



Światło

Legacy / Perimö 2/24

Gazeta Sasha 2 / 2024
Legacy / Perintö

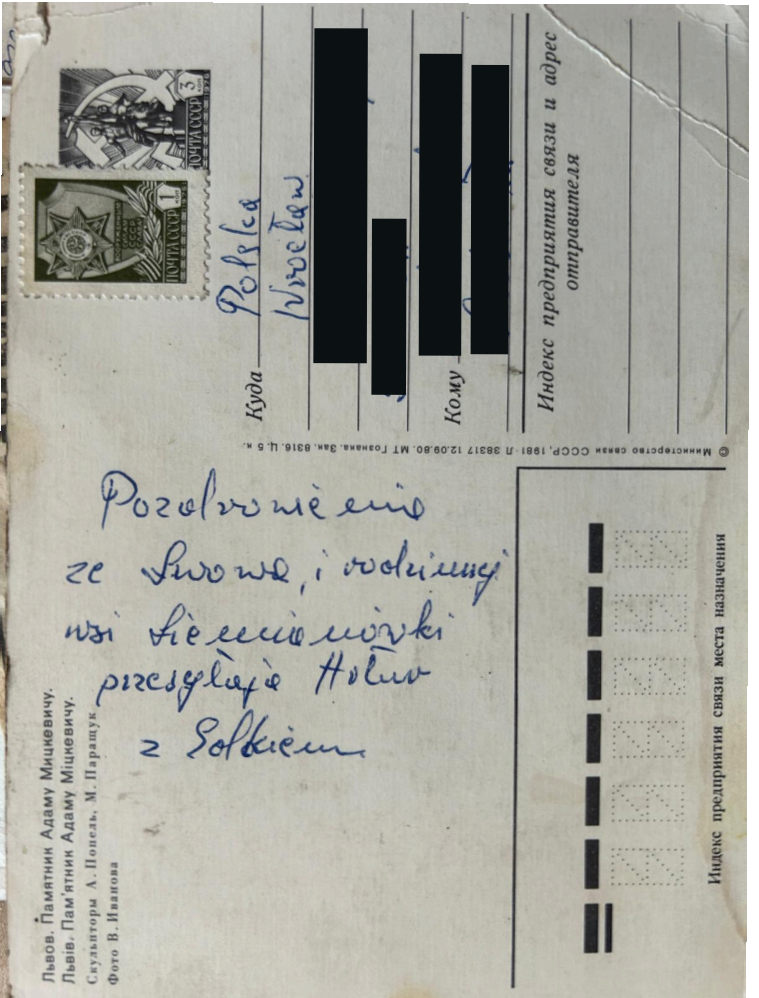
Editors-in-chief: Oliver Reschreiter and Sierra Salazar

Texts, photographs, layouts, edits: Lotta Aro, Lila Bednarska, Jenni Kirkinen, Anna Koryukova, Daniel List, Giulia Panfilo, Juho Pitkänen, Oliver Reschreiter, Lucina Rudloff, and Sierra Salazar

Cover Photo: Lila Bednarska
Cover logo: Jalmari Sarla

Ainejärjestä Sasha ry

Gazeta Sasha saa HY:n järjestölehtitukea.



Cover Photo: Front and backside of a postcard sent to Lila Bednarska's grandparents from Lviv, the city they were relocated from during the population exchange between Poland and Soviet Ukraine after the World War II.

Editorial

Text – Sierra Salazar and Oliver Reschreiter

Now more than ever is it important to raise students' voices, and provide a platform made for and by them. It is imperative to continue to question the norm, enrich our knowledge of the world, and speak on behalf of what we believe in. Despite the challenges posed to do so, both overt and subtle, we students will continue to remain steadfast in our critical engagement. And while this student journal can only affect several individuals, several "small worlds", we hope these following stories will allow our readers a glimpse into the lives of those within Eurasia and Eastern Europe today.

This edition stands as a testament to our commitment to do just that, as seen through the theme of legacy, which has been approached by various student writers from a bottom-up perspective. We pose the question: how does the past live on today? Through rigorous

analysis and creative expression, our aim is to contribute a deeper understanding of the various pasts that shape the region today and pull back the curtain on the living meaning of "legacy".

Before summer begins, let us present to you that – in the words of Katalin Miklossy – the past is never truly dead. From Belgrade, Serbia, Gazeta Sasha's previous Editor in Chief, **Juho Pitkänen**, inquires just how past should be remembered and reconciled through his interviews discussing the 1999 NATO bombings of Yugoslavia, while Sasha's chair, **Daniel List**, writes from his journeys in Moldova. Through her interview with an activist under the pseudonym "Semyon", **Anna Koryukova** delves into the fight for memory of the politically repressed in Russia. **Lila Bednarska** reflects on the volatile nature of legacy through the repatriations of

Poles from the eastern borderlands, and **Giulia Panfilo** details the realities today of Nicolae Ceaușescu's brutal pro-natalist policies in Romania. And, as per tradition old and new of Gazeta Sasha, we conclude with a multi-author account of the ExPREES students' trip to Uzbekistan and a Shopska Salad recipe from the Balkans, written by **Jenni Kirkinen**.

Lastly, we extend our thanks to the interviewees, named and unnamed, who strive to uphold the legacy and memory of those beyond the dominant narratives and ideals. We thank those who persist in ensuring that their own stories are heard and preserved, regardless of the obstacles that may come their way. 📖

2021



Chair's Greetings

Text - Daniel List

Dear Gazeta Readers:

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the second issue of the Gazeta this year, themed “legacy”. This edition explores the enduring historical events that impact governmental, societal, and other communities within the Russian, Eurasian, and Eastern European (REEE) regions during the turbulent times of the Cold War and beyond.

With my recent visit to Romania and Moldova back in March, I witnessed the legacy of the communist past still existent within both country's societies. While visiting Romania, you can feel that the Romanian people still struggle to gain the government's trust after they have suffered harshly under Ceaușescu's regime. Slowly but surely, the wounds from Ceaușescu's regime are still healing. During my visit to Moldova, I noticed the immediate fallout from the Soviet Union's forced Russification, where you hear the local population either speaking Russian or Romanian in Chisinau. Many individuals from both nationalities are trying to preserve their culture and livelihood. As you read my article on my recent travel to Moldova's breakaway region, Transnistria, I have gained a whole new perspective on how the Soviet influence was able to put a massive footprint on both Romania and Moldova throughout the Cold War.



