, decided to reframe the fellowship. "It was designed for a different time. And the journalistic landscape has changed drastically in the last several years," said Harriman Director Valentina Izmirlieva.

The fellowship's new goal is to support independent Russophone media in exile. In partnership with Columbia Journalism School Professor Keith Gessen and Andrew Meier of the New School, and the JX Fund (a European fund that supports journalists in exile), a new program was created, the Global Klebnikov Fellowship, offering online training to help journalists in exile, with an in-person workshop abroad. The first cohort of fellows met in Berlin in the fall of 2024.

The fellowship on campus has continued, too. Ukrainian journalist Nikita Grigorov, a Paul Klebnikov Fellow (PKF) in 2022, and Russian journalist-in-exile Andrei Zakharov (PKF '24) were the most recent recipients.

I spoke with five former fellows about where their work has taken them since the fellowship.

SVETLANA REITER (PKF '13)

“The Only Thing Left from the Past is Our Job”

I met Svetlana Reiter over Zoom in September. She paced a courtyard in a European city—for safety reasons, she prefers not to disclose her location—recalling her career details. Currently, she works for the independent, Riga-based outlet *Meduza*, where she’s been for four years. “The longest time [I’ve worked somewhere] so far,” she said.

Jumping around has been the norm for independent journalists in Russia; the Kremlin frequently censored independent outlets, but new ones popped up in response. *Meduza* emerged that way, from the ashes of popular independent news outlet *Lenta.ru*, whose fired editor-in-chief Galina Timchenko and much of her staff founded *Meduza* in 2014, registering it in Latvia to secure independence.

Reiter worked for *Lenta.ru* at the time of its demise. From there, she went to the investigative department of *RBC*, a media outlet then owned by the oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov, which maintained its independence until 2016, when it investigated the assets of President Vladimir Putin and his inner circle. “And so, we faced a lot of repressions,” said Reiter.

From *RBC*, Reiter went to *Reuters*, then to a business news startup called *The Bell*, then to *BBC Russia*. By the time Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Reiter was working for Timchenko again, this time at *Meduza*. She left Russia quickly—first for Armenia, then Georgia, and, soon after, a third destination in Europe. She said her memory of that first year is hazy. “We were all working 24-7, and we’re still working a lot.”

Exile has been challenging. “We don’t know what to expect in the future. We don’t know how we’ll manage to work with all these repressions in Russia, with all this blocking of the sites we are working on, with all the repressions we’re facing,” Reiter said. The Kremlin labeled *Meduza* an “undesirable organization” in 2023. It uses the designation to ban organizations from publishing content in Russia and criminalizes all engagement with them. Last spring, after she published an interview with the late opposition leader Alexey Navalny’s lawyer, Reiter faced prosecution in absentia for her association with *Meduza*.

Though she lives abroad, Reiter could still be affected by Russia’s case against her. “They give you a warning, and then you need to stop doing what you do, otherwise you’ll be sentenced, even if you’re in exile,” she said. Reiter said she isn’t so worried about herself, since she is in Europe. “What is more important for me—knock on wood—is that my parents are still okay.”

For now, she plans to continue her reporting in spite of the risks. “I think the only thing left from the past is our job,” Reiter said. “We all have new homes, new circumstances, but the job still prevails.”

Svetlana Reiter
Photograph by Peter Kollanyi/Bloomberg via Getty Images, 2022

MARIA TURCHENKOVA (PKF '15)

“We Found Ourselves in Isolation on the Social Level”

Russian photojournalist Maria Turchenkova built her career working for media outside of Russia. She covered Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine for *Le Monde*, *Time*, and other outlets, “I had almost no publications with the Russian press. It was just how my career was developing,” she said over Zoom from Paris.

Turchenkova has always been drawn to conflict reporting. After visiting New York for the Paul Klebnikov Fellowship in 2015, she covered Yemen's civil war and Iraq's war against ISIS. She settled in Paris and began to question her work. “I didn't see how my photography was helping to stop this violence or changing the minds of people about what's going on,” she said.

“I stopped taking photos and concentrated [on] filling myself with ideas and words.”

In 2019, she returned to Moscow, freelancing as a photographer again and studying philosophy.

When the full-scale invasion of Ukraine started, most of her friends and colleagues were leaving the country, but she decided to stay. Turchenkova said she wasn't worried about repercussions from the Russian government. In their eyes, she said, she was essentially a foreign journalist, and the government seemed neutral toward them (until *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich's arrest in 2023).

As the war intensified, “I was shocked by how normal everything seemed,” Turchenkova said. She began to withdraw from Russian society. “We found ourselves in isolation on the social level.” After opposition leader Alexey Navalny died in an Arctic prison, she was one of the few reporters to get inside the church to document his funeral (also for *Le Monde*). “There was this really disgusting moment when people were shouting, ‘let us say goodbye,’ and they were just closing the coffin and taking it out of the church,” she recalled.

In the summer of 2024, Turchenkova moved back to Paris, where she is working on a book about Russian society during the war. “It will frame the state of Russian society today, and freeze this moment in time somehow,” she said. “We don't know if we are at the beginning of the end or if there will be seventy more years.”

Maria Turchenkova
Self-portrait, 2019

IRINA MALKOVA (PKF '17)

“After that Mountain Was Russia”

Irina Malkova's visit to New York and Washington, DC, during the Klebnikov fellowship in 2017 marked her first trip to the United States. She met with editors at the *New York Times* and other media outlets, and all of them asked about the Kremlin's media censorship. “I had never talked so much about freedom of speech in Russia,” she said in an interview.

It was a subject in which she had considerable expertise, having worked for several business news outlets that eventually came under Kremlin pressure. When she was in New York, she was editor-in-chief of the political magazine *Republic* (formerly *Slon*) but was contemplating launching an independent media startup in Russia.

Before the fellowship, Malkova said, she hadn't fully grasped the precariousness of the Russian media landscape. “When you're living out a situation and observing it from the inside, you don't see just how bad it is. You adapt and make do with what you have,” she said. “Looking at it from the outside, I realized that everything is pretty bad and we have to do something on our own because it's the only guarantee that no one will try to influence [our content],” she said.

Malkova teamed up with two *RBC* colleagues to start *The Bell*. “The first couple of years were really difficult,” she said. Eventually, they found their stride, opening an office, hiring staff, and even offering entrepreneurship courses with professors from Stanford University and University of California, Berkeley. “When the [full-scale invasion] began it was the first year we had made a profit. The first and the last,” said Malkova.

After Russia's invasion, the team quickly left Russia. Malkova and Peter Mironenko (one of the co-founders and now Malkova's husband) found an apartment in Old Town Tbilisi, which became their new home and *The Bell's* new headquarters.

They worried about their safety in Georgia. “I could see a mountain from my window, and after that mountain was Russia,” said Malkova. “It was very close.”

In the spring of 2023, Mironenko took a short trip abroad and wasn't allowed back in by Georgian authorities. “We didn't know what to do because I couldn't leave Georgia [where her son was in school]. I was afraid that they wouldn't let me in as well,” she said.

After several more attempts Mironenko was allowed to reenter Georgia, but the couple decided it was time to leave.

Malkova, Mironenko, and the rest of *The Bell's* team relocated to an undisclosed country in Europe. They don't know how long they will stay or how long they will be able to continue running *The Bell* from exile. In hopes of financially securing their survival, they moved their newsletter behind a paywall. “And the results, they give us hope that we can go on,” said Malkova.

Irina Malkova
Photograph by Alena Kondyurina

ELENA KOSTYUCHENKO (PKF '18)

“No Culture Is Immune to Fascism”

Elena Kostyuchenko (PKF '18) is a rare breed among Russian journalists: until the Russian government banned the independent outlet *Novaya Gazeta* in 2022, Kostyuchenko had spent seventeen years working at the same place.

The day after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine started, *Novaya Gazeta* sent Kostyuchenko to Ukraine (she was one of the few independent Russian journalists allowed in by Ukrainian authorities). After her editors received a tip that she was on a Russian military kill list, she reluctantly left. *Novaya Gazeta* was banned in Russia soon thereafter, and Kostyuchenko, who then moved to Berlin, started working for *Meduza*.

In hopes of returning to Ukraine, Kostyuchenko traveled to Munich to obtain a visa. On the way back, she felt sick. The symptoms — nausea, fatigue, stomach aches, swelling — lasted for months. Eventually, a doctor suggested she had been poisoned. German police, along with the investigative outlet *Bellingcat*, are still investigating the allegation. At first, Kostyuchenko had trouble believing it. In hindsight, she said, it does not surprise her. “I have to admit I was an easy target,” Kostyuchenko said over Zoom. “I stopped taking security precautions as I always did in Russia, I just didn’t feel that I was in any danger and acted accordingly.”

Two years later, after publishing a book of essays called, *I Love Russia*, which explores how “fascism is growing on our soil, unnoticed,” Kostyuchenko is at a crossroads. “It’s very hard to figure the new boundaries of my opportunities,” she said. “All my life I was reporting on Russia for Russians. And now . . . it doesn’t work anymore. I cannot go back to Russia as a reporter.”

Currently, she is at Harvard University on a Nieman Fellowship for journalists. “My story is not unique here,” said Kostyuchenko — the cohort includes fellows from Syria, Colombia, and China, among others. “My Nieman colleagues also faced incredible things like prosecutions and assassination attempts and exile,” she said.

Kostyuchenko’s fellowship will end in the spring of 2025. She’s not sure what’s next, but she hopes foreign readers of her book, co-translated into English by Bela Shayevech (M.A. in Russian Translation ’08, Columbia University), will learn from Russia’s experience. “I know now for sure no culture, no country, is immune to fascism. It can grow on every soil,” she said. “Rights can be taken away, and you can lose everything you have.”



Elena Kostyuchenko
Photograph courtesy of Kostyuchenko

MARIA ZHOLOBOVA (PKF '19):)

“If I Could Have Stayed and Worked Anonymously, I Would Have”

Maria Zholobova left Russia after police raided her Moscow apartment in June 2021. At the time, she was a reporter with the independent investigative online media outlet *Proekt*, about to publish a story on the alleged corrupt business dealings of Russia's minister of interior. But officers said they were there because of a libel lawsuit brought against her four years before, after an investigation she'd conducted for *TV Rain*.

This didn't add up: The statute of limitations for the case had run out in 2019, and, as Zholobova discovered later that day, police had also raided the apartment of a *Proekt* editor who had nothing to do with the *TV Rain* story.

Days later, *Proekt* was deemed an “undesirable organization” and Zholobova's editors urged her to flee Russia. She begrudgingly went to Tbilisi. “I packed enough for two weeks, thinking the whole thing would blow over by then,” she told me over Zoom from Tbilisi that summer. But, after realizing she would face an eight-year prison sentence in Russia, Zholobova stayed. That winter, her father brought warm clothes and her dog Chandler to Georgia.

