

EAST & WEST

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5 YEARS SPECIAL ISSUE

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EAST & WEST AT 5

Five years ago, in May 2016, East & West was born. 5 years is not a long time ago, but from the perspective of 2021 the year 2016 feels already like a slightly different era. May 2016 was before the Brexit referendum, before Donald Trump's presidency, the likelihood of which at the time most experts still considered nothing but a joke, and of course before the last pandemic, which has drastically affected our lives over the last year and a half.

We were not exactly planning to write much about politics when we started East & West. Even before the Trump presidency polarized political discussion, the culture of politics had been evolving into divisive hot stuff. Our goal was to unite: we wanted to be above all these petty and unnecessary arguments, these artificial outrages that have become the hallmark of all public discourse in the age of political correctness. Current events forces us to think and write about politics far more than we had wanted to. Any conversation about culture or history would have been impossible without touching the

hot topics of the day. At times we just had to react to what was happening around us. Many parts of the world have witnessed history in the making over the last few years and we could just not ignore this.

East & West started with a special focus on Central and Eastern

happened 80 years ago. In Central and Eastern Europe instead history with all its burdens and painful memories lives on.

East & West has been written mostly in English, English as a lingua franca, that is not always by native speakers, but used to reach to wider

“Beyond the borders of the Anglicized, Netflix watching, post-historical and a bit, self-aggrandizing world of America and Western Europe, there is a whole less explored world, a bit exotic but rather familiar at the same time. Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and even Russia, to the surprise of many, are no less European than Portugal or Greece”

Europe. In places like Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and Russia historical conversation has the power to sow irreconcilable discord and provoke misunderstandings and deep hatred to this day. In the West history is seen as little more than remembering stories from many years ago. It does not belong to the good and cultured tone to judge and attack countries and entire peoples for what

audiences. We wanted to show that, beyond the borders of the Anglicized, Netflix watching, post-historical and a bit, self-aggrandizing world of America and Western Europe, there is a whole less explored world, a bit exotic but rather familiar at the same time. Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and even Russia, to the surprise of many, are no less European than Portugal or Greece.

Ten years ago the British historian Niall Ferguson published a book called: “Civilization: the West and the rest”. The book asked why the West could have become so successful. It seemingly assumed that in our contemporary world the word civilization and “West” should be regarded as synonyms. Only the West was truly civilized - the rest not so much. Not many people in the West would probably admit this in public, but the idea that true civilization today is to be found only in the West (with a few exceptions) belongs to the firm set of beliefs of most Western citizens. It is just not good manners to say this out loud.

Niall Ferguson's book provoked a long diatribe between the author and the Indian writer Pankaj Mishra in the columns of the London Review of Books magazine. Mishra accused Ferguson of being a racist, Ferguson accused Mishra of distorting his arguments. Two of the most prominent public intellectuals of our time, the sort of highly intelligent people that one would

WESTERN EUROPE NEEDS ITS 1989 MOMENT

1989 marked the liberation of Eastern Europe from Soviet control. Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had regained their independence, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, Eastern Germany reunited with Western Germany one year later. 1989 is probably the most important year for the history of Europe in recent memory. 2 years later, the Soviet Union collapsed.

In the 1990s, Soviet troops left the countries that formerly belonged to the Warsaw Pact, a military organization created in 1955 in response to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, born in Western Europe six years before. 30 years after the demise of the Warsaw Pact, it may be time for Europe to emancipate itself from the US and NATO. This kind of stance is of course anathema in Transatlantic public discourse and it will almost automatically bring accusations of Russian propaganda. This is nonsense.