The collection of stories you are about to read is evidence that the resilience and diversity of the individuals are directly impacted by historical legacies within the REEE region. These stories shared from a wide range of perspectives, recount both positive and negative memories of historical decisions brought on by their governments. They faced many challenges and made progress, which has shaped their lives today. The stories show how past events within the REEE region have shaped people's feelings and lives and created new identities for themselves through the good and the bad that they had to overcome. The collection of stories for the second issue is designed to help us understand how history affects our present and future. I especially thank the many writers, volunteers, and graphic designers for creating this amazing issue for our readers who have a passionate interest in the REEE region.

Thank you once again for your enduring support of the Gazeta. We hope you enjoy reading our second issue, legacy.

index

Events Bulletin	7
Lwów - The Land That Was Lost but Never Forgotten	9
Under the Shadow of the Foreign Agent Law: An Interview with an activist	19
How Should We Remember	25
A Day into the Unknown	33
Upea, uudistuva Uzbekistan	39
The Legacy of Ceaușescu's Demographic Policy: The Children and Women of the Decree	47
Recipe: Шопска салата	55

Russian, Eurasian, and Eastern European

May 1st — EU Eastern Expansion

On May 1st, the EU celebrated its 20th anniversary of eastern expansion. This expansion saw Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and former Warsaw Pact members Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic join the EU in 2004. 20 years later, this expansion is still the subject of debate and scrutiny within the EU among member states. While the eastern expansion can be hailed as a success in many regards, there are still lingering concerns around its impact and implications. Economic disparities between older and newer member states remain a focal point. Despite progress, differences in GDP per capita and infrastructure persist, challenging the EU's cohesion goals.

The expansion has also diversified the EU's political landscape, raising questions about institutional efficiency and enforcement of EU rules. Recent democratic regressions in some Eastern European states highlight this concern. As the EU looks eastward once more for expansion, the lingering debate surrounding the 2004 expansion is one that is significantly influencing current discussions about accepting Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova as EU member states.

June-September — Pride Across REEE

As a number of countries around the world prepare to celebrate Pride Month in June, the LGBTQ+ community across Eurasia will be marking the occasion with a mix of celebration and resilience. In Warsaw, the annual Equality Parade will be taking place amidst both jubilation and tension. Poland, like many countries in Eastern and Central Europe, has seen a rise in conservative ideologies and backlash against LGBTQ+ rights in recent years. Despite this, the Warsaw Equality Parade will continue this year, serving as a defiant display of solidarity and advocacy for equality. Under similar conditions, Belgrade Pride will be taking place in September following last year's largest ever pride march in the country to date.

However, there will be a number of places where similar pride marches will not be visible. While across Central Asia there may not be large-scale events or marches, the LGBTQ+ community continues to demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination in the face of adversity. In Kazakhstan, LGTBQ+ media organisation Kok.Team continues its efforts to provide support and visibility for the community through online platforms and local initiatives. As such, Gazeta Sasha commemorates all those across Eurasia who will celebrate pride, whether in public demonstrations or quieter acts of defiance and solidarity amidst adverse conditions.

an Events Bulletin

May 26th — Georgian Independence day and the foreign agents bill protest

Amidst the upcoming 33rd anniversary of its independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia finds itself embroiled in a tumultuous political landscape, marked by both celebration and discontent. May 26th, the Georgian Independence Day, traditionally a moment of national pride and unity celebrating Georgia's original 1918 Act of Independence, will now unfold against a backdrop of ongoing protests against the proposed Foreign Agents Bill. Similar to the existing law in Russia, the Foreign Agents Bill would require organisations who receive more than 20% of their funding from sources abroad to register as 'agents of foreign influence'. As with the existing law in Russia, many fear that the bill could be used to quash dissent by targeting NGOs and other civil society groups who receive foreign funding.

Since April, Tbilisi has been rocked by nightly protests against the bill with numerous cases of police brutality and escalating tensions between demonstrators and the ruling Georgian Dream party. As Georgia had received EU candidate status in December 2023, the protests against the Foreign Agents Bill have added a new layer of complexity to Georgia's aspirations for European integration. The granting of EU candidate status was viewed as a significant milestone for the country, signalling its commitment to aligning with the EU's values and standards. However, the recent crackdown on dissent and the proposed legislation have raised concerns among EU officials about Georgia's commitment to democratic principles and the rule of law putting its future in the EU in jeopardy.

August 23rd — Anniversary of the Baltic Way

On August 23rd, the Baltic Way commemorates its anniversary. This event, which occurred in 1989, saw approximately two million people from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania join hands to form a human chain spanning over 600 kilometres across the three Baltic states. It was a powerful display of unity and determination, symbolising the shared desire for freedom and independence from Soviet rule. The Baltic Way would prove to be instrumental in restoring independence to the three Baltic states, and provided a visible reminder of their aspirations to the world. It captured the attention of the international community, drawing support and solidarity from across the globe. Today, the Baltic Way remains a poignant reminder of the resilience and solidarity of the Baltic nations, inspiring movements for democracy and human rights around the world.

Lwów

The land that was lost but never forgotten

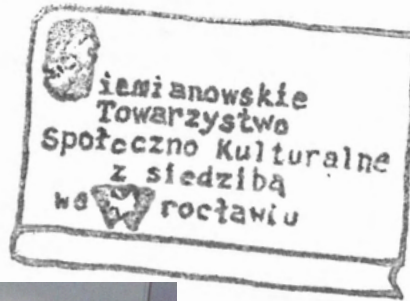
Text & Pictures: Lila Bednarska

In 1945, after the end of the Second World War, my maternal grandmother Maria together with her mother, aunt, grandmother, and grandfather moved to a new flat overlooking a bomb crater in Wrocław. They could still see and experience the legacy of war and the destruction and pain that war brings. They saw the remnants of life that just a few months prior, Germans led in Breslau. Breslau was soon to become Wrocław and the old empty German houses were soon to be full of Poles. A new legacy was to be built. And so it was, with every brick that was used to rebuild the city, with every street renamed, and with every storefront repainted. Yet, if you look close enough, the old legacy is still there reminding us that life is fragile.

The repatriations of Poles from Kresy Wschodnie (Eastern Borderlands) lasted for years.¹ My other grandfathers arrived in Poland only in 1956. My father's sister was born in the Ukrainian SSR in the formerly Polish city of Lwów (Lviv). Being originally from Siemianówka (Semenivka, currently in the Lviv Oblast), they moved to Lwów as a young couple. In Lwów, my grandfather worked as a motorman of Lwów trams. After their relocation to Wrocław, he continued to work as a motorman but now of Wrocław trams. The same job continued to connect my grandfather to his past life. My grandparents left their families and legacy in Lwów and surrounding villages. My grandmother could no longer visit her father's grave. Her father was shot and immediately



Pictures on the left: Poles from Siemianówka meeting there after they've already moved to Poland. The man in a blue suit next to the woman in red is my grandfather - Edward Bednarski.