Soon after leaving Russia, Zholobova left *Proekt* and became editor of investigations at *Meduza*; she was still working there when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Soon, dozens of Zholobova's friends and colleagues arrived in Tbilisi. Suddenly, the world she'd left behind had come to her. “It felt like all of Moscow had moved here,” she said. But Georgia was only a temporary stop. In October 2022, Zholobova left for Prague to work for the Russian exile investigative outlet *iStories*.

Since the latest move, Zholobova has focused on investigations related to Russia's war on Ukraine. She's partnered with *Reuters* to trace the global supply chain that enabled the making of Russian-deployed killer drones, and with the German outlet *Der Spiegel* on an investigation about German companies evading sanctions to supply electronics to Russia. *iStories* promoted her to editor of investigations, but she feels “skeptical” about becoming an editor again because she loves to write. She said she still misses Russia—if given the chance, she would have stayed and worked there anonymously. But in exile, “I feel less alone than I did in Moscow,” she said recently on the phone. “In immigration, people are more united, more supportive.”

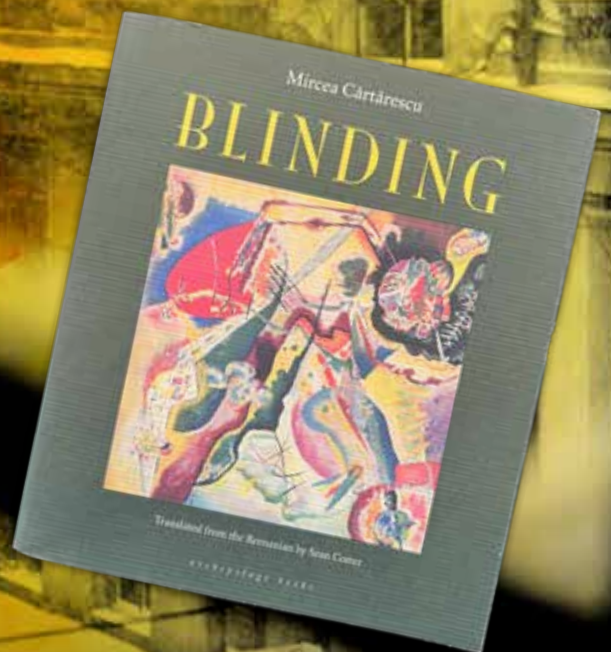
Maria Zholobova in June 2021, after police raided her apartment in Moscow.
Photograph by Pavel Golovkin via AP

Blinding: The Left Wing

BY MIRCEA CĂRTĂRESCU

TRANSLATED FROM THE ROMANIAN BY SEAN COTTER

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Mircea Cărtărescu, the Harriman Institute's 2024 Writer in Residence, is "not only the best living Romanian writer, but arguably one of the most talented writers of his generation worldwide," said Harriman Director Valentina Izmirlieva, when she introduced the author at a Harriman literary evening in October 2024.

Cărtărescu launched his career in Bucharest as a leader of the "1980s Generation" in Romania, an influential movement of postmodern Romanian poets. In the 1990s, he switched to prose, but, as he emphasized during the Harriman event, "My prose is written with poetry in mind."

This excerpt comes from the first volume of *Blinding*, Cărtărescu's three-part novel that won the 2015 Leipzig Book Award for European Understanding. It was translated into English by Sean Cotter (Archipelago Books, 2013), who appeared with the author at Harriman's event.

Only the first volume of *Blinding* has been translated so far. It is described by Archipelago Books as "Part visceral dream-memoir, part fictive journey through a hallucinatory Bucharest . . . one of the most widely heralded literary sensations in contemporary Romania, and a bestseller from the day of its release."

Before they built the apartment blocks across the street, before everything became boxed in and suffocating, I used to spend entire nights looking at Bucharest, from the triple window in my room on Ștefan cel Mare. Ordinarily, the window reflected the cheap furniture—a bedroom set of yellowed wood, a dresser with a mirror, a table with some aloe and asparagus in clay pots. A chandelier with globes of green glass, one of which had been chipped for a long time. The yellow reflected space became even yellower as it deepened into the enormous window, and I, a thin, sickly adolescent, in torn pajamas and a stretched-out vest, spent the entire afternoon perched on the small cabinet in the bedstead, staring, hypnotized, into the reflection of my own eyes in the transparent glass. I would prop my feet on the radiator under the window, and in the winter my soles would burn, giving me a perverse, subconscious mixture of pleasure and suffering. I saw myself in the yellow glass, under the triple blossom of the chandelier's phantom, my face as thin as a razor, my eyes heavy with violet circles. A stringy moustache emphasized the asymmetry of my mouth, or more precisely, the asymmetry of my entire face. If you took a picture of my face and covered the left half, you would see an open, adventuresome young man, almost beautiful. The other half, however, would shock and frighten you: a dead eye and a tragic mouth, hopelessness spread over the cheek like acne.

Only when I turned out the light did I truly feel like myself. At that moment, phosphorescent blue and green stripes would rotate across the walls, electric sparks from the trams that clattered on

the streets five stories below; immediately, I became aware of the terrible din of the traffic, and my loneliness and the sadness without end that was my life. When I pushed the light switch behind the wardrobe, the room turned into a pale aquarium. I moved like an old fish among the furniture that stank like a swamp's marine residue, over the jute rug, stiff under my feet, to the cabinet in the bedstead, where I sat down again and put my feet on the radiator, and Bucharest exploded outside the lunar blue glass. It was a nocturnal triptych, shining like glass, endless, inexhaustible. Below, I could see a part of the street, where light poles like metal crosses held the tram lines and rosy light bulbs, the poles that in winter nights would attract wave upon wave of furious or gentle snowfalls, sparse like in cartoons or thick like fur. During the summer, however, I thought it was fun to imagine every pole in the endless line held a crucified body with a crown of thorns. Boney, hairy, with wet towels tied around their hips, their tearful eyes following the wash of cars over stony streets. Two or three children, out late for who knows what reason, stopped to look up at the nearest Christ, who raised his triangular face toward the moon.

Across the street was the state bakery, a few houses with yards, and a round tobacco kiosk. A shop that filled seltzer bottles. A grocery. Possibly because the first time I ever crossed the street alone was to buy bread, I dreamed about that building the most. In my dreams, it was no longer a dank hovel that smelled like rats, where an old woman in a white work coat kneaded bread, but a space of mystery, resting at the top of a long, steep staircase. The bald light bulb, hanging from two bare wires,

became a mystical object, and the woman was now young and beautiful, the stacks of bread racks as big as a cyclops. The woman herself is tall as a tower. I count my coins in the chimerical light, as they glitter in my palm, but I lose track and I start to cry, because I cannot tell if I have enough to buy bread. Further on, at the south end of the street, is Nenea Hounddog, a shabby and lazy old man, whose yard looks like a war zone, all dirt and junk. He and his wife wander back and forth like ghosts, in and out of their shack patched over with greased cardboard, tripping over the skeletal dog who gave them their name. Toward Dinamo, further still, I can just see the corner of the grocery store. Toward the circus grounds are the cafeteria and newsstand. There, in my dreams, the caves begin. I wander, holding a wire basket, among the shelves of sherbet and jam, napkins and bags of sugar (some with little green or orange metal mechanisms hidden inside, at least that's what kids said), I would go through a swinging door into another area of the store, one that never existed, and I would wake up outdoors, under the stars, the basket of boxes and jars still in my hand. I was behind the block, among mounds of boxes, broken boards, and in front of me was a table, painted white, where they would sell cheese. But now there was not just one door, as in reality, but ten, in a row along the building, with windows between each one, brightly lit basement apartments. Through each window you could see a bed, strangely high, and in the beds young girls were sleeping, their hair spread over the pillows, their small breasts uncovered. In one of these dreams, I opened the door closest to me and found a spiral staircase, I descended for a long time and ended in a small alcove with an electric light, where one of these girl-dolls was waiting, curly-haired and timid. Even though I was already a man when I had this dream, it was not given for me to have Silvia, and all my excitement spent itself in woolen abstractions of words and gestures. We left holding hands, crossed the snowy street, and I saw her blue hair in the lights of the pharmacy window and the restaurant, then we both waited for the tram, in a snowfall that covered over our faces, and the tram came, without walls, just a frame with a few wooden chairs, and Silvia got on and was lost to a part of the city that I found only later, in other dreams.



“At that moment, phosphorescent blue and green stripes would rotate across the walls, electric sparks from the trams that clattered on the streets five stories below...”

Behind this first row of buildings were others, and above them, stars. There was a massive house with red shutters, and a pink house like a small castle, there were short apartment blocks braided with ivy, built between the wars, that had round windows with square panes, Jugendstil ornaments on the stairways, and grotesque towers. Everything lost in the leaves, now black, of poplars and beech trees, which made the sky seem deeper, darker and darker toward the stars. The lit windows held a life I caught only in fragments: a woman ironed laundry, a man in a white shirt did summersaults on the third floor, two women sat in chairs and talked without end. Only three or four windows were ever interesting. In my nights of erotic fever, I would sit in the dark at my window, until every light was out and there was nothing to see, hoping to glimpse uncovered breasts and cheeks and pubic triangles, those men tumbling women into bed or leading them to the window and taking them from behind. Often the drapes were drawn, and then I strove, squinting, to interpret the abstract and fragmentary movements that flashed in the wedge of unobstructed light. I would see hips and calves in everything, until I had made myself dizzy and my sex dripped in my pajamas. Only then did I go to bed, to dream that I entered those foreign rooms and participated in complicated erotic maneuvers in their depths . . .

Beyond this second row of buildings, the city stretched to the horizon, covering half of the window with a more and more diminished, confused, blurry, haphazard mixture of the vegetable and the architectural, the steeples of the trees shooting up here and there and strange cupolas arcing among the clouds. I could just make out (once, when I was a child, my mother pointed it out to me, on the skies after a storm) the zigzagging shadow of the mall on Victoria, and some more tall buildings in the center, decades old and built like

ziggurats, burdened with pink, green and blue fluorescent billboards that blinked on and off in opposing rhythms, and further on there was only the ever-greater density of stars at the horizon, which, in the distance, became a blade of tarnished gold. Held like a gemstone in the ring of stars, night-time Bucharest filled my window, poured inside and reached into my body and my mind so deeply, that even as a young man I imagined I was a *mélange* of flesh, stone, cephalo-spinal fluid, I-beams and urine, which, supported by vertebrae and concrete posts, animated by statues and obsessions, digested through intestines and steam pipes, made the city and me one being. The truth is, while I sat all night on the bedstead with my feet on the radiator, not only did I watch the city, but it also spied on me, also dreamed me, also became excited, as it was only the substitute for the yellow phantoms that stared at me from the window when the light was on. I was more than twenty years old before I lost this impression. By then, they had lain the foundations of the building across the street, had decided to widen the street, to repave it, to demolish the bread factory, seltzer shop, and kiosks, and to put, on the other side of the street, a wall of apartment buildings, taller than ours. The winter was windy, the sky white and clear after a heavy snow. I could look out of the window only once in a while. A bulldozer knocked down, with its toothed cup, the building where a fulsome woman lived, who had never shown herself to me naked. The interior of her rooms was bare and more visible now as ruins, and more sentimental covered in snow. Bucharest was missing a kidney, was having a gland removed, perhaps something vital. Maybe under the skin of the city, like under a wound, there really were caves, and maybe this extremely libidinous housewife who (out of spite?) never showed herself to me naked was somehow a node, a vortex for this underground life. Now her gums crumbled like plaster. Soon, that side of the street looked like a mouth of ruined teeth, with yellowed stumps and gaps

and rotting metal caps. The snow smelled wonderful, as I opened a mammoth third of the thin, wet window, putting my shaven head outside, to freeze my neck and ears and watch the clouds puffing out of the room, but beyond its clear, clean smell of clothes frozen on the line, I could sense the stench of destruction. And if it was true that the cerebral hemispheres developed from the ancient olfactory bulb, the stench, the metaphysical drunken breath, the smell of the armpits of time, the cardboard acidity of vases of coming ecstasy, the airs of watercress insanity are, possibly, our most profound thoughts.

