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INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



TURKEY ELECTIONS

OTTAWA

ALDE

THEARY SENG

UGANDA

EVENTS

- 27th June LIBG/PAF Forum – Russia’s ‘other’ European neighbours. 6.30pm-8.00pm by Zoom – see page 3
- 23rd-26th September Liberal Democrats Federal Autumn Conference, Bournemouth.
- 21st October Liberal Democrat Town & Parish Councillors Conference, free event, online, provisionally 10am-1pm.
- 21st– 22nd October Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru/Welsh Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference, Ramada Plaza Hotel, Wrexham.
- 28th-30th October Scottish Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference, The Town House, Hamilton.

For bookings & other information please contact the Treasurer below.

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CONTENTS

- LIBG/PAF Forum – Russia’s ‘other’ European neighbours. page 3
- The Turkish Election, Erdoğan won, the Nation lost, by A. Kurt pages 4-5
- Ottawa ExCom page 6
- ALDE Congress, by Merlene Emerson... pages 7-8
- The first anniversary of Theary Seng’s imprisonment. page 8
- Hong Kong people are more engaging and proactive than ever before. By Kevin Lam page 9
- Uganda's New Anti-LGBTQ+ Law page 10
- International Abstracts page 10
- Reviews pages 11-16

Photographs – Stewart Rayment, Liberal International, Merlene Emerson, Theary Seng, Kevin Lam, George Cunningham, Lucy Brennan-Shiel.



Cover Photograph – Whorled (Here After Here After Here) by Jitish Kallat, Somerset House Fountain Court, London.

The Mumbai-based artist’s first major public commission in the UK invited visitors on a moving journey to consider the relationship with the planet and beyond. Inspired by the visual language of British road signs giving specific distances from Somerset House, walking through the installation resonates with ritual traditions of circular movement ‘Whorled maps the spiral into the spheroid form of the globe, symbolically interlacing the terrestrial with the celestial and the past with the future.’



LIBG/PAF FORUM

Russia's 'other' European Neighbours



27th June 18.30-20.00

Overview

Since Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine in February 2022, attention has focussed quite rightly on the war. But threats and instability abound elsewhere in the region we once called 'eastern Europe'. In Moldova there are fears of a Russian attack and hopes of EU accession; in Belarus the precarious regime is facing and presenting new difficulties; and in the South Caucasus Georgia's democracy and Euro-Atlantic aspirations seem doomed whilst the Azerbaijanis and Armenians seem to be close to war again.

This event will examine Russia's actions and influence over its 'other' European neighbours. It will also ask if the new European Political Community can help with regional security.

Speakers

Edward Lucas - Russia's influence over its European neighbours

Edward Lucas is the the Liberal Democrat PPC for Cities of London and Westminster and is a former aide to Paddy Ashdown. He has four decades of experience in European security, including postings to Moscow, Berlin, Washington DC, Prague and the Baltic states. He has worked for the Economist and the BBC, and now writes a column for the Times and advises the CEPA think tank.

Edward will examine Russia's actual and desired influence over its European neighbours. He will discuss the out-of-date concepts of "post-Soviet" and "eastern Europe" and look to the future, including the role of the new European Political Community.

Dr Cristina Gherasimov (tbc) - the political situation in Moldova

Cristina Gherasimov is Senior Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of the Republic of Moldova

Dr Carol Weaver - the South Caucasus & Nagorno-Karabakh

Carol Weaver is the author of many research-based academic publications including 'The Politics of the Black Sea Region' (2013). She is an LIBG executive member, a former PPC, and a member of the International Security policy working group.

Carol will discuss the current events in the South Caucasus, in particular how the disagreements between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh are causing the area to develop into a tinder box with Russia, the EU, the US, Iran, Israel and Turkey all drawn in once more as in the 2020 war.

Chair: Irina von Wiese

Irina is Chair of the Liberal International British Group, a councillor, and a former LibDem MEP for London

To register and to receive the Zoom link for this meeting please click here:

<https://forms.office.com/e/kGHA0DdkBX>

THE TURKISH ELECTION: ERDOĞAN WON, THE NATION LOST...

A. Kurt

The last democracy around the Middle East has been effectively destroyed by Erdoğan's re-election. It may not have been up to the standards of Western Europe, not even eastern Europa but there was some hope to turn the clock back in the sense democracy in Turkey. Alas it has all but gone up in flames. The Turkish presidential election ended with a very little margin and Erdoğan wins again. Two points is going to make a huge difference to the life of Turkish citizens, also around the Middle East and Europa.

Black Sea region, Middle Anatolia and east Anatolia voted for Erdoğan. Western Turkey, almost all the major metropolises and all the coastal towns (except one) voted for the opposition. Erdoğan's share vote went down comparing the last election. Election results clearly showing that country divided into a two separate camps. One side consists of hard-core Islamists, ultra-nationalists and corrupt cronies of Erdoğan (this group has no ideological target, they are only looking for amassing more wealth by any means possible) The opposition side are made up of secularists, moderate Islamists, Kurds and anybody who wants to live in a fair and better country.

This clear polarisation of Turkey is not going to go away; because with this election victory Islamists and ultra-nationalists will demand more power, more changes (which would completely break the fabric of society especially in major cities and coastal towns) and they will attempt to transform the rest of the society by force, if they cannot by consent.