*Roduje ty serce
gdy lewom wole do kosciolne
Ciebie my tygo nie
i polecamy strazy armiove
Mamy sie nie
- omie.*



owka no to swowa 22 lipca 1931

killed on the 5th of July 1944 by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, while he was walking from Młyniska (Lviv Oblast) to Żydaczów (Zhydachiv, Lviv Oblast). The relocation to Dolny śląsk (Lower Silesia) and leaving their home in Lwów was a traumatic experience. Yet, they left the traumas of death, destruction, and fear of surviving the war and the threat from the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. The traumas were not talked about. But whose legacy became visible in the tangible things – family photos and letters from Lwów, souvenirs brought from much later visits to their old home.

My family's relocation was part of a significantly larger resettlement of millions of Poles after the Second



*Pozdrawiam
ze swowa i rodzinny
wsi Siemianowski
prześlaje Holow
z Solkiem*

*Polka
Lwów*

*Львів. Пам'ятник Адаму Міцкевичу.
Львів. Пам'ятник Адаму Міцкевичу.
Скульптори: А. Попов, М. Паранюк.
Фот. В. Павлик*

“Millions of Poles went to sleep in Poland, but woke up in a different country.”

World War to Ziemie Odzyskane (Recovered Territories).² The resettlement and re-drawing of borders were decided in conferences in Potsdam and Yalta. By the decision of the Allied powers, millions of Poles went to sleep in Poland, but woke up in a different country. Their motherland just

disappeared and they became strangers in their own land. The newly gained territories that Germans primarily occupied until 1945, were to be populated with Poles coming mainly from Kresy. To a lesser extent from other Polish regions and repatriates from, for example, Kazakhstan. Whilst the Germans were forced to leave their houses and move further West,

the Polish repatriates were moving into their houses to restart their lives in the newly gained Western territories. This was the largest exchange of population in European history. Whole villages were relocated: an entire Polish village from Ukraine was resettled in a formerly German village. It was like nothing had changed. Yet, everything has changed. Sometimes Germans and Poles lived together until the Germans eventually had to leave. Amongst the horrors of the war, rare friendships have been built. There are

stories of Poles being impressed with German agricultural technology or Poles coming from the fertile soils of Ukraine not knowing how to harvest the mountainous fields of Sudetes. Having lost their legacy and history in Kresy, the repatriates needed to rebuild everything and their future in their new homes far away from their homelands.

The repatriates came to the Recovered Territories with nothing and had to rebuild their lives and the new lands with nothing. The overwhelming feeling was that the Recovered Territories were temporarily Polish. As easily as they were given to Poland and the Poles, as easily they could be lost. Indeed, only in 1990 with the German-Polish Border Treaty and the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, Germany accepted the sovereignty of the post-1945 Polish borders and the border issues ceased to be contentious. The uncertainty and temporality resulted in a reluctance to rebuild the recovered territories in the first years after the war. The repatriates felt like they were to lose their new homes at any second, therefore they thought it was not worth restoring such volatile lands. Subsequently, many areas fell into disrepair. My grandmother still recalls how as children they were picking up bricks in Wrocław to be sent to Warsaw for the reconstruction. The whole nation united to rebuild the capital. The German bricks would be used for the restoration of the Capital and Wrocław needed to wait for its



Посольство
Польской Народной Республики
в СССР

Москва, 4 декабря 1956 г.

Уполномоченный Правительства
по делам репатриации

№ 274 / Б) 1254)56

Удостоверение

Согласно имеющимся данным Уполномоченного Правительства Польской Народной Республики по делам репатриации поляков из СССР: гражданин (ка)

Фамилия **БЕДНАРСКАЯ** Имя **Людмила** Отчество **Франковна**
 Год рождения **1934** Место рождения **Львовская область, село Семенивка**
 Национальность **полька**
 проживает в СССР **Львовская область, гор.Щирец, Гипсовый завод**

состоял до 1939 года в польском гражданстве и проживал в Польше.

Семья вышеуказанного состоит из следующих лиц:

Степень родства	Фамилия	Имя	Отчество	Год рождения
муж	БЕДНАРСКИЙ	Эдвард	Петрович	1929
дочь	БЕДНАРСКАЯ	Гражина-Лидия	Эдвардовна	1956

Примечание.

В 1945-46 г.г. подлежади репатриации последним транспортом, который не вкчал. В СССР родственников не имеет.

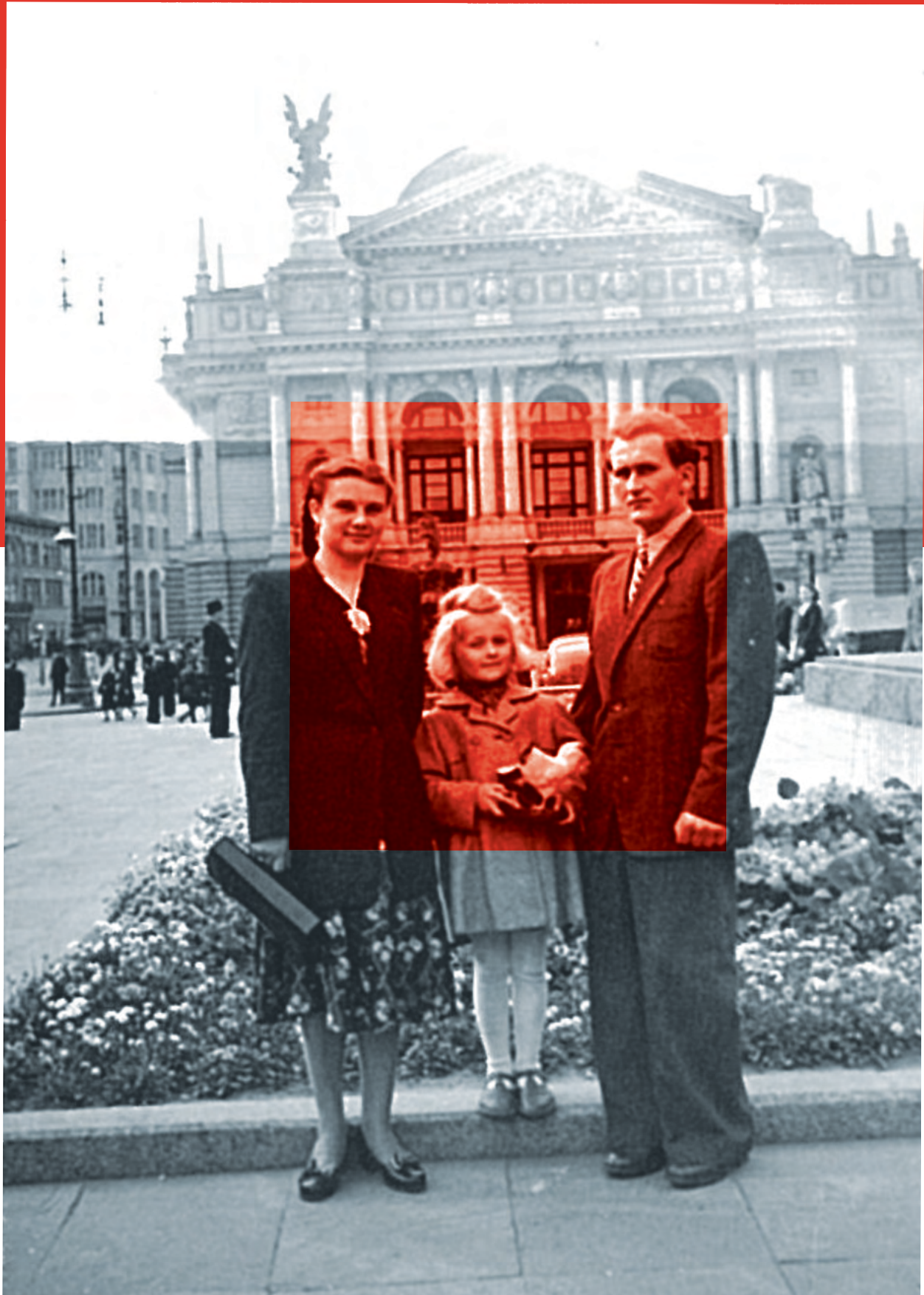
Просим вышеуказанному гр. **БЕДНАРСКОЙ Л.Ф.** и его семье ускорить возвращение в Польшу.