Continues inside - page 4

naively expect to be able to find truth and harmony through dialogue and reason, descended into a heated discussion. America and Europe's prosperity, until recently practically unrivalled by the rest, seemed to be an incontrovertible proof that only the West was truly successful. It was successful because it was liberal and democratic, that is the justest and most humane of all possible worlds. At least since the financial crisis of 2008 and the rise of China these claims of universality and unshakable self-assuredness seem to have been questioned a bit. Maybe the West is not so successful after all. Maybe the Western model is not the universal road to the good life. The utopian belief in the end of history, which persisted in the minds of many, appears naive now. The idea that the entire world is bound to become like the West and that this is an ultimately desirable and good thing has shown its limits. But many Westerners continue to glee at the pictures of protests in Hong Kong or Belarus, imagining that these people "just want to be like us". It feels good to feel privileged after all, in spite of what they say. Maybe not everything is perfect in the West, like most Westerners would have believed only a few years ago, but the sight of people wanting to join the West and fighting for freedom and democracy gave the Westerner some kind of complacent pleasure. It feels good to feel privileged after all. Even after the Iraq and the Syrian wars, even after the financial crisis and China's increased influence, and for different

reasons even after Donald Trump, to most people in the West Western dominance across the globe (that is US dominance) still seems to be the most natural thing in the world. Some people now try to put the blame for the perceived loss of American and Western prestige on the callousness of Trump or Russian disinformation, but the reality is that the wider world has never had the blind faith in the West that people in the West would like to believe. These people, generally professional experts and by the sole virtue of their profession and reputation objective like no-one else, conveniently forget that by the time Trump was elected President the US had already done more than enough to lose prestige in the eyes of at least hundreds of millions of people across the globe. One could say that these people are not mature enough for civilization and Western values. The paradox here is that hundreds of millions of people cannot be disregarded as a far-fringed marginal group. The feelings of entire nations cannot be easily dismissed, especially when one claims to be a humanist, that is to value the human in every person. Apparently even in the eyes of Western humanists, some humans are more human than others. Not everything is bad in the West. It would be stupid to say so. But the Iraq war and the chaos that ensued and endures to this day in the entire region is just one of most recent examples of Western hubris. Trump's seeming unwillingness to continue with the US mission of being

the world policeman turned out the entire US and globalist establishment against him and proved to be a fatal blow to his presidential career. Experts said that the Trump was a menace to world order. If the world order is meant to be understood only as an order built around the foundation of Western moral and military supremacy, Trump was certainly a threat to that.

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The first major and for years the most important issue for East & West has been the Ukrainian crisis. By now, most people in the Europe and America think they know what is going on in Ukraine. Crimea was annexed and Russia is waging war in Eastern Ukraine. And in Ukraine, the West is being threatened by Russia and Putin. But it would be more precise to say that Ukraine became the battleground of the confrontation between the West in its unstoppable and fueled by a sense of inevitability push for expansion and resistance forces, in this case supported by Russia. The US and the EU conveniently portray the Ukrainian conflict merely a result of Russian aggression, but clearly the situation is more complex than that. It does not matter how many times one is told this, the conflict in the Donbass cannot be seen just as a Russian-Ukrainian war for the independence of Ukraine. Ukraine has been independent since 1991 and was independent in 2014. It is a conflict between two parts of the souls of Ukraine in which both the West and Russia intervened.

The phrase fake news has become common language after the 2016 US election. Professional experts simply could not find any reasonable explanation for the election to US president and by extension to leader of the Western world of a man of the calibre of Donald Trump, which they judged inept and divisive. Some in all seriousness compared Donald Trump to Hitler. It does not matter now that this kind of analogies appeared wildly out of proportion. None of the reputed professional experts lost him job for making wild claims like that. The experts told us that Donald Trump was elected because of fake news and Russian disinformation. A deluge of articles and books affecting concern was published. Donald Trump, an isolationist, a nationalist rejecting the inevitable path of integration and globalism, could not possibly have been elected in a civilized Western country without the help of a villain like Putin. Suddenly it looked as if internet, which had been celebrated for its independence and freedom and an instrument of enlightenment and progress before, was a dangerous place controlled by hostile powers. Russian propaganda was seen everywhere. It was a field day for the established corporate media, the only ones that were legitimate and had a right to a say. Dissent became to be regarded as suspicious, hostile propaganda. It contrasts to the omnipresent Western claim of the sanctity of freedom of opinion and information. Social media, previously promoted as a place for dialogue, turned out to

be a place of division. But blaming all divisions in Western societies on Russian propaganda won't certainly solve the problem. After the US election that went the way it was not supposed to go, Facebook and Twitter, on the instigation of the US establishment, engaged in an overzealous campaign that inevitably resulted into massive censorship of alternative media. Criticism of anything that the West did in the international arena triggered the reflex of blaming Russian propaganda and Putin's plan to do nothing short of destroying the West. Most so called fake news website did not have any connection to Russia and the mythical Kremlin bot factories.

