

Europe's silence on China's treatment of the Uighurs

At least one million Muslims are imprisoned in Chinese camps as the regime wages a war of religious oppression.

Robert Fox

Environmentalism is the future of conservative politics

The political left have owned the environmental agenda for decades - but conservatives across Europe are rewriting the script and embracing green issues.

p.4 Toby Guise

The US and Europe must act in the Western Balkans

There is a shared diplomatic interest in ensuring peace and stability in the region. Washington and Brussels should get down to work.

p.10 Luke Coffey & Dan Kochis

Handke scandal: It is not about his politics, it is about truth

The Nobel Prize for literature should not have been awarded to a supporter of the war criminal Milosevic.

p.12 Gerald Warner

p.17



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THE CONSERVATIVE

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Hopes of a brave new dawn collide with reality

The European Commission and France's President Macron promised that this autumn would be a fresh start for the EU heralding several years of bold reform. Instead, integrationist over-reach and wrangles in the increasingly assertive European Parliament have left the new Commission struggling to get established. Incoming President Ursula von der Leyen now faces a string of serious challenges on the eurozone and Brexit against a backdrop of Brussels inertia and infighting.

p.2 / p.10

GRINDLOCK

CONTENTS

Brussels is stuck in an impasse - <i>Maggie Pagano</i> , p.2	A Corbyn victory would be a historic catastrophe for Britain and Europe - <i>Iain Martin</i> , p.13
Europe's silence on China's treatment of the Uighurs shames the West - <i>Robert Fox</i> , p.4	Joseph de Maistre: Scourge of the Pseudo-Enlightenment - <i>Gerald Warner</i> , p.14
ECR's nomination for the Sakharov prize of anti-FGM activists pipped to the post by Ilham Tohti - p.6	Has Michel Houellebecq gone soft? - <i>Alastair Benn</i> , p.15
Nord Stream 2 pipeline could undermine European security - p.6	Far from the madding crowd - <i>Henry George</i> , p.16
Catalan separatism has become an anti-democratic movement - <i>Jorge Buxadé MEP</i> , p.6	Handke scandal: It is not about his politics, it is about truth - <i>Gerald Warner</i> , p.17
If Ukraine wants more Europe, corruption must end - <i>Alexandr Vondra MEP</i> , p.7	On the same team at last: Steve Reich and Gerhard Richter in harmony - <i>James Hardie</i> , p.18
Ukraine must counter illicit trade - p.7	Opera enthusiasts should take a trip to Wexford - <i>Gerald Malone</i> , p.18
Caracas is at the centre of a totalitarian tsunami that has swept through Latin America - <i>Hermann Tertsch MEP</i> , p.8	El Camino: The past leaves scars - <i>Alexander Larman</i> , p.19
The EU must find a smarter strategy to manage enlargement - <i>Pieter Cleppe</i> , p.9	Non-Fiction: Nothing much happens in this publishing drama - <i>Will Hutton</i> , p.19
Leader column: Bottleneck in Brussels - p.10	Henry Root: Model for Nigel Farage - <i>Toby Guise</i> , p.20
Environmentalism is the future of conservative politics - <i>Toby Guise</i> , p.10	Rome: The Eternal City is still a world-class centre of European culture - <i>Jack Dickens</i> , p.21
The US and Europe must act in the Western Balkans - <i>Luke Coffey & Dan Kochis</i> , p.12	Norbert Niederkofler: Mountain Chef who made an art out of thinking differently - <i>Bruce Palling</i> , p.22
Changing of Lagarde and big risks at the ECB - <i>Maggie Pagano</i> , p.13	Culture Digest: The best of Europe's art and culture - p.23

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Brussels is STUCK IN AN IMPASSE

The new President of the European Commission is struggling. The European Parliament is flexing its muscles. Integrationist President Macron is cosying up to Putin. And Brexit has been delayed yet again

by *Maggie Pagano*

Forget Brexit. The real battle for taking control is being waged deep within the heart of the European Union itself, where major changes in the Parliament and a troubled start for the new regime at the Commission have combined to create gridlock in Brussels.

The signs of the splintering of the old order are everywhere to be seen.

First, there was the collapse earlier this year of the Spitzenkandidat process of selecting the new European President. Once upon a time, Manfred Weber, as leader of the EPP which gained the highest number of seats, would automatically have been chosen as President. In the event, Ursula von der Leyen, the former German defence minister and president-elect was only nominated after a tortuous fight in the Council, and by a narrow majority of nine votes.

Second, there is still no new Commission. Von der Leyen has had a miserable start to her reign. Since her election address, the only news of note from her came via Germany's Die Welt newspaper saying that she would be sleeping in a small room next to her office on the 13th floor of the Berlaymont building to save money.

It was a nice gesture. But the 61-year-old mother of seven cannot work or sleep in the office because there is no new Commission, yet. Three of the Commissioners nominated by France, Hungary and Romania were rejected in a humiliating vote by the parliament and new ones are unlikely to be appointed until December.

Delays are not new: in 2004 the commission headed by Jose Manuel Barroso was three weeks late and his second commission, was several months late. Yet this year's delay looks far more significant, a sign that the European Parliament is flexing its muscles over what sort of route it wants the EU to take.

From the outside, the postponement reflects not only the gridlock but also the weakness of Von der Leyen's leadership because of her inability - or unwillingness - to rein in the EPP rebels within her own grouping. It is a double blow for her: it raises questions

“What we are witnessing is a clash between the older generation of politicians - on both the traditional right and left - who are wedded to the 20th century view of looking at European politics through the prism of class struggle. These “old men in a hurry”, as one observer put it, are also wedded to the idea of a deeply integrated, federal European Union.

about her legitimacy since she derives power both from the European Council as well as the European Parliament, which is caught in a stalemate.

The president-elect is only 100 days into her new role. But she has managed to infuriate Weber, her fellow EPP member, and more pertinently, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, who secured her the post. Not a clever way to start.

Macron is still fuming that the parliament rejected his candidate, Sylvie Goulard of the liberal Renew Europe group and he feels personally betrayed by von der Leyen and the

EPP group, it is reported. Yet much of the criticism of Goulard came from the EPP itself, a move which many see as revenge by Weber against Von der Leyen for beating him to the top job.

The EPP was backed by the S&D and the Greens, a move that could still backfire on the EPP as the two biggest parties will need partners like Renew Europe - which is now the third biggest grouping with 108 MEPs - if it is to continue ruling the roost.

Weber and his EPP opposed Goulard because they wanted to show what happens when you abandon the Spitzenkandidat system. They also did it to get at President Macron to show who is boss in Europe.

Macron, who is by far the most pro-EU French president for decades, has a clear vision for his sort of Europe. He favours a multi-tier Europe with a core of committed euro states clustered around France and Germany. Outside of this core, he envisages an outer ring of non-euro states that share in its “values, democratic principles and economic freedoms”.

As his private advances to President Putin earlier this year suggested, Macron takes the line that Russia should be brought in from the cold. Turkey could be a member of this outer ring too, he says, but he also closed the door to Albania and North Macedonia joining the EU.

This stance has not gone down well within the EU. Eastern Europeans with long historical memories are understandably furious that Macron is cosying up to Putin.

The French President has pressed on regardless. Macron said recently:



“Excuse me for not yielding to the tyranny of the majority or the pressure of the Brussels bubble.”

But the battle in the European Parliament suggests that such an arrogant approach is unlikely to yield results in the next few years. A struggle for control is playing out in the Parliament.

On one side is the old guard made up of the two traditional political parties which have ruled the continent for decades almost without challenge. This political grouping - the European People's Party (EPP) and the centre-left Socialists and Democrats (S&D) - is now in a fight for survival against the upstart parties which, working together, could command a majority position in the new European Parliament.

In essence, what we are witnessing is a clash between the older generation of politicians - on both the traditional right and left - who are wedded to the 20th century view of looking at European politics through the prism of class struggle. These “old men in a hurry”, as one observer put it, are also wedded to the idea of a deeply integrated, federal European Union.

Ganging up against them are a younger crop of MEPs and parties with a more iconoclastic outlook. They are drawn from a generation which is more interested in identity politics and environmental rights - or migration - than issues based on class alone.

As one former MEP says: “What the EPP and the S&D still do not realise is that their beliefs, which are based on socially conservative, often Catholic,

values mixed with an interventionist economic outlook, are outdated. It's a view based on the industrial landscape of a hundred years ago which was dominated by people being in one place of work all their lives, and on the power unions. That has gone. Their parties are dwindling across Europe from Sweden to Spain. Kaput.”

Added to this, the European Parliament is more factional and geographically divided than ever. There are now thirteen different political parties represented, and seven political

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As one former MEP says: “What the EPP and the S&D still do not realise is that their beliefs, which are based on socially conservative, often Catholic, values mixed with an interventionist economic outlook, are outdated. It's a view based on the industrial landscape of a 100 years ago which was dominated by people being in one place of work all their lives, and on the power unions. That has gone. Their parties are dwindling across Europe from Sweden to Spain. Kaput.”

groupings. At the same time, the rift between Western and Eastern member countries is growing, made all the more apparent when none of the top jobs in the new parliament went to Eastern Europeans.

This autumn the result of these clashes is gridlock. For the first time since 1979, the EPP and S&D no longer have an absolute majority allowing them to control the European Parliament. This means they can only wield power if they work with the parliament's other parties.

In the elections earlier this year the EPP parties suffered losses across Europe, in Germany, Italy, France and Spain. Support for Socialist and Democratic parties also collapsed with seats lost in Germany, Italy, France and the UK. The EPP now has 182 seats while the S&D have 154 MEPs.

No wonder there is a standoff when you have so many breakaway groupings: look at the numbers. The EPP and S&D are down to 336 votes out of 748. To push policy through committees or parliament, they will need to win over some of these smaller groups such as Renew Europe which has 108 MEPs.

The Greens and related parties have 74 seats while the Identity and Democracy Party has 73 MEPs from the far-right populist parties, including Marine Le Pen's National Rally and Italy's Matteo Salvini's Northern League party. They all made gains.

Ironically, Britain's Brexit party has 29 MEPs and, although it is not part of any grouping, it is the biggest single political party. The Conservative ECR Group is down to 62 seats, mainly because it lost seats from the UK Conservative Party.

That brings us to Brexit, where there is also gridlock. The Brexit negotiations have been a failure because they not produced a resolution. For a successful negotiation, there needs to be a win-win outcome for both sides and a feeling of mutual respect. Until Boris Johnson became Prime Minister, it's fair to say the EU had the upper hand and set the red lines.

Apart from on the Irish backstop, the EU bureaucracy has shown itself

to be immovable, inflexible and unimaginative. Three and a half years since the British voted to leave, the Commission and the leaders of the 27 opted to kick the can down the road again until January 31st rather than forcing a decision.

Is this toxic legacy of gridlock what the European Union wants to project? And is a weakened Commission under Von der Leyen capable of successfully overseeing a successful negotiation on the future relationship with the UK?

We shall see. What the EU has managed to achieve with its rigid Brexit stance is to frighten off the more Eurosceptic countries such as Italy and France. For now, Le Pen's National Rally and Salvini's League have stopped banging the drum about leaving the EU or the euro. Instead, they are portraying Brussels as the bad cop to whip up domestic support. Expect their MEPs to disrupt policy on migration or row about budgets as much as they can in parliament. But the moves towards Brexit or Qitally have died a death.

The EU has other tough challenges ahead: the risk of a standoff with Turkey and the danger that President Erdogan will let migrants back into Europe, friction with Western Balkan countries which have been vetoed by France, quarrels with President Trump over the European Army as well as tariffs and negotiations with Russia next year over natural gas exports.

Throw into this simmering mix the fact that Germany is teetering on the edge of recession, Europe's banks are bloated with massive debt and the eurozone economy is faltering.

Dealing with these huge challenges will test Brussels and the Commission to the limit. By comparison, resolving Brexit early next year is a piece of cake. ■

**BREXIT
BRITAIN IS
DEADLOCKED
TOO** by *Joseph Rachman*

Britain will go to the polls on the 12th December as Prime Minister Boris Johnson attempts to get a mandate to deliver on his promise to get Brexit done.

Johnson renegotiated a deal with the EU, but he became increasingly frustrated with the Westminster Parliament's moves to delay and extend the period of debate on his Withdrawal Agreement Bill. Britain missed the deadline to exit the EU by 31st October.

Repeated defeats in Parliament seems to have convinced a frustrated Johnson that the situation was unworkable. By calling an election Johnson has banked on the voters delivering him a strong working majority, likely buoyed by recent strong polling for the Conservatives.

However, even getting an election was difficult. Legislative changes meant that calling an early election now requires a 2/3 majority in the House of Commons. Support from opposition parties was needed. Labour was particularly sceptical insisting there could be no election until a No Deal Brexit was ruled out as a possibility, although many saw their objections as motivated more by their low polling numbers. In the end, MPs voted Tuesday 438-10 for an election on the 12th.

An upset is possible. British politics is more fluid than ever. In the 2017 election Theresa May managed to lose a double-digit polling lead and the Conservative majority thanks to an insurgent Labour Party and a botched Tory campaign. The anti-Brexit Liberal Democrats could make gains or act as a spoiler in the First Past The Post System. Nigel Farage's Brexit Party is another possible joker in the pack. Whatever the results, it will be a tough fight. ■

Europe's silence on China's treatment of the Uighurs shames the West

At least one million Muslims are imprisoned in Chinese camps as the regime wages a war of religious oppression. International institutions including the EU have been virtually useless when it comes to speaking up and confronting China on this global scandal

by Robert Fox



The oppression of the Uighur people, the Turkic minority that have inhabited China's far western region of Xinjiang for millennia continues unabated. By conservative estimates, at least one million are now incarcerated across a gulag of corrective, concentration and "re-education" camps across the province.

That is around a tenth of the total Uighur population of 11.3 million in China. Some estimates suggest that one and a half million are now being held in the camps, including other Muslim minorities. In July this year, 22 nations, including the UK, Canada, Australia, and Japan signed a letter to the UN Human Rights Council demanding the camps be closed immediately.

But 38 countries, including Saudi Arabia sent a counter-letter to the UNHCR praising China for its "remarkable achievements in Xinjiang." In February this year Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman defended the use of camps as "China has the right to carry out anti-terrorism and de-extremism work for its national security."

Conspicuously, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has failed to come to the aid of its co-religionists of the Uighur Muslim community. Gulf countries, including Iran, won't touch the subject at all, so dependent

are they on China for purchasing their energy output and inward investment.

The present crackdown, and the institution of the camps, began in 2014, and was boosted by a new provincial Communist Party Secretary, Chen Qanguo, in 2016. He had been promoted from a similar post in Tibet where he had been credited with success in an aggressive "Sinification" programme, imposing Chinese values, standards, and repressive politics. The inmates of the camps are made to speak and undergo political indoctrination in Mandarin. There are some reports of them being forced to eat pork and drink alcohol.

In Xinjiang, the Beijing regime stands accused of a concerted campaign of cultural eradication. The Uighur Turkic language and literature are suppressed, and Islam frowned upon and worse. Mosques and churches have been destroyed. Halal butchers and shops have been closed.

The camps are described in terms of an Orwellian nightmare – torture, enforced abortions, kidnaps, disappearances, and enforced internal exile to elsewhere in China. This has been accompanied by deliberate pressure on

the Uighur diaspora of about a million strong. Email and social media contacts are meticulously and minutely monitored, and then used to compromise the Uighurs at home.

The story of the Uighurs and China has a deep, rich and highly complicated past. The Uighurs emerged as one of about twenty different Turkic groups, each with a distinct language or dialect, about two millennia ago. They con-

Islam – it was a gradual process by osmosis more than a compelled conversion. Even with the arrival of Islam, their culture remained surprisingly humanistic, with figure portraits, ballads and music, and open and airy interior design and architecture.

The 2005 Royal Academy exhibition, *Turks – a thousand years of civilization 600 – 1600 CE*, showed some extraordinary examples of Uighur art, portraiture especially. My favourite was a double portrait of a Uighur man and woman from a Xinjiang mural of the 12th Century CE. The label simply said "examples from Uighur culture, a remote medieval Turkic people", or words to that effect.

The show was sponsored by the Turkish government, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party had just won power. Erdogan doesn't like the Uighurs, though he likes to talk of the "great family" of Turkish and Turkic peoples. He much prefers the family of his new friend – the president and leader-for-life Jinping.

As much as history, and the catalogue of past confrontation, it is geography that makes Beijing so sensitive to the role of the Uighurs in Xinjiang,

China's largest, most remote, and most westerly province. Roughly the size of Alaska, it forms the bridgehead of the ancient Silk Road. Jammed between the Gobi Desert and the great northern steppe, it commands access to the two main western routes of the road, one going south to Balkh in Afghanistan and into India and the sub-continent, and north towards the Aral and Caspian seas and via Bokhara to the shores of the Mediterranean. Today the new strategic Silk Road Railway runs through Xinjiang.

The latest spat between Beijing and Europe occurred a few days ago with the EU's award of the Sakharov prize for human rights to Ilham Tohti, a moderate Uighur activist sentenced to life imprisonment in 2014. He was praised by the European Parliament as "a voice of moderation and reconciliation" – he is not a separatist – adding that he should be released immediately. Beijing faxed a reply that Tohti is a criminal, the EU should respect Chinese sovereignty, cautioning them not make a terrorist appear influential.

If past clashes with the Qen kingdom across the centuries and during the early years of Communist China must be eschewed, as must "promoting civil society," "promoting neoliberalism" and promoting the "the West's idea of journalism". Effectively, the paper sets out the terms and rules of engagement of the new struggle – it actually speaks of the "need to



state showing off its new tools and powers. Ironically, many of the techniques now used to surveil, corral, and dominate the Uighurs came from America and the West, from facial recognition to entrapment methods by securing and analysing DNA.

Beijing sees a direct correlation between Islamic religion, the Uighur language and cultural identity with violent extremism, subversion and terrorism. Riots in the capital Urumqi in 2009 saw 197 killed on the spot, and many more "disappeared" and injured. In 2014 further attacks to the south of the capital led to some 70 deaths. In October 2013 a truck rammed a crowd in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, leading to five deaths – all blamed on "Uighur extremists" of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement – or ETIM.

In 2015 ISIS extremists killed 50-year old Fan Jinghui, a Chinese national, in Iraq. Uighurs in ISIS forces, numbering about 115 in all according to the US New America think tank, demanded loyal Muslims rise up and kill Chinese officials working in North Africa.

The Beijing regime has employed the tried and trusted methods used by the Qen kingdom in its confrontations over two centuries with the Uighurs of Xinjiang, and flooded the region with Han Chinese from further west. The biggest recent game-changer, perhaps, was signaled by an initiative under the singularly dull sounding title of Document Number Nine – or "Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere." It was submitted to the leadership, it is believed, with the signature of President Ji Jinping himself. Even the leaker, a journalist called Gao Yu, was sentenced to seven years and put under house arrest.

It rages against the ideology of the West, and any activities "promoting Western constitutional democracy." The espousal of "universal values" must be eschewed, as must "promoting civil society," "promoting neoliberalism" and promoting the "the West's idea of journalism". Effectively, the paper sets out the terms and rules of engagement of the new struggle – it actually speaks of the "need to

conscientiously strengthen management of the ideological battlefield."