Уполномоченный Правительства
по делам репатриации

Stefan Kolonowski
—/. **Колоновски Стефан**

1855-5000



13 Polish family members in Lviv in 1955

turn. Its Polish legacy was yet to be built. The legacy of former Polish territories is present in tangible items and institutions in cities like Wrocław. Yet, in the hustle and bustle of everyday life, we fail to notice it. In many ways, Wrocław became the new Lwów. The majority of professors from Lwów University relocated to Wrocław. Additionally, many members of the Lwów Mathematical School moved, including Hugo Steinhaus. The Ossoliński National Institute was relocated from Lwów as well. It continues its mission of supporting Polish language, upkeeping the archives, and publishing. And, finally, the Aleksander Fredro Monument was moved from Lwów in 1956. From the ruins and shreds of old Polish legacy, Wrocław has surged to become Polish.

As elements of German rule and Lwów are present in modern Wrocław, so do the legacies of Poland and the Poles remain in Lwów and Western Ukraine. I experienced this with multiple trips to Lwów, Tarnopol Oblast, and surrounding villages. While walking the streets of Lviv, I saw the remains of the Polish legacy at every corner. I thought about how just a few decades ago my grandfather was driving the Lwów trams. Driving through the old town's streets every day. The most famous examples are the monument of Adam Mickiewicz and Cmentarz Orłąt Lwowskich (Cemetery of the Defenders of Lwów). Although the national identity of Adam Mickiewicz is disputed, for Poles, he is undoubtedly Polish. The monument is a haunting reminder of how volatile legacy is. My grandparents passed this monument many times without even thinking that one day, they would no longer be able to do it. Until they couldn't. As I sat on its stairs, felt the need to deeply reflect on my grandparents' past in the city. The same feeling recurred again when I found a picture of unknown distant family members in front of the monument in the family archives after my paternal grandmother passed away. Similarly, the feeling of reflection and overwhelming sadness is inescapable when one enters the grounds of Cmentarz Orłąt Lwowskich. This is the place where hundreds of young Lwów men defending Lwów against the Bolsheviks are buried. The youngest boy was 13. His and many others' sacrifice and legacy are now physically far, but also far away in memory. For them I hold nothing but reverence.

Memory and legacy are volatile. I have seen it vividly during my four journeys to Ukraine, mostly to Ternopil Oblast as a part of the initiative “Mogilę pradziada ocal od zapomnienia” (Save your grandfather’s tomb from oblivion). The initiative, jointly with schools in Lower Silesia, organised voluntary excursions to Ukraine to tidy up old, forgotten, Polish cemeteries in Ukraine. My school took part in cleaning old Polish cemeteries in Podwołoczyska (Pidvolochysk) and Hałuszczyńce (Halushchyntsi). Still a small number of the original Polish population resides there. Every year we would go to the Polish cemetery in Podwołoczyska to take care of the overgrown grass, weeds, and trees. It is a forgotten place, in which lives and legacy blur together. The cemetery always looked miserably forgotten as we would have to cut the thicket to discover the old graves. We would cut the grass around graves and clean each grave one by one. While being there I would always wonder what the people buried here were doing before they died. What happened to them and their descendants? Has their legacy and stories been passed on? We discovered the grave of a participant of the January Uprising, one of three




important Polish uprisings in the 19th century, Stanisław Woźniewicz. We rebuilt his tomb and marked it with a white and red ribbon. One by one, we would bring people’s memories to the world again. For a few weeks or months till the thicket wins over yet again. And this same tedious process we would repeat every year. The cemetery in Hałuszczyńce is located on a hill overlooking the village and wheat fields. It is a peaceful and isolated space with hundreds of Polish graves in relatively good condition, but nevertheless, touched by the passing of time and oblivion. Yet, once you walk through the alleys, you’re faced with the legacy of the past. You pass by forgotten graves while the dead look at you from the photographs on the tombstones. And in these moments, it becomes clear how fragile and volatile life and legacy are.

When you ask somebody in Warsaw where they are from, you are likely to hear how proud they are for being from Warsaw through generations. And how their ancestors fought, for example, in the Warsaw Uprising. Some may even claim that the newcomers are never going to be from Warsaw. In the recovered territories, the idea that your family has been settled in one city for generations is



Graveyard in Podwołoczyska before,during and after tidy up

*Wszystko przemija,
wspomnienia, pamięć też.
A bez namacalnego,
rzeczowego świadectwa
świat o nas zapomni.*

bizarre and alien. In Lower Silesia and other recovered territories, nobody is from “here”. Our original legacy comes from somewhere else. In my family’s case, it is mostly Lwów Oblast. For others, it is Wilno or the current territories of Western Belarus. Therefore, the recovered territories are a place where different legacies have met and created a new one by entwining traditions, local customs, and dialects. Now, we are all simply Polish. One day I hope to return to the land of my ancestors. To face what’s no longer there in the flesh but continues to haunt my family’s legacy to this day. I will finish this story with what I wrote when I was 15 years old: Wszystko przemija, wspomnienia, pamięć też. A bez namacalnego, rzeczowego świadectwa świat o nas zapomni – Everything passes, memories and memory too. But without tangible, material testimony, the world will forget us. 