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In the age of YouTube, Twitter and TikTok, East & West has been a niche publication. Deviating from the standard line puts one at risk of being labelled as Kremlin propaganda. It does not matter how articulately, carefully and measuredly one crafts one's points and articles. The quality of the texts does not count too much in the age of smart phones. There was a time when people could talk of an article they had read in their favourite magazine for weeks. Now the success of a media outlet is measured in the number of views, clicks, comments and likes. This is not a complaint. It is just the way things are. East & West won't follow the logic of views, clicks, comments and likes. This probably condemns us to remain a marginal publication. But in this independence lies out strength.

THE UKRAINIAN-PERSIAN WAR AND THE GREAT UKRAINIAN EPOS

It used to be a trope in the study of history that ancient, younger and more energetic peoples, thanks to their unconstrained genius, were able to craft powerful myths to explain the world around them, their own genesis and their mission. In these earlier stages of a civilization, ancient peoples were considered to be in a state of childhood, during which, like children, they possess unlimited creative fantasy to make beautiful and compelling stories up, have enough recklessness to believe in them and a natural confidence in their abilities. Ancient Greeks, the Jewish prophets of the Bible, and Americans were all gifted with these wonderful artistic qualities – and modern Ukrainians have them too.

“Sanskrit, the ancient language of Indians, is close to Ukrainian”, says a geography textbook used in Ukrainian schools. “And the names of Western and Southern countries and people like Galatea, Galilean, France (Gaul) Galicia in Spain or Portugal (Portu-Gal) likely suggests that the ancestors of contemporary French, Spanish, Portuguese, Jews and Turks could have reached their lands from Ukrainian Galicia”, the authors of this textbook for 15-year old pupils go on.

Another textbook begins referring to the one-hundred-forty-thousand-year long history of the Ukrainian people. A different one calls all territory from the Carpathians to the Urals as “Greater Ukraine” 1000 years before Christ, equating Ukrainians to the ancient Arian people tout court (this helps explaining the residual of sympathy towards the ideals of Arian purity in the most aggressive elements of contemporary Ukrainian patriots, even if the German champion of the Arian race did not exactly hold of high opinion of all Slavs in general, deeming them a slave race). The same textbook then refers to the Scythian campaign of the Persian king of kings Darius the Great in 513 BC as a “Ukrainian-Persian war” – because it was largely fought in the territories that today belong to Southern Ukraine.



Image 1 - a picture from a history manual currently in use in Ukrainian schools, showing ancient Ukraine extending from the Carpathians to the Urals

“Sanskrit, the ancient language of Indians, is close to Ukrainian”, Ukrainian history textbook currently in use in Ukrainian schools

In the poisoned atmosphere that emerged following the onset of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, any criticism of Ukraine is dismissed as some form of Russian propaganda. Westerners want to see the sort of Ukraine that makes them feel good about themselves, where Ukrainians are model Europeans who love Europe and want to be just like Europeans and for this reason fight for their freedom against the evil forces of reaction and brutality that Russia embodies. Westerners are interested in little else – all the rest is Russian disinformation.

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The kind of myth making displayed in many contemporary Ukrainian textbook is undeniable though. It can be interpreted of course of the healthy manifestation of a perfectly natural vigour that so often characterizes the early stages of the history of a people when energy is so abundant that appears limitless – fact-based narratives and careful consideration being something for later, more mature but also almost senile, more tired, more cynical and sometimes decaying civilizations. Or it could be seen as a symptom of deep insecurity by a young nation, which, much like teenagers do, makes wild stories up to give itself some sense of importance and feel more prestigious.