Erdoğan's dreams of rebuilding the neo-Ottoman imaginary state is already dead but this idea, this dream still works for his domestic policy. He will most probably be fuelling and channelling this dead idea to his followers by using every means of media. He will desperately need a new story because of the coming economic collapse. In the past whenever economy went in to dire straits he pushed Islamic values (opening Hagia Sophia as a mosque after almost a century), ultra-nationalist ideas and created imaginary enemies; funnily enough it worked. So, in the event of economic downturn or collapse he will turn to those old but sure methods.

There is a very clear danger that lies ahead for him in near future; the contradiction between his family and his cronies huge wealth (and desire to have more) and his Islamic ideals. Those are two different highways; they are going to two different directions. He could keep this duality up to a limited time but eventually there will be an antagonistic crash. Also, his health clearly failing, in the event of his death, there is nobody that could lead his party's masses as he does. So, the end of the Erdoğan regime might be nearer than anybody thinks; but because of the polarisation and deep divisions that he created in last twenty one years, when he is not in the picture there will be huge turmoil, even the danger of civil war.

In coming days it is most likely we are going to see a massive economic crisis, with the potential to shake the foundation of Turkish economy, plus anybody who invested in Turkish markets, bonds or any Turkish interests. According to the world-famous economist Daron Acemoğlu of MIT, the expected crisis could be as big as Argentina's (1998-2002) which was one of the biggest before the 2008 recession.

If a crisis of this scale takes place, Erdoğan has only one option, capital controls. He also needs a full-scale police state to keep the country under control. Central bank reserves are completely dry, short term foreign debt has risen to such amounts which have never been seen before in the history of republic. Unless he finds money from his close allies (such as Qataris) the economy might collapse completely.

One thing is certain half of Turkish population desires a hard-core religious conservative government. They do not care about how corrupt the government is, how unchecked, how unfair. All they want is to see the nation is governed by religious ways and society to be re-designed by religiously. The other half is against this idea, so country is separated to two antagonistic side.

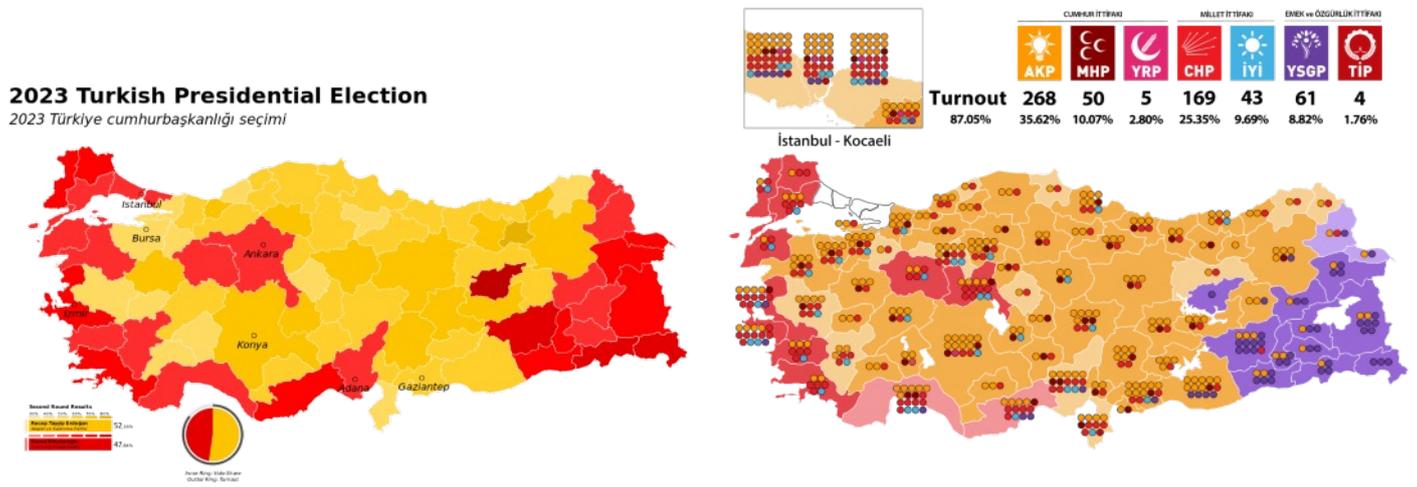
He will most certainly keep his dual political game with NATO and Allies. On one hand tries to get more arms from USA, on the other hand will keep close contact with Russian Federation. The Kurdish Party's most important ex-leader Selahattin Demirtaş (currently in prison) has announced that he will resign from political life. This development might cause the Kurdish party (HDP) to divide at least in two different factions. The Islamists in HDP will certainly be more powerful, they may even get the leadership of the party. Over the last ten years Erdoğan tried hard to achieve this; now it might happen.

I suspect, before the end of the year or before his health completely fails; Erdoğan would change constitution and political regime. Turkey is technically a secular state, Erdoğan most probably will change some law and regulations which enable him to convert the republic into an Islamic state. He is desperate that the regime he set up should prevail after his death (his son is seen as the most probable successor). If this kind of development takes place whole region could be shaken economically and socially.

