

A b s t r a c t s

Sergej Lebedev

Testimony of the Dead

Yuri Dmitriev, a wanderer in the Archipelago

In 1997, the Russian historian Yuri Dmitriev discovered a secret mass grave dating from 1937/38 near Medvezhegorsk. He has since found and identified numerous bodies and published the names of thousands of victims of Stalin's terror. Thanks to his efforts, the former killing site was transformed into the memorial of Sandarmokh, devoted to the memory of each individual victim. Dmitriev's meticulous work is of vital importance for Russian society's ability to relate to its own past. However, this work has been interrupted by a systematic campaign against him: Dmitriev has been held in prison under blatantly false accusations since December 2016.

Martin Pollack

"I believe in the power of narrative"

Martin Pollack on historical remembrance, Polish reportage and a teaspoon in reverse

The writer, publicist and translator Martin Pollack explains his choice to study Slavonic Studies as being an infantile reaction to his grandmother, sees the spirit of Europe as being the centuries-old cohabitation of people with different languages and religions, before it was destroyed by nationalism, conflicts between nations and National Socialism. His purpose is to remind us of this past, by describing what was there, what happened, and who the perpetrators and victims were. Literary, historical remembrance requires a special tone: calm, instead of pathos, distance instead of dramatisation are the linguistic means of doing justice to the monstrosity of the crimes that still contaminate the eastern regions of Europe today.

Democracy, Rule of Law and Security

Volker Weichsel

Democracy in abeyance

The parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic, 2017

The victor in the parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic is the billionaire entrepreneur Andrej Babiš, who now wields huge influence over the economy, the media and the political arena. However, the situation is different to that in Poland or Hungary. The traditional parties, particularly on the left, have been considerably weakened, and the party system is extremely fragmented. Yet the division of power remains intact. Babiš does not have an ideological programme, and has not promised system change. The ANO party which he founded and now leads also has no majority in parliament, and no coalition partner. Whether or not a gradual erosion of the rule of law will occur under Prime Minister Babiš, against whom charges of subsidy fraud have been filed, also depends on the result of the presidential election in January 2018.

Maria Shklyaruk

In dubio pro quo?

Prosecution procedures in Russia and Germany

In Russia, almost all prosecutions lead to a conviction. Acquittals are in effect precluded. A comparison with Germany shows why this is the case. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the principle applies that in cases that are not clear cut, the accused enjoys the benefit of the doubt. In Russia, the reverse is true. Instead of halting proceedings if there is insufficient evidence and acquitting the accused, the indictment remains in force for all authorities throughout the legal process. In effect, it is therefore not the judges who make the final decision, but the investigators from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Two-thirds of these investigators are women. If a procedure initiated by them ends with an acquittal, they are likely to be accused of failure to perform their duty.

Volodymyr Kulyk

The song I hear is the language I speak . . .

Language policy and media usage in Ukraine

After it became an independent state in 1991, the language situation in Ukraine changed only very slowly. Russian remained the dominant language, even though almost everyone was also able to speak Ukrainian. This was reflected in the language used in the media, for example. Whenever no decisive state measures to reinforce Ukrainian were in place, Russian was used. It was only following the upheaval of 2014 and the perception of Russia as an aggressive military power that the situation changed fundamentally. As a result of stronger state regulation and a shift in language awareness among the population, the Ukrainian language has now gained dramatically in importance. Whether this will also be the case in other social contexts remains to be seen.

Justina Budginaitė-Froehly

Liberalisation, diversification, resilience

Lithuania's energy reform

Lithuania used to be highly dependent on Russia for its energy supply, making the Baltic state vulnerable to financial and political pressure from Moscow. After a decade of being unable to push through reform, Lithuania has now succeeded in reshaping the structure of the energy sector. The pioneer here is the gas market. By implementing the EU's "third energy package", a dividing line has been drawn between suppliers and utility providers, creating the basis for more competition. Diversification was taken one step further with the construction of a terminal in Klaipėda, meaning that now, liquid gas can also be imported. At the same time, Lithuania is developing regenerative energy sources. All this is helping to strengthen the country's energy security.

Benno Ennker

Russia's new foreign policy, The Internal preconditions, 2011–2013

The annexation of Crimea and the war against Ukraine are an indication that Russia's political leadership is pursuing imperialist power politics. Politically, this has been in the making for some time. Paradoxically, the change of course began while Medvedev was president, when Putin, then Prime Minister, introduced a different strategy. As a result of the realignment of competences, the appointment of anti-liberal forces to positions of power and the promotion of national-imperialist and power state worldviews, he undermined the "liberal experiment" even while it was officially still being pursued. Instead of socio-economic modernisation of the country with the aid of the West, the militarisation of the economy and society turned against the West and the "liberal world". This changed power relationship within the Russian elite is one of the main reasons for the change of course in domestic and foreign policy.