WESTERN EUROPE NEEDS ITS 1989 MOMENT

From page 1

Image 1 - People in Berlin gathering in December 1989

US dominance over Europe was a direct consequence of World War II and the destruction of Europe that resulted. NATO occupying forces and memories of the horrors of the war served the purpose of guaranteeing peace in a continent that had seen two world wars in the space of thirty years. For all their sophistication, European countries had not found a way to peacefully find solutions and compromises when their interests diverged.

Germany has been blamed for the outbreak of both world wars. In the aftermath of WWII it was clear that it had to be brought under control. Fears of a Europe dominated by Germany had been circulating since the turn of the century and after the Nazi atrocities this provoked horror to many. Parts of Germany had been occupied by French soldiers even after WWI but the fact just a few years before Hitler came to power in January 1933. German revanchism led Europe to catastrophe.

Because of the natural instability of a region with at least three big rival powers, peace in Europe could be granted only by an occupying force. Europe has de facto been in relation of suzerainty with the US since 1945, with the US controlling foreign policy of European formally independent nations. For the first 40 years after WWI the Soviet Union served as an enemy against which Western Europe coalesced. Recovering after the war, Europe went 30 years of growth and material prosperity. The West stood for freedom and democracy, while the Soviet Union



stood for oppression and dictatorship.

America and Western Europe become closer than ever. America had begun as an offshoot of European civilization and found emancipation from European imperialism. Now the young nation America, free of the original sin of European nationalism, stood for progress and liberation from the burden of the European decadent and ultimately self-destructive culture.

Today Europe and America are almost inseparable from each other, in spirit and action. American pop culture has invaded the houses and lives in the imagination of most Europeans. Political discourse has also been influenced by the latest American trends. Nowhere in the world was Barack Obama more cheered and Donald Trump more despised than in Europe.

Today's Europe, however, is not the Europe that came out of the ashes of WWII. It does not need the US generous hand, offered to rescue it from itself. European countries have built now over a

eighty year long history and peaceful cooperation. Europeans know each other better than most Americans know Europe. Europeans can use their experience to continue working together with US overlordship. It would be absurd to say that contemporary European democracies are not mature enough to solve their problems and finding a common ground without the US mediation. On the contrary, the extreme polarization of the US public discourse, centred around the issues of race, sexual identity or immigration, does not help at all in finding harmonic and organic solutions to open questions. It may sound surprising to most people in the West, but in the vast majority of the rest of the world LGBT rights and abortions are simply not the kind of issues that people consider to be at the centre of the political and societal collective debate. People simply have other problems.

Instead of acting as a neutral arbiter in conflicts in other countries, the US (and increasingly

Europe under the US tutelage too) risk polarising and increasing the tension between different groups even more. Take Ukraine or Belarus, where the US and EU unconditional support for the Europhiles against the not so Europhiles has brought one country to a war with a large part of its population and the other to the brink of revolutionary chaos that could be halted only with significant police brutality and repression.

Europeans, in particular young Europeans, are so in awe of America that last year, during a pandemic, tens of thousands in

Image 2 - North Stream 2, the new "controversial" pipeline. Image from Wikimedia Commons



different cities took to the street to protest in solidarity with the killing of George Floyd, apparently killed just because he was black. Not many stopped to consider the fact that police violence against blacks is simply not an issue in Europe. Europe is not America. Europe has built a tradition of shared prosperity through government socialism, with generous benefits, high taxes and some degree of basic social security. There are innumerable socialist parties in Europe and nobody sees anything wrong with them. In America, the sole word Socialism echoes invented Cold War

memories of Stalinist-like repression and tyranny, although European socialism is nothing of the sort. Many Americans, however, seems simply unable to comprehend that.