Interestingly more than 1.5 million Erdoğan votes (almost the full difference between him and opposition) came from Turkish diaspora. It was not a fair election but Turkey has not seen fair election for last 13 years, maybe even more. Mainstream media is solely under Erdoğan's control. So, this is not an excuse for the opposition having come so close. International observers have said that the elections were free but not fair. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Special Coordinator, Farah Karimi, said in a news conference in Ankara that "biased media coverage and a lack of a level playing field gave an unjustified advantage to the incumbent."

Immediately after the election (even a week before) European Union countries stopped issuing visas to Turkish citizens. The future is very bleak for Turkish citizens, particularly for the young generation. The same goes for the Kurdish population, left wing opposition and anybody who believes in a secular state.

A. Kurt



Data from Anadolu Agency

CC BY-SA 4.0 File:Turkish Electoral District 2023 Visual.svg Created: 29 April 2023

These maps show the extent of the polarisation in Turkish society; the cities in the hands of the Opposition, the east, the Kurds, whilst the government holds and prevails through Anatolia.

The maps can be viewed easier on Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Turkish_general_election

The World's Liberals convene in Canada for LI's 206th ExCom and LPC Convention

Liberals the world over came together in Ottawa, Canada 2-4 May for a series of high-level political debates and exchanges over the course of LI's 206th executive committee meeting, which saw the global liberal family return to Canada for the first time in almost 15 years.

With 140 registered delegates spanning 40 countries and 60 organisations, the ExCom welcomed 6 new member parties, adopted 18 political resolutions and was addressed by several government ministers and parliamentarians in an action-packed programme spanning topics from democratic decline to strategies and ambitions for COP28.

The 2023 Prize for Freedom laureate was confirmed by the ExCom as Vladimir Kara-Murza, whose wife Evgenia, addressed delegates during a hotly-anticipated panel 'organising from opposition.' Organised with the ALDE Party the debate centred on imprisoned liberals and what can be done to help them.

Delegates were also treated to an evening dinner with former Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chretien, who spoke of his most seven decades of political activity, the importance of a free media to democracy, and his optimism for redistributing the benefits of globalisation.

Meanwhile the LI Bureau met with Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Melanie Joly, in a closed meeting to exchange ideas about closer cooperation and advancing common Liberal values.

"More than ever, in this consequential moment in the world, your energy is needed." was the message from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, as he addressed delegates of the 2023 Liberal Party convention, to which LI delegates ExCom were also invited and able to participate. The politically star-studded line up included an address from former US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton who, discussing foreign affairs, insisted that "Ukraine's fight for freedom is our fight", before adding that "the best way to end Putin's aggression is for Ukraine to win".

Liberal International is grateful to its sponsors for the ExCom, including the European Liberal Forum, ALDE Party, Renew Europe, the Canadian Group of Liberal International, and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.



The Who, What and Whys of ALDE Party Congress 26-28 May 2023 Merlene Emerson

Who?

ALDE Party (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe) is an umbrella membership party of liberal leaning and social democratic parties in Europe. There are currently 77 members across 44 countries in Europe, both in EU as well as non-EU countries. Sadly, the LibDems have now fallen into the 2nd category but it remains a lifeline that keeps us connected with others in the liberal and democratic family in Europe.



The Liberal Democrat Delegation

What?

So what was the recent Congress all about and how do I encapsulate in a short piece the spirit and substance of the annual gathering? There were policy resolutions¹ passed (ranging from Restoration of a pro-active Trade Policy, to supporting Introduction of Civil Partnerships in Ukraine), election of new Bureau members and important amendments to internal regulations, but it was the first session, a fireside chat with Vice-President Margrethe Vestager and Commissioner Vera Jourova that I found hugely inspiring.

The world is on fire (metaphorically speaking). EU stepped up during Covid19 to protect its citizens as well as managed to export vaccines to the rest of the world. Our "liberal footprint" can be seen in the

continuous championing of the rule of law, the fight against climate change and in seeking to uphold fundamental rights of free speech and an independent media. We now have to look into introduction of EU regulations of AI (...and *no, this has not been written by Chat GPT*).

Why?

Europe is an amazing continent made up of cultures and peoples who have influenced the globe for over 500 years (Portuguese explorers such as Magellan and Vasco da Gama are household names, whilst the French, Dutch and British have left their mark on many a country in the ASEAN region.) Despite the large diaspora Chinese E & SE Asian communities in Europe, this was the first year I finally met someone else of CESEA background at an ALDE gathering. Julie Tran is an elected Swedish politician of Vietnamese heritage from our sister party Centerpartiet.

Perhaps diversity is growing within ALDE Party too as evidenced by Muharrem Demirok of Turkish heritage becoming leader of Centerpartiet earlier this year. And Malik Azmani MEP of Moroccan descent from Dutch party VVD getting elected to the Bureau this weekend. Yet populist and nationalist parties continue to grow across Europe and migration policies remain a hot potato. Let's face it, the UK is suffering from a cost-of-living crisis in part due to Brexit, which was voted for as a result of scare-mongering about increased migration from UK's EU membership.

The penny finally dropped for me sitting through a heated debate on an urgency motion censuring Mr Babis (leader of ANO in Czech Republic) showing support for Victor Orban at a CPAC event in Hungary. The DNA of liberals in Europe was forged by memories of the Holocaust and fascism. In Asia, reference points for freedom and liberalism stem from the Pacific war and the Japanese occupation (WWII) as well as the

fighters for independence from colonialism and imperialism. That is not to say we disagree on what are liberal values and the pursuit of democracy and human rights. But countries with different political systems (such as democracies vs autocracies) are not the same as values and beliefs. And it is clear in my mind that an "Indo-Pacific strategy" that tries to label and divide countries as allies for purposes of trade, security and defence is at best aspirational, and at worst divisive and deeply dangerous. The elephant (or panda) in the room was perhaps not China but Sinophobia.

It is at conferences such as ALDE Party Congress where we have the opportunity to listen, learn and collaborate with European colleagues to find the best liberal democratic solutions to global problems (including poverty, climate change, health inequalities, peace and security.)

Merlene Emerson, one of the 10 LibDem Council delegates to the ALDE Congress

https://www.aldeparty.eu/tags/congress_in_stockholm_sweden_may_2023?utm_campaign=final_email_congress_2023&utm_medium=email&utm_source=aldeparty

The first anniversary of Theary Seng's imprisonment

14th June marked the first anniversary of the imprisonment of prominent Cambodian human rights activist and lawyer Theary Seng. On 14 June 2022, she was sentenced to 6 years in prison on the charges of treason. As a child, she moved to the United States after her parents were murdered in the Khmer Rouge genocide. She graduated Georgetown University and later obtained a law degree from the University of Michigan. In 2004, she moved back from the United States to Cambodia to fight for democracy, freedom, and human rights. Since the crackdown of violence in 2017, Theary refused to flee, instead staying in the country to continue her fight.

Her imprisonment only shows that Prime Minister Hun Sen's authoritarian rule is threatened by any political dissent. By not allowing any freedom of expression, Prime Minister Hun Sen continues to raise fear in the people of Cambodia that speaking up against injustice will cost one's freedom. Paradoxically his Cambodian People's Party is a member of the Centrist Democrat International (Christian Democrats before 1999).

Liberal International's Human Rights Committee continues to support Theary Seng and other Cambodians in these uncertain times and strongly condemns the imprisonment of Theary Seng and Cambodian activists opposing the draconian rule of Hun Sen. Freedom of expression is a human right, and the victims of Hun Sen's regime should have justice.



Theary Seng was awarded the Hans van Baalen Medal of Liberalism in 2023. The Medal is awarded to a person that has worked hard to advance liberal values on a local, national and international level. Furthermore, she was a strong candidate for the Liberal International Prize for Freedom 2023.

At the 53rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council this month in Geneva, Liberal International will deliver an oral statement on oppression in Cambodia and the unjust imprisonment of Theary Seng.

Image courtesy of Theary Seng's website.

Hong Kong people are more engaging and proactive than ever before.

Kevin Lam

I believe not many members in the party know that there is a HK subgroup in Chinese Liberal Democrats.

One of our *key objectives* is to help HK people integrate into the UK. And earlier this month in May, we were invited by Diversity Resource International (DRI), a non-profit-making Social Enterprise that supports ethnically diverse and migrant communities, as speakers of a workshop. This is in order to let HK people have a basic understanding of the UK political landscape and system before voting. It was a very meaningful event, and even more meaningful to me was seeing HK people getting more engaged and proactive than before.

HK people have an image, I am not sure since when, that they are shy and quite detached from the local community, just focusing on their jobs and earning money. But happily, it is changing, one of the reasons is the impact of HK BNO holders.



For example, the feedback from the workshop were encouraging, and majority of them said "I will go to vote". I don't have a solid figure, however, from what I heard, most of the HK BNO holders did vote in the local elections. For some reason, the last generations of HK Chinese who came to the UK were relatively passive in terms of social engagement. After they saw the new HK BNO comers active and vocal, the last generations of HK Chinese also feel empowered and gained the momentum to be more participating.

Once in a lunch, a local friend said there are so many Chinese people now (regardless from HK or other countries/cities) in the UK, some of the HK people have been here over decades, but you rarely see a Chinese in the parliament, nor in the cabinet. Yes, there are only two MPs of Chinese descent at the

moment, and no single one in London Assembly. It showed that we were not doing well enough in comparison to other ethnic groups. Fortunately, the good news is Chinese LibDems had a few members elected as councillors in the recent local elections, namely, Cllrs Ying Perrett and Calvin Chong (both of whom are BNO Visa holders) and Cllr Marguerita Morton (originally from Macau). We also have a PPC Victoria Collins in Harpenden and Berkhamsted who is of mixed Chinese heritage.

The other objective of HK subgroup is to bridge the communication gap between local communities and different ethnic groups with the HK people, and not just supporting HK people. I believe cultural exchange is the only way to break the wall of misunderstanding; there are still many people think that all Chinese are spies. In particular, the recent hot news is about immigration: there were 1.1 million people who migrated into the UK in the year ending June 2022, 76,000 of whom were from Hong Kong. It is the time for Hong Kong people to step forward. In the meantime, I also invite the people from different ethnic groups to interact with us more frequently. The positive election results of 4 May were a good sign that we are on the right path, even though there may be some way to go.

Kevin Lam, Chair of HK Subgroup in Chinese Lib Dems

Any local party or Constituency that has a large population of HK BNO migrants and would like resources and help in reaching out to them, please feel free to contact Kevin and the HK subgroup via hello@chineselibdems.org.uk

Uganda's New Anti-LGBTQ+ Law

On Monday 29th May, President Museveni chose to sign into Law the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, one of the world's harshest anti-LGBTQ+ laws. The law includes the death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality." Individuals charged with promoting homosexuality can face up to 20 years in prison.

In early May, Liberal International passed a motion at their Executive Committee in Ottawa condemning the verbal and physical abuse and hate speech inciting violence against LGBTQI+ people in Uganda and stating that global liberal parties need to support the local LGBTQ+ community in Uganda. We call on Uganda to abide by its international treaty obligations and Constitution by not imposing these appalling draconian laws.

HRC LGBTQ+ rights spokesperson Adrian Hyyrylainen-Trett commented that "this abominable law being introduced only persecutes further the rights of LGBTQ+ people in Uganda, and we in the UK, and other safe western countries should immediately be prepared to provide a country of refuge and support for the Ugandan LGBTQ+ community." Hyyrylainen-Trett also called on LI's member parties to continue to support the local activists on the ground in whichever way best suited.

LGBTQ+ rights spokesperson Joost Dijkshoorn commented that it is deeply appalling that the anti-homosexuality bill was adopted. He suggested that countries should reconsider their support for Ugandan law enforcement programmes, while continuing to actively support the protection of the Ugandan LGBTI+ community.

ALDE Congress earlier in May also passed a resolution urging President Museveni not to sign the Bill into law. That resolution can be found on their website and goes into some detail on the issues.

https://assets.nationbuilder.com/aldeparty/pages/6637/attachments/original/1685281383/On_the_recent_anti-LGBTIQ_law_in_Uganda.pdf?1685281383

64 countries around the world - mainly in Africa, the Middle East and Asia- criminalise homosexuality and transgender identity by law, in some cases as a legacy of previous colonial regimes.

International Abstracts

Liberator 416

Becky Tinsley wrote on Erdoğan's progressive erosion of Turkish democracy and his dealing with opponents abroad. It also carried Unforeseen Consequences, by Grahame Jackson & Harriet Brown, which appeared in interLib 2023-01 and an obituary of Robert Woodthorpe Browne by Phil Bennion. Otherwise, content was dominated by the Liberal Democrats' relations with Labour. <https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/back-issues/>

Liberator 417

The only international article appearing in Liberator 417 was Appeasement in Khartoum, by Rebecca Tinsley, which appeared in interLib 2023-03. Let's hope Layla Moran is acting upon it. Ed Davey's stance on the EU at the York Conference may no longer be parish council business. Otherwise, the magazine focussed on the May 4th elections, Guaranteed Basic Income policy, Artificial Intelligence, the problems of the SNP and the prospects that raises. <https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/back-issues/>

Middle East, Israel, Palestine

What will Saudi-Iran rapprochement mean for the Palestinians? By Omar H. Rahman. +972 magazine. 24th May 2023

Not much, if past precedents are anything to go by but an interesting review of current developments in the Middle East. Omits commentary on Yemen and Saudi/UAE tensions there about.

+972 Magazine is a left-wing news and opinion webzine established in August 2010 by a group of four Israeli writers in Tel Aviv. <https://www.972mag.com/saudi-iran-palestinians-abraham-accords/>

reviews

The New Cold War by Gilbert Achcar Saqi Books 2023

This could be pigeonholed as a book saying “I told you so on a New Cold War twenty years ago”, and “It is all America’s fault”. But this analysis by Professor Achcar is much more sophisticated than that. Two chapters are reprinted from in fact twenty five and twenty four years ago (bringing us to the period after the Kosovo war) and two new ones are added. It is a left wing analysis on US / Russia / China, with the subtitle “The United States, Russia and China from Kosovo to Ukraine”. I suspected when asked to review that this might be the classic Euro Marxist “It’s all America’s fault” or worse a simple far left apology for authoritarian regimes. However having read the author’s profile it was immediately apparent that not only are his book titles at least clever and thoughtful, but Professor Achcar seems to have eclectic and broad knowledge. That is confirmed by my reading of the book, especially the two new chapters and the overview and concluding remarks. Chapter 3, ‘Vladimir the Terrible: an opera in five acts’ is a masterful account of the rise of Vladimir Putin and the real and imaginary threats that he has posed. It may be my stereotype but the professor appears to be a classic European-Middle Eastern intellectual Marxist, which means he has some balance to criticise all sides from a different perspective. Achcar is from Lebanon (born in Senegal) and has taught and researched at prestigious Universities in Paris, Berlin, and since 2007 SOAS in London. The text is also very well referenced with a wide range of sources – think tank, journalistic, scholarly, experts, and from different disciplines, for example left wing and more conservative, philosophy and economics. There is no academic snobbery here.

The work does demonstrate that Achcar was one of the very first (maybe the first or second person) to use the term the New Cold War in print, which would have seemed very pessimistic to me at the time in 1998. The book is biased against America, NATO and ‘the West’, concentrating on their political failures and critiquing their involvement in Bosnia, Kosovo and Serbia (Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya more fairly). The narrative all the time seems to suggest that using force to end the war in Bosnia and to try to stop atrocities in Kosovo was US NATO adventurism. In the later chapters it is true that human rights and individual concerns get more focus, fundamentally however this is a book about relations between States, and Achcar subscribes to a very Great Power oriented view where individuals (or small countries) have little agency. He does at least recognise the desires of Kosovo Albanians for self-determination, and of many citizens of Eastern and Central European states not to be dominated by Russia. Achcar supports the view that the US / Madeleine Albright were determined to bomb (‘Yugoslavia’) Serbia whatever what. I’ve talked to a Scandinavian diplomat who explained the tireless work to avoid bombing, and heard it from a senior US diplomat. But also how could anything Milosevic said be trusted, just as how can anything Putin says be trusted. I’ve met and worked with the victims of their wars, including their own citizens in the case of Serbia. Edward Lucas in his 2008 *The New Cold War: Putin’s threat to Russia and the West* (revised 2014) did predict and point out much of the behaviour that Putin and his circle’s captured state have enacted, especially about energy politics.

Along with reviewing *The New Cold War*, by chance but for context reading *Shadowplay* by Tim Marshall, a journalistic political account about the Kosovo War and Serbia. I wish I had read these two books before going out to work for two and half years at the borders of Serbia, Kosovo and North Macedonia. At a broad economic and political level (and Marshall at European and regional one) Professor Achcar’s earlier chapters fill in gaps in my knowledge and answer some enquiries that I still had, although I regularly disagree with his conclusions or political views. Marshall like Achcar favours the line that the bombing of Serbia was always going to



happen; however while he was basically a journalist among Serbs in Serbia he presents information from all parties in an unbiased way. Both confirm what I always thought was myth that the CIA were arming the Kosovo Liberation Army in advance – maybe a wise precaution but certainly having a horse in the race. It is also clear despite two decades of national myth that many Albanian citizens of Kosovo did not support armed violence (as many Irish people in 1916 – 1922 did not), though they probably don't recognise that now – equally it is clear that the reason for the violence was the repression by the Milosevic regime. The Serbian nationalist / State mantra “Kosovo is Serbia” was the same as Ukraine government, UK & EU diplomats and politicians repeated “Crimea is Ukraine”, until Putin's full scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin and his followers are the cause of Russia's downfall and the inevitable return of Crimea to Ukraine after Ukraine wins the war.

The text is persuasive on three aspects. The key thing missed by many other analysts was the rise of China. That this is the key geo-political issue of the early twenty first century is obvious and the author focuses on whether China can be encouraged to act in a peaceful way to its neighbours or will it resort to military action to assert itself. In that regard the militaristic and confrontational language by some US leaders is not helpful. What happens will likely define the century. (Recently I heard an interesting discussion on this by Dr. Paul Flenley from Portsmouth with Mike Mannin & others at Liverpool Hope University). While disagreeing with the Prof that States should not criticise human rights abuse in other countries, I agree that they should try and dial down talk of conflict. The focus on NATO expansion instead of pursuing cooperation and economic aid is thoroughly scrutinised. The book analyses the military spending in detail – what a waste of money. Victims of Russia's / Soviet expansionism wanted to join NATO, and the Alliance has not attacked Russia. Prof Achcar is clear to acknowledge that only Putin is responsible (at the initiation) for his War on Ukraine, but it is fair to say that a military based (and aggressive economic policy) by the US may have alienated parts of Russian society who earlier wanted engagement with 'the West'. The US is also deliberately opportunistic in encouraging swapping Russian to US energy for Europe.

I have recommended Professor Achcar's book to media professional, Marcus Brogden, an expert on Turkey and Russia, who confirms from personal knowledge how traumatic the '90s were for ordinary Russians and how Western Europe and America failed to help, but encouraged gung ho capitalism that turned into carpet bagging privatisations. Plenty of other sources document this, including Mark Galeotti in his *A Short History of Russia*. Those who want Russia to disintegrate after the War (including some Ukrainian nationalists & US hawks) should be careful what they wish for, and wary of making the mistakes that Keynes warned about after Versailles.

On the failure of America, Britain and allies to help Russia with a Marshall Plan under Gorbachev and Yeltsin I am delighted (though still sad) to find someone echoing what I have said always right from the time of Gorby. This is for me the biggest failure of political leadership of my lifetime and I will always blame Thatcher and Bush for this. They and hawks, Cold Warriors, many liberal democrats, wanted to say “we've won” and wouldn't take a chance to help Gorbachev and thus help a properly managed transition in the Soviet Union.

I've been working among the diplomatic community in the Western Balkans in the last three years and formed an increased respect and admiration for the diplomats. American and British (military) intelligence and diplomacy was right on Russia's invasion of Ukraine but have been wrong lots of other times – also hindered by political choices. Let's hope that after this, calm assessments are made. And that 'Western' countries (the term ridiculously implying some block or group think), especially the United States of America and the United Kingdom, think carefully about the hypocrisy and double standards that has been embedded in their foreign policies for seventy years almost always despite whoever has been in power.

How to move forward? Achcar prioritises the importance of the UN, but without ideas about how to achieve it apart from engaging all permanent members of the Security Council. He echoes the moral and logically unbeatable call of Nobel laureates to put military spending into peaceful development. Overall he is right that no one country or even oligarchy of them should try to dominate the World. That is wise advice to both the US and China, and whoever rises later in this century.