By Spring, the foundations were excavated, sewer pipes flowed like rivers through clay, pink and black cables unrolled from enormous wooden spools, each taller than a person, and steel skeletons rose up, obscuring one strip of Bucharest after another, choking off the rustling vegetation and blocking up the entryways, gargoyles, cupolas, and stacked terraces of the city. The disorderly and unsteady forms of wood and cast iron, the scaffolds that the workers climbed, the cement mixers that emitted waves of smoke, the piles of new steel electrical poles that replaced the rusted crucifixes, all seemed like the visible parts of a conspiracy, intended to make me say goodbye to Bucharest, and to myself, my fifteen years spent sitting on the bedstead with my feet on the radiator, pulling the curtain back and watching the vast skies of the city. A wall goes up, a section of my mind closes, and from now on, the wall keeps me from accessing all I projected into every cube and square, the black green and the yellow green and the moon thin as a fingernail reflecting in every window. When I was seven or eight, my parents made me nap every afternoon. The dresser was across from the bed, and I would watch the light shine on its surface, minute after minute, a child with dark eyes sweating under his sheet and unable to sleep for a second. When the sun reflected in the veneer blinded me, made me see purple spots, I turned my face to the wall, to follow every little rust colored blossom and leaf in the upholstery on the side of the bedstead. In this floral labyrinth, I discovered small symmetries, unexpected patterns, animal

heads and men's silhouettes, with which I created stories I meant to continue in my dreams. But sleep never came, there was too much light, and one October, precisely this white light convinced me to play with fire: I listened first for any sounds from my parents' room, and then I quietly got out of bed and tip-toed to the window. The image of the city was dusty and far away. The street curved off toward the left, so I could see the apartments on our side, toward Lezeanu and Obor. In the distance, I could see the old fire watchtower, and behind it, a city heating unit with its paraboloid boxes ejecting petrified smoke. The trees looked straight, or like Gothic arches, but the closest ones betrayed their provenance: the branches, filled with trembling, sprouting leaves, were not straight but twisted like an unfastened braid. I leaned my forehead against the window and, dizzy with insomnia, waited for five o'clock, but time seemed to have stopped flowing, and the terrifying image of my father bursting through the door, his dark hair knotted in a stocking on top of his head like a fez, and falling in a thick brown line like a crow's tail, kept coming to my mind. Once during these minutes stolen from obligatory sleep, I witnessed the most beautiful scene in the world. It was after a summer storm, with lightning branching through the suddenly dark sky, so dark that I would not have said if it was darker in my room or outside, with gusts of rain, rapid parallel streams surrounded by a mist of fine drops lazily bouncing in every direction. When the rain stopped, between the black sky and the wet, grey city, daylight suddenly appeared. It was as though two infinitely gentle hands were protecting the yellow, fresh, transparent light that lay across these surfaces, coloring them saffron and orange, and turning the air gold, making it shine like a prism. Slowly the clouds broke apart, and other stripes of the same rarified gold fell obliquely, crossing the initial light, making it even more intense, clearer and cooler. Spread over the hills, with the Mitropol towers the color of mercury, with all the windows burning like a salt flame, crowned with a rainbow, Bucharest painted itself onto my triple window, the sash of which my collar bone just touched.

My illumination would now be scraped off, and above them, written in neat, closely spaced letters, would be a command, heavy as a curtain. But today, at the midpoint of my life's arc, when I have

read every book, even those tattooed on the moon and my skin, even those written with the point of a pin on the corners of my eyes, when I have seen enough and had enough, when I have systematically dismantled my five senses, when I have loved and hated, when I have raised immortal monuments in copper, when my ears have grown long awaiting tiny God, long before I understood I am just a mite burrowing through his skin of old light, when angels have populated my head like spiro-bacteria, when all the sweetness of the world had been consumed and when April and May and June are gone—today, when my skin flakes beneath my ring like thousands of layers of onion paper, today, this vivacious and absurd today, I try to put my disorder into thought, to read the runes of windows and apartments with balconies full of wet laundry, the apartments across the street that broke my life in two, just like the nautilus that walls over each outgrown compartment and moves into a larger one, inching through the ivory spiral that forms the précis of its life. But this text is not human and I cannot understand anything more. What remains in there, my birth, childhood, and adolescence, seeps through the pores of the enormous wall, in long, enigmatic strands, deformed, anamorphic and foreshortened, nebulized and diffracted, numberless, through which I can reach the small room where I sometimes return. Ivory over ivory over ivory, blue over blue over blue, every age and every house where I have lived (if it all was not a hallucination of nothingness) filters all that came before, combining with them, making the bands narrower and more heterogeneous. You do not describe the past by writing about old things, but about the haze that exists between yourself and the past. The way in which my present brain wraps around my brains of smaller and smaller crania, of bones and cartilage and membrane. The tension and disagreement between my present mind and that of a moment ago, and ten years ago. Their interactions, their amalgamation with the images and emotions of the other. So much necrophilia in memory! So much fascination for ruin and rot! So much analysis like the court physician peering through liquefied organs! To imagine myself at different ages, so many previous lives completed, is like talking about a long, uninterrupted line of dead bodies, a tunnel of bodies dying one

into the next. A moment ago, the one that was here writing, in the reflection of the dark pool of a coffee cup, the words “dying one into the next” fell off the stool, his skin crumbled away revealing the bones of his face, his eyes rolled out weeping black blood. A moment from now, the one who will write “who will write” will be the next to fall into the dust of the one before. How can you enter this mausoleum? And why would you? And what mask of tiffany cloth, what surgical glove, will protect you from the infection of remembrance?

Years later, while reading poetry or listening to music, I would feel ecstasy, the abrupt and focused clot in the brain, the sudden swelling of a volatile and blistering liquid, the sudden opening of a window-pane, but not to anything outside me, but toward someplace surrounded by brain, something deep and unbearable, a welling-up of beatitude. I had access, I gained access to the forbidden room, through poetry or music (or a single thought, or an image that appeared in my mind, or—much later, coming home by myself from high school, stomping in puddles along the streetcar tracks—a window flash, the scent of a woman). I entered the epithalamus, I soaked in the adenoids, I balled myself up in the abstract extension of the gold ring in the center of the mind. The revelation was like a cry of silent happiness, it had nothing in common with an orgasm except its epileptic brutality, but it expressed tranquility, love, submission, surrender, adoration. These were breakthroughs, rendings swirling in the interior limit of thought, turning it into a starry heaven, since we all have this starry heaven in the skull and, over it, our conscience. Often, though, this interior ejaculation would not reach its consummation but stop in the antechamber, and the antechambers of antechambers, where it brought up flickering images that were snuffed out in a second, leaving behind a regret and nostalgia that would follow me the rest of the day. Poems, these illumination machines, debauched me, I used them like drugs until it was impossible for me to live without them. I had begun, some time before, to even write poems, in which, among so many graceful lines, fairy-like and aggressive, I would find myself stringing together, for no reason, passages of nonsense, dictated, it seemed, by someone and which, when I read them, terrified me like a prophecy fulfilled. In these I spoke

of my mother, God, childhood, just as if, in the course of a conversation over a beer, I suddenly started to speak in tongues, with the thin voice of a child, a castrato, or an angel. My mother appeared in my poems walking down Ștefan cel Mare, taller than the apartment buildings, kicking over the trucks and streetcars, crushing the sheet-metal kiosks beneath her enormous heels, sweeping up passersby with her cheap, quilted skirts. She stopped in front of the triple window of my room, crouched down and looked inside. Her enormous blue eye and her frowning eyebrow filled the window and filled me with terror. Then she stood and went off toward the west, her wiry, phosphorescent hair destroying postal airplanes and satellites in the sky full of blood . . . What was this mythologizing of my mother? Nothing, ever, made me feel close to her, nothing in her interested me. She was the woman who washed my clothes, that fried me potatoes, that made me go to my college classes even when I wanted to skip. She was Mom, a neutral being who looked neutral, who lived a modest life full of chores, who lived in our house, where I was always a stranger. What accounted for this dearth of feeling in our family? My father always traveling, and when he came home, red-faced, stinking of sweat, and tying up his hair, thick as a horse's tail, on top of his head with pantyhose, the top sagging open and a dark foot hanging between his shoulder blades. My mother making him dinner and watching television with him, pointing out their crushes on the folk music singers or variety show actors, gossiping about them endlessly. Me eating quickly and going to the room on the street side of the apartment (the other two rooms let onto the back of the building, toward the melancholy red brick building of the Dîmbovița flour mill) to watch the polyhedral drone of Bucharest in the window, or to write disconnected poems in graph paper notebooks, or to curl up under the blanket, pulling it over my head as though I could not stand the humiliation and shame of being an adolescent . . . We were, my family, three insects, each only interested in our own chemical trails, occasionally touching antennae and moving on. “How was school today?” “Fine.” “Dinamo got creamed, on their own turf.” “So what, Polytech's alright.” And then into the shell, to write more lines from nowhere:

mother, the power of dreams was your gift to me
I would spend entire nights with you eye to eye
and hand in hand I would believe I was beginning to know.
and your heart would beat again for both of us
and between our crania translucent as the shells of shrimp
an imaginary umbilical cord would emerge
and hypnosis and levitation and telepathy and love
would be the different colors of the flowers in our arms.
together
we would play an eternal game of cards with two sides: life, death
until the clouds would flash in the fall of day, far off. ♦

WARTIME REFLECTIONS



Water flows over the collapsed Kakhovka Dam in Nova Kakhovka, in Russian-occupied Ukraine, June 7, 2023. Destruction of the dam, likely carried out by Russian soldiers, robbed a million Ukrainians of drinking water and overwhelmed wetlands along the Dnipro River. Photograph via AP

War and Ecology in the Black Sea

BY TAYLOR ZAJICEK

An environmental historian reflects on the far-reaching consequences of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

By the time the television crew arrived, there wasn't much to film but ash. Apparently, the broken bits of drone had pulverized on impact, setting fire to the surrounding brush. The headlines were arresting—"Russian drone debris crosses Romanian border"—but the cameras had to make do with a black, smoldering smear in the dirt.