[1] The term Kresy Wschodnie also has an ambiguous meaning. With years the meaning of the term blurred from a literal meaning towards a more mystic and ideological description of the great, truly Polish, rich lands of Poland. Only after the second world war it is meaning gravitated towards description of lost lands of Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania as a result of agreement in Potsdam and Yalta.

[2] The term Ziemie Odzyskane was created for propaganda purposes as the new lands have been barely, if ever, Polish. Nowadays, it is more appropriate to use the term Ziemie Zachodnie (the Western territories).

Under the shadow of the foreign agent law


An interview with an activist

Text - Anna Koryukova

Pictures - Anna Koryukova and Emma Haney

*The photos shown are a part of an upcoming
photo book project created by @hny.emma.*





As Cicero famously stated, “Historia Magistra Vitae est”, suggesting that history should serve as a lesson for the future. However, Michel Foucault would likely add, that history is also an exercise of power.

In 2022, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation officially dissolved an important NGO that specialized in historical preservation under the “Foreign Agent Law”. The NGO was established to document the victims of Soviet political repression and to advocate for human rights.

However, while the NGO has been shut down, the work of the organization is still alive. Several local departments and enthusiasts of the NGO remain active despite the growing pressure from the government. One such enthusiast is the protagonist of our story. For the sake of anonymity, the person’s name and location have been concealed, but we shall call him Semyon.

This is not merely a story about a significant human rights organization and the growing political battle over legacy in Russia, but also about a local activist, whose passion for his home region’s history and justice drives him despite the restrictions he faces. This is a story of the past, present and future.



In the beginning

Before Perestroika, nobody dared to speak about Stalin’s repressions, and even the slightest mention of ‘The Great Terror’ was stigmatized. In 1988 under the light of Glasnost, a new community of activists was born in Moscow with a mission to collect materials and memories about Stalin’s incalculable violations of human rights. One year later, the NGO’s mission expanded to monitoring human rights violations in contemporary Russia. The organization became one of the most significant symbols of the late

Soviet era and one of the first NGOs in the USSR.

Yeltsin’s liberal and pro-Western attitude in the 1990s gave way to Putin’s revisionist, autonomous and patriotic agenda of the 2000s. NGOs were restricted, forced to leave or dissolved, especially those sponsored from abroad and those that contradicted the dominant agenda.

Since the enactment of the “Foreign Agent Law” in 2012, the NGO would become one of the first targets of the law. Officially, the law was aimed at safeguarding national sovereignty, preventing undue foreign influence

on domestic affairs and ensuring transparency of organizations regarding their foreign funding. The “Foreign Agent Law” in Russia is not unique. The first known law in the world, concerning restrictions on foreign influence, is the American FARA (Foreign Agents Registration Act) and similar laws exist in China and Israel to monitor foreign organizations. However, the law would later be expanded to impede the activities, add extra expenses for those registered as “foreign agents”, and limit their funding or donation sources.

While the organization plays a crucial role in advocating for the remembrance of repressions, its voice often pales in comparison to other historical narratives. The government appears inclined to monopolize historical memory, primarily favoring narratives that glorify the Soviet Union, specifically those centered around World War II.

A lesson to remember

As a professional historian in his 60s, Semyon has dedicated his life to teaching history and preserving the memories of his home region of Russia. As the head of the regional branch of the NGO, he leads projects to preserve the memory of political repressed and maintain the NGO’s complexes and archives. However, since being labeled as a foreign agent in 2015, the organization faces

several hurdles. Despite these challenges, Semyon remains passionate about continuing the work. Inspired by the legacy of his great-great-grandfather, himself a victim of repressions during the 1930s, he strives to make an impact for the common good. He has contributed several books and materials on how to study family genealogy, which were distributed throughout the town.

*“They
prepare the
upcoming
generation
for the
replacement,
and it is very
hard to
influence.
However, as
long as there
is still
memory...”*

“One teacher told me, that when she was graduating from school, she got one of my books,” Semyon shows the book, which was written specifically for students in Russian schools several years ago – “She said, how interesting it was to research on family’s history and then decided to become a historian. Can you imagine how important it is to see that you are not doing something in vain and that something helped a person to choose their life path?”

The tone of our conversation changed from inspirational to melancholic, as Semyon added: “But as you can see, it has become more and more difficult”.

The law states that “foreign agents” are not allowed to educate children or distribute any educational materials. When I asked him why it is significant to educate children and students about the history of their family, he responded passionately about what he thinks of state narratives in schools:

“Children are our future. My grandchild started in the first grade this year. I saw his schedule. Every Monday the first lesson is “the conversation about important things”. Already in the first grade, they mess up with children’s minds. Talking about the war in Ukraine and all that stuff. They prepare the upcoming generation for the replacement, and it is very hard to influence. However, as long as there is still memory...”

Fighting for memory

The main task of the regional branch of the NGO is to preserve the memory of political repressions in the region. One of their projects involves maintaining the organization’s complex, located on the spot where thousands of victims of state repression were buried. Every year the NGO organizes actions at the site to remember the past and avoid repeating mistakes in the future. However, the site of the complex is not protected by law, and there are plans to build a stadium for a state-owned football club, threatening its preservation: “We are trying to build a dialogue with the authorities” - Semyon says, “but the authorities are hiding from us in every way possible. [...] Right now the organization’s complex is in poor condition. It’s embarrassing to show it to anybody and I feel ashamed in front of the fallen.”


Remembrance of political repressions from the Stalin era has been considered at the state level. In 2015, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev approved a state policy for an unspecified period, aimed at increasing non-governmental engagement in activities related to the history of political repressions. However, Semyon notes that while the NGO works on issues of national importance, they don’t receive any financial support from the state, only stigma, ignorance and pressure from the legal system.

Future of legacy?

Foreign agents face strict reporting requirements, leading to increased administrative burdens, extra expenses, and pressure on their activities. The situation is not getting better, when Semyon endured denunciations from anonymous senders and frequent visits to the police station to draw up another protocol: “There are people, who put it mildly, don’t like us and they would like to cease us to exist... But we can’t give them such pleasure”.