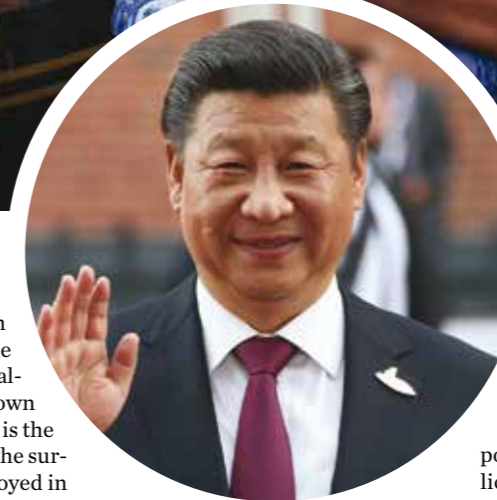
The main weapons system in this war is the Internet – the West's passion for open journalism must be turned upside down and fired back at the West. This is the blueprint for the new phase of the surveillance state, now being deployed in

gruesome detail against the Uighurs of Xinjiang. All the Chinese equivalents of the West's Google, WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook are state controlled. Attempts, successful or not, by China's 830 million Internet users to use international websites and apps are monitored and logged. China's Big Brother is well on top of China's big data.

In the case of the Uighurs, it means that the reading habits, general tastes, and online discussions are monitored and acted upon.

In September last year a Uighur reporter for Radio Free Asia in the US, Shohret Hoshur, was alerted by email about a film being circulated to teachers and education managers in Xinjiang. This film, entitled "The Plot Inside the Text Books", explained the pretext for rounding up hundreds of intellectuals: they were denounced as "two-faced people who acted to split the motherland."

On hearing about the film, Kamal-turk Yalqun, exiled in Philadelphia, realised his father Yalqun Rozi, a well-known art critic and an editor at the official Xinjiang Publishing House, was vulnerable. Managing to get him on the phone last October, his father said quickly: "It's not a good time. I'm about to be taken away." Later Rozi was jailed for 15 years for "inciting subversion of state power." His "crime", it later transpired, was that in a textbook he published, he had relied 60 per cent on Uighur and native literary sources – 30 per cent is the permitted upper limit – and in 200,000 words of text the word "China" had been mentioned only four times.



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When sanctions were threatened by UN members against the party boss in Xinjiang, Chen Qanguo, in March 2019, Beijing flatly denied the presence of the detention camps. They were referred to as “re-education centres.”

Photo: Mikhail Svetlov - Getty Images

When sanctions were threatened by UN members against the party boss in Xinjiang, Chen Qanguo, in March 2019, Beijing flatly denied the presence of the detention camps. They were referred to as "re-education centres." "A country under the rule of law, China respects and protects human rights in accordance with the principles of the Constitution," a white paper stated, claiming that terrorism had been eliminated, extremism curbed, and social security guaranteed as a result of new policies in Xinjiang.

Yet if the Uighurs only comprise less than one per cent of China's population of 1.4 billion, why is there such a sense of threat at all levels of officialdom?

Some of the answer lies in the human geography of the Uighurs. Just as Xinjiang once formed one of the great junctions of the old Silk Road, it now forms the western bridgehead of its modern incarnation, the Belt and Road project, a project beloved of President for Life Ji Jinping. It is a keystone of the postmodern mercantilism through which China seeks to dominate the globalized economy.

The three principal land routes of Belt and Road emanate from Xinjiang: the new Eurasian Land bridge

into central Asia and northern Europe; the China Central Asia and West Asia corridor to Turkey, the Balkans and the Mediterranean; and the China Pakistan Corridor to the Indian sub-continent.

The southern and central routes point to Afghanistan and the republics of the southern steppes. They

pass through playgrounds for an array of militant Islamist and nationalist groups, new versions of al Qaeda and ISIS, and the affiliates of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. The Ferghana Valley running across three Asian republics to the north of the Pamirs has been the setting for on-off feuds and battles running for generations between

Islamist groups and local tribes. The threat of militant Islam, real or imagined, just inside or beyond China's border is a fixation of Beijing's security policy.

On a wider canvas, the Uighurs seem to be yet another minority that has become a geopolitical inconvenience to bigger and richer powers. They join the roster along with the Kurds and the Hazara of Bamyán, peoples who are nations without a fixed abode and reliable patrons in the international community.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan's sense of ethnic loyalty does not stretch to the Islamic and Turkic Uighurs. On a visit to President Ji Jinping last July, and with a tour of Xinjiang he stated, "it is a fact that the people of all ethnicities in Xinjiang are leading a happy life amid China's development and prosperity." Previously Turkey had been one of the few Muslim countries to raise questions about the camps.

The camps, the surveillance and harsh treatment, including disappearances and tales of torture are the most haunting aspect, perhaps, of the story of the Uighurs today. Tools that the author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* could only have dreamed of are being used for what many regard as an egregious combination of geopolitical domineering, social engineering, and cultural genocide. ■

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MEP Assita Kanko welcomes the ECR's nomination of anti-FGM activists for the Sakharov prize

The European Parliament's Conference of Presidents took the decision to award the 2019 prestigious Sakharov prize for freedom of thought to Ilham Tohti. The ECR Group and its Flemish MEP Assita Kanko had nominated the Restorers, five Kenyan students who have developed an app to help fight female genital mutilation (FGM).



Photo: European Union 2019 - Source: EP

They call the app I-Cut and it allows girls at risk of genital mutilation to get help quickly if they feel at risk of undergoing FGM. In an emergency situation, they can then request help from the police or from a medical aid post.

One in four Kenyan women and girls have undergone FGM, a process which involves the partial or total removal of the external genitalia, according to the World Health Organisation.

However, Kenya's President announced plans in Vancouver in June 2019 to end FGM by 2022, eight years ahead of the UN sustainable development goal.

Following today's decision, Kanko, who herself survived genital mutilation in her native Burkina Faso, gave the following comments about the nomination and shortlisting of the Restorers: "The Restorers have created a message of hope and community from their own horrific experience of female genital mutilation".

She added: "This App helps provide girls with self-determination in one of the most intimate decisions that will ever be made about their body; a decision they should never have to make in the first place."

According to the World Health Organisation, up to three million girls are at risk of FGM every year. Currently, 200 million girls and women worldwide live with the terrible consequences of FGM.

FGM is often an unavoidable feature of family life in the cultures in which it is prevalent. According

to surveys by UNICEF, more than 65% of women aged 15-49 years have undergone FGM in at least 10 countries.

The prevalence of FGM is also affected by background – women without education are more likely to undergo FGM than women with the highest level of education.

Kanko finished her speech by calling upon the European Parliament "to write a report and propose a series of concrete actions in the fight against FGM; so that the EU can help put an end to this barbaric practice once and for all."

Although FGM is mainly practised in African and Middle Eastern countries, there are also communities in the United States and Europe in which such practices are common.

The European Organisation, End FGM, estimates that there could be as many as 479,138 FGM survivors living in EU countries. Each year, it is estimated that 180,000 girls and women in Europe are at risk of FGM. ■

Nord Stream 2 pipeline could undermine European security

The European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) has adopted a "State of political relations between the EU and Russia" Report championed by ECR MEP Anna Fotyga. One of its main points was to block Nord Stream 2 and underline the threat of militarisation of the Kaliningrad oblast.

Nord Stream is an offshore natural gas pipeline run by the Russian state-owned natural gas company, Gazprom. Its first two lines were opened in 2011 and 2012, after seven years of planning and preparation. Now, Gazprom is hoping to expand the Nord Stream project. The Nord Stream 2 pipeline will carry gas from Russia under the Baltic Sea and into Germany.

Fotyga, who is also the head of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE) and a member of the AFET was pleased with the decision. She said that in terms of concrete actions towards Russia the EU lags behind the US which plays a leading role in opposing Russian imperialism both militarily, economically and politically.

"Almost four years ago I was the co-author of the last document concerning EU-Russian relations," Fotyga said after the vote. "Unfortunately, the outlined threats from back then have become today's reality."

Fotyga believes that the EU should not only oppose further Russian aggression, but also "force Russia to cover the costs of its aggressive actions" in Ukraine.

She expressed that she was "happy that the document clearly indicates that

Russia cannot be treated as a strategic partner".

On 22nd October 2019, Fotyga attended, and spoke at, a conference held at the Hilton in Strasbourg, which was led by the Coalition for Pro-Democracy Russians. She spoke as a panellist at a session entitled "Putin's Nord Stream 2 Pipeline and Its Real Costs to Europe". She spoke alongside figures such as the Ukrainian MP Olga Bielkova and Jakub Janda of the European Values think tank.

At the conference, Fotyga announced that "abandoning Nord Stream 2 is a prerequisite for European solidarity", once again highlighting concerns that "projects with Russia like Nord Stream 2 undermine the security of Central and Eastern Europe". For Fotyga, the Nord Stream projects are not a matter of "business" but of "security".

However, not all states are convinced by Fotyga's diagnosis – on 30 October 2019, the Danish government granted its approval for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, removing what had been until then an obstacle to the expansion. It has also received the endorsement of Finland, Sweden, and Germany.

In Germany, Steffen Siebert, a spokesman for chancellor Angela Merkel, said that the "transit of gas through Ukraine must continue" and urged that they would "continue to support the EU in its trilateral talks with Russia and Ukraine".



The Kremlin says that the venture is purely economic in nature – they point out that while it is fully owned by Gazprom, half of the costs of construction are being covered by European energy companies such as Shell, ENGIE, and OMV.

The report championed by Fotyga, however, points to NS2 increasing the dependency of the EU on Russian gas, which it believes threatens the EU's internal market and is not in line with the EU's energy policy. The report also denounced Russia's violation of airspace and territorial waters of the Baltic Sea countries and the militarization of the Kaliningrad oblast.

This report echoes the concerns of the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, who said in a press conference held with the NATO Secretary-General on 31 October that the Gazprom-led pipeline would strengthen Russia and weaken Europe.

There are widespread concerns that if EU countries become too reliant upon Russian natural gas, the Kremlin will hold significant geopolitical leverage over their policies in Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

The report will be discussed and voted on during the European Parliament's plenary session in March. ■

Catalan separatism has become an anti-democratic movement

On December 27th 1978, the Parliament in Madrid approved the Spanish Constitution, after its ratification by the Spanish people in a referendum that took place on December 6th of that year by 88.54% of votes in favour. In Catalonia, one of the most populous regions of Spain, the referendum had an even higher percentage of favourable votes; in Barcelona, 91% voted for the new constitution.

The Spanish Constitution provided for a broadly decentralised model, recognising the regions as *Autonomies* with their own legislative assemblies. Catalonia, the region located in the north-east of Spain, and sharing a border with France, was an *Autonomie* with more significant competencies. The education system, health provision, law and order, and cultural policy were all meaningfully devolved to the regional level.

In due course, Catalan nationalist parties have acquired further concessions on regional powers by engaging in confidence and supply arrangements with the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) and the centre-right People's Party (PP) that ruled Spain in the decades following Franco's death in 1975 and the transition to democracy.

In parallel to further concessions from Spain's centre, Catalan separatism

has developed in a rather more extreme direction. They have imposed the Catalan language on the education system and established severe restrictions on the general use of Spanish imposing fines on companies for the use of Spanish on placards.

Separatist parties developed for years a clientele network of associations and entities financed with public funds for the "construction" of a historical rendering of Catalan identity. The most extreme example is the Institute of the New History of Catalonia, where it is genuinely argued that Cristobal Colón, Cervantes or Santa Teresa de Jesús were Catalans.

Following the economic crisis of 2008, separatism decided to start a "process" of rupture with the Spanish constitutional settlement. This effort was built on over-heated rhetoric that verged at times into a kind of Catalan supremacism.

In 2017, separatist parties breached resolutions made in the Constitutional Court of Spain, drawing on associations that are directly dependant on public money, and dictated unconstitutional laws. This was nothing less than a coup – several of their leaders have now been condemned for crimes of sedition, misappropriation and disobedience.



by Jorge Buxadé MEP

Recently, as a result of the sentence, separatist parties have encouraged thousands of protesters onto the streets. They have exercised violence and committed acts of terrorism (illegal blockades of roads and highways, the assault of Barcelona airport preventing 10,000 tourists from travelling), committed attacks on police and staging illegal demonstrations. We have seen Barcelona burning for five days, with 300 police officers injured, and neighbours fleeing their homes for fear of fires.

Catalan separatism has now become a fundamentally violent movement. Its aspirations are openly undemocratic – it now seeks to impose itself on the majority of Catalans. We should move towards the immediate restoration of order and individual freedom, the detention of the separatist leaders and an immediate review, in accordance with the Constitution, of the status of *Autonomies*, in order to guarantee equality across the whole of the Spanish peninsula. ■

If Ukraine wants more Europe, CORRUPTION MUST END

When the recent phone call between US President Trump and Ukraine's President Zelensky went viral, it made headlines for several reasons, none of them good. Although most of the mud flowed West, Ukraine did not escape unscathed, as ill-advised criticisms of Germany and France for their lack of support for Ukraine became public. But this is not the case for all

European players. Ukraine is a priority partner for the European Union as it helps us to build resilience and strengthen human rights protections in the area and safeguard our democracy. Both the European Union and Ukraine are committed to working together to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

Since 2014, Ukraine has embarked on an ambitious reform programme

with the main objectives of stabilising its economy and improving its citizens' livelihoods. Recent political moves in the country show that Ukraine truly wants Europe's support, but for closer European integration to become more than a nice slogan, the government should tackle the systemic corruption that not only undermines such integration, but also hurts business and the legal economy by allowing criminal organisations to act with impunity.

President Zelensky's landslide victory signaled Ukraine's strong desire for change and since entering office, he's made a couple of positive moves. For example, he signed a decree to increase the effectiveness of countering corruption and smuggling during the customs clearance of goods imported into the territory of Ukraine, something that in theory could increase the level of confidence of businesses in state bodies.

But signing a decree does not necessarily mean concrete action. The roots of corruption go deep in Ukraine and the current administration is suffering for the mistakes of the past. For years now, Ukrainian politicians have regularly accused each other of corruption while claiming to fight it. MPs are on record stating that fixing corruption is Ukraine's number one problem – but it is not necessarily its number one priority.

The impact on business is such that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has stated that corruption is a "significant obstacle" to doing business in Ukraine. Companies mainly encounter corruption in business licensing, taxation and customs.

Since the decree was signed, Ukrainian authorities have intensified cooperation with the European anti-fraud agency (OLAF) to reduce the flows of lucrative goods like smuggled cigarettes into the EU across the border. However, this problem shows no signs of diminishing. Ukraine is the number one source country for smuggled cigarettes. To root this out, more effective cooperation between OLAF, the EUBAM, member states and local Ukrainian authorities is essential to prevent criminals operating across borders.

The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, on which the provisions towards closer integration are founded, contains anti-fraud and anti-corruption provisions as well as a protocol on mutual administrative assistance in customs matters. But in a country where smuggling is not even a punishable criminal offence, change will not come easy. Moving goods that cost little in Ukraine to EU countries where those goods are expensive is incredibly profitable,



by Alexandr Vondra MEP

and media coverage has revealed the links between this and criminal organisations.

While Ukraine should continue to seek assistance, exchange information, and coordinate operations with the EU to tackle cross-border cases, this won't be enough if smuggling isn't criminalised by Ukrainian authorities first.

Criminalising smuggling would be a big step towards closer integration between Ukraine and Europe – both sides have a strong mutual interest in further closeness as a means to promote peace and stability in the region. However, this integration cannot come at any cost, and to be fully welcome at Europe's table, measures aimed at cleaning up corruption cannot simply pay lip service to an idea. A whole suite of enforcement measures will be essential if there is to be truly systemic change, and a new generation firmly rooted in the rule of law can be guaranteed. ■



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Ukraine must counter illicit trade

One of the main obstacles to a successful trading relationship between the European Union and Ukraine is the country's ongoing corruption. Despite the huge investment made by the EU and the early results flaunted by the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, there is still a long way to go.

As part of The Liberty Summit, hosted by the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party in Kyiv, speakers such as the former Member of the European Parliament, Daniel Dalton, and the first Vice Prime Minister charged with European integration, Dmytro Kuleba, will aim to tackle this issue.

The issues of corruption and organised crime have been ever-present in the relationship between Ukraine and the EU. They are referred to in the agreement dating back to the Association Agreement, and have been discussed in all other monitoring reports since.

As part of this agreement, Ukraine was granted visa-free access to the EU, which opened the borders of the EU to allow Ukrainians preferential access to the EU's market. Upon the granting of visa-free access for Ukrainian citizens, the European Commission noted that one of the possible negative consequences of the arrangement included new opportunities for Ukraine-based organised crime to

establish a clear path for smuggling illegal goods into Europe.

Two years on, questions remain over the fulfilment of the commitments made by Ukraine, particularly in areas around organised crime and corruption.

As it stands, Ukraine has become the biggest source of cigarette smuggling into the EU, but there is also a significant illicit trade in other materials such as amber, metal, wood and alcohol. A full 80% of the wood exported from Ukraine is illicit. Over 200 tonnes of amber are mined in Ukraine and shipped to the EU illegally. The total worth of Ukrainian contraband is estimated to be 10 billion dollars, the equivalent of 36% of the Ukrainian state budget.

President Trump's recent attempt to use Ukraine in his political chess games shone the spotlight back on the country's corruption. Several Ukrainian mayors and city council members have been suspected of using their positions to serve their own interests. Tobacco smuggling is a very visible manifestation of this problem. Illicit tobacco from Ukraine is most evident in those countries that share a border with Ukraine. According to a report by KPMG, over 1.5 billion counterfeit and contraband cigarettes came into the EU from Ukraine in 2017.



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Tobacco Smuggling from Ukraine to the EU

A major tobacco company in western Ukraine was caught ordering an abnormal number of tax stamps for cigarrillos in order to use them on cigarette packs that were then distributed on the black market and sold in the European Union. The company responsible continued this practice over three years and in one year was able to avoid paying €156 million to the government.

The company itself has a complicated past, being owned by a prominent local figure who, amongst other things, was a representative in local government and associated closely with a number of sports teams. It is believed that he used all of these positions to accumulate vast sums of money and build a real estate empire. He is believed to have worked closely with two associates who have equal political influence within the region.

The latest measures that Ukraine took at the border-control are encouraging. However the infrastructure at checkpoints should be improved. Ukraine should get rid of the old, inefficient and corrupt guard at customs and invest in new, qualified personnel that fight for better integration.

Ukraine is not alone in this fight and the EU should help Ukrainian authorities create a joint EU-Ukraine commission for control over the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Countering Illegal Manufacturing and the Turnover of Tobacco Goods. To build on the progress made so far, the EU

should enhance international cooperation to help Ukraine fight corruption and smuggling. Agencies such as Frontex and Europol should reinforce their monitoring of Ukraine and bolster the assistances they provide in order to protect against the misuse of the visa-free regime, as well as carefully monitoring the crucial benchmarks of corruption and anti-corruption.