Even US insistence on Europe stopping the construction of the gas pipeline North Stream 2 through the Baltic Sea proves that the US does not always have the best interest of Europe at heart. Jan Psaki, the White House speaker, said that North Stream 2 is a "bad deal". It would make Europe too dependant on Russian gas and would be detrimental to European security. Why can't Europe decide for itself what is good? The nonchalance with which a US representative can say these things

should be troublesome to people who have some self-respect. The US of course is not very interested in seeing EU emerging as an alternative pole to US dominance. And some states in Europe (Poland, the Baltics) seem to have stronger loyalties to Washington than to the interests of European cooperation. But a subordinate Europe will deviate from its natural development path in the name of some fanatical idealism. Europe needs to start cooperating on the basis of rational realism. Emancipating itself from the US is the first necessary step in this direction.

UKRAINE AND NATIONALISM

Over the last few years, the Western public, who arguably until 2013 had a very vague idea of that country in Eastern Europe called Ukraine, has been gradually and systematically educated into thinking that the phrase "Ukrainian nationalism" must unmistakably be the mark of Russian propaganda. "There are no nationalists in Ukraine" after all, as the Western public has been told after the revolution of dignity of 2013-14. The threats to the Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine were just the imagined opera of Kremlin *dezinformacja*, this most terrible of Russian weapons. Later developments have shown otherwise. It is hard to describe contemporary Ukraine as anything else than a nationalist state.

One can argue that most contemporary European states probably went through such a nationalist phase in the past, at the early stages of their formation, when consolidation and centralization were a priority. France rooted out Occitan and Breton regionalisms starting from the 18th century at least. Spain assimilated Catalonia, not to mention the UK, with its constituent four nations. These consolidations have often implicated violent repressions, rebellions and heated disputes for decades.

Never in its history Ukraine had been a homogeneous monoethnic country. Until well into the 20th century "ethnic Ukrainians" mostly lived in the countryside. Cities of what we today call Ukraine mostly had Polish, Russian and Jewish imprints. In fact the first mass Ukrainization of Ukraine happened in the early years of the Soviet Union after 1922. The Bolsheviks reconquered Ukraine, when an independent Ukrainian government emerged from the corpse of the Russian Empire, destroyed by the World War I and the October Revolution in 1917.

Continues on page 6

UKRAINE AND NATIONALISM

Continues from page 5

Within the Soviet Union Lenin offered Ukraine independence. Indeed, Ukrainian independence had always been one of Lenin's key goals, at least since his days in Cracow, just before World War I broke out in August 1914. Intent on breaking up the Russian Empire and animated by personal hatred towards the Romanov family that had killed his older brother, Lenin promised independence to every nation of the empire, even to those, like Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine, that had never been independent before. In the early years of the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks, true to their radical proletarian populism, for the first time introduced mass education in Ukrainian, a language that until that time did not have a very long written tradition. It used to be the languages of poems and folk songs. Suddenly Ukrainian became the language of administration, journalism, science and encyclopaedias. This policy was drastically reversed by Stalin in the 1930s. Fearing that an increased sense of Ukrainian autonomy could incite separatism in Ukraine, Stalin tried to eradicate the Ukrainian peasant element. The resulting catastrophe, a famine that killed millions, is known in Ukraine as *holodomor* and it evokes tragic memories to this day. However, it killed not only Ukrainians but millions of other peasants in the Volga region and in Kazakhstan. Attempts to exploit the famine of 1932-33 and exploit the *holodomor* exclusively as a genocide against ethnic Ukrainians should be

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regarded at least as controversial. Westerners, used to the conception of one state, one people, one language, project their concepts on Ukraine and imagine that the right Ukraine must be a Ukrainian that

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is completely Ukrainized, with one official language and Russian regarded as an entirely external foreign element. When Westerners are baffled at Ukrainian mixed ethnic and cultural mosaic and see the Russian element as a lamentable heritage of the Russian Empire and Soviet dictatorship,

“It is surprising that Europeans and Americans, who generally are overeager to demonstrate enthusiasm for ideas like multiculturalism and all kinds of fluid identities, seem unwilling to concede that it would be absolutely normal for a place like Ukraine to be Ukrainian and Russian at the same time.”

they are indulging in oversimplification. Even today most countries in the world are in fact multicultural entities where a variety of languages are spoken. Different people somehow manage to live together and they have done so for centuries. This was the case until recently for Ukrainians and Russians too.