Semyon and his team fight back by going through several courts per month to cancel fines and generally to remove the label of foreign agents, but it is not easy. Semyon understands it as well. The purpose of his fight is to clean the name of the organization and to secure the evidence for the future:


“We understand that what we are doing is important, therefore all that peel, which covered everything here, will be gone one day. All those court decisions are unjust and will be revised in the future and all those court materials are already gathered.”

Semyon remains convinced in his belief that justice is on his side, facing the future with a mixture of optimism and melancholy. 

Note: Names and places have been changed/left ambiguous to protect the identity of the interviewee. In light of possible ethical/safety concerns, the name of the NGO described will remain anonymous.







HOW SHOULD WE REMEMBER?

In spring 1999, the traumatic decade in the Balkans came to an end when NATO bombs fell on Yugoslavia. 25 years later in Belgrade, Gazeta Sasha's former editor-in-chief Juho Pitkänen spoke with two Zoomers with roots in ex-Yugoslavia, in search of a path for their generation to reconcile better than their parents.

Text and pictures – Juho Pitkänen

AHTI-NATO

NATO

NAP

NPOTEKT 24.3.

In early 1999, the Kosovo War had raged on for months, and the possibility of another Balkan genocide seemed to be on the horizon, as Yugoslav forces were ethnically cleansing the local Albanian population. Traumatized by the few-years-earlier Bosnian war and the genocide committed by the Bosnian Serbs, the West decided to act. The bombardment of Yugoslavia began, without the approval of the UN Security Council.

The US-led bombings lasted for two and half months and were largely focused on the crumbling nation's capital, Belgrade. While the official policy was to focus on critical infrastructure and military targets, hundreds of civilians died – the official number still being debated, though.

Strolling through the streets of Belgrade, the impact of the events of 1999 on the public space is unmistakable: some bombed buildings have been intentionally left in ruins, while anti-NATO graffiti dot the walls of most streets. The NATO peacekeepers in Kosovo are seen as occupiers of “the heart of Serbia”, as a banner

next to the Defence Ministry of Serbia tells you. Earlier in the spring, graffiti calling people to take to the streets on March 24th also appeared on several buildings – marking the 25th anniversary of the beginning of the bombings.

For outsiders, the culture around the NATO bombings seems complex, painful, and often toxic. Due to the trauma, it's a dominant topic in the national narrative, but also something to avoid when conversing with Serbs, especially if you think the bombings were at least somewhat justified. That's why I wanted to meet two locals from ex-Yugoslav countries and to discuss how our generation could create a culture that enables honest and less toxic discussion on such a painful topic.

Those born at the turn of the millenia are now in universities, writing the histories and soon creating the policies that deal with the past. Svetla Jaksic, a Macedonian born in 2000, is studying International Relations in Belgrade. For her family, the events of 1999 constitute a painful topic, as her father is Serb, and her mother a Macedonian – a mixed family, typical for the Yugoslav period.



“The NATO bombings and the Kosovo war in general are difficult to discuss, as my father’s side of the family were Serbs from Pristina who fled the war to Belgrade. At first, they and other people fleeing the war received harsh treatment.”

Even though there is painful trauma involved, her family and friends still discuss the 1990s.

“My parents were shocked that Yugoslavia fell. They really thought it’d stay intact forever, in the name of brotherhood and unity. But there was provoked nationalism, which now feels like a sad story”, Jaksic says, emphasizing

the word provoked – in her parents’ Yugoslav youth, a war between its citizens seemed out of question.

“When the wars started, my parents’ generation looked at each other as different nations for the first time. All of their memories and the most beautiful times of their lives were destroyed.”

“One of my friends in Belgrade lost his entire family when a clinic was bombed. There is too much pain, and the topic is impossible to discuss with him. Maybe I would be like that too if it had happened to my family.”

In the Skopje bazaar, Albanians and Macedonians live together peacefully. That is how society should be.

While North Macedonia was not directly involved in the Yugoslav wars, the bombings of 1999 became a relevant topic again in the late 2010s, as the country was about to join NATO. Jaksic sees the North Macedonian accession to NATO as a strategic move, not a middle finger to their northern neighbor.

“Some Macedonians were not happy with us joining because of what happened in 1999 - also some Serbians thought it was selfish from the Macedonian side. I understand why people who grew up in Yugoslavia feel the NATO bombing as their own, but for our generation it is not as relevant. Montenegro has joined NATO, as have Croatia and Slovenia. We must remember what happened and collectively move on.”

In the 1940s, the Independent State of Croatia, a Nazi German puppet state, committed genocide against the Serbs, while the violent Serbian Chetniks slaughtered Croats and Muslims while fighting guerilla warfare against the Croatians and Yugoslav partisans. The complicated Balkan fabric of World War 2 pitted neighboring families against each other, and similar violence happened 50 years later during the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

In fact, in her 2003 book *They Would Never Hurt a Fly*, Croatian journalist **Slavenka Drakulić** argues that one of the reasons for the violent Yugoslav 90s is the trauma from the Second World War never being addressed. Instead, the pain was repressed for several decades to make way for Yugoslav *brotherhood and unity*.

When it comes to the new generation's responsibility in preventing the cycle of generational trauma from continuing, Jaksic sees only one option: not to dwell in the past. For her, the answer is creating the conditions for democracy, rule of law and less corruption – in a nutshell, working towards a functioning and inclusive state.

“In 10 years, our generation will be in position to change things. We have lived only under democracy, and the past has taught us that conflict can be provoked in various ways, which we must be aware of. Instead of nationalism, the human side in all of us must be awakened. In the Skopje bazaar, Albanians and Macedonians live together peacefully. That is how society should be.”





Milena Djordjevic was born in late 1998 in Kokomo, Indiana. Her Serbian parents emigrated from Yugoslavia to the United States in the early 1990s, but the events of 1999 were felt across the ocean.

“My mom had just had me when the bombardment began, it was extremely stressful for her. We had family close to the bombing sites in Novi Sad and Belgrade. My grandfather remembers standing on the balcony in the outskirts of the capital, seeing the city aflame.”

In Djordjevic’s family, discussion on the bombings is not impossible. Her parents bring the topic up when they want to criticize the US.

“For them, the bombing was a demonstration of American hypocrisy. My dad has told me that he had culture shock when he was watching American news about the events in Yugoslavia. For example, they were talking about bombing the bridges in Novi Sad to prevent the army from entering Kosovo. If you look at the map, you understand how that makes no sense.”

For a Serb growing up in the US, the discussion on the bombings created cognitive dissonance. Djordjevic's family gave her a negative portrayal of the US, but her school education was very patriotic. Since then, she has explored the same topics during her bachelor's at the University of Texas and her master's at the University of Belgrade.