Manfred Huterer

Security with and against Russia Comments on a current debate

Since Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine, relations between the West and Russia have been in deep crisis. The dual strategy of "as much containment and deterrence as necessary, as much cooperation and dialogue as possible" offers an orientation for future policy towards Russia. NATO and the EU need security with and against Russia. The goal must be to again obligate Russia to comply with a rules-based security policy and conventional and nuclear disarmament. The West should be prepared to conduct a dialogue on a cooperative security policy and conventional and nuclear disarmament in order to generate trust and prevent an uncontrollable escalation dynamic. One key issue remains how security and stability should be organised in the region between the EU and Russia. Providing formal assurance to Moscow that there is no intention of absorbing Ukraine and the other states in the region into the EU or NATO would send a false signal. A normalisation of the relationship with Russia will not be possible without a clear de-escalation of the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

Egbert Jahn

Peace among the peoples The idea and the reality of communist internationalism

It is generally assumed that the October Revolution resulted from the misery suffered by the workers and peasants. In fact, however, it was not so much the social aspect but the national issue that made communism so attractive for hundreds of millions of people during the 20th century. Capitalism was regarded not only as the cause of inequality and exploitation, but also of devastating wars. Lenin had promised to build entirely new relationships between states and peoples. Yet the national

federalism and internationalism of the Bolsheviks was nothing more than a tactical manoeuvre. The Stalinist terror, including against entire peoples, discredited communism. The yearning and the search for inner-state and international order, which permits peaceful relations between the peoples, is still alive today.

Robert Kindler

Soviet people

The Russian Germans between de-Stalinisation and emigration

The history of the Russian Germans in the 20th century can only be understood when examined in the context of Soviet history. Repression and discrimination, as well as the integration of Germans into Soviet society after Stalin's death, were variations of a – frequently tragic – Soviet “normality”. To date, however, this dimension has hardly featured at all in the version of the history of the Russian Germans supported by academics and the general public. Thus an important common element of the Russian Germans, who emigrated to Germany in their hundreds of thousands during the 1990s, is overlooked.

Uwe Halbach

Russia and the Caucasus

Two books about a difficult relationship

In Russia, it has been alleged for some years now that western historiography is distorting the history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Two books about Russian rule in the Caucasus disprove this assertion. Jeronim Perović presents a nuanced picture of rebellion and adaptation in the multi-ethnic region of the Northern Caucasus. Philipp Ammon looks to the Southern Caucasus and illustrates how in Georgia, Russia has been perceived sometimes as a protector and sometimes as a colonial power.

Michail Skarovskij

Persecution and its consequences

Religious policy under Khrushchev

The Khrushchev era is described as being a phase of de-Stalinisation and liberalisation. However, in terms of religious policy, the opposite was true. From 1958 onwards, the CPSU waged a campaign against the Russian Orthodox Church. Its openly declared goal was to completely destroy the Church and exterminate religion. Religious thought and life were regarded as being reactionary. However, the assault on the Church failed. The Soviet regime also needed the Church again as a foreign policy tool.

Katrin Boeckh
Forces for reform
The Catholic churches and Perestroika

The liberalisation of religious policy was one of the few successful reforms of the Perestroika years under Michael Gorbachev. It promoted social change, mobilised the faithful and enjoyed international support. The Roman Catholic Church in particular under John Paul II recognised the opportunities for opening and consolidated the reform dynamic. The Greek Catholic (uniate) Church, which had been suppressed for decades in the Soviet Union, also benefited from this. The influence on the realignment of relations between the state and the churches asserted by individuals such as the chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs, Konstantin Kharchev and Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, who were given responsibility for the operative implementation of the new policy towards religion, was far greater than has been assumed until now.

Dietmar Schon
Human dignity, freedom and rights
Comments on a key document of the Russian Orthodox Church

With “The Russian Orthodox Church’s Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights”, the Orthodox Church is attempting to reposition itself in Russia. It presents itself as a witness to and counsel for human rights on the basis of Orthodox anthropology. With this theological teaching, the church formulates its aspiration to shape the legislative framework and society in Russia according to Orthodox ideas. However, in so doing, it underestimates the religious and social plurality of the Russian population, and Russia’s integration in the globalised world.

Regina Elsner
Restricted power resource
The Russian Orthodox Church in Russia’s foreign policy

Since Russia’s political leadership performed a nationalist-patriotic U-turn in 2012, the Russian Orthodox Church appears to have gained influence as a power factor. References to “traditional values” and religious rhetoric are used by the leadership to mobilise the population and legitimise its hold on power. However, with regard to foreign policy, the Church is of limited use as a power resource. The multinational nature of the Church, the plurality in Orthodoxy and its specific international interests are not identical with the goals of Russian foreign policy. This is reflected in the separate course taken by the Russian Orthodox Church in relation to Ukraine since the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine.