

A b s t r a c t s

Nightmare Analyses from Russia and the South Caucasus

Thomas de Waal
Profit, Paranoia, Protest
Georgia's Nightmare

In Georgia, all signs point to a storm. The increasingly authoritarian government and a broad social protest movement stand irreconcilably opposed to one other. The country appears to be trapped in a confrontational political culture. The ruling party is producing Soviet-style images of the enemy and wants to grind down the last bastions of independent control. This development was not inevitable. Apparently, the oligarch behind the ruling party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, succumbed to panic because he saw his assets invested abroad at risk due to Western sanctions against Russia. He wants to turn Georgia into an authoritarian fortress, seemingly equidistant from Russia and the EU. The situation is extremely prone to violence. The elections in the autumn of 2024 offer a small chance to turn the confrontation on the streets back into a competition at the polls.

Vakhushti Menabde
Unfair Competition
Methods of Influencing Elections in Georgia

Georgia is at a historic crossroads. For years, the government led the country towards the European Union. Now, it has made a U-turn, but hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets to protest. The conflict has been put on hold for the time being and will be settled at the ballot box in October. Experience from previous years has shown that the ruling party conducts election campaign by unfair means. The electoral law, which benefited large parties and helped to consolidate the power of ruling parties, has been changed. But the familiar methods of influencing elections can be expected. They range from the use of administrative resources to open violence.

Narek Sukiasyan
Bellicose Unrest
Fear and Unrest in Armenia

Almost a year after the expulsion of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia is still under massive pressure. The violent end to the conflict over the

exclave may well have increased the possibility of a settlement with Azerbaijan. The government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is seeking such a compromise. But the autocratic regime in Baku continues to act aggressively and is constantly putting forward new demands. Even if it comes to a compromise, there is no one to guarantee the agreement. The former security guarantor Russia is having a destabilising effect, the EU is paralysed and toothless, and the United States is acting with restraint. The desperate situation is leading to social tensions. A protest movement has formed against the government. The fears of the protest movement are justified, it has no solutions, and radical slogans worsen the situation.

Democracy in the Crosshairs

A Conversation with Hana Antal about the Attack on Prime Minister Robert Fico and the Situation Afterwards

The assassination attempt on Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico hit the country at a turbulent time. During the 2023 election campaign, Fico divided the country with populist friend-foe rhetoric and did not mitigate this after his election victory. The parties in his government indulge in anti-Western stereotypes and verbally pander to Russia. In foreign policy, however, much remains rhetoric. Domestic policy is different: Fico was on the way to establishing an illiberal regime based on the Hungarian model. It is to be feared that the politicians in the governing coalition will use the attack to push ahead with these plans all the more.

Nikolay Mitrokhin

Russia's War against Ukraine

Weekly Reports Spring 2024

Russia's attack on the Kharkiv region has failed. The Ukrainian defenders were able to stop the occupying troops. On other sections of the front, Russia was also unable to make any significant gains in territory. This is also why the aggressor continues with its massive attacks on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure such as power plants and the electricity grid, in order to wear down the population. The delivery of Western air defence systems promises improvement. After heavy losses, both sides lack the reserves necessary to carry out offensive operations.

Reinhard Flogaus

"Holy War" and Russia as "Katechon"

The Moscow Patriarchate on the Road to Heresy

The Moscow Patriarchate has committed itself to the Kremlin's neo-imperial and revisionist plans. Drawing on the narrative of "Holy Rus" and an apocalyptic ideology of war from the 16th century, it legitimizes Russia's war against Ukraine. The church leadership under Patriarch Kirill has declared the war a "holy war" and is promoting the apotheosis of the soldier's death.

Thomas Bremer
The Russian World Today and Tomorrow
On the Document of the Russian People's Council

At the end of March 2024, the World Russian People's Council published an instruction that caused a stir: it declared the "special military operation" in Ukraine a "holy war", called for a demographic change in Russia, and for the first time attempted to define the Russian world (*rususkij mir*). It is understood as a "spiritual and cultural-civilizational phenomenon" whose borders transcend those of "great historical Russia". The Russian world is closely linked to Russian statehood and opposes the evil that is identified with the West. There is no theological argumentation. The term is part of a specific historical and political worldview that has dangerous revisionist implications. The war in Ukraine shows this.

Lev Gudkov, Nataliia Zorkaia
History, Remembrance, Memory
Results of the Russian memory monitor

In Russia, the people's "historical consciousness" and "collective memory" are shaped by the state. Television, the most powerful propaganda machine, and schools reproduce the central elements of Soviet ideology and an authoritarian understanding of the state. The pivotal point of state history policy is the victory in the Great Patriotic War. It serves to propagate the idea of the necessary unity of *vlast' i narod* (the leadership and the people) as a prerequisite for the nation's survival and to justify the war of aggression against Ukraine. The critical reappraisal of Stalinism is on the defensive, the repressions and the Great Terror are being displaced in the population's collective consciousness. The positive assessment of how the Germans dealt with the crimes of National Socialism is fading. It is being overshadowed by the idea that Germany is once again a hostile state that supports Ukraine.

Alexei Uvarov
More Shades of Grey
Notes on the Russia Memory Monitor

In its "Memory Monitor 2023", the Levada Centre examines historical awareness within Russian public opinion. The data provides insight into how Russia's culture of remembrance has changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the picture of history and society in Russia that author duo Lev Gudkov and Nataliia Zorkaia paints, is too strongly outlined in black and white. In fact, there are more shades of grey. You can only recognize them, however, if you take note of the counter-public sphere in Russia, which still exists to this day despite censorship and propaganda, and which is committed to a pluralistic view of history and efforts to come to terms with the past.

Konstantin Pakhaliuk
History as a Lubricant
Russia's War and Propaganda Machine

The Putin regime has created an imperial, statist, and militaristic ideology to legitimize its rule, in which the supposed constants of “history” and “geopolitics” are integral components. A multitude of institutions, organizations, and individual actors readily compete for state resources. They spread the official patriotic politics of remembrance. Since the beginning of the full-scale war against Ukraine, the state has increased its control over the collective memory of its citizens. Heroic tales from the past, imperial traditions, and historical images from the “Great Patriotic War” are intended to justify the unprovoked war against Ukraine. History has become an instrument of propaganda. But it is only effective under conditions of repression and censorship.

Antonina Klokova
Revaluation and Appropriation
Russia: Art Music in the Service of the State

The Putin regime presents its war of aggression against Ukraine as a war of defence. Its aim is to liberate Ukraine from “Nazism” and confront the hostile “collective West”. To legitimize the war and strengthen society’s fighting spirit, the regime has appropriated Dmitrii Shostakovich’s most famous symphonies, the 7th (“Leningrad”) and the 13th (“Babi Yar”). Sergei Rachmaninoff is stylized as a hero of Great Russian patriotism, while conductors close to the regime use concerts and competitions to simulate cultural normality and perform Russian works to turn music into a ringing weapon of propaganda.

Irina Rebrova
Hijacked and Ideologized
An Exhibition about Nazi Victims in Russia

The traveling exhibition “Pomni o nas ...” (Remember us...) about the Nazi mass murder of people with disabilities in the North Caucasus in 1942/1943 was intended to make the Russian public aware of the fate of a victim group that has received little attention. It was shown in Russia from 2018 to 2021. In 2022, the exhibition was subjected to a “hostile takeover” by a Russian foundation, which turned the exhibition’s content on its head. The exhibition is now supposed to spread the narrative of the “genocide against the Soviet people” and illustrate the “criminal” nature of the “fascist” enemy against the backdrop of Russia’s war against Ukraine.