"It was a huge thing to be from a country that the US had bombed. As a kid, I thought the bombing was unjust, and I had these *Kosovo je Srbija* opinions. As I grew older, I wanted to have an objective opinion – something a well-educated Croat or Albanian could agree on. I wanted an understanding of this mess that would do justice to what happened and take all sides into account. As they say, the truth will set you free, but at first it will piss you off. I think that's part of the reason that sent me on this Eastern European studies route."

Like Jaksic, Djordjevic is somewhat critical of memorialization for memorialization's sake.

"Some scholars are entirely against memorialization. Usually each group memorializes their own side, while having amnesia on what they themselves did. Here, there is basically no discussion about what was done in the name of Serbia both in Bosnia and Kosovo. The NATO bombings are important to memorialize, but in an ideal world, it would be done in the wider context of the Yugoslav wars, and the lesson would be to prevent it from happening ever again."

Only democracy and rule of law cannot address the inner identity of people.

"Only democracy and rule of law cannot address the inner identity of people. There should be reckoning that both vindicates valid trauma of the Serbs and addresses the cycle of violence done in the name of Serbia."

In Belgrade, the memorials of the NATO bombing are extremely one-sided. The memory sites have plaques which are written solely from a victim's perspective, without providing proper context. Addressing this, for Djordjevic, could be one the first step towards a healthier culture of remembrance.

"We need to construct a new narrative of not just being the victim, but of the wars in general. Everyone here wants to forget what they have done, and to remember what has been done to them. Our generation has the responsibility of preventing something similar from happening ever again."

When working on her master's thesis on nationalism in the Balkans, Djordjevic received a comment from her friend that influenced her thinking.

"In my thesis draft, I used the term *co-existence*. My friend from Skopje said that it is a Western idea, an idea of only tolerating the people living close to you. Instead we should focus on *mutual existence*."

During Yugoslav times, army personnel were sent to other parts of the country during their service to get acquainted with the multi-ethnic country's other peoples and regions. Djordjevic thinks social media could serve a similar purpose today.

"We are a generation connected by technology. I follow many people from other ex-Yugoslav countries, I think it helps with recognizing our shared humanity. We have been here for centuries, and our existence is not exclusive, but mutual." 📖

A Day In th



nto e Unknown

Text - Daniel List

Pictures - Daniel List

After waking up in Moldova's capital of Chişinău, I felt excited yet anxious, knowing I had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience something unique and extraordinary. I was about to spend a day touring Tiraspol, the capital of the unrecognized breakaway region of Transnistria. Historically, the area encompassing modern day Transnistria fell under Moldova, which was part of the Soviet Union from post-World War II to the early 1990s. By the 1990s, many of the Soviet republics, including Moldova, were breaking away to become independent. As Moldova moved to become independent, a dilemma arose in the eastern part of the country. The Russian-speaking majority in the Transnistrian region didn't want to be part of Moldova seeing the local culture threatened by the rise in Moldovan nationalism. For two years, from 1990 to 1992, a military conflict

would erupt resulting in hundreds of people losing their lives from both the Moldova and the separatist Transnistrians. After the conflict, a ceasefire agreement was signed between Moldova and the Transnistrian separatist. Transnistria emerged as a de facto independent state, however it has no international recognition.

Upon checking into my Airbnb in Chişinău two days before, the landlord asked why I had come to visit the city. I told her I wanted to see many historical places in Chişinău and thought about going to Tiraspol. She mentioned that she knew a tour guide who offers day tours of the city and gave me the tour guide's phone number via WhatsApp. Without hesitation, I contacted the tour guide, who went by the name of "Tim Tiraspol," and told him that I wanted to spend a day in Tiraspol. In his text, Tim mentioned he was available for a

tour on March 8. After thinking about it, I confirmed with Tim that I would spend the day in Tiraspol. At that point, there was no backing out if anything went badly for me in Tiraspol. I was worried that my identity as an American anything could go wrong in the area. However, going with Tim, who has years of experience bringing tourists into the region, brought me a sense of security and safety in the Transnistrian region.

Fast forward to March 8, I received a text message from Tim saying he had arrived at my apartment. I made my way down and to his car. There I met his friend Simon, who is fluent in Russian and has years of experience getting tourists across the Transnistrian checkpoint. After a few pleasantries and exchanges, we went to Tiraspol. An hour of driving later, we finally reached the Transnistrian border control. A few armed Russian sol-



diers were guarding the border, and I felt anxious. I went with Simon to the customs house to enter the region. After ten minutes, I received a paper slip of the day visa from the authorities. We were cleared to enter Transnistria, with Russian troops looking at us as Tim drove away.

The first impression of the town was astonishing. It felt like entering a new world. I didn't see any Moldovan language signs like in Chişinău. Driving by, I was able to see multiple Russian military bases, remnants of the original Russian forces from the Moldovan-Transnistrian war. Occasionally, we saw Russian troops walking down the street. Tim took me to see a railroad station

that was built after World War II with an original Soviet train that was standing still on the railroad tracks. I could appreciate the history behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. Many relics of the Soviet Union remain today at Tiraspol. Tim told me that since the Soviet Union collapsed, much of Tiraspol's town had been able to adjust to capitalism. However, much of the city of Tiraspol determines what businesses can be run under their controlled capitalism philosophy in the region.

After visiting the train station and observing the bullet-riddled apartments from the Transnistrian War, Tim guided me to an outdoor market to exchange my Euros for Transnis-

trian Rubles. Where many of the sellers were selling food, metal hardware tools, used cameras and used smartphones. One tent I spent most of my time in was a person selling Soviet pins. I bought a Communist Party Pin from Soviet times as a souvenir to remind myself that I was present in Transnistria. The seller was friendly and we exchanged pleasantries. Next, we went to the center of Tiraspol. Tim told me to climb onto a tank in the center square, see their national hammer and sickle flag, and visit the memorials of World War II and the Transnistrian War. Later, Tim, Simon, and I spent time at a newly built café where I bought pizza and some pastries. The cashier and many of the café workers



were super friendly and amazed that I came from the United States. The locals even patiently communicated with me in Russian, which was heartening, accommodating my beginner level easily.

I asked Tim how he got to live in Transnistria in the first place. He told me that years ago, he lived in California and wrote a script for a Hollywood movie called "Deep Blue Sea," which was a box-office success. However, he never got any royalties from the film and attempted to sue the company. The case would not favor Tim, and the movie industry's lawyers would prevent Tim from gaining his royalties. He decided to leave the U.S. and tour Europe. He finally settled in

Transnistria when he met his girlfriend. Later in the 2000s, tensions rose between Transnistria and Moldova, and it gained a lot of interest among popular mass media outlets like BBC, CBS, CNN, and many other international news sources. Tim was one of the only Western individuals to be contacted by many media outlets, so he successfully got many reporters through the border checkpoints and made a permanent living by corresponding with media news outlets and giving tours to anyone in the Transnistrian region.