If all these measures are put in place by the time our new Ukrainian High Representative comes before the European Parliament to update the elected officials of the EU, there can be a clear path towards success. ■

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Caracas is at the centre of a totalitarian tsunami that has swept through Latin America

Europe's inaction over the crisis in Venezuela has empowered the Maduro regime



by Hermann Tertsch MEP

Six months ago, the bloody dictatorship of Nicolas Maduro was floundering in Venezuela. The countries of the region took unprecedented steps towards an agreement that would put an end to the Chavez-inspired regime that in just a few years has plunged the country into a chasm of misery, violence and unbelievable cruelty. Six months ago, there were serious expectations that the Lima Group, under the auspices of the Organization of American States (OAS) and with US support, would organise an operation to evict the main leaders of the mafia that governs Caracas under the regime of Maduro. There was a belief that this would kick-start a serious transition towards democratisation, the restoration of law and public order and a re-establishment of legal certainty that could revive an economy destroyed to an almost inconceivable extent.

In January 2019, Juan Guaidó was elected as acting President of Venezuela by the National Assembly, the only body to emerge with legitimacy from the December 2015 elections. This was considered as a constitutional and legal way to definitively declare Maduro as a usurper who had already breached all the requirements to remain legally and legitimately as President of the country.

When Guaidó was declared as acting president, the hope was that the opposition could finally come together in a united front to expose all the incapacity, perversion and guilt of Maduro's regime and its henchmen. It became possible to dream that the regime would lose its influence over opposition politicians, which has always been exerted through pressure and corruption.

In the end, the whole operation failed because Europe vehemently opposed external intervention, and Washington made it clear that any positive move from the international community needed to be at the request of the Venezuelan opposition and the OAS. Meanwhile, the Venezuelan opposition, which had by now become fully infiltrated and largely bought by the regime, found itself arguing against a hasty intervention.

When faced with the narrative that an intervention would produce nothing but violence, all the forces in favour of a robust action against Maduro were neutralised and "compromise forces" emerged once again. In reality, this meant sustaining the Maduro regime in power.

There were warnings about the catastrophic effects of a "foreign" or "imperialist" intervention, as if there

was not already a flagrant foreign presence in Venezuela in the form of Cuban forces which are employed in the power structures, army, police forces, intelligence services and the political police. On top of this, Iranian forces are already there through the presence of the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah, which pledges obedience to Tehran.

It is hard to imagine that intervention could have worsened a situation already characterised by extreme violence, despair and death with 30,000 annual murders and deaths by hunger and disease. Cities are currently without electricity, food and medicine are in short supply, and millions are fleeing from Venezuela across South America.

The intervention didn't happen and conversations were once again opened between the opposition and the Maduro regime.

Behind the scenes, a sinister Spanish figure, the former President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, has been playing a prominent role. He presented himself in 2015 as a mediator between the regime and the opposition but he has since been revealed to be Maduro's de facto right-hand man. He has been complicit in the mafia dictator's methods of extortion, threats and treatment of political prisoners. That has turned Zapatero in the eyes of ordinary Venezuelans into the most hated operator in the criminal band directed by the regime.

Venezuela was once one of the wealthiest countries in Latin America, with the world's largest oil reserves. Twenty years ago, however, its prosperity was given over to a socialist project directed by Commander Hugo Chavez. Now its economy has collapsed, and its citizens fight to salvage food from rubbish bins. The average Venezuelan has lost muscle mass. Children die due to the lack of food while aged and sick people die due to lack of medicines. Once eradicated diseases have returned.

A total of 30,000 Venezuelans are



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murdered every year. In 2016, according to a UN report, 7,000 extrajudicial executions took place. Five million people have already fled the country in an exodus that could dwarf the migration caused by the Syrian civil war. Venezuela is the most dangerous country in the world and it is not even at war.

The state of Venezuela has become an immense global scandal. It is ruled by a criminal and incompetent regime, formed by the communist elite of the former Chávez party, the Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela

plunders Venezuela's assets – that is how he pays for international protection from China and Russia. He allows international contractors to mine strategic precious metals and control gold production.

While this is taking place, bands and guerrillas then destroy the Amazon by washing it with chemicals. The Orinoco Basin has suffered mass deforestation – strangely, this seems to bother European environmental groups far less than similar abuses in other countries.

The severity of the situation in the country is partly a product of the ways in which Cuba exports destabilisation, communist subversion, anti-democracy messages to other countries. Its toxic exports in this regard include arms trading, money laundering for oil and a huge amount of cocaine, all of which finances both the internal apparatus of the Venezuelan state and its external funding networks, especially in Spain and mainland Europe.

These networks allow the regime to effectively buy its own survival. They facilitate repression, the slavery of the population, the obscene privileges of the leading elites and the formation of destabilising forces abroad, like the units from the Colombian terrorist groups of FARC and ELN that control large territories in Venezuela.

The regime feels safe now and has started a counter-offensive. International talks in Barbados held in August 2019 have given the regime exactly what it wanted – a consolidation of Maduro's control and further division

amongst the opposition.

The agents from Havana and Caracas are already wreaking havoc in Venezuela, as they are across South America. They are at the burning barricades in Quito, Ecuador. Here, they brought Rafael Correa back to power and closed all cases against corruption and fraud that were opened up. Cuban and Venezuelan agents have played a leading role in Chilean extremist movements that have tried to undermine President Piñera. They helped Kirchner and her candidate Fernandez in Argentina and without doubt they are integrated into the forces of Morales and his party.

In Europe, Latin America is still treated as a testing ground for social and political projects. The consequences are always tragic for the local population. The role played by Federica Mogherini, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has been shameful. Throughout her tenure, which began in 2014, she has been consistently in favour of the messianic left wing groups and against the rational choices of democrats and the advocates of free markets. Let us hope that her incoming replacement, Josep Borrell, a friend of many Latin American left-wingers who remains dangerously close to socialists with ominous intentions in the continent, will not do the same.

We must react to the failure of the democratising offensive that failed to end Maduro's regime and to the totalitarian counteroffensive which has been unleashed in the aftermath. In order to do so, there must be a real desire within Europe to leave the comfort zone of speech and enter into the field of concrete actions against the enemies of freedom in Latin America. ■



We must react to the failure of the democratising offensive that failed to end Maduro's regime and to the totalitarian counteroffensive which has been unleashed in the aftermath. In order to do so, there must be a real desire within Europe to leave the comfort zone of speech and enter into the field of concrete actions against the enemies of freedom in Latin America.



The EU must find a smarter strategy to manage enlargement

Emmanuel Macron's vetoing of accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania shows that the EU must be more careful about how it intends to bring more countries into the fold – EFTA could be a useful first stepping stone to full membership

by Pieter Cleppe



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French President Emmanuel Macron received a lot of criticism for his decision to block the start of accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania, even if the governments of Denmark and the Netherlands were with him.

There really was no good choice: either North Macedonia would be upset (it went as far as to change its name in order to be able to enter the EU) or European citizens would have been angry, wary of welcoming into the EU yet more countries with weak governance and high levels of corruption. The fundamental issue is that there is "enlargement fatigue" in Western Europe.

Balkan governments have been looking to strengthen ties with the likes of Russia, China and Turkey instead, which does not bode well in terms of embedding the rule of law and Western-style democracy over there. Serbian human rights campaigners recently warned against the roll-out of hundreds of Chinese surveillance cameras using facial recognition software, a move resulting from growing ties between Serbia and China.

In North Macedonia, exiled oligarch Nikola Gruevski, who has been convicted for crimes committed when he was Prime Minister, may well manage to return from Hungary, which has granted him "asylum", and run in the snap elections which followed the collapse of the government after the EU refused to open entry talks.

What to do now? In my view, the EU must simply be honest. It must tell countries that enjoy very little support among Europeans that their entry into the EU simply won't happen in the foreseeable future. We are talking about Turkey and Ukraine.

At the same time, the EU should offer the Balkan Six a closer relationship. Perhaps membership of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which is a loose platform to open up trade. Offering the Balkan six EFTA membership could be presented as the first stepping stone to EU membership. Of course, EFTA member states' citizens also enjoy freedom of movement to each other's countries, so this may have to be reviewed.



Apart from the prospect of EFTA membership, the EU could require that those six Western Balkan countries can only join at the same time, to give them an incentive to deepen diplomatic ties. This is already happening, regardless. In response to EU intransigence, the Prime Ministers of Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania have just signed a declaration, creating a co-operation agreement modelled on the EU's Schengen Agreement, providing for the free travel of people, goods, capital, and services between their three connected countries.

The organisation shouldn't be confused with the European Economic Area (EEA), to which three EFTA member states – Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein – belong. Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland shouldn't fear this would upset their cosy arrangement with the EU, as it is their membership of the European Economic Area which is key, not of EFTA – even if non-EU states need to be an EFTA member before being able to become an EEA member.

The UK could also join the non-EEA department of EFTA and it could

even emerge as the leader of EFTA, thereby reinvigorating the organisation and proving that Britain wants to keep close trade ties with European countries even if it has rejected the top-down regulatory approach of the EU and EEA. In this way, Turkey and Ukraine could be reassured that EFTA is no second-rate arrangement, as the UK even prefers it to EU membership.

To offer clarity to Turkey will further help to reassure the "Balkan

to give them an incentive to deepen diplomatic ties. This is already happening, regardless. In response to EU intransigence, the Prime Ministers of Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania have just signed a declaration, creating a co-operation agreement modelled on the EU's Schengen Agreement, providing for the free travel of people, goods, capital, and services between their three connected countries. The other Balkan states have been invited to join, and the intention is to create a joint market of 18 million people. This "mini-Schengen" should become operational in 2021.

This initiative has not been pushed by Brussels, but this is exactly the kind of arrangement the EU could promote, for example, by requiring progress on it as a precondition for membership. That would also reassure suspicions among North Macedonian business federations, that the initiative serves to drive the Western Balkans away from the West.

Perhaps some of these suggestions can be questioned, such as the idea to only let Serbia enter the EU once Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina comply with the conditions, as this may curb Serbia's motivation to join. The lesson from the previous rounds of EU enlargement is that the prospect of EU membership can truly make a difference in improving the rule of law in candidate countries. When the big EU funds start to flow, the EU's leverage seems to become much weaker.

There is nothing wrong with France and other countries vetoing accession talks if they believe that the concerned countries do not yet comply with the requirements. What is problematic is making all kinds of false promises without having a plan B ready in order to keep close diplomatic ties with Europe's weak underbelly. ■

1951

Six countries, comprising of France, West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and Luxembourg, sign the Treaty of Paris, creating the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

1957

The European Economic Community (EEC) is created by the Treaty of Rome, signed by the same six nations who had convened to sign the Treaty of Paris. It proposes the creation of a customs union, and a single market for goods, labour, services, and capital across member states.

1960

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is established by the signatories to the Stockholm Convention, signed by Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, and Portugal and established as a competitor to the EEC.

1973

Denmark, the United Kingdom, and Ireland join the EEC.

1981

Greece joins the EEC

1986

After applying for membership in 1977, Spain and Portugal finally become members of the EEC.

1987

Turkey makes a formal application to join the EEC. Turkey eventually sign a customs union agreement with the European Union in 1995.

1992

Under the third commission of Jacques Delors, the Maastricht Treaty is signed. This creates the European Union out of the old EEC and expands its remit to include the creation of a monetary union, a common foreign and security policy, and cooperation in justice and home affairs.

1995

Sweden, Finland, and Austria join the EU

2004

Former members of the communist eastern bloc during the Cold War – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary – all gain accession to the EU, alongside Cyprus.

2007

Romanian and Bulgarian membership of the European Union inaugurates the "fifth enlargement" undertaken by the EU. In this same year, Slovenia adopts the Euro.

2008

Malta, Cyprus, and Slovakia all join the Euro.

2013

Croatia joins the EU, becoming its most recent member.

2016

The United Kingdom votes to leave the EU.

2019

President Emmanuel Macron of France vetoes the opening of the EU's accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia.



LEADER COLUMN

Bottleneck in BRUSSELS

It was not meant to be like this. During the months leading up to the installation of a new EU Commission there was a climate of expectation – even of excitement – that the European Union was about to experience a radical transformation. The more dramatic elements derived from President Emmanuel Macron's declared ambition to carry forward a fast-moving programme of integration. To the majority of EU members that was not a development to be welcomed, but it at least augured a period of stimulating political initiatives and lively debate.

Yet already, before the new Commission has had time to take hold of the levers of power, those expectations have died. It is not the political impasse blocking the integrationist project that is to be regretted, but the withering of any realistic prospects of moderate and much-needed reform. When the new Commission president Ursula von der Leyen was narrowly elected there was widespread scepticism about her competence, based on her unimpressive tenure of Germany's defence portfolio. Now, with 100 days having passed since her election, the President is daily confirming those doubts.

She has been mired in crisis from the start. Even before the inauguration of the new College of Commissioners, three commissioners-designate have been rejected by the European Parliament – candidates from Hungary, Romania and, most importantly, France. The anger of President Macron is understandable: it was he who put forward Mrs von der Leyen's name and he insists she had committed to persuading the Parliament to support his commissioner-designate. Yet the recriminations over this issue unconsciously testify to the undemocratic barter system that has been endemic to the running of the EU.

In terms of present reality, this failure to deliver a quid pro quo exposes Ursula von der Leyen's inability – or even unwillingness – to rein in not only a rebellious European Parliament but even her own EPP group within that institution. The EPP is in revanchist mood, determined to punish the European Council's sidelining of the *Spitzenkandidat* process which, if followed, would have seen EPP chairman Manfred Weber installed as Commission President.

One theory, designed to give Ursula von der Leyen the benefit of the doubt, suggests she was deliberately giving the institution with the theoretically strongest democratic mandate an opportunity to express its standpoint. But the widespread opinion is that she simply lacks gravitas, power and determination, as well as political experience. She also clearly lacks a body of support within the Parliament. Sceptics may legitimately ask whether her appointment is another example of Angela Merkel's increasingly inept intervention in EU affairs.

In theory, the Commission enjoys a double legitimacy, being nominated by the European Council and approved by the European Parliament. Since Ursula von der Leyen has managed to alienate both, her lack of leadership nous has turned that double legitimacy into a double liability. Apart from its potential to disrupt EU administration at a time of crisis, the Parliament's flexing of its muscles is not an unwelcome development. Although it dates back to 1952 as a nominated chamber and to 1979 as a directly elected assembly, it remains unique among world parliaments in lacking the power to initiate legislation. What credibility can attach to a 21st-century parliament with fewer powers than the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire?

Brexit, now looming ever larger, has been the worst failure of the sclerotic Brussels mindset. There has been no genuine negotiation, merely a set of red lines designed to punish a “deserter”. True negotiation produces a win-win outcome for both sides. The EU has failed to reach internal consensus and has settled for a punitive intransigence and playing a pointless blame game. Angela Merkel's recent warnings about the threat to Germany of a powerful post-Brexit UK as economic competitor betray the crude protectionism underlying her stance.

The incoming Commission now looks even weaker than the one that mishandled Brexit. How will Ursula von der Leyen's Commission cope with Britain's departure, possible complications arising therefrom and intractable EU challenges such as the rewriting of the immigration rulebook and Eastern European disaffection? Already, the momentum of the new Commission has evaporated even before the installation of the commissioners. It feels more like an end than a beginning. ■

ENVIRONMENTALISM IS THE FUTURE OF CONSERVATIVE POLITICS

Environmentalism has been dominated by the political left for decades – conservatives across Europe are rewriting the script

by *Toby Guise*

In the midst of the Extinction Rebellion protests which paralysed London last month, a strange thing happened. The protestors sighted a Tory MP and government minister, and waylaid him with the gift of a young oak tree. “They were totally civilised, totally polite, and we had a proper discussion,” said the MP in a later interview. This was in spite of him being “someone you might expect the protestors to protest against” – namely a conservative, a committed Brexiteer, and a close ally of the current Prime Minister.

Zac Goldsmith – the parliamentary in question – is perhaps the most prominent British example of a new breed of conservative environmentalists. These “blue-greens” have been steadily re-writing a fifty-year old narrative that the environment is the exclusive remit of the centre-left. This has meant undoing the association between environmental policy and top-down, centralised solutions – and promoting market-oriented entrepreneurial policies in their place.

Fortunately, conservatives have a long history of policy achievements – and philosophical grounding – on which to draw: Disraeli's Public Health Act of 1865; Anthony Eden's Clean Air Act of 1955; and Mrs Thatcher's championing of the Montreal Protocol.

Indeed, during the same period as the last two events, the Socialist governments of the Eastern Bloc and China were causing untold environmental damage. It was the Soviet Union where they “left the windows open in winter”, not in the West. If this seems an extreme

example, it is one warranted in response to the militant wing again ascending the ranks of Left-wing parties in Europe.

In intellectual terms, much of the ground of conservative environmentalism has been marked out by British philosopher, Sir Roger Scruton. “There is no political cause more amenable to the conservative vision than the environment,” he has written. “It touches on three foundational ideas of our movement: trans-generational loyalty, the priority of the local, and the search for home.”

“

First, conservatism is by nature a negative philosophy – it is more easily defined by what it isn't than what it is; and by seeking the avoidance of mistakes by government rather than in the pursuit of interventions.

A keystone of this approach is the idea of *oikophilia* – love of home – from which environmental stewardship ultimately flows. Like John Ruskin before him, Scruton represents a brand of conservatism that searches deeply within the soul for its connections to landscape and culture – the very same connections which large swathes of Extinction Rebellion are, in their inchoate way, also trying to establish.

Rather than sweeping aside the existing tools of society – the common law and the free market – Scruton finds in them the means for society to regulate itself and its relationship with the environment. The first successful environmental lawsuit in the UK – *Rylands vs Fletcher* of 1865 – turned on the common-law principle that the one

whose activity caused environmental damage should pay the costs.

This ruling in turn reflects Adam Smith's own view of the free market as one in which each individual gains the benefit and pays the cost of his activity. All this would surely have Extinction Rebellion nodding along, not least when they are camped outside Britain's Royal Courts of Justice, advocating precisely this type of “lawfare” on behalf of the environment.

This reappraisal of the free market's relationship with both society and the environment also fits into a much broader current of self-examination within conservatism. In truth, conservatism is going through something of an identity crisis at present. I would argue this is centred on the erosion of its marriage of convenience to liberalism. In the US, this union emerged after the Second World

War under the banner of Fusionism, by which thinkers like William F. Buckley hewed conservatism to economic liberalisation. Such thinking emerged with a bang on European shores under the guise of Thatcherism. Underpinning both was the belief that individual autonomy alone would be a sufficient guarantor of culture; which is to say that conservatives were confident enough in their cultural values to assume these would survive any amount of liberalisation.

Looking around, it seems they were wrong. It transpires that voters now want more from government than just a liberal vanishing point: they want something to believe in. The Left has already decisively responded to this shift, jettisoning its own liberal marriage of convenience in favour of figures such as Jeremy Corbyn, Thomas



Piketty, and Bernie Sanders.

Although conservatism is taking steps in the same direction, these are more tentative – for two reasons.

First, conservatism is by nature a negative philosophy – it is more easily defined by what it isn't than what it is; and by seeking the avoidance of mistakes by government rather than in the pursuit of interventions. Second, its relationships with the specific yet intangible aspects of national culture can appear anachronistic in an era of multiculturalism. Key conservative writers such as Burke and de Tocqueville – with their respective reliance on “little platoons” and cultural mores – were writing when the nation state could truly be said to represent a nation.