I watched the broadcast with interest from a Bucharest café during the summer of 2024. A few days earlier, I had been exploring the Danube River, about ten miles from the spot where the drone crashed.

Three days and ten miles isn't a near miss. But it was close enough to get my attention.

No conflict is truly contained. Yet from the beginning, Russia's war on Ukraine has been remarkable for its global repercussions: Millions dis-

placed. Soaring food and energy prices. Sabotaged infrastructure. Massive arms and aid transfers.

And occasionally, an errant drone careens across international borders.

The downed drone brought to mind friends and colleagues in Ukraine—people living under actual bombardment. But the charred ground it left behind also reminded me, an environmental historian, of the conflict's ecological spill-overs. That black stain near the Danube's bank is just one speck in a landscape that is being beaten, poisoned, and torn every day.

I was in Romania and Bulgaria this past summer to conduct research. I spent weekdays in Bucharest and Constanța, digging through archival files on topics such as the Chernobyl disaster, sturgeon fishing, and the Danube-Black Sea canal. And

WARTIME REFLECTIONS

on the weekends, I drove out to places like the Danube Delta, a biodiversity hotspot.

As a postdoctoral scholar at the Harriman Institute, I'm writing a history of the Black Sea region from 1930 to the present. Specifically, I'm investigating how environmental issues, like fishing and water pollution, have shaped the Black Sea's political relationships. I want to know how the region's states cooperated—or competed—in the management of transborder ecological concerns.

One of my project's core arguments is that modern geopolitical orders—the alliances, rivalries, and power balances that structure interstate relations in a particular period—also function as environmental orders. The Cold War, for instance, contoured the circulation of scientific research, regulatory regimes, pollution, and flora and fauna around the Black Sea in ways that distinguished it from previous eras. Likewise, the Cold War's end ushered in a new system of environmental management characterized by multilateral institutions.

Today, we're living through another big geopolitical/ecological shift. The war in Ukraine—and whatever comes next—will leave a tangible legacy for the Black Sea and its hinterlands. It's impossible to predict with certainty what these long-term outcomes might be. For one, events are volatile and unfolding. For another, much of the information we have is produced by groups that have a clear stake in the struggle to control the war's narrative.

We can, however, identify several important (if largely dispiriting) trends.

For starters, wars are bad for the environment—a truism that deepens, rather than diminishes, the acute human suffering they inflict. Broadly, this plays out in four ways, each of which has defined the Black Sea's latest conflict.

FIRST, militaries have ravenous metabolisms. Even in peacetime, armies consume vast quantities of resources—everything from food, to fuel, to building materials. Like all enterprises, they also produce waste. A 2022 report by



First, militaries have ravenous metabolisms. Even in peacetime, armies consume vast quantities of resources.”

the Conflict and Environment Observatory, a watchdog organization accredited by the UN, estimates that the world's militaries are responsible for about 5.5 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, the primacy of national defense in political agendas means that armed forces are often exempt from domestic environmental regulations—not to mention international agreements such as the 2015 Paris Climate Accords.

The forces arrayed in Eastern Europe and their allies are no exception. The Ukrainian environmental ministry postulates that the mobilization, fighting, and reconstruction will pump some 175 million tons of extra carbon dioxide into the atmosphere—equal to the annual emissions of the Netherlands, Europe's sixth largest economy.

SECOND, modern weaponry tends to poison land, air, and water—with lingering health effects for the communities that rely on them. Some World War I battlefields are still contaminated by heavy metals; shipwrecks from World War II continue to ooze chemicals.

It's no surprise, then, that the Putin regime's pretensions to Eastern Ukraine are wrecking it—and not only on the frontline. Only a year into

the full-scale war, a report in *Science* claimed that the fighting had sparked 20,000 fires across Ukraine, scorching more than 750,000 hectares—an area larger than Delaware. The explosive ordnances lobbed by both sides are leaching pollutants. So too are damaged infrastructures: methane from pipelines, ammonia from chemical factories, oil from port facilities, and on and on. It's a gruesome list, whose legacy will range from habitat loss to birth defects (even barring a catastrophe at one of Ukraine's nuclear power plants).

Mines might be the deadliest residue. According to the Polish Centre for Eastern Studies, nearly a third of Ukrainian land is pocked by the weapons—at an estimated cleanup cost of \$38 billion. Neither is the Black Sea safe; unmoored naval mines have turned up perilously close to shorelines and shipping lanes, including the heavily trafficked Bosphorus Strait. Russian territory, too, is mined.

Local wildlife may already be feeling the squeeze. The Ukrainian environmental ministry announced that a fifth or more of the country's nature preserves have been degraded. Most notoriously, as the Ukrainian and Russian



Visitors to the Danube Delta Eco-Tourism Museum Center in Tulcea, Romania, above an aquarium that showcases endangered sturgeon species. This and the photograph on p. 46 were taken by the author during his summer 2024 research trip.

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navies stalked the Black Sea in spring 2022, unusual numbers of dolphin and porpoise carcasses washed up on beaches. With 2,500 dead seals surfacing soon after on the Caspian Sea—a launchpad for Russian vehicles and missiles—it's reasonable to suspect that the war is pushing vulnerable animals over the edge.

THIRD, since antiquity clashing armies have targeted the environment intentionally. They do so to burn, starve, poison, expose, deter, or displace the enemy. Rome legendarily (and probably apocryphally) salted Carthaginian fields. Imperial Russia torched Caucasian forests. The United States sprayed the herbicide Agent Orange on North Vietnamese redoubts.

We've seen similar tactics in today's war—from the small-scale (Ukrainian soldiers flooded farmland to slow the invasion) to the large-scale (Russian soldiers likely blew up the Nova Kakhovka Dam). The dam's demise sent 18 cubic kilometers of reservoir

water down the Dnipro River, robbing a million Ukrainians of drinking water and overwhelming wetlands, according to a January 2024 report in *Science*. By targeting civilian infrastructure, Russia's leadership hopes to render parts of Ukraine unlivable. Such practices have come to be known as "ecocide," a nod to the better-known "genocide" (some definitions of the term also include unintentional environmental harms). The Ukrainian government has joined some countries and international activist organizations in calling for the International Criminal Court to codify ecocide as a prosecutable crime under international law.

FOURTH, war complicates efforts to solve transborder environmental problems. This point often goes unmentioned in analyses of this war's ecological dimensions. It's insensitive—perhaps even condemnable—to invoke seeming luxuries like scientific diplomacy, information sharing, and stewardship while people are

dying in frightful confrontation. Who cares about trees or seals or climate futures when the human plight is so immediate? The argument therefore bears repeating: nature's disfigurement, tragic in its own right, will compound communal traumas in the short and long terms.

It's appropriate, then, to lament the disruption to environmental cooperation in the Black Sea region and beyond. The Black Sea littoral has rarely been a propitious setting for would-be peacemakers. From Rome and the Pontic Kingdom to the Ottoman and Russian Empires, the sea's residents have regularly succumbed to rivalry. The Cold War, too, militated against dialogue (though, as my research shows, some eco-friendly initiatives did slip through the Iron Curtain). Communism's demise shattered this status quo, and the 1990s seemed like the dawn of a multilateral golden age. With international backing, the region's newly independent states launched a raft of joint endeavors on pollution abatement, scientific exchange, and environmental protection. But the twenty-first century has not been kind to the optimists: territorial revisionism in the South Caucasus, Crimea, and Eastern Ukraine have pummeled the Black Sea's cooperative institutions into oblivion or obsolescence.

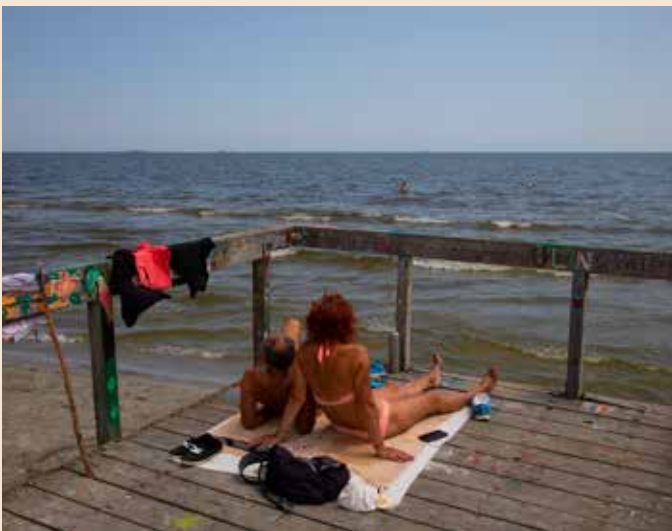
This regional decoupling echoes globally. Russia is the planet's largest country, in area. It has the fourth-longest coastline, fourth-highest level of greenhouse gas emissions, and the second- or third-highest incidence of methane mega-leaks. It also sits atop millions of acres of thawing permafrost. Moscow's readi-

ness to court pariah status has led to the withdrawal—or expulsion—of Russian expertise, data, and funding from global and regional environmental initiatives. This blows a Russia-sized hole in research agendas—one that won't be easily mended.

TO BE SURE, there are countertrends to war's grim environmental record. Human conflict can also open curious windows for ecological recovery. Scholars have noted the rewilding of depopulated areas like the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone and the Korean DMZ. In the same way that Covid lockdowns reduced automobile emissions, observers have suggested that the closure of Ukrainian factories and Black Sea fishing grounds could improve air quality and fish stocks. But this path to a greener future should cheer no one but the most committed misanthropist.

If there's reason for hope, it's obviously to be found in reconstruction, not destruction. When I began my research as a graduate student in 2017, the Cold War seemed like a low point for the Black Sea's ecosystems. The last two years of relentless conflict have shown that the region can sink further. When the war ends—when the drones stop plummeting from the sky—it will be time to build more just systems, in environmental management as well as geopolitics. The two are bound together.

Taylor Zajicek is Mellon Teaching Fellow and Lecturer in History at the Harriman Institute. ♦



A couple relaxes in Sulina, Romania, where the Danube River's main shipping canal reaches the Black Sea.

WARTIME REFLECTIONS



Tymofiy Mylovanov, 2021. Photo courtesy of the Kyiv School of Economics

Impacting Ukraine's Economy: An Interview with Tymofiy Mylovanov

BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

A Ukrainian economist on his time in government and life in wartime Ukraine.

Tymofiy Mylovanov, a prominent Ukrainian economist and Minister of Finance, Trade, and Agriculture during President Volodymyr Zelensky's first year in office, appeared at the Harriman Institute for a closed discussion with students and faculty in September 2024.

