

A b s t r a c t s

Portent War, Authoritarianism and Ideology

Alfrun Kliems

The Frenchman among the Central Europeans

Milan Kundera (April 1, 1929 – July 11, 2023)

Milan Kundera's novels combine a sense of the fragile and tragic with a robust affirmation of life. They are full of ambivalence and contradictions. Deadly seriousness alternates with irony. Aesthetic purpose is paired with lightness. Aphorisms that stand next to philosophical excursions – against kitsch, against idyll, nostalgia, forgetting. Kundera was always accompanied by accusations of being an erotomaniac who saw only the male perspective. This is not wrong, but in totalitarian times, he was above all concerned with a counterforce to the impositions of crude collectivism. Born in the Czech city of Brno and living in exile since 1975, Kundera died in Paris in July 2023.

Lev Gudkov

The “Leader of the Nation”

Putin and Collective Consciousness in Russia

Over the past 20 years, Russia has evolved from a weak democracy to a repressive police state and now to a wartime dictatorship. The causes can be seen in a dynamic interplay between the collective mentality of an amorphous society and the institutional continuity of the Soviet Union's repressive apparatus. Russian society's inability to organise itself and a longing for a strong leader came together with the mechanisms of bureaucratic self-regeneration. Elections do not serve to select elites, but to confirm the leader by acclamation. Propaganda ascribes to him charisma; collective consciousness confirms this induced legitimacy. The state's production of conceived enemies plays a central role. Such propaganda legitimises the 20 years of internal war waged against those who think differently and the external war against Ukraine, which has been ongoing since 2014.

Otto Luchterhandt

Portent of Doom

Putin's Autocracy and Prigozhin's Uprising

The British historian Ian Kershaw has developed a catalogue of factors to analyse the influence of political leaders on the course of history. At its core lies the classic relationship between personality and power. Kershaw's grid may be used to explain the rise of Vladimir Putin, once an unknown man without qualities, to the presidency of Russia, the concentration of power in his person, and

the transition from autocracy to dictatorship. Every successful autocracy carries within itself the seeds of its own downfall. In Putin's case, the war he arbitrarily unleashed on Ukraine is acting as a catalyst. The "Wagner Uprising" under Evgenii Prigozhin on June 24, 2023, is the overture to the Putin regime's "Götterdämmerung".

Oleg Morozov

Self-Victimization

Russia's War against Ukraine in the Exile Media

How exile media outlets such as Dozhd', Populiarnaia Politika, or Zhivoi Gvozd' report Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine today will impact how the war is remembered collectively by Russians and Ukrainians tomorrow. Although the exile media condemns the war, their daily journalistic work hardly addresses the experience of Ukrainian victims. News from Russia takes centre stage. This approach reduces empathy for Ukrainians as the actual victims of the war and encourages a perception among audiences within Russia and in exile that they are themselves victims of the war. Meduza and DOXA show that there is another way.

Il'ia Shablinsky

Authoritarianism and Ideology

A Comparison of Regimes

As a rule, authoritarian regimes do not develop a cohesive and binding ideology. This distinguishes them from totalitarian regimes. However, a comparative look at right-wing and left-wing dictatorships in the second half of the 20th century shows that the juntas in Greece and Latin America, as well as the authoritarian regimes in Spain, the Philippines or Egypt, worked with ideological set pieces. The Putin regime did the same in the 2000s, and after the protests of 2011–12, it massively intensified this practice. Since its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has been moving toward totalitarian rule. Nonetheless, comparison shows: every regime that tries to impose a state ideology crumbles with the death of the ruler at the latest.

Alexander Libman

Russian Studies on the Eve of a New Start

Russia's War, Isolation, and Consequences

Russia's war against Ukraine has massive repercussions on the way Russian Studies sees itself and how it conducts its work. Similar to what happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the field faces a need to reformulate key assumptions and develop new methods. Back then Russian Studies reacted with new paradigms and gained recognition in the mother disciplines of the social sciences thanks to broad-based field research, high standards, pertinent methods, and substantive findings. Under conditions of isolation and repression in Russia, as well as the war against Ukraine, these achievements are in danger of being wiped out.