This is not to say that translating conservative values onto the present is impossible: principles such as privacy, family, private property, freedom of conscience, and self-realisation through work all have universal appeal. But it is a work in progress, mired in cultural conflict and forever prey to capture by populists who would like to instil their own, nationalist set of answers.

Hence conservatives need a more immediate pitch, which makes an appeal to something much broader than cultural considerations: why not the environment?

Although Greta Thunberg's penchant for Antifa t-shirts – and the wider Extinction Rebellion movement's strong anti-capitalist current – may provide little initial solace to conservatives, there are also deeper currents at work. On a tactical level, the evidence of the Austrian election is that the up-tick in Green Party support is coming at the expense of

the very centre-Left parties which believed they had captured the green vote. This implies that the environment is being re-established as a political issue in its own right, rather than simply a branch of the Left. This subtle correction to the political narrative may provide conservatives with more than just a tactical dividend (by splitting the opposition vote). It may also create the opening for environmentally-motivated voters to hear the message being offered by Goldsmith-Scruton type conservative environmentalists.

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Left-environmentalism has become synonymous with a much wider transnational associations of social justice, intersectionality, and global redistribution.

Left-environmentalism has become synonymous with a much wider transnational associations of social justice, intersectionality, and global redistribution. But these values are now facing a backlash of their own; not least due to the growing sense of Malthusian misanthropy underpinning the movement. This in turn provides the opening for conservative environmentalism to respond with its own set of values centred on personal responsibility, humanism, and our two most ineffable relationships: those with the continuum of generations and our national landscapes.

For this to happen, conservatives need to shake off their acceptance of the Left's connection of environmentalism and socialism – the idea that “big problems require big solutions”. This has led some conservatives to see

environmentalism as an expedient for left-wingers to do what they've always wanted: collectivise and build supranational institutions. From a discomfort with the solutions, conservatives have too often rejected the underlying issues.

But the solutions which are delivering the best results around the world often turn on precisely the opposite set of political values to those advocated by the Left. The past twenty years has seen an intellectual ferment in the area of environmental markets and natural capital, which rest on aligning environmental outcomes with individual responsibility.

Let me provide an example: when fish stocks in certain areas of the US became depleted, they were turned over to a “catch-share” system. This means each fisherman owns a share in the fishery, the long-term value of which would fluctuate in line with its overall health. With such an incentive in place, control of quotas was handed over to the beneficiaries themselves. Needless to say, stocks soon rebounded: natural capitalism in action.

Similarly, large corporates – the arch villains of Left-environmentalism – have themselves provided some of the greatest impetus towards greening supply chains. Their motivations are twofold: first, to drive more stable long-term returns by reducing exposure to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG); and, second, to guard their brand reputations against increasingly aware and motivated consumers. The drive for companies to internalise their environmental costs and – where

possible – move to circular resource use would be music to Adam Smith's ears.

The same process is taking place across the financial supply chains of the investment industry, driven by the realisation that the risks of short-termism outweigh the benefits. Meanwhile it is private entrepreneurs and investors who are driving forwards the technological solutions to lowering resource-use in both energy-generation and industry. When Britain's Jeremy Corbyn responded to Extinction Rebellion by promising the creation of huge, government-controlled wind farms, economists came back with a simple answer: you don't need to.

Marrying the gains which have

already achieved to a positive, conservative-conservationism – one which celebrates rather than refutes the role of the nation state in protecting our natural patrimony – offers a direct challenge to transnational left-environmentalism. Yet it is a challenge that should resonate deeply with people seeking a deeper connection to both their natural heritage and the continuum of past and future generations. Such a pitch will not immediately dissolve Marxist environmentalism or empty parliament square of Extinction Rebellion. But it will go some way towards restoring a more positive emotional core to the environmental movement – all while providing a new conservatism with a much needed bedrock of meaning. ■

The US and Europe must act in the WESTERN BALKANS

There is a shared diplomatic interest in ensuring peace and stability in the region. Washington and Brussels should get down to work

by **Luke Coffey & Dan Kochis**

Since the 1990s, the US has sacrificed significant blood and treasure to ensure that the Balkans remain peaceful and stable - and therefore should have a say in any major development in the region. This is why the appointment of US Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell to serve as US Special Envoy for peace talks between Kosovo and Serbia is an important move. Ambassador Grenell must be mindful of the fact that nothing in the Balkans is easy, tinkering with borders is a bad idea, working with European countries in the region increases the likelihood of success, and that the US should be patient with Kosovo and remain conscious that Serbia is Russia's foothold in the Balkans.

Kosovo's Road to Independence

Kosovo is a small country in the western Balkans with a history rooted in complex relations between ethnic and religious groups. Kosovo is predominantly secular Sunni-Muslim and has a majority ethnically Albanian population. Kosovo also has high youth unemployment. As a result of war in the late 1990s, a NATO peacekeeping force, called Kosovo Force (KFOR), maintains 4,000 troops there mainly from European countries.

Following the sectarian wars of the 1990s, Kosovo was placed under United Nations administration in June 1999. On February 17, 2008, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia and has been recognised by 114 countries, including the United States and all of its neighbours in the Balkans except Serbia, as an independent, sovereign nation.

Relations with neighbours have been rocky recently. This is especially true regarding Serbia. In early November 2018, Kosovo imposed a 10 per cent tariff on products made in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia (the former also not recognising Kosovo's independence). On November 20, 2018, Kosovo's third bid to join Interpol failed to reach the two-thirds vote required for membership. Following the vote, the government in Pristina issued a statement blaming Serbia for the failed bid saying, "Serbia's wild campaign shows once again its stand against Kosovo and against the idea of normalising ties." Three days later, Kosovo raised tariffs on products from Serbia from 10 per cent to 100 per cent.

EU-facilitated dialogue, which since 2011 has sought to normalise relations between Kosovo and Serbia (initially successful in helping secure a series of technical agreements), has in recent years stalled, with the tariff disagreement contributing to the latest impasse.

Russia's Foothold
Serbia has long served as Russia's foothold in the Balkans. Serbia is a fellow religiously Orthodox nation with which Russia enjoys a close economic, political, and military relationship. Serbia and Russia have an agreement allowing Russian soldiers to be based at Niš airport in Serbia. The two countries signed a 15-year military cooperation agreement in 2013 that includes sharing of intelligence, officer exchanges, and joint military exercises.

In August 2018, Serbia took ownership of the first two of six MiG-29 fighters that Russia delivered to Serbia. While ostensibly free, Serbia is spending \$213 million to have them overhauled by Russia. Additionally, Russia plans to supply Serbia with 30 T-72 tanks, and 30 armoured patrol vehicles, the first third of which arrived at Niš airport in July.

The so-called Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Centre at Niš - widely believed to be a Russian spy base - is only 90 km from NATO's KFOR mission based in Pristina. Russia has relied on cultural ties to Serbia to further increase its role in the nation, positioning itself as the defender of Orthodoxy and investing funds in refurbishing Orthodox churches. Additionally, Russia has established more than 100 pro-Russian non-governmental organisations and media outlets in Serbia.

Serbia and Russia have signed a strategic partnership agreement focused on economic issues. Russia's inward investment is focused on the transport and energy sectors. Except for those in the Commonwealth of Independent States, Serbia is the only country in Europe that has a free trade deal with Russia. In January, Serbia and Russia signed 26 agreements relating to energy, railway construction, and strategic education cooperation.

In a January 2019 state visit to Serbia, Vladimir Putin stated a desire for a free trade agreement between Serbia and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union to be signed by the end of the year. That free trade agreement was signed on the 25th of October. Additionally, Russia has held out the possibility of \$1.4 billion in infrastructure aid to Serbia, aimed at building the Turk Stream pipeline and increasing Russia's energy leverage.

Despite its close ties with Russia, Serbia also maintains contacts with the West. It trades far more with Germany and Italy than with Russia. Serbia also regularly conducts more military exercises without Russia than with Russia. Like Russia, Serbia is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program. The US and Europe should be realistic and approach Serbia as it is, a country playing its relations with China, Russia, and the West off one another. That does not mean that we should stop seeking meaningful engagement. Rather, we should recognise that Serbia is unlikely



Richard Grenell

to join Western structures anytime soon, and that holding out hope for a massive change in the nation's trajectory is naïve.

Nothing Is Easy in the Balkans

As Ambassador Grenell begins his work he should remember and be guided by these five principles:

First, he needs to work with Europe, not against it to encourage Kosovo and Serbia to normalise relations. Stability in the Balkans is a major area of policy alignment Washington shares with Brussels. The US needs to stay engaged and work with European allies, particularly the UK and Germany, to advance a transatlantic security agenda. This includes supporting the region's transatlantic aspirations and continued US involvement in KFOR.

Second, Ambassador Grenell must understand that nothing is easy in the Balkans and be mindful of America's past commitment to the region. Both Belgrade and Pristina will push simplistic and seemingly easy proposals as a way to normalise relations. The US has invested heavily in the Balkans since the end of the Cold War. US soldiers have served in the Balkans, and the US has spent billions of dollars in aid there - all in the hope of creating a secure and prosperous region that will someday be part of the transatlantic community.

Third, Ambassador Grenell should be a Special Envoy, not a cartographer. Due to the disposition of minority groups, some suggest that a land swap between Kosovo and Serbia could speed up the normalisation process. Swapping land and redrawing borders based on ethnic and sectarian lines would mark a dangerous precedent and would open up a Pandora's Box in the region. Supporting an initiative allowing Serbia and Kosovo to swap thousands of acres of land is not worth the instability it could cause throughout the rest of Europe. The US should make it clear that it does not support any land swap.

Fourth, he needs to be patient with Kosovo's progress. This applies to Europe as well. Kosovo is a poor country. The US and Europe need to develop a strategy based on an understanding that the improvements in good governance and economic growth will be a process and not an event. The strategy should take account of Kosovo's long-term transatlantic aspirations, such as NATO membership; and engage the nation's youth in building a robust civil society and a prosperous economy.

Finally, he needs to keep his eyes open when dealing with Serbia. Some Serbian politicians talk a good game about wanting to join the transatlantic community, while continuing to court the Kremlin. Serbia is still a source of instability. This is especially true in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Belgrade's support for separatism in the Republika Srpska. That does not mean the US should stop seeking meaningful engagement with Serbia, but that any engagement should be pragmatic and realistic.

The appointment of Ambassador Grenell as Special Envoy denotes the Trump Administration's intent to stay actively engaged in negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia at a time when many are arguing Washington is turning away from Europe. Ambassador Grenell must work with Europe to encourage the nations of the Western Balkans to put aside historical, cultural, or religious complaints and work constructively to increase trade relations, settle border disputes, and forego inflammatory rhetoric for the sake of stability.

Stability in the Western Balkans is one area that most policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic can agree on. Now it is time to act. ■

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Changing of Lagarde and big risks at the ECB

The new head of the European Central Bank inherits a mess from Mario Draghi. Can she find a way through with the help of her friend the German Chancellor?



by **Maggie Pagano**

At first glance, Europe's two most powerful women could not be more different. Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, makes a point of dressing down her power, covering her tubby figure with a uniform of bright suit jackets and no-nonsense black trousers. Merkel grew up under communist rule in East Germany, the daughter of a pastor, studied physics and then quantum chemistry before going into politics just as the Berlin Wall came tumbling down.

By contrast, Christine Lagarde, the new president of the European Central Bank, known in her native France as *L'Americaine*, dresses up to her role. Perennially tanned and tall, she sashays across the international stage in impeccable Chanel suits, draped with flowing silk scarves and fabulous drop earrings.

After winning a scholarship to the US, she worked as an intern on Capitol Hill, trained as a lawyer and went on to head up one of America's biggest law firms. She served as France's first female finance minister, and headed up the IMF. Married twice, she lives with her third partner.

As they say, *vive la difference*. Yet curious as it may seem, the two are said to be good friends. They often text and give each other presents at Christmas. One year, Lagarde famously gave Merkel a trinket from Hermès while

she received a Berlin Philharmonic recording of Beethoven from Merkel, a lover of classical music.

As Lagarde once remarked to an interviewer, they are often the only two women of power in the room: "So there's a sense of recognition, complicity, solidarity."

They may be friends but can their amity survive their political differences now that Lagarde takes on what many Germans see as Mario Draghi's reckless monetary expansion?

Their approach looks miles apart. While running the IMF, Lagarde has been a vocal critic of eurozone countries such as Germany for not doing enough to help with pro-growth policies.

For her part, Merkel has always taken the high road. Like many of her fellow Germans, she maintains that Europe's more troubled countries have themselves to blame, and must get through their problems with another dose of austerity.

Critics see Draghi's eight year reign at the ECB as a disaster. His legacy is of massive financial imbalances between eurozone members and a tanking euro. Last month's eurozone

inflation rate was just 0.8pc, way below the ECB's 2% target.

Indeed, the policy of slashing interest rates into negative territory and his quantitative easing programme is seen to be favouring southern Europe rather than either the Germans or the other 19 eurozone countries.

Once known as Super Mario for his policy of doing everything to support the euro, the German press has taken

low. Coupled with rock bottom lower interest rates and a gloomy outlook, German companies are also holding back on investing.

The ECB is equally unhappy. Divisions within the central bank go back years, but have come to the fore again following Draghi's latest interest rate cut and bond buying which starts again next month. There is also the question of the ECB's more private intra-eurozone transfers known as "Target 2". Germany is owed about €1,000bn under this scheme.

Unsurprisingly, at the last ECB's Governing Council, seven of the 25 members were against Draghi's swan song. German's feel they should have more say as they have so much skin in the game - it is the ECB's biggest shareholder with nearly 20% of its capital.

Board director, Sabine Lautenschläger, has already resigned in protest of the ECB's loose monetary policy, the third to do so this decade. Six former Bundesbank bankers recently attacked his policy in an open letter. And the euro, which Draghi once promised to do all he could to protect? The currency is down 20%

“Lagarde has repeatedly said if women had been running the show, the 2008 financial crash may never have happened. She famously noted: “There should never be too much testosterone in one room. In gender-dominated environments, men have a tendency to... show how hairy chested they are.”

presenting him as Count Draghila because rock bottom interest rates are gobbling up their savings.

Always conservative creatures when it comes to saving, Germans prefer to put money in the bank or insurance policies. Savings are now at a record high but rates at a record

against the dollar.

Lagarde could not be joining the ECB at a more demanding moment. She inherits a ghastly mess from Draghi to which there is no obvious immediate solution other than an almighty bust-up between Germany and the ECB.

Yet the approach of these two women may not be as wide apart as they first seem. What's interesting about Lagarde is that, for all her criticism of eurozone countries such as Germany, she carried a big stick in her IMF dealings, noticeably with her treatment of Greece during the financial crisis.

Maybe her taking a tough line could help Merkel soften Germany's approach, to smooth the path to a middle way. Although Merkel is stepping down, she doesn't leave until 2021 and will not want to wreck her carefully crafted public image.

Lagarde has repeatedly said if women had been running the show, the 2008 financial crash may never have happened. She famously noted: "There should never be too much testosterone in one room. In gender-dominated environments, men have a tendency to... show how hairy chested they are."

It was always a dangerous boast. The onus now is on Lagarde to show that her charm can beat chest-thumping. ■

A Corbyn victory would be a historic catastrophe for Britain and Europe

Incredibly, Britain's main opposition party in next month's election is led by far-left extremists who were on the wrong side in the Cold War



by **Iain Martin**

Listening to some of the Western liberal commentary published ahead of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 9th 1989) you would be forgiven for thinking that this great liberation was a historic catastrophe. One writer in the Financial Times, based in London, mused recently in a long feature on how the high hopes of 1989 had been a let-down.

Really? Since Communism was vanquished, and Eastern Europe freed from far-left tyranny, growth has rocketed and the prospects of the citizenry have dramatically improved. Poland's GDP per capita has increased by close to 150% since the early 1990s. As Marcin Piatkowski of the World Bank makes clear in his recent book - Europe's Growth Champion, Insights from the Economic Rise of Poland (Oxford University Press 2018) - economic freedom and social mobility has meant that a country that has little in the way of

natural resources, but an abundance of ingenious human capital, is well on its way to catch up with the West and power ahead.

Problems abound across Eastern Europe, of course, as they do in Western Europe. But compared to where Eastern Europe sat in 1989, there has been a revolution in expectations and an exciting improvement in life chances. This achievement stands as one of the greatest developments in the history of Europe in more than a century. Markets work.

Ironically, just as the anniversary comes round, in Britain the Labour Party goes into this year's emergency general election led by someone who definitely wanted the other side - the Soviet Union, the Communists - to win in 1989. Several of those closest to Jeremy Corbyn have written extensively on what they see as the tragedy of Russia's defeat in the Cold War. Corbyn's politics are rooted in a hatred of

the West and the market economy.

While Corbyn's primary interest is foreign policy - and what he terms the evils of Western policy - his shadow Chancellor John McDonnell is a self-avowed Marxist whose central interest is in economics and smashing the market system. In recent years he has done a clever job of attempting to rebrand himself, touring boardrooms and even convincing a few more gullible British capitalists who have not read their history that a far left government would somehow not be as bad as it has been everywhere in human history.

Anyone who has read Marx's disciple Lenin knows that the aim is to ride to power having co-opted a once mainstream party. Then the resulting emergency can be exploited to make what are termed "Lenin's leaps."

If Corbyn and McDonnell get into power they will - in classic far-left

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In the election on December 12th Corbyn is up against Boris Johnson. The Conservative leader is a formidable campaigner who usually wins. But if Johnson fails, then a leading market economy and free society will end up with a catastrophic far left government despite all the lessons of history showing where it leads. That - and not just Brexit - is what is at stake in Britain's most important election since the 1980s.

style - do as much as they can get away with and Britons will have to hope their institutions are strong enough to resist the madness.

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if Johnson fails, then a leading market economy and free society will end up with a catastrophic far left government despite all the lessons of history showing where it leads. That - and not just Brexit - is what is at stake in Britain's most important election since the 1980s. ■



Joseph de Maistre

SCOURGE OF THE PSEUDO-ENLIGHTENMENT

by Gerald Warner

In the second of a series of essays on conservative philosophers, Gerald Warner reflects on the contribution of Joseph de Maistre, critic of apologists for the French Revolution

From out of the chaos of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars there arose a voice – strong, denunciatory, logical and implacable – which aggressively proclaimed the truth that others had evaded and forced the discredited rump of 18th-century liberalism to confront its responsibility for the catastrophe. That voice belonged to Joseph de Maistre.

Maistre is the colossus of 19th-century conservatism. He denounced the nakedness of the emperors of the Pseudo-Enlightenment – Rousseau and Voltaire, Holbach and Helvétius, Condillac and Condorcet – whose subjective speculations had eroded a civilisation established over a millennium and a half and precipitated the worst bloodbath so far experienced in European history.

Joseph, Comte de Maistre was born on 1 April, 1753 at Chambéry in Savoy. Though French by culture and recognised as a great stylist in the French language, he was a subject of the King of Piedmont-Sardinia and only visited Paris once, late in life. Belonging to a family of Savoyard noblesse de robe, he was educated by the Jesuits, studied law at the University of Turin, graduated in 1774 and became a Senator in the court of which his father was president in 1787.