Mylovanov spent years of his adult life in the United States as a tenured professor at the University of Pittsburgh. He got involved in Ukrainian public life from abroad, during Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity in 2014, after helping a fellow Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) alumnus

start *VoxUkraine*, a popular governance and economics blog. Two years later, KSE was on the brink of bankruptcy, and he became its president (traveling frequently between the United States and Ukraine while keeping his Pittsburgh post). He turned KSE into a thriving global academic institution. "What helped is that I didn't go to KSE to save the school. I went there to make an impact on the economy of Ukraine," he told me.

In two conversations following his talk, Mylovanov reflected on his time in Zelensky's administration and on returning home perma-

nently during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This transcript has been edited and condensed for clarity.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER: Can you talk about how you ended up in government, what your experience was like, and why you left so quickly?

MYLOVANOV: In Ukraine you end up in the government, not because you build a long career to be in the government, but because of, you know, a coincidence of circumstances.

When Zelensky became president and the parliament

was elected, they were looking for people who could onboard new members of parliament, because there were a lot of people who were out of the system. They were looking for an institution [to] help with that. And we [KSE] were available—a lot of my career has been built in this way and a lot of success actually depends on this, in my view, that you're fast and ready during moments of opportunity. And then I think they kind of figured it out, ok, he's an economist, we need a Minister of Economy. The MPs said, "he's a good guy." I wasn't controversial yet.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER: And how did you feel about going into government?

MYLOVANOV: From a career perspective, it was almost a no-brainer. You can become a minister and then you go back to teach if you want, to this double appointment, KSE/Pittsburgh. But I was very unsure. Am I good enough? Am I not good enough?

And then they sold me on the fact that President Zelensky wanted to do a land market reform. There was a land market trade moratorium for 20 years at the time, and he said that he was going to combine the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Agriculture and push these reforms through. And what economist doesn't want to create a market in his lifetime? I had already written a few top papers, and now I wanted to create a market in a country where markets for land matter—it's an agricultural powerhouse of Europe; that's a big deal. So, I got seduced. And I pushed it through with the leadership of Zelensky.

WARTIME REFLECTIONS

And it took a lot of sabotage, you know, I figured out how the system works quite quickly, shrewdly. You have to be very, almost Machiavellian about it.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER: And what do you mean it took a lot of sabotage? Like, you had to sabotage other people?

MYLOVANOV: No, no, it took a lot of overcoming sabotage. You know, people don't go and campaign in the parliament. They use their friends in the system to lose your paperwork so it gets denied. Things like that. It happens all the time, so you have to learn how to navigate that very quickly.

For example, because it was a new ministry, I couldn't appoint people for a while. You need to pass a document to appoint people and they were kind of losing approvals or sending me for another round of approvals to get it done. The system slows you down and you have to overcome that.

And I think it was a very good experience. But then when the government was changing [2020], I wanted to quit because the land market reform was already on track. And there was not that much left for me to do because there were no other reforms coming through. At least in the pipeline, it was becoming more of a political battle over appointments.

My sense was that if I don't quit at that time, I'd get stuck for another three, four years. And I didn't see myself being stuck for that long, okay? It was the perfect exit because the government was reshuffled. I was offered the position of a minister and I kind of refused to go on and it burned my relationship with

the president and his inner circle a little bit. I would be upset too, if I were them, I chose KSE and academia over them. So, this maybe would not be the right choice strategically for most people, but for me, I think it worked out just fine.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER:

What were you doing at the time of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022?

MYLOVANOV: I came back [to Ukraine] two days before the war. I didn't believe the war would start, but once they started cancelling flights, I rushed from San Francisco, from some conference, to the last flight on Lufthansa from Munich to Ukraine. And it was full of people like me, who are semi-leaders. I couldn't bring myself to think about my wife [Nataliia Shapoval, chairman of the KSE institute—they had just married in December 2021] and my family being in Ukraine without me when the war started. I've been there since. And so far, I've survived, we'll see how it works out further.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER:

What has your life looked like since you came back? What's it like running an institution like KSE in the middle of a horrific war?

MYLOVANOV: It's a lot of visits to Europe and the U.S. to keep publicity and awareness, fundraising, you know, all kinds of infrastructure, governance, compliance, investments, basically managing resources. It takes effort and it's not easy—you have to build relationships. We have to be proper.

It's not a small company,



I couldn't bring myself to think about my wife and my family being in Ukraine without me when the war started. I've been there since. And so far, I've survived, we'll see how it works out further."

according to Ukrainian standards. Running it is difficult. And I need to learn—I have never been trained professionally. I think I would benefit from an MBA in a top school, or at least short-term courses.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER:

You've also been fundraising for the war effort and have raised a ton of money. Can you talk about that aspect of it?

MYLOVANOV: We raised over \$100 million. Maybe 110 by now, overall, and most of this went to humanitarian and defense efforts. That means bomb shelters for schools, scholarships for students, but not necessarily at KSE. In the beginning of the war, we were doing medical kits and protective kits, bulletproof vests. We were doing cars. We bought so many cars. Some of them were given to the military actually, which is allowed. Some of this, we channel through KSE, others, we do it either personally or with

foundations targeted specifically for the defense effort. That's actually a tricky part—you have to be careful on the details, you know?

We helped veterans. We trained a lot of people [both civilians and military], which is totally allowed, by the way, for 501(c)(3)s. We actually have to hire lawyers who give us opinions on what can and cannot be done.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER:

Wow. And for now, is your plan to just stay as long as the war is happening?

MYLOVANOV: Yes, absolutely. I want to stay as long as the war is going on. Morally, I can't leave. People are in the military, dying, you know, friends of mine. If I run away, it's probably not going to look good in my own mind later in my life. I'll feel bad about it. I've done bad things in my life, including some things I did while I was a minister, and some of them I regret. I don't want any more regrets. ♦

IN MEMORIAM

Richard F. Gustafson

1934–2024

BY COLLEAGUES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SLAVIC LANGUAGES

RICHARD FOLKE GUSTAFSON, Professor Emeritus in the Barnard/Columbia Slavic Department, died on May 5, 2024, in New York City. He was 90.

Gustafson was on the faculty of the Slavic Department at Barnard for over four decades and served in many roles, including as department chair at Barnard and Director of Graduate Studies for Columbia's department of Slavic languages. He was a masterful teacher, an inspiring mentor, and an influential writer. His expertise ranged from poetry, to prose, and to religious thought, from the nineteenth century into the twentieth.

His first book, *The Imagination of Spring: The Poetry of Afanasy Fet* (Yale University Press, 1966), drew on the doctoral dissertation he completed at Columbia in 1963. It addressed both the philosophical themes and the artistic structures that animated Fet's work. Those who took his poetry classes remember that he was brilliantly attuned to how form contributes to meaning.

In 1996, he published *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger* (Princeton University Press), a work with a tremendous impact on Tolstoy studies. He examined the religious and philosophical dimension to Tolstoy's writings, from beginning to end, revealing the continuity from Tolstoy's early work through his late work and the interrelatedness of his fiction and his work in other genres. Gustafson's research has been vital to the movement in Tolstoy studies to reckon with the whole Tolstoy.

Gustafson was also instrumental in the movement to make Russian religious thought a subject of academic study and scholarship at Columbia and beyond. Together with Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, he edited and contributed to *Russian Religious Thought* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1996). The collection examined writers active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in Russia and in emigration, who approached religious and philosophical ideas from a modernist and/or post-modernist perspective.

After his retirement in 2006, Gustafson learned Spanish, traveled widely, and spent long summer seasons in Maine. His husband, Spencer Means, died two years before him.

All of us who knew Richard Gustafson at Barnard and Columbia—colleagues, former students, and others—cherish and honor his memory. The impact of his work over the years, in the classroom, in conversations around the Slavic Department and at the Harriman Institute, at conferences elsewhere, and in print, continues. ♦



Richard Gustafson. Photo by Deborah Martinsen



**Read the full obituary
on our website**



Concertina wire lines the perimeter at the Transit Center at Manas, Kyrgyzstan, in December 2013. Photograph via Wikimedia Commons courtesy of the U.S. Air Force

Harriman Institute Publishes Central Asia Military Base Timeline

BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

A Central Asianist distills decades of research into an interactive digital timeline.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States opened two military bases in Central Asia to support its war in Afghanistan. The first was the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base in Uzbekistan, opened in October 2001, followed two months later by the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan (later known as the Manas Transit Center). Karshi-Khanabad closed in 2005, after the Uzbek government opened fire on Muslim protestors in Andijan,

and the United States (reluctantly) pressured the Uzbek government to clean up its human rights record. The Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan closed in July 2014, after the Kyrgyz government finally gave in to prolonged pressure from Russia to evict the U.S. troops stationed there.

More than a decade after the last U.S. soldiers left, the legacy of those military bases lives on. There's a geopolitical perspective—Russia and

China have thwarted U.S. attempts to reinstate bases in the region. And there is an environmental aftermath—veterans' groups in the United States and Uzbekistan are suing the U.S. Department of Defense for information about environmental toxicity at the base in Uzbekistan, which the groups believe may explain high rates of cancer among troops that served there.

To document this evolution, former Harriman direc-

tor Alexander Cooley (Claire Tow Professor of Political Science, Barnard College) and Emma Larson (MARS-REERS '25) created an interactive digital timeline of U.S. military bases in Central Asia, published on the Harriman Institute website in fall 2024.

"A timeline is a naturally-fitting tool to scaffold the rise and decline of something," said Cooley, who has been researching U.S. military involvement in Central Asia since he joined the faculty at Barnard in fall of 2001.

During his first semester, he taught the large university-wide "Introduction to International Politics" class. On the day of his second lecture, 9/11 happened. "And it takes me down this research path of writing about some of the behind-the-scenes tradeoffs that are being made with these [Central Asian] governments to establish military access," Cooley said. One such tradeoff involved a transnational fuel-smuggling ring in Omsk, Russia, that supplied the Manas facility in the late 2000s, at a time when the Russian government was trying to close the base. "So, on the one hand, you have the geopolitical tug of war," said Cooley. "On the other hand, behind the scenes, you have this fuel smuggling ring where everyone's working together and making a load of money." These dynamics inspired Cooley's second book, *Base Politics*, about U.S. military influence abroad.

The nuances of a 23-year period that encapsulates a shifting geopolitical landscape are difficult to capture with writing alone, Cooley and Larson said, and the timeline allowed them to put seemingly disparate developments

IN BRIEF



The military presence is a vehicle to talking about all the political and social dynamics and upheavals going on at the time.”

together in a comprehensive way. “You can add in geopolitical events that are not completely about the military bases the way you couldn’t in an essay,” Larson said.