August in Kabul - America's Last Days in Afghanistan, by Andrew W. Quilty.

Bloomsbury Academic 2023 £18.00

isbn 9781350370319

The West's disorderly pull out of Afghanistan in August 2021 is brought vividly to life in a recent book by Andrew W. Quilty, an Australian journalist based in Kabul who bore witness to the collapse of a reforming but inherently corrupt Afghan government propped up by the West and its replacement by the return of the totalitarian theocracy of the Taliban.

The author's lucid account is based on almost one hundred interviews with witnesses to the conflagration who tell their tales about that fateful month – from a young woman dreaming to go to university, a prisoner escaping from detention at an empty Bagram airbase, a presidential aide fleeing the Arg Presidential Palace, to US Marines at the Hamid Karzai International Airport, restraining huge crowds of Afghans, desperate to escape after the fall of the capital.

Quilty gives a short history of the twenty years of fighting and nation-building (which NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is reported to have lamented afterwards as having been way over-ambitious). Exasperated by the lack of sufficient progress in transforming the country and faced with a never-ending



Bagram Airbase, 2018

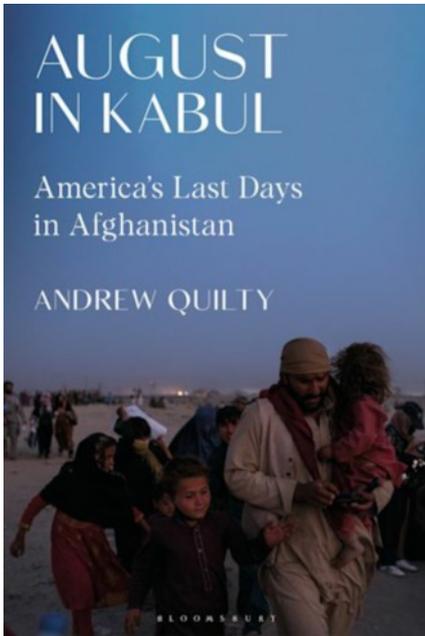
war, the US held negotiations with the Taliban in Doha to end the impasse. Trump's February 2020 US-Taliban Doha Agreement, reached without the participation of the Afghan government - confirmed by Biden - effectively sealed the country's fate. Biden's reassurances in June 2021 that all would be well, came when resistance to the Taliban was already crumbling. Agreed deadlines for US withdrawal from Afghanistan allowed the Taliban to sit pretty in Doha while their fighters gained ground on the battlefield against the collapsing morale of the Afghan government forces and its militias, increasingly bereft of US military support.

The fall of Kabul certainly revealed President Ashraf Ghani was no Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Ghani famously said in an interview in UAE shortly afterwards that he fled by helicopter "in a vest, shoes and a T-shirt and I didn't take anything else with me" as the Taliban entered Kabul. Quilty reveals that Ghani did indeed take US\$200,000 in cash "as per normal protocol" while it is said his administrative staff carried a further US\$500,000 in local currency in the four escaping helicopters.

The atmosphere at Kabul airport during the evacuation is well portrayed in the book. "From the moment I saw the Taliban in the palace, my only focus was how to survive, how to get out of Kabul" says our Arg Presidential Palace escapee. There was surge of people rushing to the airport to leave. "An incongruous relationship was forged between US and other military forces inside the airport and the Taliban fighters outside, parties that had been fighting one another for two decades". For two weeks, until 31st August 2021, evacuation flights brought out those with western passports or visas. Many who should have got out, were left behind; some who did not deserve to be evacuated, found easy passage.

In a country where its people had become prone to hide or embellish the truth to gain favour from Westerners in particular, Quilty has done his best to authenticate the stories of those he has interviewed and rejected implausible accounts of what happened. His carefulness is revealed when he weighs the evidence whether the apparent gunshot wounds of many Afghan civilians killed at the time of ISKP's (Islamic State of Khorasan Province) IED (Improvised Explosive Device) explosion at Abbey Road by the airport was caused by US soldiers' indiscriminate fire – and decided he could reach no conclusion.



Happily, despite the title of this book, the story does not fall into the habit - as many such books about US global military interventions do - of ignoring the considerable contribution made by US allies. Nation building in Afghanistan was an immense exercise which involved the whole “international community” (by which is meant the West), coordinated as best it could by the United Nations and including the largely bank-rolling role of the European Union, both briefly acknowledged in the book. The reader is reminded that NATO’s ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) military contingent comprised 51 nations at its height. Many countries sent soldiers to participate in the evacuation effort of their nationals and others, all listed in the book.

To this day, Afghans left behind who were closely associated with the former government, its military forces and civil society are being hunted down by the Taliban. This has meant many of us who have served in Afghanistan have also been active in helping getting people out when possible. Afghanistan should not be forgotten.

George Cunningham
EU Deputy Ambassador to Afghanistan 2016-18



EU Deputy Ambassador George Cunningham and German Ambassador Walter Haßmann, Kabul 2018.

Learning to Live in these Weird Times: Daniel Hartlaub at the Electro Studios.