Nothing in Maistre's early life suggested the future Counter-Enlightenment crusader. He even joined a Freemasonic lodge, despite the Church's condemnation of Masonry, in 1774 and remained a member until 1790. He initially approved of the movements that led to the French Revolution. But from 9 July, 1789 when the three-chamber Estates General merged into the unicameral National Constituent Assembly, a usurpation of power which he recognised as amounting to a revolution, Maistre became an opponent.

In 1792 the French revolutionary army invaded Savoy and in 1793 Maistre departed to Switzerland. At Lausanne he began his career as a counter-revolutionary writer by publishing *Letters of a Savoyard Royalist*. Eventually his peregrinations took him in 1800 to the displaced Sardinian court at Cagliari where the king, Charles-Emmanuel IV, received him cordially; but since the publication of *Considerations on France* in 1797 Maistre had become a focus of controversy over his counter-revolutionary writing and the Sardinian court found his presence uncomfortable.

The solution, in 1802, was to despatch him as the king's diplomatic representative to the court of Tsar Alexander I at St Petersburg. There Maistre remained for fifteen years, the most intellectually productive period of his life. He was a social success in

St Petersburg, and frequently advised Alexander I on policy matters. In 1817 the mercurial Alexander requested his recall, so that his final four years saw him reunited with his family from whom the revolutionary turmoil had separated him for much of his days. He died in Turin on 26 February, 1821.

Maistre's principal works of philosophy and politics were: *Considerations on France* (1797); *Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions* (1814); *On the Pope* (1819); *The Saint Petersburg Dialogues* (1821); *On the Sovereignty of the People* (1795, published 1870).

Since the last two were published posthumously, Maistre's reputation during his lifetime derived from his 1797 work on the French Revolution – his equivalent *oeuvre* to Burke's *Reflections* – his study of political constitutions and his celebrated book on the Papacy, the Ultramontane thesis that began the process that culminated in the definition of Papal Infallibility by the First Vatican Council in 1870.

Maistre's impact on the European public was phenomenal. The combination of his aggressive approach – trampling down Enlightenment totems as ruthlessly as the *philosophes* had ravaged the traditional order – deploying biting sarcasm, dramatic paradoxes and a prose style that elevated him to the front rank of French literary achievement, stunned and appalled the Revolution's apologists. The Counter-Enlightenment had found its anti-Voltaire, as eloquent, caustic and polemical as the original.

Maistre implacably assigned the responsibility for the deaths of five million people in the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars to the Enlightenment dilettantes. Free thinking, rampant individualism, disguised but militant atheism, disseminating contempt for all legitimate authority and beliefs had inevitably resulted in the collapse of the social fabric. To Rousseau's noble savage he

France from its allegiance to traditional society, personified by the King and the Church. That had caused the French Revolution. Yet the Revolution had been providential: it had ruthlessly punished a society that had failed to repudiate the subversive claims of the *philosophes*.

A return to traditional order was his prescription for stability. Excessive individualism was the enemy of order; authority its guarantor. Enlightenment theories of contract or of natural rights belied the true nature of society, which was not an artificial construct but an instinctive community based on precepts handed down from the past. It followed that the most unnatural political activity was the manufacture of written constitutions, such as had occurred in France six times between 1791 and 1804.

Maistre wrote: "One of the gravest errors of a century which embraced them all was to believe that a political constitution could be written and created a priori, whereas reason and experience agree that a constitution is a divine work and that it is precisely the most fundamental and essentially constitutional elements in a nation's laws that cannot be written."

In this Maistre concurred with Burke. He still approved of traditional representative institutions such as had existed prior to 1789, but not revolutionary assemblies pretending to embody the general will.

Maistre saw sovereignty as divine in origin: "Since God has not thought it appropriate to use supernatural agents in the establishment of states, it is certain that all developments have come about through human agencies. But saying that sovereignty does not derive from God because He has made use of men to establish it is like saying He is not the creator of man because we all have a father and a mother."

Yet he also acknowledged that, following traditional precepts of society, the people could be the voice of

God. The only release from the duty of obedience to an oppressive sovereign lay in appeal to the Pope. This was a return to mediaeval juridical concepts. "Infallibility in the spiritual order and sovereignty in the temporal order are two completely synonymous words," wrote Maistre.

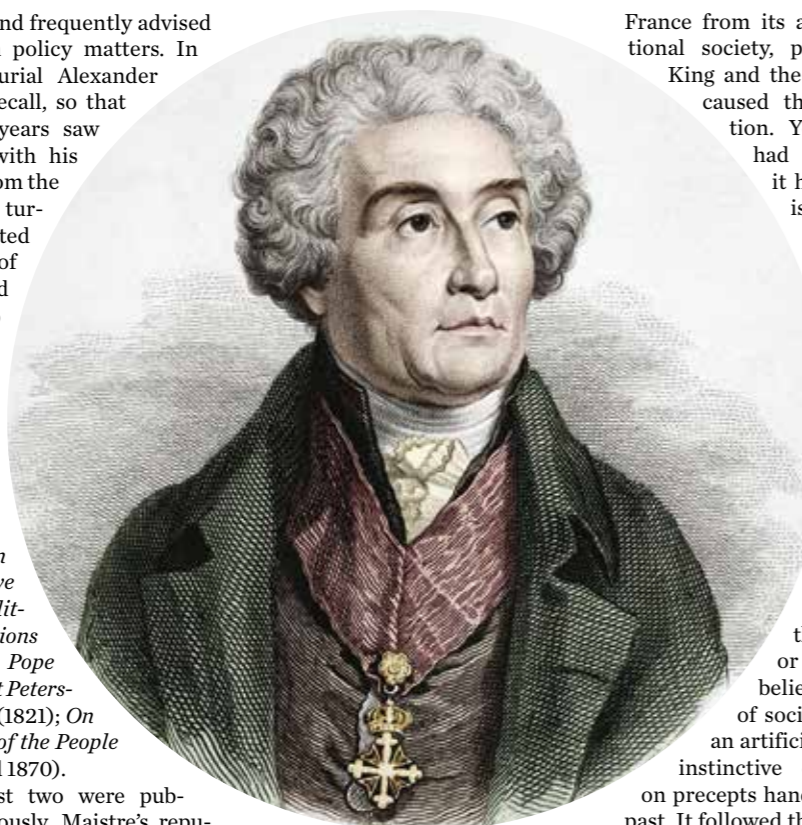
Despite Maistre's image as the great upholder of Catholicism, there are startling lacunae in his religious thought. In his drive to discredit the *philosophes*, instead of simply denouncing their arrogance in redesigning human existence out of their own undisciplined imaginations and calling that process "reason", Maistre reacted by demonising reason itself and exalting irrationality. In that he was at odds with Aquinas who had insisted upon the compatibility of faith and reason.

Maistre was writing before the revival of Thomism and his theological inspiration came from an early Church Father, Origen. It is also notable that Maistre's attack on the *philosophes*' "natural rights" theories are not counterbalanced by a vindication of the Natural Law, seldom invoked by Maistre. There is also in parts of Maistre's *oeuvre* a whiff of the esoteric that inevitably recalls his early Masonic sympathies.

The most unjust attack on Maistre was Isaiah Berlin's characterisation of him as a proto-fascist. That was absurd: Maistre looked back, not to a Utopian future; his ideal was Louis XIV, not Adolf Hitler. The real prototype of fascism – extravagant nationalism married to bourgeois pseudo-socialism – was Maistre's chief enemy French Jacobinism, the direct ancestor of Nazism.

The Jacobin Terrorists asked the scientific community of Paris to advise whether large numbers of people could be killed faster by herding them inside mines and pumping in poison gas; at Ponts-de-Cé, near Angers, a tannery processed human skin from executed Vendean royalists. The French state has stubbornly resisted repeated calls to acknowledge the genocide committed in the Vendée, out of embarrassment over the compromising origins of the Republic.

Joseph de Maistre was more successful in his attacks on progressives than in creating a future programme for conservatives. But he reassured conservatives they owned the moral high ground, demolished all radical theories, commended the cherishing of tradition and refused to base a conservative programme on liberal premises (the fatal weakness of 20th and 21st-century conservatism). He opened the great post-French Revolution ideological debate on behalf of conservatism and restored its intellectual confidence. ■



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Photo: Stefano Bianchetti - Getty Images

opposed the reality of man, empirically observed, disposed to commit great evil.

The opening words of Maistre's *Considerations on France* encapsulate his philosophy: "We are all bound to the throne of the Supreme Being by a flexible chain which restrains without enslaving us." That statement encompasses divine authority, the restraints imposed by Christian doctrine and the gift of free will. It was within those parameters of traditional society that Maistre defined his social order.

In Maistre's analysis a century of scepticism and speculation based purely on "reason" had divorced

Serotonin, by Michel Houellebecq

HAS MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ GONE SOFT?

Michel Houellebecq's latest offering marks a major departure for the enfant terrible of French letters

by Alastair Benn

The novelist Michel Houellebecq has repeatedly claimed that he was at his happiest in life in his first literary incarnation as a little-known troubadour poet, appearing at literary festivals and winning the attention of a small circle of enthusiasts. In a 2005 interview with the magazine *Les Inrockuptibles* he said that he views his poetry as his most accomplished work to date. "Compared to a poet, no novelist has or can ever have a style," Houellebecq wrote in his exchange of letters with the philosopher Bernard Henri-Lévy published under the title *Public Enemies* in 2008 – he can only work with "certain harmonies".

If Houellebecq's novels can be said to have a "style", then the closest approximation might be to Balzac's demotic *anti-style* (he himself cites Balzac as a key influence), in which a weird commingling of folk tales, melodrama and proto-Gothic sensibility is married to a keen social realism to build up a rich picture of the whole sweep of 19th century experience.

Houellebecq's mostly blunt, affectless prose veers between abstruse sociological speculation, pornographic episodes, and compelling reflections on both high and low culture. Moments of lyricism are fleeting.

Houellebecq's plots are schematically identical (depressed middle-aged man slowly withdraws from the world around him until he finds himself without friends, family or loved ones THE END). In his latest novel, a depressed male protagonist, Florent-Claude Labrouste ("I hate my first name," he admits) leaves his girlfriend and his job in Paris and goes to stay in Normandy with an old friend from university, now a farmer.

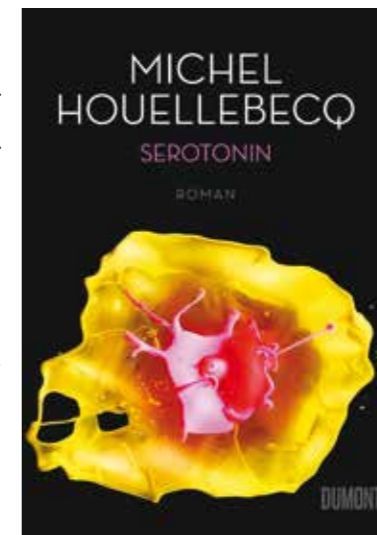
He finds that he has gone to seed, his business model shattered by cheap imports and new costs imposed by diktat from Brussels. The farmers launch a series of protests which end in complete failure. Labrouste then progressively withdraws from social life until he finds himself utterly alone, without friends, family... okay you get the picture.

Houellebecq's philosophical outlook is a curious synthesis of left, right, Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment ideas – at times, it's boilerplate Marxism (he wrote in his debut novel

Extension du domaine de la lutte that, "economic liberalism is an extension of the domain of the struggle, its extension to all ages and all classes of society"). He laments the atomisation of French society and the spread of social nihilism in terms familiar to the academic affection for declinist thinking – think how many books have been published in recent years in France with titles like *Illusions gauloises* or *Le suicide français*. He is sharply critical of the legacy of the *soixante-huitards* – a set of viewpoints he shares with New Right thinkers like Alain Finkielkraut.

Serotonin was marketed to the Anglophone world as Houellebecq's *Gillets Jaunes* novel. It isn't really anything of the sort (although I understand the temptation to further popularise the notion that Houellebecq is gifted with prophetic powers – his 2001 novel *Plateforme* culminates with a massive terror attack on a Thai beach remarkably similar to the Bali bombings. The imagery Houellebecq employs to illustrate the farmers' protests – wasted produce piled up in village squares, sheep left loose on town halls, and tractors wheeled onto motorways to block traffic – will be familiar to anyone who has followed French politics over the past thirty years.

His subject is really the whole development of globalisation, and although his novels take on a massive range of contemporary phenomena, the sex industry and terrorism (*Plateforme*), the rise in tandem of the far-right and Islamism (*Soumission*), genetics (*Les Particules Élémentaires* and *La Possibilité d'une île*) and the contemporary art world (*La carte et le territoire*), globalisation is a theme that is felt throughout – for Houellebecq, the worldwide rhythms of the market economy progressively flatten out the possibilities of life, the affective realm of desire, love and family ("I'd understood, even then, that society was a machine for destroying love," Florent tells himself).



“

Houellebecq's philosophical outlook is a curious synthesis of left, right, Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment ideas – at times, it's boilerplate Marxism (he wrote in his debut novel *Extension du domaine de la lutte* that, "economic liberalism is an extension of the domain of the struggle, its extension to all ages and all classes of society").

In their place, consumption, and its rituals, is elevated to a state of absolute sovereignty – all that is left for the impoverished inhabitants of the West is to watch cable TV, eat ready meals and wend our way up and down the bright aisles of gigantic supermarkets. Florent relieves his boredom ("The weekends were always torture") by subscribing to a multi-channel sports package: "I could [...] follow the French, English, German, Spanish and Italian national championships, which represented a considerable number of hours of entertainment," he says proudly.

On encountering a massive *hyper-marché* in Coutances, Florent finds himself "almost dizzy" at the thought of "the mobilised logistics, the vast container vessels crossing uncertain oceans". He concludes: "Order and beauty – that was the least one could say."

For Houellebecq, love is predicated on the possibility of alterity, an encounter with someone, or something inexpressibly different to oneself. In *Serotonin*, Houellebecq writes: "I don't think I'm mistaken comparing love to a kind of dream à deux... little games of connection and encounter." This, he continues, is the only way "for us to transform our earthly existence into an endurable moment – the only way [...] to tell the truth".

In an undifferentiated, hyper-globalised world, it has no value – in *Les Particulaires élémentaires* and *La Possibilité d'une île*, the logic of progress leads to certain innovations in genetic science that allow humans to pass to the next stage – a neo-human world of absolute serenity, in which our bodies all look the same, in which our matterless minds embody pure reason. In this way, humanity comes to a fork – to cling to some last burst of desire, defeated and full of anguish though it might be, or to accept

the inexorable logic of progress. In *Serotonin*, those grand utopian visions are substituted for an anti-depressant – "a small, white, scored oval tablet" – labelled Captorix. Florent notes: "It provides no form of happiness, or even of real relief; its action is of a different kind: by transforming life into a sequence of formalities it allows you to fool yourself."

For those who have never loved, it helps them pass their days in a state of ease. For Florent, however, he finds himself in a state of almost unbearable conflict. He has experienced love: "I could have made a woman happy. Well, two; I have said which ones." The first is Kate, "probably the most intelligent person I have ever met," and his first experience of love as "an endurable moment". He recalls: "We could have saved the world, and we would have saved the world in the blink of an eye, *in einem Augenblick*, but we didn't,

or I didn't, and love didn't triumph; I betrayed love." His life is transformed a second time by Camille: "I felt so calm, a kind of calm that I had never known before." But, of course, love fails, broken by time or by error – and for Florent curdles into a kind of white-hot, pure regret: "You plunge into the past, you begin to plunge into it and then it seems as if you're being engulfed by it, and nothing can put a limit on that engulfment." In *Serotonin*, the past destroys the present; as surely as the onward march of progress. Whereas *Les Particulaires élémentaires* concludes with the epitaph "This book is dedicated to mankind", *Serotonin* affords no resolution to the predicament. And that's what sets apart *Serotonin* from Houellebecq's novels to date. We can no longer be confident that humanity has the potential to evolve into a more advanced state.

We are stuck, like Florent, consumed by this almost unendurable pain – at once to dimly perceive the value of love and to live apart from it. This sense of loss, and Houellebecq's loss of personal conviction, seems to eat its way through the novel like a canker. The prose meanders aimlessly for several pages at a time. Several scenes seem to have been inserted into the text without any forethought, especially the episode featuring Florent's encounter with a paedophile. Jokes repeatedly fall flat. A long excursus in which Houellebecq muses on Proust's masturbation habits feels like an impoverished copy of the caustic anti-canonical attacks of his previous novels: "We are a long way from *Wuthering Heights* to say the least," as the protagonist of *Extension du domaine de la lutte* brilliantly puts it. At times, it doesn't even read like a particularly interesting or relevant critique of globalisation.

In *Serotonin*, all these typically Houellebecqian touches fall away – and the only portions of text that bear any resemblance to his "certain harmonies" are his reflections on love, and the death of love. They make this novel worth reading and re-reading for their astonishing luminosity and brutality. There are those who have "nothing to regret", Houellebecq writes: "I am not in that situation." ■

Far from the MADDING CROWD

Conservative thinker Douglas Murray's new book - a demolition of politically correct "woke" culture - is essential reading

by **Henry George**

Douglas Murray points to what rumbles beneath the surface of our culture, those things which we all know but cannot approach for fear of the consequences. Murray's last book, *The Strange Death of Europe*, was so successful because it said things many people privately believed to be true, or at least worth talking about, but either didn't know how to discuss or were afraid of doing so. His new book *The Madness of Crowds* is brilliant and essential reading, and serves as a guide for our times.

Murray's thesis is that our current fits of mass madness stem from our loss of the grand narratives that gave our societies a sense of purpose. He argues that Christianity died in the 19th century and we now live in its wreckage. What do you do when the story runs out? Murray argues that this has been compounded for younger generations by the financial instability following the 2008 crash and the spread of social media.

As Murray explains, this has led to an increasing investment by an increasing number of people in our societies in identity politics. This rests on an obliteration of complexity and nuance that ends up denying the messy and complicated nature of humanity itself. This brutal simplification of humanity underpins the concept of identity privilege, that which rests on being born with a certain skin colour, sex and sexual orientation or gender identity. This worldview is adhered to by more and more of today's Left. Groups are ranked on a scale of oppression and privilege using the concept of intersectionality, no

matter the reality of their lives. Those held to enjoy undue amounts of privilege (often but not always straight, white men) are therefore fair game, and all weapons can be used against them to knock them off their privileged pedestal. The more damage caused in the fall, the better.

This worldview, as Murray demonstrates, is couched in pseudoscientific language regurgitated from the debris of Marxism and its step-child post-modernism, disseminated through various university social science courses. Today's revolutionaries look to the identitariat at home and the wretched of the earth abroad to bring down western hegemony. Ideas like Peggy McIntosh's "white privilege" have now seeped into the mainstream and are poisoning our cultural dialogue.

It sharpens disagreement to the point of tribal warfare, denying the common humanity of our flawed natures. Instead we have what David Hirsh calls the Community of the Good who stand judgement on the Community of the Damned, which is everyone but them. That is until they too fall victim to the monster they've helped develop as a way of saving themselves from the void of meaninglessness.