Cooley said the timeline summarizes years of his research and can serve as a first step for researchers and journalists interested in the U.S. military presence and wider geopolitical dynamics in Central Asia. “The military presence is a vehicle to talking about all the political and social dynamics and upheavals going on at the time,” he said.

Cooley and Larson said they will continue adding to the timeline as events unfold. “We want it to be adaptable, to be a breathing, evolving thing,” said Cooley. ♦

Follow the QR Code to view the Central Asia Military Base Timeline



From Central Europe to Central Asia: The Harriman Library of Contemporary Fiction

Of all the books published in the United States, fewer than one percent are translations of literary fiction, and most of those translations are from German or French.

A new Harriman partnership with Columbia University Press aims to alter that, one novel at a time, by identifying, translating, and publishing outstanding literature from Eastern and Central Europe and Eurasia—the regions Harriman faculty and scholars have studied for more than seventy-five years.

The agreement between the Institute and Columbia University Press calls for publishing three novels in English translation each year, starting in 2026 or 2027, under the rubric: “From Central Europe to Central Asia: The Harriman Library of Contemporary Fiction.” An advisory group of translators and academics, headed by Harriman Director Valentina Izmirlieva, will propose titles to Columbia Press. Harriman will also help

recruit gifted translators who can produce English versions that preserve all the literary power of the original novels, whether they were written in Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Kazakh, or another of the forty or so languages from the region that “boast rich, centuries-long traditions” in literature, according to the publishing proposal.

Within the region, Russian authors are translated far more frequently than others, crowding out talented veterans and fresh new authors from other countries whose works remain untranslated for English-speaking audiences. As Izmirlieva says in an interview published on p. 8 of this issue: “We know more about third-rate Russian writers than about first-rate Eastern European writers.”

The translation project, says Izmirlieva, “is unique in its scope and in its representation of both neglected masterpieces and emerging voices from the entire region covered by Harriman.” ♦

Ukraine Recognizes Izmirlieva for Leadership in Ukrainian Studies

Harriman Institute Director Valentina Izmirlieva was recognized for her “dedicated work which has illuminated the authentic history and culture of Ukraine” at a July 2024 conference in Washington, D.C., “The U.S.-Ukraine Partnership in Education: Stronger Together.”

The conference, co-sponsored by the Ukrainian Embassy and the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, took place during the NATO summit.

A certificate, signed by the Ukrainian ministers for Foreign Affairs and Education and Science, said that Izmirlieva’s contributions to the field of Ukrainian studies during the “challenging period” of Russia’s full-scale war on Ukraine, “are of exceptional value.”

The recognition is “so well deserved,” said Bohdan Vitvitsky, president of the Ukrainian Studies Fund, “for Izmirlieva’s individual scholarly contributions, for her initiatives on behalf of Ukrainian culture makers, and as the director of one of the two leading academic institutions that have hosted Ukrainian studies the longest.” ♦



Translating Ukrainian Literature into English: Meeting a Growing Need

BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

Last summer the Harriman Institute partnered with several universities and organizations on the 2024 Translating Ukraine Summer Institute, a two-week international program for established and emerging translators of Ukrainian literature held in Wrocław, Poland.

Mark Andryczyk, who runs the Harriman Institute's Ukrainian Studies Program, taught at the summer institute. He became a translator out of academic necessity and sat down with me to discuss the evolving field of Ukrainian translation.

MARK ANDRYCZYK: I was teaching Ukrainian literature, and if my students couldn't read Ukrainian, there were certain works that hadn't been translated that I really wanted them to read for the class. I said, okay, I want them to have it. And that's how I became a translator. So, for the next time I taught the class [in 2009], I already had my draft versions of several short stories, poems, all that stuff. Eventually they got published—I've been translating steadily since.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER:

Is the field so small that you know who all the translators are?

ANDRYCZYK: It used to be. And now it's grown—I find out about a new translator maybe every month or two.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER:

Is that since Russia's full-scale invasion?

ANDRYCZYK: I would say Maidan [protests at Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti] was a major impetus in 2014, but the full-scale invasion was definitely the impetus for this new crop interested in translating from Ukrainian to English.

But a big thing is that Harriman, we were one of the major forums for translation of Ukrainian literature into English for years before Maidan.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER:

Who was doing the translation back then?

ANDRYCZYK: I had this contemporary Ukrainian literature series that went from 2008 to 2016 with the Kennan Institute in Washington. We brought a Ukrainian writer every year to our institutes and presented contemporary Ukrainian literature in English translation. So, we premiered new translations at this event. And these would be excerpts of novels, short stories, poetry.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER:

All translated by you?

ANDRYCZYK: Not all translated by me. I would gather what was available, but there was a lot that wasn't. So, the Harriman was a place where a lot of first translations were inspired because they were needed for this series.

That's how I published my first anthology, *The White Chalk of Days*, because I accumulated all these texts—most of them from these events. And the anthology was picked up by Penguin.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER:

Tell me more about Translating Ukraine.

ANDRYCZYK: The idea was birthed here... at the initiative

of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute... and then partners joined on... Ideally, we'd be holding it in Ukraine, of course, right? But, like a lot of things with Ukrainian culture and academia during the war, it was held in Poland... it's very close; we have a lot of colleagues who work on Ukraine; there's a lot of Ukrainians in Poland now.

UDENSIVA-BRENNER: How open are publishers to publishing Ukrainian literature?

ANDRYCZYK: Open like never before. But you know, publishing takes a while. So, going forward, we're going to see kind of the momentum from the last two-and-a-half years, and then we'll see how that goes afterwards. Hopefully it'll continue. ♦

Scan for details about the Translating Ukraine Summer Institute



Mark Andryczyk (middle, right) working alongside workshop participants in Wrocław, Poland. Photograph by Ali Karakaya

IN BRIEF

Faculty News



Select updates about our faculty. Please visit our website for the full listing

Mark Andryczyk Received Peterson Literary Fund's Translated Book Award

Mark Andryczyk (Associate Research Scholar, Ukrainian Studies Program) received the 2023 Translated Book Award from the Peterson Literary Fund for his translation of Volodymyr Rafeyenko's *Mondegreen*.

Alexander Cooley and Joseph Stiglitz Received Columbia Provost Faculty Awards

Alexander Cooley (Claire Tow Professor of Political Science, Barnard College) received a Dialogue Across Differences seed grant from the Office of the Provost for the project "Academic Upheaval in a Time of Geopolitical Conflict," co-led with V. Page Fortna.

Joseph Stiglitz (University Professor) received a Bollinger Convenings Grant from the Office of the Provost for the project "Saving Journalism," co-led with Anya Schiffrin (Senior Lecturer in Discipline of International and Public Affairs).

The University of Tetova Recognized Tanya Domi for Human Rights Advocacy

Tanya Domi (Adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs) received recognition for her human rights advocacy from the University of Tetova in North Macedonia at an international conference, "The Future of the Western Balkans after the Russian Aggression on Ukraine," organized by

the University's Center for Peace and Transcultural Communication.

Anna Frajlich's *My Father's Name* Shortlisted for Encounter: The Ukrainian-Jewish Literary Prize

Anna Frajlich (Senior Lecturer, Emerita, Department of Slavic Languages) was shortlisted for the Encounter Prize for her poetry collection, *My Father's Name*. The prize is awarded by the Canadian charitable, non-profit organization Ukrainian Jewish Encounter, in cooperation with Ukraine's NGO "Publishers Forum" (Lviv, Ukraine). *My Father's Name* (Imię ojca) was translated from the Polish into Ukrainian by prominent Ukrainian writer Vasyl Makhno.

Rebecca Kobrin Named to Columbia Task Force on Antisemitism

Rebecca Kobrin (Russell and Bettina Knapp Associate Professor of American Jewish History; Co-Director, Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies) was named to the Columbia Task Force on Antisemitism, "formed to address the harmful impact of rising antisemitism on Columbia's Jewish

community and to ensure that protection, respect, and belonging extends to everyone."

Agnieszka Legutko Received Two Teaching Awards

Agnieszka Legutko, (Senior Lecturer in Yiddish) received a 2024 Presidential Award for Outstanding Teaching and a 2024 Lenfest Distinguished Faculty Award for her "exceptional record of teaching and mentoring students... and her contributions to the ongoing success and expansion of the Yiddish language program at Columbia."

Matthew Murray Appointed to Ukrainian NACP Head Selection Commission

The Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers approved Matthew Murray (Adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs) as a member of the Selection Commission for the post of Head of the National Agency on Corruption Prevention. ♦



Top Row Left to Right: Mark Andryczyk, Alexander Cooley, Joseph Stiglitz, Tanya Domi

Bottom Row Left to Right: Anna Frajlich, Rebecca Kobrin, Agnieszka Legutko, Matthew Murray

IN BRIEF



Faculty Books

Our faculty members have published a wide-ranging selection of books. Learn more in the following listing.

Ukraine 22: Ukrainian Writers Respond to War

Edited by Mark Andryczyk (Associate Research Scholar, Ukrainian Studies Program)

A selection of Ukraine's leading writers—Taras Prokhasko, Yuri Andrukhovych, Olena Huseinova, Olena Stiazhkina, Oleksandr Boichenko, Andriy Bondar, Volodymyr Rafeyenko, Iryna Tsilyk, Sophia Andrukhovych—convey the reality of life within Ukraine during the first year of the invasion. Translated by Mark Andryczyk, Michael M. Naydan, and Alla Perminova.
London: Penguin Random House UK, 2023
ISBN: 978-1-802-06291-5

Zenithism (1921–1927): A Yugoslav Avantgarde Anthology

Edited by Aleksandar Bošković (Senior Lecturer in Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian; Co-Deputy Director of the East Central European Center) and Steven Teref

This is described by the publisher as the first-ever English language anthology

of zenithism, an eclectic avant-garde movement unique to the Yugoslav region from 1921 to 1927.
Academic Studies Press, 2023
ISBN: 9781644697221

Live Stock and Dead Things: The Archaeology of Zoopolitics between Domestication and Modernity

by Hannah Chazin (Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology)

Building from the author's archaeological research in the South Caucasus, *Live Stock and Dead Things* combines zooarchaeology and anthropology to challenge traditional narratives about the roles of herd animals in the economic, political, and social development of modern societies.
University of Chicago Press, 2024
ISBN: 0226837491

Thinking Russia's History Environmentally

Edited by Catherine Evtuhov (Professor of History), Julia Lajus (Visiting Associate Professor, Department of History, 2022–23) and David Moon

This edited volume showcases collaboration amongst an international set of scholars who focus on the contribution that the study of Russian environments makes to the global environmental field.
Berghahn Books, 2023
ISBN: 978-1-80539-027-5

Odrastamy od drzewa (We Grow from the Tree)

by Anna Frajlich (Senior Lecturer, Emerita, Department of Slavic Languages)

A poetry collection. "One of the main themes of Anna Frajlich's new collection of poems is empathy toward victims of violence, both distant and unknown, as well as those remembered from personal experience" —Piotr Michałowski.
Szczecin: Wydawnictwo FORMA, 2024
ISBN: 978-83-68215-16-8

Szyborska. Poetka poetów (Szyborska. The Poet of Poets)

by Anna Frajlich (Senior Lecturer, Emerita, Department of Slavic Languages)

A collection of Frajlich's scholarly writings and personal reminiscences about the Nobel laureate Wisława Szymborska; her correspondence with Szymborska; images of the collages Szymborska sent to Frajlich with her letters; and photographs from Frajlich's archive.
Szczecin: Wydawnictwo FORMA, 2023
ISBN: 978-83-67460-74-3

IN BRIEF



(Лекции по истории математического образования)
Lectures on the History of Mathematical Education

by Alexander Karp (Professor of Mathematics, Teacher's College)

An introductory history to the most pressing developments in mathematical education.