The idea that the right kind of Ukraine must be a monoethnic Ukraine for Ukrainians only is hence in every respect a historical abomination. Ukrainian and Russian identities in Ukraine have always been fluid. The idea that Ukrainians, that is

the people living in what we today are used to call Ukraine, have always identified with the Ukrainian nation and exclusively with it is a historical falsehood. One could be born Ukrainian and become Polish or Russian by assimilating into the Polish or Russian speaking cultures of the cities. One could be born in a city and rediscover one's roots by learning the language of the countryside and promoting its folklore. A government that in the process of consolidation infringes the rights of and disenfranchises millions of its citizens who are guilty of belonging to a slightly different group cannot be regarded as nothing else that a nationalist government.

It is surprising that contemporary Europeans and Americans, who generally are overeager to demonstrate enthusiasm for ideas like multiculturalism and all kinds of fluid identities, seem unwilling to concede that it would be absolutely normal for a place like Ukraine to be Ukrainian and Russian at the same time.

IS ALEXANDR LUKASHENKO AN ILLEGITIMATE PRESIDENT?

Is Alexandr Lukashenko the legitimate president of Belarus? Many would say no. What kind of politician after all forces an airplane to an unplanned landing just to arrest a dissident? One EU agency recently called Lukashenko “illegitimate”.

Last year Europeans and to a lesser extent the rest of world have discovered a new *cause celebre*, Belarus. When protests and demonstrations took over the capital and other Belarusian cities on the evening of election day and the state predictably tried to suffocate them, the harshness of the police produced a backlash effect in the public perception, encouraging the protests and providing them the moral high ground. The violence shocked many.

The pictures of hundreds of thousands of Belarusians demonstrating for “freedom” and “democracy” have been shown and shared innumerable times over the last year and European citizens, most of whom had a very vague notion of what Belarus is like, have largely reacted expressing support and solidarity. The European Union has refused to recognize the results of the elections, on the ground that these was neither “free” nor “fair”. With the anti-government protests gathering momentum, the idea that Lukashenko must have stolen the elections and that these must have been massively falsified cemented itself as a fact into the minds of those tired of the president.

Europeans and Westerners in general are particularly sensitive to this sort of events. It makes them feel good, special and privileged. Germans, Italians, Spanish, French and others instinctively assumed that because

Lukashenko has been in power since 1994 and he occasionally may say or do things that do not conform to contemporary Western progressive conventional wisdom, he must by definition be an autocrat that entirely lacks popular legitimacy and is kept in power exclusively by arbitrary will and brutality.

Westerners were induced to see this as a struggle of the entirety of

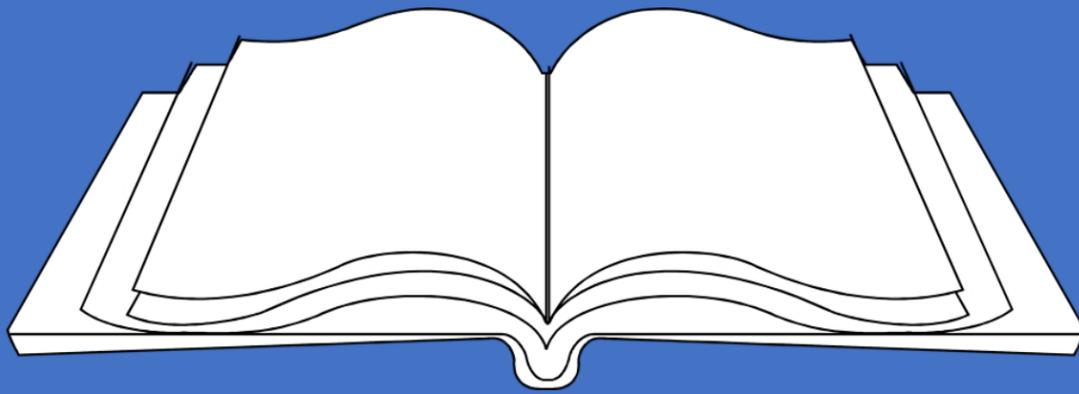
“Because Lukashenko has been in power since 1994 and he occasionally may say or do things that do not conform to contemporary Western progressive conventional wisdom, he must by definition be an autocrat that entirely lacks popular legitimacy and is kept in power exclusively by arbitrary will and brutality.”