As Murray puts it, there are various issues which can be divided into hardware and software issues. Hardware issues are qualities you are born with, and software issues come through environment, socialisation and cultural conditioning. It is now considered offensive to admit that men and women are different, that hardware issues of biology play a role alongside software issues of social environment.

Questions around male/female relations cannot be discussed.

The chapter on race makes the important point that we had started to move away from a hardware view of racial issues, but now seem to be moving back to that world. Both the woke Left and alt-Right believe that race is more than a social construct, and is an intrinsic part of one's identity, on an almost mystical level. Murray is right to worry where this new racialisation of politics could lead, and his concerns over the unhealthy interest in whether there are IQ differences between races is certainly warranted. Hell lies down those dark paths.

The final chapter on the trans debate is the best in the book. This is the issue where campaigners understand the least but claim the most certainty. Murray approaches this impossibly contentious issue with great care and sensitivity, including two personal stories about people who have faced the questions over their gender identity, and whether transitioning is the right course. He considers the case of the writer Jan Morris, who transitioned and felt it was certainly the right thing to do. However, Murray doesn't shy away from the difficulties and rightly points out that our confusion of hardware and software is most apparent here, with the potential for negative consequences for intersex, transgendered individuals and women all just over the horizon.

One of the most important concepts raised by Murray is forgiveness, which is what we need to continue living together without devolving into rage-driven tribes. This is becoming harder and harder to do in the age of social media, when your worst moments are kept on public view forever for people who need a shot of Schadenfreude to revisit and castigate you as a moral failure.

Social media reinforces our increasingly shallow and grievance-led engagement with history. If young people have any historical awareness

it is usually through a prism of crimes committed, oppression and bigotry perpetrated. As Murray argues, instead of forgiveness or curiosity, we now approach history with constant recrimination, seeking a form of supposedly restorative retribution. The flattening effects of increasingly pervasive technology heighten our sense of justification in judging the past by the ever-changing standards of today.

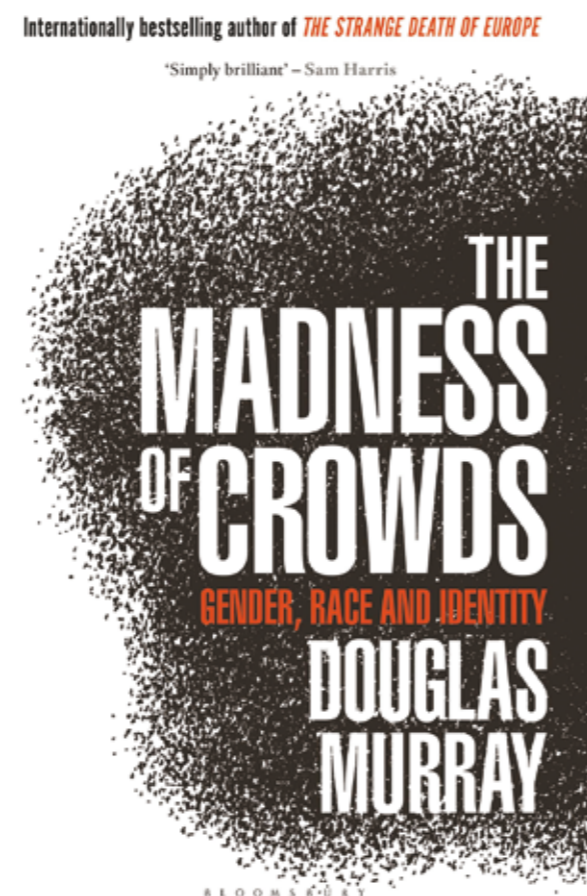
handed on to us the good things we enjoy.

Murray's beautiful, lapidary prose brings home the point of these arguments with wit and a force that speaks of a real concern of where our societies are headed.

However, the narrative that these identitarian movements arose mainly because of the need for new crusades to fight doesn't quite explain why these causes are believed in with such vehemence. Our grand narratives have partly collapsed but that doesn't fully answer why young people are as invested in these causes as they are. Murray answers the what and the how, but he needs to work more on the why.

Some of the answers to this is given by Mary Eberstadt in her book *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics*. In it, she explains what she calls the Great Scattering. The fracturing and reforming of families from the 1960s on has left more and more people unsocialised. Identity, toleration and forgiveness are practised and learned in the family, the smallest social group. However, the familial and relational sources of identity formation no longer exist for many. More and more people are alienated from themselves and isolated from each other, unable to answer the key question: "who am I?"

How do we mend this? Forgiveness, evidence and compromise are vital and necessary if we wish to have a decent society to hand on. We need a sense of common purpose based on a shared understanding of what constitutes the good. Without this, we will not avoid either apathetic despair or pathological partner in identitarianism. We need a conservatism of limits so we can approach each other with a sense of sympathy and common sentiment, that looks towards a broadly shared conception of the highest good grounded in a cultivation of moral character, gratitude towards our national traditions and cultural inheritance. If we don't do this, it is unlikely that we can emerge unscathed from the current insanity. Murray's book is a beacon guiding us back home through these difficult times, and he is to be commended for it. ■



“Murray's beautiful, lapidary prose brings home the point of these arguments with wit and a force that speaks of a real concern of where our societies are headed.”

The lack of historical connection combines with our present isolation and blinds us to the fact that those who follow us will judge our time as we judge the past. This should encourage us to view the past with a degree of forbearance, appreciating the contingencies of time and place and circumstance that we are all subject to. It is not always easy to remember that events in the past were once in the future. Hindsight should be paired with humility at our own common human frailty and fallibility, while we should feel grateful to those who have

handed on to us the good things we enjoy. Murray's beautiful, lapidary prose brings home the point of these arguments with wit and a force that speaks of a real concern of where our societies are headed. However, the narrative that these identitarian movements arose mainly because of the need for new crusades to fight doesn't quite explain why these causes are believed in with such vehemence. Our grand narratives have partly collapsed but that doesn't fully answer why young people are as invested in these causes as they are. Murray answers the what and the how, but he needs to work more on the why. Some of the answers to this is given by Mary Eberstadt in her book *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics*. In it, she explains what she calls the Great Scattering. The fracturing and reforming of families from the 1960s on has left more and more people unsocialised. Identity, toleration and forgiveness are practised and learned in the family, the smallest social group. However, the familial and relational sources of identity formation no longer exist for many. More and more people are alienated from themselves and isolated from each other, unable to answer the key question: "who am I?" How do we mend this? Forgiveness, evidence and compromise are vital and necessary if we wish to have a decent society to hand on. We need a sense of common purpose based on a shared understanding of what constitutes the good. Without this, we will not avoid either apathetic despair or pathological partner in identitarianism. We need a conservatism of limits so we can approach each other with a sense of sympathy and common sentiment, that looks towards a broadly shared conception of the highest good grounded in a cultivation of moral character, gratitude towards our national traditions and cultural inheritance. If we don't do this, it is unlikely that we can emerge unscathed from the current insanity. Murray's book is a beacon guiding us back home through these difficult times, and he is to be commended for it. ■

HANDKE SCANDAL

It is not about his politics, it is about truth

The Nobel Prize for literature should not have been awarded to a supporter of the war criminal Milosevic

by **Gerald Warner**



The controversy over the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Austrian novelist Peter Handke, who denies the established facts of the massacre of Bosnians by Serb forces at Srebrenica in July 1995, raises a challenging number of ethical, political and artistic issues. It is not a matter on which anyone should rush to judgement, but a dispassionate review of all the relevant considerations makes it possible to arrive at a reasoned conclusion.

The idea of denying a writer a literary prize on the grounds of his political opinions is repugnant to proponents of free speech and artistic liberty. At a time when Western universities, disgracefully, are at the forefront of censorship and thought-policing initiatives, the preservation of freedom of opinion and expression must be a high priority for those who cherish the traditional liberties of an open society. Already, "woke" influences are disseminating cultural Marxism within many publishing houses: what prospects of publication would an identifiably conservative novel have today?

So, if opponents were demanding the withdrawal of the Nobel Prize from Peter Handke on the grounds that he is a supporter of Serbian nationalism they would be offending against the criteria that define literary freedom. On closer examination, however, that is not the case. What is at issue is not the pros and cons of Serbian nationalism, but something quite different and extremely

important: a writer's commitment to objective truth.

Handke is on record as denying that the Srebrenica massacre occurred. The tone of his 1996 book *A Journey to the Rivers: Justice for Serbia* might be excused on the basis that not all the information about the Bosnian atrocities had been established at that time. Today, however, the corpses have been disinterred, eye-witness accounts abound and an international court has authenticated the evidence. Yet Handke has never resiled from his state of denial.

In assessing the award of any prize the primary consideration is: what does the prize seek to recognize? In the case of the Nobel Prize for Literature its purpose was clearly articulated by Alfred Nobel as being to reward "the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work in an ideal direction". That has generally been construed as meaning the winner's literary oeuvre should be inspired by a spirit of idealism.

Does Peter Handke qualify as having produced a literary canon infused with idealism? It could credibly be argued that his, admittedly eccentric, view of Serbia as a uniquely pure remnant of the authentic Europe and his romanticized concept of the Serbian nationalist cause represent a kind of idealism. He also seems to be disinterested insofar as his only family links

“The corpses have been disinterred, eye-witness accounts abound and an international court has authenticated the evidence. Yet Peter Handke has never resiled from his state of denial.”

with the former Yugoslavia appear to be Slovenian, through his mother.

If, therefore, Handke had taken the stance that he believed Serbia had been unfairly treated and that he remained loyal to its cause despite its having been tainted by atrocities such as Srebrenica he would have left his critics still muttering, but his position would have been morally respectable. To dispute allegations against a cause one supports is justifiable, until incontrovertible evidence is forthcoming. In the case of Srebrenica the evidence is incontrovertible. To deny it is not idealistic but dishonest.

Handke seemed to express an indifference to objective truth when he told 20,000 mourners at the graveside of war criminal Slobodan Milosevic in 2006: "... I don't know the truth. But I look, I listen, I feel. This is why I am here today, close to Yugoslavia, close to Serbia, close to Slobodan Milosevic." That suggests he was looking and listening everywhere but in the right place - the mass graves of Srebrenica - and was giving priority to the subjective experience of feeling.

Recently, in the face of strong criticism, Handke has played the injured

artist card, complaining that media reporters only asked him questions about the controversy "and from not a single person who comes to me I hear they have read any of my works or know what I have written". Handke added: "I am a writer, I come from Tolstoy, from Homer, from Cervantes. Leave me in peace and don't ask me questions like that."

Despite the somewhat immodest literary pedigree claimed, that is a clever defence. If the circumstances were slightly different it would even be valid. Few of the journalists besieging Handke are competent to judge his work. But it is not his work they are judging, but his moral compass. The Nobel Prize is not awarded for a single work, but for an author's entire canon. In Handke's case that embraces denial of a great crime.

The Nobel committee commended Handke's "linguistic ingenuity [that] has explored the periphery and the specificity of human experience". According to media reports, when it was pointed out to Handke that the exhumed corpses of Srebrenica furnished concrete evidence against the Serbs, his linguistic ingenuity prompted him to reply: "You can stick your corpses up your ass!"

That dishonours the victims and diminishes the writer. A good writer should have an unflinching commitment to objective truth. Upholding truth, in the morally anarchic

postmodernist climate whose smog envelopes the contemporary arts, should be a primary responsibility of every artist, as it was historically.

As to whether Handke should be stripped of his Nobel laureateship, that is very much a secondary consideration. Literary and other arts prizes are becoming increasingly debased and no longer confer much prestige outside the bubble of the "industry". A witch hunt is never edifying and there is a danger of politicizing the arts even further. The so-called "arts scene" has been radicalised for the same reason as universities: the failure of conservatives to resist the extravagant demands of a militant left, heavily subsidized by the taxpayers it despises.

If writers such as Handke are to be condemned - as he deserves to be - then the same should apply to all who debase objective truth. Should anyone be considered for a literary prize who denies the scientific truth that there are only two sexes? Would such a rejection not provoke outrage among the thought police of PC orthodoxy? Where is civilisation going if objective truth can be overturned in the interests of Serbian nationalism, transgender fantasy, or any other ideology?

The Nobel prize was already tainted with scandal from the debacle of last year. Conferring laureate status on someone like Peter Handke has brought further discredit - because of his perverse denial of an objective truth established beyond doubt. ■

Reich/Richter at the Barbican Centre, London

ON THE SAME TEAM AT LAST

Steve Reich and Gerhard Richter in harmony

This collaboration represents a coming together of two icons of contemporary culture

by James Hardie

I had the rather surreal experience a few years ago of watching a film about American composer Steve Reich in an almost empty room; almost empty, as the only other person in this room – a former waiting room in an old station building in Liverpool, since reclaimed by arts institution Metal Liverpool – was Steve Reich himself. We sat there for about 20 minutes together, watching the film in silence, me a little star-struck, him perhaps a little bemused but largely unbothered by the experience of watching his talking head on screen.

The occasion was Reich's 80th birthday celebrations, part of which was a live performance of his seminal work, *Different Trains*. The performance by the London Contemporary Orchestra, combined with a film by Bill Morrison, sticks in my mind as one of my most powerful cultural experiences to date. The capacity audience, packed into a downward-sloping cobbled station yard, nodded and toe-tapped *en masse* to the pounding, swirling, incestuous patterns of *Different Trains*, while actual trains chuntered past on either side. It was also amusing as Reich, usually a pretty quiet, background figure at this stage

in his life, didn't wholly approve of the sound engineering that night, and hopped on to the desk himself.

Now 83, Reich has developed a cult following over his long career, and despite his own reserved persona and appearance – only ever seen in his uniform of dark shirt and black blazer, topped off with his signature black baseball cap – he ignites great excitement in his fans in what are often rather sober concert halls. The professional-looking woman sitting next to me in Barbican Hall, a communications executive and mother to two grown-up children as I found out later, couldn't help but let out whoops and cheers when Reich appeared on stage at the very end.

This was a reassuring reaction, as the first work in the programme left me feeling a little cold. *Runner*, written in 2016, is based on a Ghanaian bell pattern, which gets divided and manipulated, lengthened and shortened across five movements. A little sedate despite its title, but a useful precursor to the techniques that were to follow in the main event of the evening. Colin Currie, usually engaged in marathon Reich performances on all manner of percussion instruments,



swapped his mallets for a baton to conduct the Britten Sinfonia, and marshalled the forces through it securely.

Steve Reich's specially-composed work for this collaboration *Reich/Richter* was far more adventurous. Patterns oscillated and clashed to create unexpected textures, and larger motifs appeared above. Reich's trademark pulsating piano chords provided a foundation for woodwind instruments that intertwined and tangled above. Its harmonic brushiness mirrored wonderfully that of its partnered work by Gerhard Richter, painting *946-3*.

Gerhard Richter's abstract visual works are mesmeric enough, but transposed to video by Corinna Belz, *946-3* took on a completely new lease of life, multiplying and repeating to create "anthropomorphic creatures". The screen teemed with colour, and as the show went on with these weird, mutated creatures reminded me more and more of Hieronymus Bosch crossed with a Rorschach test.

Like Richter, Reich was originally a creator for the art gallery; in his earlier years when concert halls weren't so interested in his minimalist works, he took them to New York galleries

instead. And in many ways his music needs the same careful examination as Richter's large canvas; it helps to be up close and personal with the musicians, watching the patterns mutate from the bows and fingers and lips of the players, as well as hearing them.

This collaboration is a coming together of two icons of contemporary culture, only four years apart in age, who have something of a shared approach. While Richter might be maximal in colour, and Reich minimal in rhythm and harmony, the sum of their works is much greater than the parts. Richter's window in Cologne Cathedral, for example, simple in its composition (but presumably not in its construction, consisting of 11,500 glass squares of 72 different colours), conjures a permanently-pixelated rainbow effect throughout the building. In Reich's works, whether a miniature like *Violin Phase* (first performed in a New York gallery in 1967), or his monumental *Music for 18 Musicians*, small units of rhythm and melody come together to create a big, throbbing mass.

Reich/Richter is the first glimpse we've had here in Europe of what Alex Poots and Hans Ulrich Obrist have

been dreaming up at The Shed in New York, the city's glittering, eye-wateringly expensive new arts centre at Hudson Yards in Manhattan, which opened earlier this year. It's interesting to note that for its world premiere in New York, *Reich/Richter* was actually performed in the gallery space at The Shed, giving audience members the opportunity to wander around and take in the morphing sounds and shapes with different degrees and perspectives.

Over the next six months, *Reich/Richter* travels to Luxembourg and Paris in the hands of Ensemble Intercontemporain and Elin Chan, and then to Oslo with the Philharmonic and Olari Elts conducting. In Paris, it forms part of a larger Steve Reich Weekend at the Philharmonie (7 - 8 March), which will attempt to distil over two days Reich's myriad inspirations, and his far-reaching influence on others, with everything from Javanese Gamelan to an exploration of *The Birth of Sounds*, a new programme on the relationship between noise, sound and music. The man himself will also be in attendance, talking about his relationship with other art forms. Be prepared for whoops and cheers. ■

Massenet was one of brace of late 19th/early 20th century French composers whose eyes often strayed to Spanish material.

This was a production built by Wexford Festival Opera and directed by Rodula Gaitanou, the Greek producer, who has delivered three other Wexford productions: *Vanessa* (2016), *Mala vita* and *L'Oracolo* (both 2018).

Small wonder Wexford keeps asking him back. This *Don Quichotte* was

who has been the no.2 to Wexford Opera's Artistic Director David Agler since 2005, and who takes over artistic direction next year, will keep Mr Gaitanou on the books.

Dorilla in Tempe is a baroque opera on a grand scale. This was a production of Teatro La Fenice, Venice, directed by Fabio Ceresa. He is an Italian director with a string of successes to his credit, many at La Scala, Milan, where he was Assistant Director from 2008 - 2014.



a triumph: it balanced the absurdity of the Quichotte character, whose infatuation with the clearly flirtatious La Belle Dulcinée is comically headed for the slough of disappointment, with the opera's theme of the gallant knight's principles, overcoming cynicism and ultimately triumphing over all as he dies, joining Dulcinée as his shining star in the heavens.

This was Mr. Gaitanou's Wexford masterpiece. I hope Rosetta Cucchi,

mother is his lost love Zora, and hence that he is girl's father... all live happily, etc. – takes place within a wedding cake. Someone dreamt up the idea of having the "prequel" in which the cake is baked.

Step up Andrew Synnott, a Dublin based composer, who has written mostly for theatre. *La cucina* was theatrical to a fault. His composition and the double billing blended beautifully, with some of the comedic characters of the first, carrying through to the second. Unlike many clunky double billings, these two works blended well.

It was an afternoon of tightly stage-managed humour, with sharp use of the chorus and a truly outstanding South African lyrical tenor, Levy Sekgapane, singing the role of Selimo, the heroine's lover. His voice was a lustrous, well-timbred wonder. He is making waves internationally and is my Wexford artist of 2019 to watch.