Siton Press, Kyiv, 2023

ISBN: 978-966-2724-28-8

The Oxford Handbook of Soviet Underground Culture

Edited by Mark Lipovetsky (Professor and Chair, Department of Slavic Languages), Maria Engstrom, Tomáš Glanc, Ilia Kukuj and Klavdia Somla

This book is described by the publisher as the first comprehensive English-language volume covering a rich history of Soviet artistic and literary underground: *samizdat* and beyond.

Oxford University Press, 2024

ISBN: 9780197508213

After the Ottomans: Genocide's Long Shadow and Armenian Resilience

by Katchig Mouradian (Lecturer in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies)

This edited volume tackles the lasting impact and the legacy of removal, dispossession, and genocide of Armenians in the last decade of the Ottoman Empire.

London: I.B. Tauris, 2023

ISBN: 9780755649709

How Russia Loses: Hubris and Miscalculation in Putin's Kremlin

by Thomas Kent (Adjunct Associate Professor of International and Public Affairs)

Kent reviews Russian influence operations around the world where hubris and miscalculation by Putin and his government have led to reversals of Russia's fortunes.

Jamestown Foundation, 2023

ISBN-13: 979-8987451939

From Pushkin to Popular Culture: Essays by Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy

by Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy (Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Russian Literature and Culture; Director of the Harriman Institute, 2001–2009)
 Edited by Emily D. Johnson, Irina Reyfman (Professor, Department of Slavic Languages), and Carol R. Ueland

In addition to some of Nepomnyashchy's best previously published scholarly work, this volume includes excerpts from *The Politics of Tradition: Rerooting Russian Literature After Stalin*, the book manuscript that Nepomnyashchy was working on in the last years of her life.

Academic Studies Press, 2024

ISBN: 9798887194240

Female Religiosity in Central Asia: Sufi Leaders in the Persianate World

by Aziza Shanazarova (Assistant Professor, Department of Religion)

Shanazarova invites readers into the little-known world of female religious

authority in early modern Islamic Central Asia, revealing a far more multifaceted gender history than previously supposed.

Cambridge University Press, 2024

ISBN-13: 978-1009386340

Practicing Sociology: Tacit Knowledge for the Social Scientific Craft

Edited by David Stark (Arthur Lehman Professor of Sociology; Director of Columbia's Center on Organizational Innovation)

This volume brings together a range of leading sociologists to reflect on their work and demystify the knowledge of fundamental academic practices. It explores the art of finding new research questions, best practices in publishing, and how to make the most out of the peer review process.

Columbia University Press, 2024

ISBN: 9780231214001

Literary Theory of Robots

by Denis Yi Tenen (Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature)

This book reveals the hidden history of modern machine intelligence, taking readers on a spellbinding journey from medieval Arabic philosophy to visions of a universal language, past Hollywood fiction factories, and missile defense systems trained on Russian folktales.

W. W. Norton & Company, 2024

ISBN-13: 9780393882186 ♦



Notable Harriman Events

1 How Has the Ukraine War Changed the China-Russia Relationship?

On April 2, the Harriman Institute and the Weatherhead East Asian Institute revived the tradition of the Borton-Mosely Distinguished Lecture Series. Leading experts Yun Sun (Senior Fellow and Co-Director of the East Asia Program and Director of the China Program, Stimson Center) and Sergey Radchenko (Wilson E. Schmidt Distinguished Professor, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies) reflected upon critical geopolitical developments between Russia and China in conversation with Professors Andrew Nathan (Class of 1919 Professor of Political Science) and former Harriman Director Alexander Cooley (Claire Tow Professor of Political Science, Barnard College).

“As the war in Ukraine grinds into its third year, China and Russia continue unsteadily towards an ever closer alignment even while pragmatically looking out for their own interests in an evolving world.”
—Event description



Scan to
learn more

2 The Witch's Triumph: A Tribute to Dubravka Ugrešić

The Institute for Ideas and Imagination, the Harriman Institute, and the Center for Writers and Translators at the American University in Paris hosted an event on June 6 celebrating the late Dubravka Ugrešić (1949–2017)—an award-winning

Croatian novelist and essayist who was the Harriman Institute's 2015 Writer in Residence. At the Harriman, Ugrešić taught the graduate seminar “National vs. Transnational Literature,” and a two-day conference was held in her honor in 2016. The same year, Ugrešić was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, often referred to as the “Little Nobel.”

“This beautiful tribute celebrated Ugrešić’s legacy with writers, publishers, translators and scholars from around the world. A real literary feast, it showcased the value of our partnership with the Institute for Ideas and Imagination and raised the international profile of the Harriman’s Writer-in-Residence program.”

—Valentina Izmirlijeva, Harriman Director and moderator



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IN BRIEF



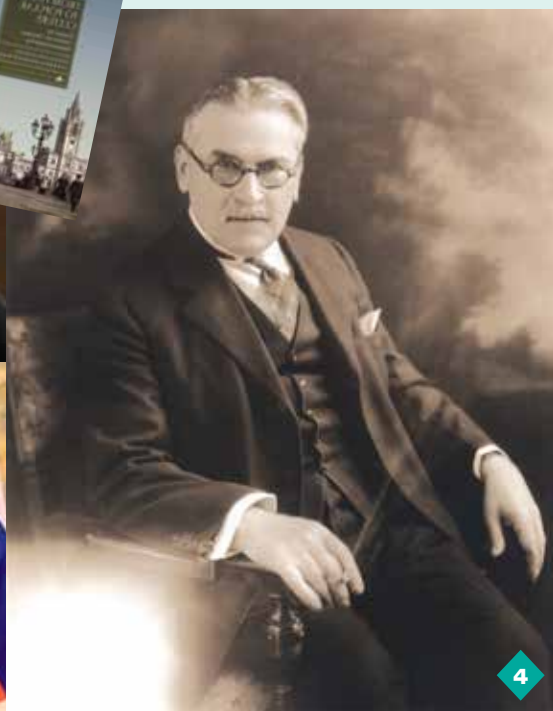
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3 Celebrating the Legacies of Two Former Harriman Directors

On September 19 and September 20, Harriman celebrated the legacies of two former Harriman directors. First, a group of scholars discussed Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy's (1951–2015), posthumous volume of essays, *From Pushkin to Popular Culture* (Academic Studies Press, 2024). Nepomnyashchy, described by the publisher as “one of the most original scholars of Russian culture of her generation,” wrote about topics ranging from Alexander Pushkin's Blackness to Vladimir Nabokov's connection to Sigmund Freud.



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The following day, Harriman held a tribute to Mark von Hagen's contribution to Ukrainian studies. As director of the Harriman Institute and professor in the Department of History, von Hagen con-

tributed greatly to the development of Ukrainian Studies at Columbia and internationally. In July 2024, in what would have been the year he turned 70, the Ukrainian Free University in Munich, where he served as professor and dean, published volume one of his collected works in Ukrainian translation. The 35 works in this volume illustrate how greatly Professor von Hagen contributed through his study of Ukraine to a rethinking of the history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.



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4 M.I. Pupin Pulitzer Prize Conference

On Friday, October 4, the Njegoš Endowment for Serbian Language and Culture at the Harriman Institute and the Department of Physics hosted a fundraising event to commemorate the centennial of the Pulitzer Prize awarded to

the celebrated Serbian-American scientist, Michael (Mihajlo) Idivorsky Pupin (Columbia College, 1883)—a physicist, inventor, and educator who made significant contributions to the fields of telecommunications and electrical engineering. Pupin received the Pulitzer for his autobiography *From Immigrant to Inventor*. The event launched the fundraising initiative for a Visiting Professorship in Serbian and South Slavic Studies.

“I hope the conference reaffirms the Njegoš Endowment's commitment to promoting Serbian culture and literature globally, and sparks deeper collaboration between Serbian and American institutions.”

—Aleksandar Bošković, Lecturer in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian and conference organizer ♦



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Heidi Kronvall with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. Photo courtesy of Heidi Kronvall

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Navigating the Consequences of U.S. Sanctions

Ballet led Heidi Kronvall (née Hoogerbeets) to Russia — and eventually to a career monitoring human rights, economic warfare, and disinformation.

BY ANN COOPER

SINCE RUSSIA'S full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Heidi Kronvall (MARS-REERS '08) has been immersed in issues surrounding U.S. sanctions against Russia. Working in the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control gives her a first-hand view of the complexities of sanctions and their impact—on the sanction targets, as well as on others in Russia. It's a long distance from what first sparked Kronvall's interest in the region.

That happened in her early teens, in Tucson, when her father brought home a VHS tape of a documentary about the students at Leningrad's world famous Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet. Kronvall, mesmerized, enrolled in ballet lessons. A year later she moved to Washington, DC, to study with Russian instructors at the newly founded Kirov

Ballet Academy. In 1995, she was accepted to Vaganova, the St. Petersburg ballet school she'd first seen in that VHS tape a few years earlier.

In St. Petersburg, Kronvall stayed with a Russian family, which exposed her to how grim life could be beyond the privileged dance studios at Vaganova. That experience inspired a broader interest in Russia. "I realized that, as much as I love to dance, there was so much more out there for me," she said in a recent interview. She studied Russian history and language at St. Petersburg State University, returned to the United States for undergraduate Russian studies, and worked at NGOs in New York City. A stint at the Committee to Protect Journalists exposed her to the great risks facing independent reporters in Vladimir Putin's Russia, like



I've been able to weave in and out of different aspects of international relations, from human rights, to reporting, to economic warfare, to disinformation."

Novaya Gazeta's Anna Politkovskaya, who was murdered in 2006.

Kronvall enrolled at the Harriman the following year and received a Harriman research grant to travel to Russia in the summer. There, she met human rights activist Natalia Estemirova, a friend of Politkovskaya's, whose grave they visited together. "She said, 'I'm going to be next,'" to which Kronvall replied: "Oh, no way." But two years later Estemirova was dead—one of six *Novaya Gazeta* journalists and contributors killed for their work.