the Belarusian people against Lukashenko. Last year, Belarus witnessed what has been called the largest demonstration in its history, with between 200,000 and 300,000 people gathering on a sunny day in central Minsk in support of the opposition. Incidentally, by the official counts Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, Lukashenko’s rival, received around half a million votes, or 10% of the total.

In the aftermath of the election, the opposition claimed Tikhanovskaya had received 80% of the votes, more or less the same percentage as Lukashenko obtained according to the official data. “Golos”, a volunteer organization supportive of the opposition and supported by the opposition, obtained access to the protocols of 1310 polling stations out of total of 5767. The report focuses on the votes that Svetlana Tikhanovskaya in reality received, but it contains also another

important bit of information that has so far eluded public perception. According to the protocols, Tikhanovskaya gathered here 471,709 votes, that is around 81% of the votes she officially received. This suggests there must be something wrong with the official electoral counts. According to the same protocols, however, Lukashenko obtained 1,157,792 votes, that is 61.7%. Not quite the 80.1% that was given to him by the electoral commission, but still a strong result that would win him the presidency after the first round – a figure that would be the envy of many Western politicians.

Not that it matters much now. The perception that Lukashenko stole the election has been transformed into an established fact. But next time someone tells you of the Belarusian revolution as a battle of the whole of the Belarusian people for “freedom” an “democracy” against an evil and isolated dictator, try to mention this. Their pictures do not look so good and romantic as those of a people in revolt and are not likely to be shown every hour, but there is a silent majority in Belarus that still appears to be behind Lukashenko. The European Union and the West, in the name of democracy and freedom, do not seem to be willing to take this into account. After all both the US and the EU for example recognized Juan Guaidó as the legitimate president of Venezuela, even when, as it turned out, Juan Guaidó has had no real power. The EU and the US seem to believe that the question of legitimacy depends exclusively on their recognition. It seems almost as if the EU and the US believe they can create their own reality.



East & West Books

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Whataboutism is a stupid counterargument

Some of our readers may get the impression that our publication is anti-West. We argue instead that criticizing the West and understanding the Rest does not necessarily mean being anti-Western. After all most of the people who over the course of five years have worked on this publication are from Western Europe. In spite of what some

malicious tongues may have said of us on the internet, we are not working from some basement in Saint Petersburg. It is our conviction that pointing out Western hypocrisy should not constitute proof of doing Russian propaganda. Nobody is perfect after all. On the contrary, aren't usually authoritarian regimes the ones neurotic-ally oversensitive about any form of criticism?

A few days ago, Belarus forced a Ryan Air plane to land, ostensibly to arrest a dissident. When people observed that similar things have occurred before and there is little unprecedented and extraordinary about this, some angered commentators

and experts replied that this is another example of Soviet *whataboutism*, that is Russian propaganda. Every time the Soviets were accused of some misdeed, instead of defending themselves they would say "What about what you did here?". Hence the term. Now, everytime Russia replies to the West, some experts will say "This is again whataboutism" and feel very brilliant for having used an unusual word and made an indirect historical reference. Apparently the whole argument is closed after that.

But the essence of whataboutism is to expose hypocrisy. What right do you have to judge me, if you do the same things that I do? Hypocrisy is a terrible thing after all. It makes us feel so much better than others.

Didn't Jesus himself say: "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."? Or was Jesus also a Kremlin propagandist?

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