The Electro Studios in St Leonards hosted the first UK exhibition of German artist Daniel Hartlaub over the weekend of 26th-28th May. Daniel Hartlaub works across several media, drawing, film, music videos, comic books & graphic novel, computer games, performance. The genesis of these is frequently a charcoal drawing, which Hartlaub describes as Black Drawing, a technique erasing from a blackened sheet; he also found that this works drawing digitally. The show was entitled *The Post Apocalyptic Romantic* (or how I learned to live in these weird times).

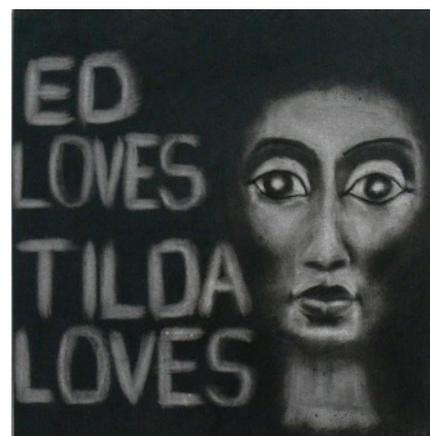
Daniel Hartlaub is based in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. He studied at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Offenbach, Germany and at St Martin's College of Art and Design in London, England. Die Post-Apokalyptische Romantik started as an art movement with Jasko Barabas, following their visit to a decommissioned nuclear power station near Frankfurt; Jasko died last year.



If you think Romantic in terms of Constable, Delacroix or Turner, you will sense the irony here, though perhaps the haunting quality of Casper David Friedrich provides an unanticipated link. Are we post-apocalyptic? Is an apocalypse already upon us? The Chernobyl disaster and Fukushima are amongst the better-known nuclear accidents. Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia is in the hands of the Russian terror-state. Chernobyl provides the best context, as Nature has fought back. Versuchssatomkraftwerk Kahl was closed in 1985; Germany is decommissioning all their nuclear plants, whilst we expand ours. Hartlaub speaks of the contrast between the elegant architecture of the plant and Nature's reaffirmation around it. Climate Change and Covid 19 (famine and pestilence?) join an ever-present war, at last one we are forced to notice... surely the four riders are assembled; are we living in a post-apocalyptic world, or at least, as Hartlaub puts it, 'a slow-burning apocalypse'? Hartlaub states that there is more man-made radioactivity around us than ever before; the outfall of nuclear tests and catastrophes, of power stations themselves. Yet 'only on a fictional/cinematic level do we allow the apocalypse to happen, and to entertain us.'

One of the things that immediately struck you on entering the gallery was the scale of some of the works, from ceiling to floor; Daniel said that he likes to see these as backdrops, a connecting link with his cinematic and theatrical work perhaps. The darkness also emphasises the Film Noire connotation as many of the drawings will be extrapolated in other mediums. The works featured span over about 20 years, many of them coming from his 2022 *Rosalie* project for a comic and computer game. Film works were shown concurrently.

So, why St Leonards, one might ask? Hartlaub has participated in works here before, and has regularly collaborated with Keith Rodway and local ensemble Necessary Animals, either providing artwork for them, or the band providing the music for his computer graphics etc. (indeed amongst the recorded music available was the number *Nobody Knows Who I Am*, which was written by Keith Rodway for *Rosalie*).



From graphic novel 2048: *When it all began.*

This leads in the multimedia event on Saturday 27th evening. The set opened with Simon and the Pope (Simon Charterton & John Pope), another Hastings drum & bass ensemble (they usually play at the Marina Fountain on the first Thursday of the month). After a break the music jumped straight to the avant garde. Necessary Animals followed, first improvising behind Lucy Brennan Shiel's rendering of Yeats' *The*



Second Coming, his response to the 1916 Easter Rebellion; then Amanda Thompson's version of *Nobody Knows Who I Am* (Maïke Elena Schmidt performed on the computer game). Necessary Animals style might be described as how Roxy Music might have turned out if Brian Eno had stayed and Bryan Ferry left. After a couple more numbers they were followed by violinist Richard Moore, familiar from Bluegrass sessions at The Stag, Hastings, but very different here as modulated at the hands of Anthony Moore – no relation (formerly Slapp Happy/Henry Cow and sometime Pink Floyd collaborator amongst others). Finally, Hartlaub projected clips from his films and still works, while the Moores and Necessary Animals improvised against that backdrop. The studio doors gave these an appropriately post-industrial setting, and the more architectural images a new 3D quality.

If all of this music wasn't enough, the evening also saw the launch of two recordings, an LP, a musical collaboration between Hartlaub and ambient composer/musician J Peter Schwalm *Die Post-Apokalyptische Romantik*. Schwalm is probably best known in the UK for his work with Brian Eno. Necessary

Animals released their single *Nobody Knows Who I Am*. Details of how to find these are below.

The disused workspace environment of the Electro Studios, hung with Hartlaub's dark images gave an edge to what must have been one of the most ambitious ambient/minimalist music projects in the town and beyond. Indeed, one of the punters, on leaving, said that it was probably the best performance she had seen in Hastings over many years. Keith Rodway deserves a special mention here, for pulling it all together.

It's a grey world, and here, illuminated in black and white by Daniel Hartlaub.

Stewart Rayment

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Both of the recordings are laser-cut in very limited runs and if interested in acquiring them contact Daniel Hartlaub as above.