In 2010 Kronvall took the first of several jobs she's held in the federal government focusing on Russia and Eastern Europe, first at the State Department, then on the White House Threat Intelligence Team, monitoring state-sponsored cyber threats. When she joined Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control in 2022, Russia had launched its full-scale war in Ukraine. Kronvall and her colleagues worked "around the clock," strategizing ways to "target revenue streams contributing to the regime's war effort without disrupting civil society," she recalled.

"I've been able to weave in and out of different aspects of international relations, from human rights, to reporting, to economic warfare, to disinformation," she said.

Currently, Kronvall's job is to review requests to undo unintended consequences of U.S. sanctions—for instance, if a U.S. citizen tries to send money to an unsanctioned family member in Russia and the transaction is blocked due to sanctions against a Russian bank.

"I'm really excited to be in that office," said Kronvall. "Sanctions are necessary. But they also affect ordinary people in so many ways." ♦

ALUMNI

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Documenting War Crimes in Ukraine

A Harriman alumnus dedicates his life to illuminating the consequences of armed conflict.

BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

OLE SOLVANG (M.I.A. '05) moved to Kyiv in July 2023 to work for the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU). As one of the mission's deputies, he oversees the work of three UN field offices—Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Odesa—and a satellite office in Chisinau, Moldova. The teams in each office conduct fact-finding missions, interviewing victims and witnesses of human rights violations and documenting the number of civilian injuries and casualties. “Sometimes these missions take place close to the frontlines,” Solvang said during a phone interview in September. “We have to be careful.”

Solvang's job involves supporting the teams—“helping them set priorities, plan missions, figure out what to do”—and analyzing the information they collect.

The mission then presents its findings and recommendations in reports to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. He goes out on some of the fact-finding missions, too. It's familiar work for Solvang, who has spent much of his career documenting the consequences of armed conflict. He began as a consultant, researcher, and later deputy director of emergency response for Human Rights Watch from 2008 to 2017. There he documented Russia's war in Georgia in 2008, the 2010 revolution in Kyrgyzstan that ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Russia's initial invasion of Eastern Ukraine in 2014, and the wars in Yemen and Syria, among others.

Solvang, who is Norwegian, became interested in armed conflict prevention while serving in the Norwegian army. While in college, he took a year-long break

to work as a Human Rights Watch associate in Tashkent. “We were documenting the terrible human rights situation in Uzbekistan and it was absolutely clear to me that unless that improved, it would lead to massive violence, which it did just a few years later,” said Solvang.

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Solvang was the partnerships and policy director at the Norwegian Refugee Council. With the war flaring up again in Ukraine, he changed his path. “I wanted to go back to investigations, to be part of the effort to document violations and hold perpetrators to account.” He quit his job in Norway and started working for the Vienna-based UN Commission of Inquiry, where he led investigations into war crimes and human rights violations, traveling to Ukraine frequently on fact-finding missions. Then, in the summer of 2023, he moved to Ukraine full-time to run the UN's Human Rights Monitoring Commission field offices.

The UN HRMMU is one of the few organizations with a mandate and capacity to monitor and document abuses in the Russian-occupied territory of Ukraine. “One of the things that really struck me . . . has been the extent of the use of torture in occupied territory against civilians, but also against Ukrainian prisoners of war,” Solvang said.

But as the third year of the war draws to a close, global attention to Ukraine has waned. “We're trying to really keep a focus on the impact on civilians of this war,” said Solvang. “That does get reported in the media, but it's also something that tends to disappear a bit when other things compete for attention.” ♦



I wanted to go back to investigations, to be part of the effort to document violations and hold perpetrators to account.”



Ole Solvang at the Kyiv School of Economics speaking about the civilian impact of attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure. Photograph courtesy of the Kyiv School of Economics

Alumni Notes



Diego Benning Wang
MARS-REERS 2016

At the Harriman Institute, in the immediate aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea, I became acquainted with the resources and insights that paved the way for my doctoral research on Soviet nationality policy and its enduring impact. It was the Harriman's auspicious intellectual environment and vigorous scholarly community that incentivized me to continue pursuing the study of the history of Eurasia and Eastern Europe at Princeton University, where I earned my Ph.D. in 2024. In the face of Russia's aggression and other authoritarian challenges to a rules-based international order, the need for de-imperializing and decentering Eurasian and Eastern European studies is more acute than ever. As I strive to turn my dissertation into a monograph on the Soviet appropriation of the literary heritage of non-Slavic nations, I remain grateful to the Harriman for the support and mentorship that continue to guide me in my academic career.



Hilary Claggett
MIA 1986;
HI Specialization

After a brief postgraduate stint at the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, I embarked on my career in publishing, which eventually led to my current role as Senior Acquisitions Editor at Georgetown University Press. Before that, I spent ten years publishing books on international affairs, consonant with my Harriman specializations in national security and Russian studies. In the

mid-2000s I published a series of books that warned of Putin's ambitions at a time when Western politicians and many in the media had taken their eyes off the ball—I credit Zbigniew Brzezinski's Soviet foreign policy seminar for this prescience. Even today, as a business editor, I draw upon my Harriman roots, working with two Ukrainian authors on a very special book whose ending cannot yet be written.



Ernest Erik Zitser
History 2000;
Harriman Pepsico Fellow,
1999–2000

I recently co-curated *Joseph Conrad's Polish-Ukrainian "Graveyard": Memory, Mourning, and Anti-Colonial Resistance in His 19th-Century Family Photo Album*. This new Duke University Libraries exhibit seeks to educate visitors about the little-known Polish-Ukrainian roots of the author of *The Heart of Darkness*. Focusing on the family photo album that the orphaned victim of Russian imperialism carried with him into permanent exile, the exhibit explores the role of early Eastern European photography in commemorating acts of political resistance and mourning the trauma of collective and personal loss. In doing so, it also provides the historical background necessary for understanding the present-day military conflict in Ukraine.



William de Jong-Lambert
TC and GSAS 2005;
Harriman Certificate
2005

I recently submitted an Oral History of Hungarian protozoologist Miklos Muller to the Rockefeller Archive Center, which

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includes an interview with the late István Deák, a beloved professor at the Harriman for many decades. I also recently completed a two-month Eugene Garfield Fellowship at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia researching the papers of Polish/Ukrainian/Russian geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky. I will spend the spring 2025 semester as a Fulbright Scholar in Brazil researching Dobzhansky's impact upon Brazilian genetics in local archives, while teaching a course on Dobzhansky at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.



Kent D. Lee
M.I.A. 1988

I never finished my dissertation due to the explosion of amazing opportunities after the end of Communism. The opportunities that Columbia, SIPA and HI opened for me were life-changing and transformative. Could there have been a better place on Earth in the 1985–1990 period to pursue Soviet studies? Absolutely not.

In 1989 I set up the first East View Information Services company with a new-found colleague and friend from the USSR Academy of Sciences. The company continues to this day with a global publishing mission. We still have offices in both Moscow and Kyiv, and have experienced this terrible and tragic war through our staff.

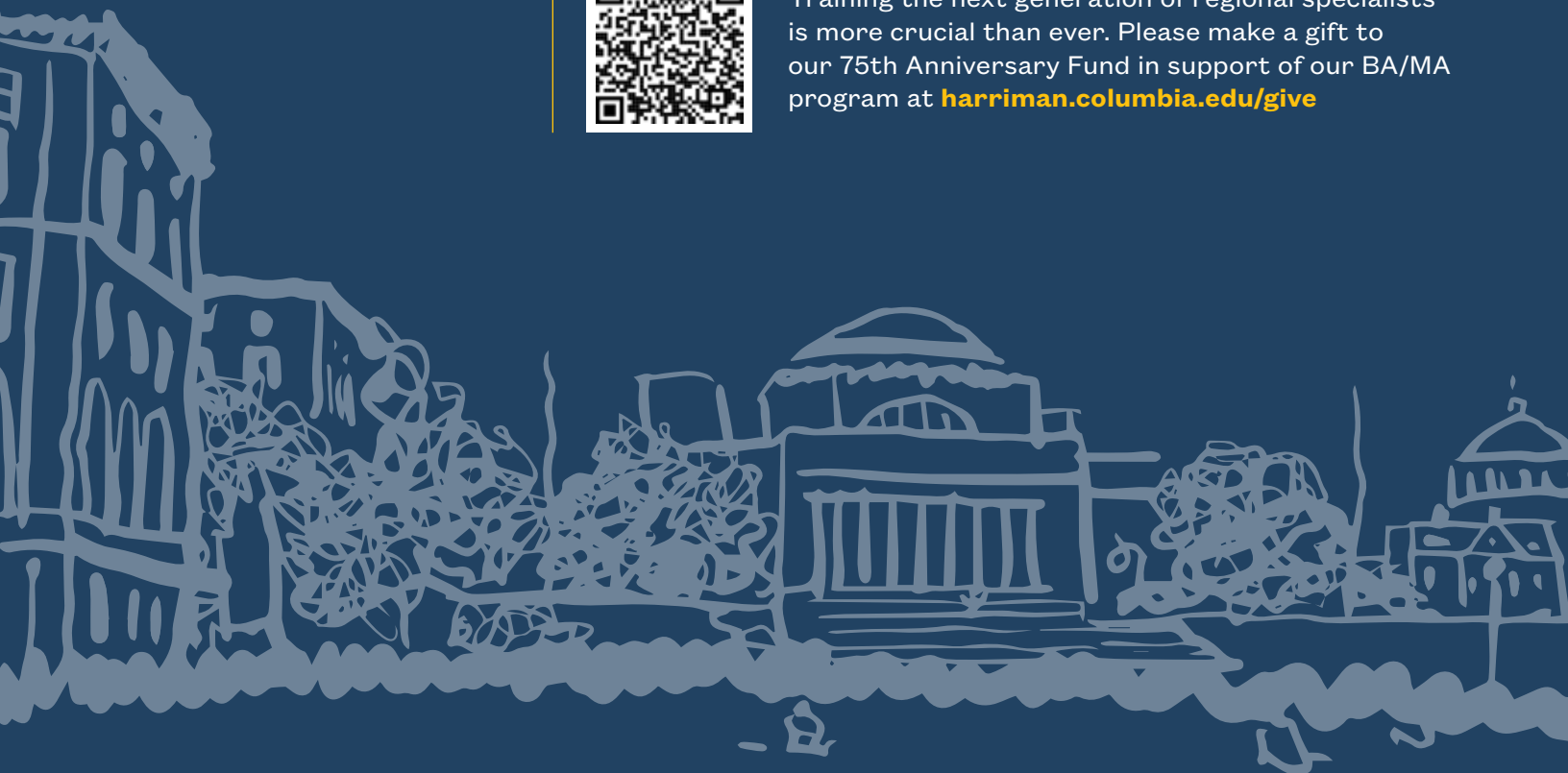
An HI professor once said that it takes weeks or months to make weapons, but decades to produce area studies specialists. Columbia continues to execute this mission admirably—I am blessed to have been touched by this epic institution. ♦



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