This year Wexford has a new Chair-woman, Dr. Mary Kelly. She takes over from the successful Ger Lawlor, and has bravely assumed the tradition of standing at the theatre door greeting each and every attendee. It may seem a small touch, but it underpins the strength of the "Wexford family", and her determination to ensure the Festival Opera is prepared to face a challenging future. ■

The action in *Adina* – the usual Rossini romp of Calif wanting girl, threatening girl's lover with execution, realising at last minute that girl's

EL CAMINO

THE PAST LEAVES SCARS

Fans of the ground-breaking television series *Breaking Bad* will not be disappointed by this accomplished sequel

by Alexander Larman

Of all of the major television series made in the past decade that one might have thought would merit one spin-off, let alone two, Vince Gilligan's *Breaking Bad* was not especially high on the list. A fantastically gripping and visceral tale of the rise and fall of one of the least likely crime lords ever to have appeared in fiction, schoolteacher-turned drug kingpin Walter White, aka "Heisenberg", it moved seamlessly between black comedy, family drama and edge-of-seat suspense, to award-winning effect. Many would

only do we have the excellent prequel *Better Call Saul*, which focuses on how dodgy-but-decent Jimmy McGill can metamorphose into evil-but-entertaining lawyer Saul Goodman, but now Gilligan has returned with a straight sequel, a two-hour continuation of the saga which picks up literally at the moment that the last series ended. Walter White is still dead, succumbing to a bullet wound amidst the gleaming splendour of a drugs lab, but his protégé Jesse (Aaron Paul) has escaped from the gang of neo-Nazis who have held him hostage to manu-

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If *El Camino* has a reason to exist, it is to explore the lie behind that idea, and to show that Mike's gruff admonition has its own truth behind it. After all, as Thomas Wolfe's novel noted, you can't go home again. The best you can hope for, as Jesse Pinkman does, is to make your peace with that, and trust in the future anyway.

facture drugs for them, or "cook", and is on the run, pursued by police and criminals alike. Predictably, nothing goes according to plan.

There is a great deal of talk in our society of "fan service", or of films and series being precision engineered to please a particular audience, artistic integrity be damned. *El Camino* represents this to the highest degree, both in terms of the excellence with

which it is executed and also of the essential redundancy of its premise. While Paul, an increasingly convincing and affecting presence in the original series, makes for a protagonist that one instinctively takes the side of, the narrative swiftly turns into a mixture of flashbacks and set-piece cameos. This allows for the return of deceased characters (who it would be unfair to reveal, but one can guess the highlights without particular difficulty), and also gives fan favourites such as Badger, Skinny Pete and the late Robert Forster's Ed Galbraith their own moment in the spotlight. Some are missed, others outstay their welcome, but this particular victory lap is one that few would begrudge.

If Gilligan, who both wrote and directed *El Camino*, has a central point, it is that the past leaves scars on one that are, literally and metaphorically, too deep to expunge. The opening, featuring the return of curmudgeonly hitman Mike (Jonathan Banks) sets out the store with admirable economy. Jesse, in search of adventure, asks Mike where the older man would recommend that he head with his drug money, to which he receives the reply "If I were your age, starting fresh, Alaska. It's the last frontier. Up there, you can be anything you want." As Jesse excitedly replies that he'll "make things right", Mike looks at him with contempt, leavened by pity. "Sorry kid, that's the one thing you can never do."

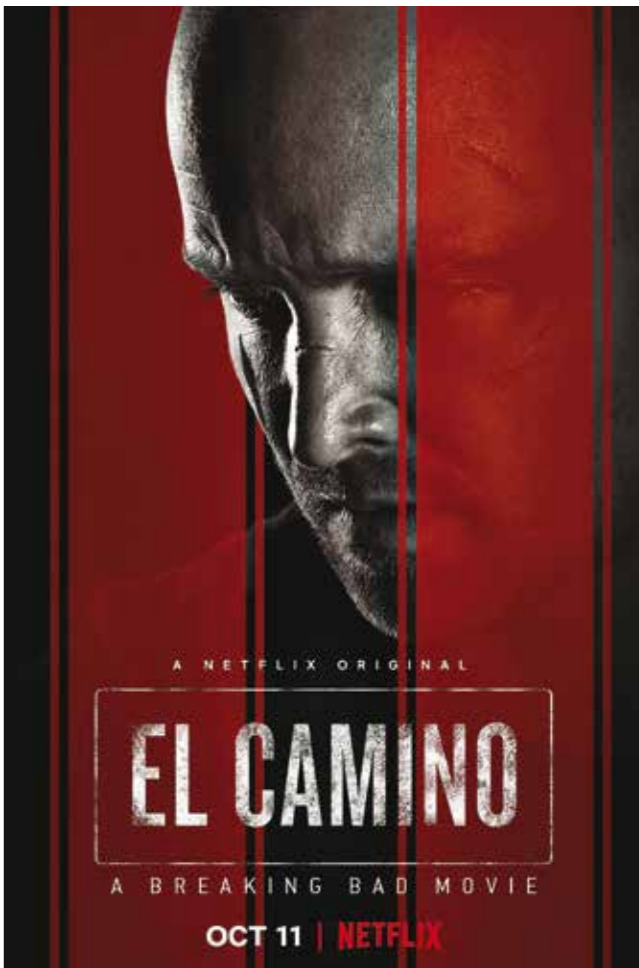
One of the central joys of *Breaking Bad* was the way in which certain lines of dialogue, almost incomprehensible out of context, became loaded with inordinate significance. If one encounters someone hissing "If you don't

is a surprising paucity of action until the final third, although Gilligan's patented slow drip-drip of tension is present throughout, and Walter White's Shakespearean grandeur has been replaced by Jesse's scrappier, angrier presence. This befits the character and the story being told, but some admirers of the original might feel disappointed.

If they do, then they only have themselves to blame. Gilligan has assembled a typically excellent ensemble cast, with Jesse Plemons' homely psychopath Todd a particular stand-out once more, and allowed them to take their characters in interesting, if inevitably predictable or pre-ordained, directions, and, as ever, the vast vistas of the cinematography, simultaneously dwarfing or enhancing the characters, have a 70mm scope that means that seeing this on the big screen would be a highly enjoyable experience.

Yet what viewers are likely to take from it is not the giddy adrenaline rush that they might be expecting, but a sad, elegiac coda, best epitomised by one character saying to Jesse "You're really lucky, you know who I am, then maybe your best course would be... to tread lightly", or announcing in declamatory fashion, "I am the one who knocks", then the allusion becomes a symbol of a shared kinship and a mutual understanding. Yet the giddiness and amphetamine rush of the original series is replaced in *El Camino* with a sadder, stately pace, and the eminently quotable dialogue takes a back seat. There

that? You didn't have to wait your whole life to do something special." If *El Camino* has a reason to exist, it is to explore the lie behind that idea, and to show that Mike's gruff admonition has its own truth behind it. After all, as Thomas Wolfe's novel noted, you can't go home again. The best you can hope for, as Jesse Pinkman does, is to make your peace with that, and trust in the future anyway. ■



Opera enthusiasts should take a trip to Wexford

In a remote corner of rural Ireland, this opera festival is one of Europe's more unlikely musical gems

by Gerald Malone

The 25th October this year was World Opera Day, a collaboration bringing in Opera America, Opera Europa and Opera Latinoamérica. Festivities at the annual Wexford Festival Opera Festival, held since 1951 in Ireland's south eastern corner, were already in full swing.

The Wexford Festival Opera is one of Europe's more unlikely musical gems. Founded by Dr Tom Walsh, a local GP, in 1951 – at the suggestion of author Compton Mackenzie – it has prospered for 68 years.

Wexford may be in the boondocks, but it is no cultural backwater. Rather than churn out familiar repertoire, the Wexford team relentlessly pursues Dr. Walsh's original idea, bringing lost

works back from obscurity. Opera aficionados in search of hidden treasure flock from across the globe. Some regulars have been attending for 40 years. My first visit was in 1978.

The casting squad scours Europe for upcoming talent to perform in search of three operas to be performed over a 13-day cycle in late October and early November each year.

This year the three mainstage operas were: Jules Massenet's *Don Quichotte*, Antonio Vivaldi's *Dorilla in Tempe* and a double bill of the premiere of Irish composer, Andrew Synnott's *La cucina*, paired with Gioachino Rossini's *Adina*.

Don Quichotte broadly follows the original Cervantes' *Don Quixote* plot.



Non-Fiction

NOTHING MUCH HAPPENS IN THIS PUBLISHING DRAMA

An all-star cast flops in Olivier Assayas's tedious take on French high society

by Will Hutton

For bibliophiles, Olivier Assayas' new film is more aetiology than entertainment – despite its blithe marketing to the contrary. Aspiring novelists beware. *Non-Fiction* should have trigger warnings: TW: Declining Readership. TW: Dwindling Book Sales. TW: The End is Nigh. It should almost be marketed as a horror film; one with a villainous e-book rearing its garishly lit screen to send shivers down its book-buying patrons.

Non-Fiction would spark greater urgency had the CT scan it delivers on

publishing's impending demise been released ten years ago when words like "democratization", "digitalization" and "the internet" became the stuff of op-eds and Twitter threads, and who knows how many in-house reviews. However, stable, seems to be the reading of publishing's condition in 2019 – though who knows what the roaring twenties will hold?

In *Non-Fiction*, publisher Alain (Guillaume Canet) oversees the running of a revered Parisian publishing house and is married to Selena

(Juliette Binoche), an actress. Both are approaching middle age and uncertain of the future: Alain of publishing, Selena of a fourth season of her crime drama "Collusion". What Alain is not uncertain of is whether or not he will publish his friend's new novel, "Full Stop". Léonard (Vincent Macaigne) is the author of autofiction that recounts, in graphic detail, his sexual liaisons with women other than his wife, Valérie (Nora Hamzawi). One such woman is Selena with whom he has been having an affair for six years and who felated Léonard during a screening of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and which Léonard changed, in his novel, to a screening of *The White Ribbon*. Add to this Alain's own affair with a young tech-savvy advisor (Christa Theret) tasked with bringing his revered institute into the digital age and you have the threadbare machinations of *Non-Fiction* where a good deal of nothing takes place over dinner tables and glasses of wine.

There is a great charm to Assayas' female characters, particularly Hamzawi as Valérie, Léonard's wife, who works as the PR/PA manager of a notable politician in crisis mode. She plays Valérie with poise; her myriad complexities unravelling in a

look, a shout, a teary titter. Léonard, meanwhile, comes across as a bed hopping dope, dumbstruck by the idea that you might actually have to make things up in order to write a book. Alain, who refuses to publish Léonard's novel (on wokeish charges of female objectification), has an uncanny – and no doubt unintended – similarity to that other well-mannered, suit-clad protectorate of culture: Christian from Ruben Östlund's *The Square*.

Though unlike that Palm d'Or winner, what Assayas offers us here is far less substantial. By the end, his characters are more or less where they started (Alain publishing; Selena acting; Léonard writing), doing a disservice to the maxim underpinning *Non-Fiction*, taken from Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, and put into Alain's mouth as he says *adieu* to one of his lovers: "If we want things to stay as they



are, things will have to change." In *Non-Fiction*, Assayas doesn't want change. But for his audience some might be nice. ■

HENRY ROOT

Model for Nigel Farage

Lost Classic is the series in which we highlight great artists that are under-appreciated or forgotten

by **Toby Guise**

What does Nigel Farage read? Like a true populist, he is wary of citing political influences which may later prove unhelpful. Left to conjecture, allow me to pitch in with a suggestion: the best available anatomy of Faragism is provided by *The Letters of Henry Root*. These record the political awakening of one Henry Root of Elm Park Gardens (London, SW). Energised by the rise of Margaret Thatcher – and with the resources of his wet-fish business behind him – he sets about putting the country right in a blizzard of correspondence with prominent people. The result is a brilliant portrait of a self-made man overflowing with blithely subjective and often contradictory solutions to the nation's problems.

The essence of Rootism is trusting in his own robust common sense over experts ("Intellectuals are very handy with words – less so, in my experience, when it comes to a bit of direct action!"). Alongside this sits his belief in optimism – "Let's go!" – and its power to overcome technicalities. He freely admits to "no relevant experience" when putting himself forwards as manager of a football club because "the name of the game is motivation and psychology – and that I know about!"

As a self-identified Thatcherite, he espouses the free market when it's making him rich – but isn't averse to a dose of protectionism when its waters lap too close to his door ("Yours for the market economy within reasonable limits!"). Free speech – "however obnoxious" – is a must when it comes to National Front rallies but soon meets its limits when it threatens public morals. The public sector should be slashed – except, of course, for the police ("Soon the thin blue line will become the thick blue line!"). Regulation is necessary for society as a whole but shouldn't impinge on the buccaneering spirit of Root and his kindred spirits

"I'll get straight to the point," he writes to Major General Wyldebore-Smythe of the Conservative Party. "What's the price of getting an

honour?" Rebuffed, he attempts to bribe the Liberals instead. These double standards collide most brilliantly when writing to offer condolences to an MP who has been "burglarised while out advocating for greater initiative among the Working Classes". Britain, he writes, should be a "free country to those who can afford it".

Like today's populists, Henry rebounds happily into the arms of foreign authoritarians whom he perceives as bastions

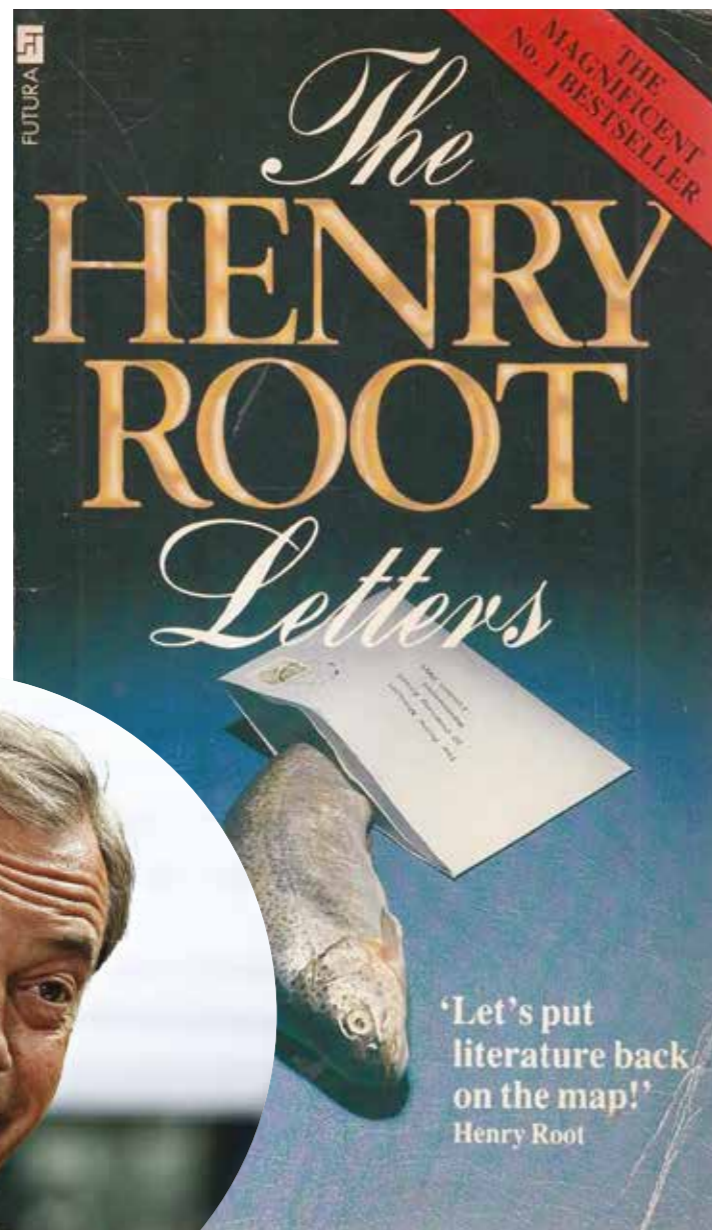


Photo: Shutterstock.com

of a lost conservatism. "Pay no attention [to the liberal press]," he writes to General Haq, military dictator of Pakistan. "Most of us realise that a backward people such as yours needs, and appreciates, the smack of firm government." Addressing his letter to "The Strong Man", he receives a reply thanking him for "certain very pertinent views". One wonders how many similar replies Nigel Farage has in his bottom drawer.

With the exception of General Haq, Henry Root regards lands abroad with some suspicion. He writes to the Greek Ambassador, asking if the activities of a certain

“What does Nigel Farage read? Like a true populist, he is wary of citing political influences which may later prove unhelpful. Left to conjecture, allow me to pitch in with a suggestion: the best available anatomy of Faragism is provided by *The Letters of Henry Root*.”

2019, which saw soggy renditions of *Jerusalem* echo around Parliament Square?

Whereas Henry Root relied on the Royal Mail to drum up support, his modern contrarian heirs have access to social media. Yet he too adopted replies from celebrities as a force-magnifier, co-opting any interaction for the purposes of further profile-building. Jimmy Goldsmith attained lifelong status as Henry Root's "very good friend" by generously forwarding his letter to a book-publisher. Denis Thatcher became ensnared by an enquiry relating to the Royal Cinq Ports Golf Club. Twitter nurtures a similar partisanship, allowing enthusiastic amateurs on both sides of the Brexit fence to climb to prominence by hurried tweets and replies from large accounts. Even EU Supergirl is, in her own way, a minor heir of Henry Root.

The letters are shot through with moments of odd prescience. He pitches *The Free Trade Association* with a demonstration outside Westminster including "traditional, right-wing, two-nations activity" such as bellowing Latin insults at the children of miners. With the self-described "One-Nation" group having been ejected from the Tories, leaving the party in control of just such a classically-educated clique, he would surely be proud. At one point, he outlines a sociological project

to "hop incognito through the door [of a ladies sauna] in a pair of ballet pumps and take unusual photos before ejection". This is not far off the experience of Canadian users of ladies' saunas in the era of Justin Trudeau.

Yet for all his misdirected enthusiasms, at the heart of the letters is the reactionary paradox: he opposes more things than he supports. The most eloquent statement of his beliefs is found in a one-sentence letter to the Evening Standard: "I wish to protest most strongly about everything."

Henry Root was not, of course, real, being instead the creation of expert misanthrope Willie Donaldson. But there is nothing unreal about Nigel Farage's misanthropic desire to "protest most strongly about everything". What better slogan could there be for a party claiming to unite people as disparate as Claire Fox and Anne Widdecombe? With each successive victory – from securing a referendum, to winning it, to mainstreaming a no deal Brexit, to insisting on a no deal Brexit – Farage has propagated a new crop of grievance from his etiolated store of nationalism.

Now he dangles the sword of Damocles over any Brexit by threatening to split the Tory vote. With the unreflecting venality of Henry Root, he is likely demanding a peerage or ambassadorship as the price of his patriotism. If the pound of flesh doesn't weigh heavily enough, he too will take his custom elsewhere. Like the bungling tradesman in the satirical song *The Gasman Cometh* – who sets off a chain of events which eventually necessitates him repeating the same job the following week – Farage seems happy to return to the first tee of his political career, assisted by a stab-in-the-back myth directed at everyone but himself.