**Ideological Control and Repression
Bloodletting in the Belarusian Art Scene
A conversation with Aleksandr Zimenko**

In June 2020, Viktor Babaryka was arrested in Belarus. The head of Belgazprombank had wanted to run in the presidential elections against longtime dictator Lukashenka. Then an art collection from the bank was confiscated. The collection, which primarily included artists from the “Paris School”, featured a painting that became a symbol of the protests against electoral fraud and arbitrary rule: Chaim Soutine’s “Eva”. What has happened to the collection since the liberation movement was crushed? And what’s happening in the art scene in Belarus now? The collection’s former curator, Aleksandr Zimenko, who had to flee the country in March 2023, provides information.

**The Polish Special Commission to Investigate Russian Influences
A conversation with Kai-Olaf Lang**

The Polish government has created the legal foundations for the establishment of a special commission to investigate “Russian interference” in Polish politics. The executive body was supposed to have far-reaching powers and exclude politicians from political office. In the 2023 election year, the commission is an instrument for discrediting opposition leader Donald Tusk and driving polarisation further. Several hundred thousand people have taken to the streets in Warsaw to protest the law. Germany has shown restraint, but the United States has voiced sharp criticism and the European Commission immediately initiated infringement proceedings. All this has changed the government’s calculations; it now sees more costs than benefits. The law will come into force in a mitigated form.

**Marta Bucholc & Maciej Komornik
“This Is Legal Nihilism in Action”
Background and Consequences of the “Lex Tusk”**

Poland’s governing majority has created a quasi-judicial special commission that is to investigate “Russian interference” in Polish politics. The justification of the law, the period of investigation, the commission’s scope of competences, and its integration into the republic’s political and legal institutional structures show that the commission violates basic principles of the rule of law. The special commission will allow itself to be misused as a tool to discredit, compromise, and eliminate the opposition led by Donald Tusk.

The Contemporary Past

**Bert Hoppe
Ukraine in the Age of Mass Violence
Terror and Occupation 1930–1947**

The territory of today's Ukraine has been the scene of collective violence for decades. The Holodomor in the early 1930s, the Great Terror in 1937 and 1938, the Holocaust by bullets from 1941 onwards, and the mutual deportations and massacres of Ukrainians and Poles in the 1940s - until the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was forbidden to remember any of these crimes in Ukraine. Instead, historical facts were falsified or distorted to prevent commemoration of the victims. This can be seen in the treatment of Bykivnia, where 12,000 victims of Stalinism were buried, and Babyn Yar, which served the Germans as an execution site. Ukraine's European orientation is now facilitating the reassessment of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict and reconciliation between the two nations.

Pavel Poljan

"We Mustn't Lose This War ..."

Babyn Yar's Killers on Trial

Few of the perpetrators stood trial for the 1941 mass murder of Kyiv's Jews at Babyn Yar. However, there were some court cases. Best known are the Nuremberg trial of the main war criminals and the subsequent Einsatzgruppen trial. The International Military Tribunal personalised responsibility for state crimes and thus made a significant contribution to the further development of international criminal law. In the Soviet Union, the first trials of German perpetrators took place during the war. After the war, almost 20 more trials followed, addressing not least of all the murder of Kyiv's Jews. Many of the accused were sentenced to death, while the rest received prison sentences, often of up to 25 years. But just as the Western Allies released all of the convicted perpetrators who had not been executed in the first half of the 1950s, the last Germans convicted of war crimes in Soviet proceedings were able to return to Germany as free men in 1955.

Magdalena Semczyszyn, Łukasz Adamski

Khrushchev as National Communist

The General Secretary and the Ukrainian question

Nikita Khrushchev had risen to prominence in the Stalin era and held high political office in the 1930s, before becoming general secretary of the CPSU himself after Stalin's death. From 1938 to 1949, he stood at the helm of the Ukrainian Communist Party. Just as he had supported the show trials in Moscow, he led the fight against "Ukrainian nationalists" in Kyiv. But when it came to territorial issues, he used ethnic arguments to advocate the "unification of all Ukrainians" in the Ukrainian Soviet republic. In the 1930s, he promoted the Russification of Soviet Ukraine. After the Hitler-Stalin Pact, he organised the murder, deportation, expulsion, and expropriation of Poles from the territories annexed by the Soviet Union and incorporated into the Ukrainian republic. His attempt to annex further Polish territories to Soviet Ukraine beyond those actually annexed to the Soviet Union was unsuccessful. But he did ensure the transfer of Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet republic in 1954.