If that happens, this latter-day Henry Root may find the Brexit movement has a new thing against which to protest most strongly: him. ■

ROME

The Eternal City is still a world-class centre of European culture

by **Jack Dickens**



Rome's reputation as a city of wonders is not simply an illusion from a romanticised, faded past

The 'Eternal City', the 'Capital of the World', the 'Sacred City' – all of these names have been given to the iconic city of Rome throughout its long lifetime. Over almost three millennia, from its mythical founding date in 753 BC, Rome has captured the imagination of wayfaring writers, romantic poets and itinerant painters. "Rome," the medieval artist Giotto di Bondone wrote, "is the city of echoes, the city of illusions, and the city of yearning."

This yearning seems to be almost as eternal as the city itself – in more recent times, its grand ancient monuments, such as the Colosseum, and its picturesque streets have also formed the backdrop for Hollywood films. The fantasy of the Roman escape was captured for generations by the masterpiece of 1950s cinema, *Roman Holiday*, starring Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn.

Despite the wealth of history and culture associated with the city, however, it has come to be viewed less favourably in many circles. British media coverage since 2015 has quite rightly highlighted the extent of urban dilapidation and often inadequate public transport. Rubbish has also become a chronic problem, with graffiti and garbage getting out of control in certain parts of the city. Public sector corruption and outdated infrastructure have exacerbated these issues.

Rome is also swelteringly hot during the traditional tourist season in June and July, and its historic sites and streets can be difficult to enjoy when you are crammed amongst the thousands of wandering tourists from across the world. Once scenic streets and squares are falling into a state of decay and disrepair. As one of my Rome-enthusiast friends once said to me: "You can see that God was here at one point, but he hasn't been back for a few centuries."

But once you accept its roughness around the edges, there is much that can be enjoyed in the city. Despite decades of neglect, Rome is still a great centre of European culture, and one which is very easy to fall in love with. Its reputation as a city of wonders is not simply an illusion from a romanticised, faded past. Romans can equally be brusque at times, but the majority are very welcoming and

will appreciate anyone who is willing to have a go at speaking some Italian, however advanced or basic it may be! For those yearning for culture, the city has the salve for every itch you might have. Of course, there are the city's Roman ruins, which are not to be missed. The Roman Forum and the Colosseum are classics, but I would recommend pre-booking tickets in order to avoid the queues on site. For those who are determined to visit more than a couple of historical attractions, I would recommend purchasing a Roma Pass, which provides discounts to popular attractions as well as unlimited use of Rome's public transport within certain areas.

There are many hidden gems around the Forum. Guided tours of the Domus Aurea, the Emperor Nero's sumptuous residence, using virtual

“The 'Eternal City', the 'Capital of the World', the 'Sacred City' – all of these names have been given to the iconic city of Rome throughout its long lifetime. Over almost three millennia, from its mythical founding date in 753 BC, Rome has captured the imagination of wayfaring writers, romantic poets and itinerant painters. "Rome," the medieval artist Giotto di Bondone wrote, "is the city of echoes, the city of illusions, and the city of yearning.”

A trip to the Vatican City or the Sistine Chapel might be on your bucket list, but do not rule out taking an afternoon to wander through some of Rome's smaller, but equally gorgeous churches. I would recommend visiting the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, one of the oldest Churches in Rome, whose basic structure dates back to the fourth century. It is set in a beautiful square and its ornate interior is truly a sight to behold. Hotels vary both in style and size, but those looking to be close to the historic heart of the city could stay in the Inn at the Spanish Steps, a small but charming hotel with a boutique feel to it. The location really is its premium. With rooms from £156 per night, it is a luxurious, but very competitively priced way to enjoy a Roman getaway.

Those who want to be slightly further away from the centre and in more spacious surroundings might try the Rose Garden Palace, which is in a quieter area north of the city centre, but still close to upmarket shopping districts and the spacious gardens of the Villa Borghese. Rooms here are luxurious, but also less expensive than comparable hotels nearer the city centre, with options from as little as £131 per night.

Rome is not renowned for its fine-dining, and those searching for top-end silver service will be disappointed. While in Rome you can take the opportunity to visit the city's oldest gelateria, which has been serving customers since 1880. La Fassi Gelateria, situated in the Palazzo del Fredo, which is not too far away from the Colosseum, is truly an institution and should not be passed up by anyone with a sweet tooth.

For those thinking of going to Rome to watch a Rugby match in the Six Nations, this quirky little eatery near the Stadio Olimpico is worth a visit before kick-off. After the game, you should head to Harry's Bar in the Via Vittorio Veneto for a cocktail. Its suave and sophisticated live piano bar will give you a refined taste of "la dolce vita".

No Roman trip would be complete without a trip to one of the city's gelaterias, and connoisseurs will not be disappointed. While in Rome you can take the opportunity to visit the city's oldest gelateria, which has been serving customers since 1880. La Fassi Gelateria, situated in the Palazzo del Fredo, which is not too far away from the Colosseum, is truly an institution and should not be passed up by anyone with a sweet tooth.

For all of these reasons, Rome and its surroundings continue to be a world-class centre of European culture. It is a lively city with much to offer for those looking to enjoy Italian cuisine and explore the wonders of an historic city. For those who are willing to press through the difficulties the city is currently facing, it still promises to be a city which you will be yearning to return to in the near future. ■

offer is the Inn at the Roman Forum. Not only is this a charming old hotel, it has managed to keep its traditional feel without becoming shabby or passé. You can arrive for drinks on their terrace, which has stunning views of the Roman Forum. If you decide to stay for dinner at the roof garden restaurant, you can dine and watch the sun set upon two thousand years of Roman history, from the ruins of the forum to the majestic Altare della Patria (and at a time of night when tourists are no longer disrupting the view).

At the other end of the scale is the humble but wholesome Antica Trattoria Pallotta Dal 1820, a family-run restaurant in the Piazzale Ponte Milvio. The service is, well, rather Roman – it will come when it comes, but it is worth the wait when it does. The food is also authentically Roman, and so is the atmosphere, which is always filled with local people. The portions are generous, and the dishes range from Italian favourites such as Carbonara and Gnocchi, to an array of classic Roman dishes.

WHAT TO DO

Virtual reality guided tours of the Domus Aurea, the Emperor Nero's residence – an exciting use of technology to bring this site to life.

The Capitoline Museum – a well-crated treasure trove neglected by tourists, but with a supreme view of the Roman Forum.

Castel Sant'Angelo, the one-time tomb of a Roman Emperor turned into a papal residence. Fantastic views and enchanting rooms.

Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere, one of Rome's oldest Churches in a beautiful square

The Inn at the Spanish Steps, competitively-priced boutique hotel in the historic heart of the city

The Rose Garden Palace Hotel – luxurious rooms which are slightly further from the madding crowd

The Inn at the Roman Forum for those on the terrace and dinner in the roof garden restaurant

Antica Trattoria Pallotta Dal 1820, in the Piazzale Ponte Milvio

Harry's Bar in the Via Vittorio Veneto for a cocktail and live piano music

Fassi Gelateria, founded in 1880 – a Roman institution and an unmissable treat for anyone with a sweet tooth

NORBERT NIEDERKOFER

Mountain Chef who made an art out of thinking differently

How an Alpine chef revolutionised his cooking by digging deeper into local culinary practices

by Bruce Palling



Around the turn of the century, Alain Passard of L'Arpège, had a major change of heart about what he liked to cook – he decided to remove all red meat from his menu. The catalyst was the spread of Mad Cow Disease in Britain plus a general uneasiness about celebrating portions of dead animals on his plates. This was not without risk, as he was considered one of the great French chefs and it was by no means certain that he would maintain his rank and status if he suddenly devoted himself to making vegetables his predominant ingredients. Fortunately, he managed to pull it off to such an extent that the celebration of vegetables as main ingredients became a worldwide trend in haute cuisine.

Shortly after this, Norbert Niederkofler, a young chef from the Dolomites in Northern Italy, made a similarly abrupt decision to fundamentally change his cuisine, starting with removing his signature dish of foie gras four ways. Nearly 90% of his clients at St Hubertus at the Rosa Alpina Hotel in San Cassiano, used to order this dish, along with more exotic international produce like abalone from Tasmania or catfish from Norway. Norbert's decision to abandon foie gras wasn't because he was squeamish about removing fattened livers from unsuspecting geese or the feelings of eviscerated abalone. Instead, it was a realisation that here he was in the middle of a mountain range and instead of exploring the culinary possibilities of his region, he was shipping in rarefied luxury ingredients from all around the globe. He was also bored, like many of us, of always coming across the same French-inspired haute cuisine dishes, whether he was in Helsinki, Munich, New York or Melbourne. The Michelin inspectors agreed and last year, he was awarded three Michelin stars.

Curiously, he was initially inspired by restaurants as diverse as Ferran Adrià's El Bulli in Spain and René Redzepi's Noma in Copenhagen, not because he in any way replicates them, but the fact that they were thinking outside the box inspired him to do the same. "Everybody was running behind them and so there was no sense in copying everything. So I started to think about what to do next, started to ask questions about what my diners wanted when they came here. I realised that although very little was written down about Alpine Cuisine, there were oral traditions and culture and especially sustainability, which affects everything."

On the back of this reflection, he developed a concept called "Cook the Mountain", which is shorthand for making your immediate environment the source of virtually all of your ingredients. This is relatively easy to do in the summer, as there are all of the usual vegetables along with local asparagus, though it only has a season of five weeks or so. Norbert realised he would have to dig deeper into local practices, which included fermentation of products for the winter months. "So, for the past decade, I have been building up a network of farmers and now we have 50 that are working directly with us. Initially, we were ordering everything through middlemen and then when it arrived we were not happy with the product, so we eliminated all the intermediaries and spoke directly to the farmers. They are all in the Alpine region, including Austria – I am not bothered about zero kilometres as it doesn't work – mountain culture is more

Interestingly, there are no local people working in Norbert's St Hubertus restaurant but instead the 20 or so people in the kitchen come from all over Italy. They have obviously learned a lot by their exposure to his approach as his former workers now hold 15 Michelin stars throughout the country.

important. We reset the whole type of cuisine – we started to use everything, especially with the meat, so we use the entire animal. In one way it is respect for the animal and in another we help the farmer because he can sell the entire carcass, so it works out really well."

Then they decided they wouldn't use any citrus fruits because at 1,700 metres above sea level, there were no

St Hubertus - rosalpina.it - Menus: €200 – €300
AlpiNN Food Space & Restaurant - alpini.it - Menus: from €35

citrus trees in the neighbourhood. Vinegar became a useful substitute. When it came to olive oil, that was also eliminated and replaced with rapeseed oil with the addition of various local herbs.

"When you close one door, you have to look around and you end up opening ten. We have a lot more work in the summer because we have to store things for the winter and it is always a bet on nature, because you have to take what the farmer produces and then learn how to preserve it and now the biggest problem is we are running out of space."



Photo: Daniel Buchholz

I recently flew to Venice and took a three-hour car journey north to spend a long weekend with Norbert, just before he ended his Summer/Autumn season before reopening in December for the ski season. There is nothing boring or predictable in his signature dishes, starting with a dish called "Tomatoes?". This originated after Valentin, one of his fruit and vegetable suppliers, brought in several hundred ripe plums. Rather than use them

in a dessert dish, Norbert and his sous chef decided to ferment them and check out the different flavours month by month. By five months, it had a rich Umami taste with a dash of acid and they discovered by adding some basil leaves and sour breadcrumbs, it tasted exactly like bruschetta with tomato. The point of starting with this dish is to show how with a creative approach, it is possible to substitute local ingredients to become a stimulating alternative to classic ingredients.

Another example was "Tartare di Coregone" or raw char. The flesh was seasoned in salt and sugar and served at room temperature with its scales dehydrated, fried and then sprinkled on top with its bones and guts reduced for the sauce. The next dish was an exquisite herb salad of twenty or so local examples – something that is only available in the summer months. Then there was a kaleidoscope of local mushrooms, which were served with an exceptionally memorable glazed eel.

The main event of the weekend was a four hands dinner with Albert Adrià, the younger brother of Ferran Adrià, who has several restaurants in Barcelona, including Michelin-starred Tickets and Enigma. Albert had never been to the South Tyrol and hadn't even met Norbert before the event, which was held in AlpiNN, Norbert's James Bond-style modernist restaurant in Kronplatz at the peak of Plan de Corones, reachable only by a 20 minute cable car ride to the 2,300 metre peak. Albert arrived with his sous chef and managed to conjure up several of his own dishes in this surreal environment with views stretching over the Austrian Alps to the north and the craggy Dolomites to the south. While Norbert offered simple but superb renditions of barbecued lambs' hearts or his famous char tartare, Albert offered classically executed dishes of lettuce soup with avocado and fresh pistachio or charcoal grilled lobster cured in aged ox fat. The alternate dishes couldn't have been more contrasting but with dishes of this calibre, there were no complaints from the hundred or so guests. Interestingly, there are no local people working in Norbert's St Hubertus restaurant but instead the 20 or so people in the kitchen come from all over Italy. They have obviously learned a lot by their exposure to his approach as his former workers now hold 15 Michelin stars throughout the country. Spreading the word is something that Norbert takes enormous pride in – "I have shown that you can reach all the way up to three Michelin stars, purely using local produce. Before, everyone thought you had to use French products or other luxury ones from abroad – I have nothing against French products, but young people in say Sicily, or Naples or Calabria, can also achieve what I have, merely using the products around them – I am not going to change the world, but this is the best message I can offer." ■

CULTURE DIGEST

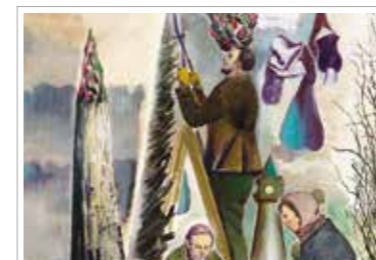
The best of Europe's art and culture



Carl Orff's Carmina Burana
 Four performances between November 9th and the 18th, Concertgebouw, Netherlands
 In a large-scale staging, Dutch conductor Raymond Janssen and over 130 musicians will perform Carmina Burana, the German composer's masterpiece.



Don Carlo
 Until 23rd November, Opéra Bastille, Paris, France
 Verdi appears again, this time at Opéra Bastille in Paris: Don Carlo is a grand opera in the French style that interweaves political, romantic and family conflicts in Verdi's signature style.



Neo Rauch. Paintings from 2009 to 2019
 Until 12th January 2020, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy
 Considered to be one of Germany's greatest living artists, this is the first exhibition of the Leipzig-born artist in Italy and comprises 37 artworks made between 2008 and 2019 including several pieces conceived specifically for the Pitti Palace.



Haydn-Quartett
 7th November, Wiener Musikverein, Austria
 The London quartet, world leading in period string instruments, performs Beethoven, Haydn and Brahms at Austria's premier Musikverein.



Masterpieces of Kunsthalle Bremen: From Delacroix to Beckman
 Until 16th February 2020, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain
 This exhibition of the German collection at Kunsthalle Bremen brings a pioneering engagement with modern art by juxtaposing its French and German masterworks from the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Collaborating with Guggenheim Bilbao, the exhibition highlights how the Kunsthalle collection was influenced by contemporary discourses on modern art and its early reception in Germany, the country that first embraced Impressionism and Post-Impressionism.



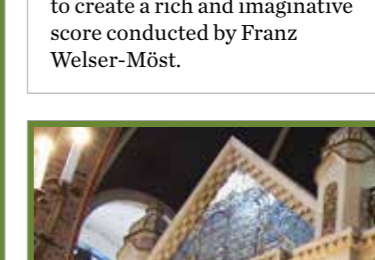
Leonardo da Vinci
 Until 24th February 2020, The Louvre, France
 An unprecedented new exhibition and ten years in the making: Leonardo da Vinci brings together as many of the old master's paintings as possible around the five core works in the Louvre's collection – The Virgin of the Rocks, La Belle Ferronnière, the Mona Lisa, the Saint John the Baptist, and the Saint Anne.



Days of Jewish Culture
 Until 17th November, various locations around Berlin, Germany
 Now in its 31st year, the annual Day of Jewish Culture comprises of a series of events taking place over a ten day period in the German capital to celebrate the full range of Jewish culture that exists there. The festival opener will have a Russian focus and include performances from Moscow violinist Yury Revich and the Moscow Male Jewish Capella Choir.



Die Ägyptische Helena
 Until 23rd November, Teatro Alla Scala, Italy
 This will be the first ever staging of Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal's opera at La Scala and draws upon the Greek works by Euripides and Stesichorus to create a rich and imaginative score conducted by Franz Welser-Möst.



La Traviata
 Selected nights in November, Bolshoi Theatre, Russia
 One of the most important works from Verdi's "middle period" and adapted from Alexandre Dumas's fils novel. The story concerns the life and death of a Parisian courtesan and is the first staging of the famous opera at the Bolshoi Theatre in many years.



Tatiana Bilbao
 Until 5th April 2020, The Architect's Studio, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, Denmark
 The Mexican architect, Tatiana Bilbao, explores and interprets her country's historical and building traditions from the rural to the urban. Bilbao's emphasis on collaboration, with philosophers and sociologists, has led to wide ranging and innovative works in Mexico, including a botanical garden in Culiacán. This is the third exhibition in a series at Louisiana's Architect's Studio.



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crossword & sudoku

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
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54	55	56							57		58	59	60	61
62						63	64	65						
66						67					68			
69						70					71			

- ACROSS**
- Scanned bars, briefly
 - Talk show host Jay and family
 - Cutty _____
 - Trough chow
 - Provide (with)
 - German foreign exchange student on "The Simpsons"
 - With humanity
 - Mythical queen of Carthage
 - Card game that uses four jokers
 - Kind of column, in architecture
 - Footnote indicator
 - Hedge plant
 - Inauspiciously
 - Strain to lift
 - Floor coverings
 - Old-time actress West
 - Chronicles
 - In the ____ (soon to come)
 - Chess piece (abbr.)
 - Dept. of Labor branch
 - Indicate a price change
 - Classic film featuring Captain America
 - "It's ____ Kiss" (1964 hit)
 - Part of the military
- DOWN**
- Gomer Pyle's org.
 - Courtroom bargain
 - Type of meal or pone
 - Pet savers' org.
 - Lane-crossing turns
 - Line that extends for 24,902 miles
 - Void, in French
 - "Black gold"
 - Snoop
 10. Numbers game
 - Had ____ ear (was tone-deaf)
 - Quick, in product names
 - Fast-food magnate Ray
 - Deadly 2003 hurricane
 - Film speed standard
 - Ostrich relative
 - Fix, in a way

- "Not ____ many words"
- Tremble
- Source of some temporary tattoos
- Throws a fit
- Charlottesvile sch.
- Adam or Will
- Honolulu porch
- Stethoscope users, at times
- Get dirty
- Kitchen appliance
- Wetland
- Reagan-era program, for short
- Fathers and sons
- Sincere
- Hankers (for)
- Michael Steele's org., once
- Kept an ____ the ground
- Chevron competitor
- Weather research agcy.
- German typographer Hermann of Dingbats
- 10 C-notes
- Jon Arbuckle's pooch
- Senator Sam
- Hook's first mate
- Cartoon chihuahua
- Outer (prefix)
- Healthy

		1		6				4	3
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		9		8	3	5		6	
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	2	8							8
1					7				3



LEADING EUROPE'S CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT



THE CONSERVATIVE