Tim, Simon, and I drove to the city's outskirts to tour the Orthodox Church and an important battle site fought during World

War II. From the top of the hill of the Great Patriotic Memorial, you can see Moldova on one side, and on the other, you can see Ukraine. Once we drove back into town, I took a few more pictures of Lenin statues and a few government buildings, then relaxed at a park where they had a statue of a MiG-21 in the center. Overall, many locals with whom I interacted along the way were friendly and wanted to know about Finnish and American culture. They were excited that I was getting an education in Russian Studies and appreciated me for visiting. Many of the locals there were very laid back and relaxed.

To end the final part of the tour, Tim took me to see a private



garage in Tiraspol. Once I entered the garage, I was shocked and amazed at what I saw. There were collections of Soviet and Nazi weapons, army uniforms from World War II and the Afghanistan War, and even a rubber hazmat suit that was present from the Chernobyl disaster. Even crazier, Tim said that I could hold the weapons. I touched each of these historical items, like the Russian AK-47, Carbine Gun, The German Luger, MP-40, and other guns and grenades used during World War II. Throughout my life, I have seen World War II equipment kept in a glass case in many museums I have been to. It was the first time I got to touch and hold many of the World War II artifacts. Not only weapons were present, but there were Soviet flags and banners, and Tim showed me a Soviet fighter pilot's helmet that I could wear. With the tour's last stop concluded, seeing the historical

World War II artifacts was highly memorable.

Tim and Simon drove me back to Chişinău as we exited the garage. I gave the border guard my paper visa and passport on the Transnistrian border. After the guard handed back my passport, we left Transnistria. The entire tour gave me a new perspective of what Transnistria truly is. Before the tour, I was worried about how unpredictable this trip might be. After the tour, I saw a place still full of life, and a local population admiring anyone visiting the town. I saw how Tiraspol has well-preserved its Soviet past, and built new cafes, shops, and other areas to attract more international tourists. I got a sense of this region's culture and society, and learned about how daily life works there. It will forever be an unforgettable experience for me. 🇸🇪



Upea, uudistunut Uzbekistä

Heinäkuussa 2023 VIExpert-maisteriopiskelijoiden vuosittainen kesäkoulu oli juuri saanut hienon päätöksen. Lammin biologisen aseman luokkahuoneessa oli valloillaan pirteä, jo seuraavaan kevääseen kurkottava tunnelma, ja viikon huipensi hyvin tiukka ulkomaan ekskursio -äänestys. Vain muutaman äänen johdolla kohteeksi valikoitui Keski-Aasian väkiluvultaan suurin maa, Uzbekistan. Matkalle Taškentiin ja Samarkandiin lähtivät Suomen eri yliopistoissa opiskelevan 17 opiskelijan lisäksi VIE-johtoryhmän Helsingin yliopiston edustajat Sirke Mäkinen ja Hanna Peltonen. Tässä artikkelissa on nostettuna joitakin matkamme parhaista paloista. Koko artikkelin voit lukea Sashan blogista [tästä linkistä!](#)

Teksti - Konsta Leikas, Larissa Potkonen, Kamille Grigonyte, Jenni Kirkinen
Kuvat - Veera Saukkonen, Konsta Leikas

va an



Matka alkakoon!

Eskkursion virallinen ohjelma alkoi sunnuntaina 7.4. yhteisellä illallisella ravintola Caravanissa lähellä Taškentin keskustaa. Perinteinen uzbekistanilainen ruoka ja ensimmäinen yhteinen koko konkkaronkan kokoontuminen eivät olleet ainoat syyt, jotka innostivat 19-jäsenistä ryhmäämme. Tapasimme nimittäin illallisella paikallisen kontaktimme, Euroopan jälleenrakennus- ja kehityspankissa työskentelevän Sijia Lin ja hänen miehensä Samuel Lammin. Vapaamuotoisella illallisella vaihdoimme ajatuksia ja saimme paljon informaatiota Uzbekistanin poliittisesta kehityksestä ja ilmapiiristä sekä yleisesti maassa elämisestä paikallisena ja ulkomaalaisena.

Ensimmäisinä päivinä Taškentissa vierailimme Nordic Universityssä, jossa pääsimme tutustumaan yliopiston toimintaan sekä uzbekistanilaiseen kulttuuriin. Pääsimme myös vierailemaan Yuksalish-järjestössä ja UNICEF:in toimipisteessä. Vierailut keskittyivät koulutuspolitiikkaan sekä kansalaisten poliittisen osallistumisen vahvistamiseen. Uzbekistanin ja Taškentin kauniista arkkitehtuurista ja Neuvostoliiton ajan vaikutuksesta pääsimme kuulemaan kävelykierroksella. Matkamme vei meidät myös maan vanhimpaan kaupunkiin,

Samarkandiin. Siellä pääsimme myös tutustumaan kaupunkiin kävelykierroksen merkeissä ja tutustumaan maan historiaan syvemmin. Vierailimme myös esimerkiksi kansalaisjärjestö Rahmdillikissä, joka tarjoaa turvaa naisille ja lapsille.

Nordic University

Vuonna 2022 perustettu opinahjo tekee yhteistyötä Kareliammattikorkeakoulun kanssa ja pyrkii soveltamaan Suomen koulutusjärjestelmän mukaisia osa-alueita opiskelusuunnitelmassaan. Yliopistossa toimii suomen kielen opettajana myös Kareliassa työskennellyt yliopisto-opettaja Johanna Järveläinen.

Alisher Juraev, Suomen Uzbekistanin kunniakonsuli, ekonomi ja yksi Nordic Universityn pääarkkitehdeista, otti ryhmämme vastaan yliopistorakennuksen etupihalla. Vierailumme sisälsi yliopiston esittelyn lisäksi uzbekistanilaisia kansantansseja ja kilpailuja paikallisten opiskelijoiden seurassa. Meille järjestettiin valtava juhla-ateria Ramadanista huolimatta. Päivällinen myös ikuistettiin: paikalla oli Uzbekistanin valtion televisiokanavan UzReportin kuvaustiimi, ja se haastatteli ryhmämme jäseniä iltauutisiin.

NORDIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY



Yuksalish-järjestö

Vuoden 2016 jälkeen Uzbekistanin valtiojohto otti käyttöön reformiohjelman, jonka virallisena tavoitteena oli vahvistaa aluehallintoa, parantaa yrittämisen edellytyksiä ja osallistaa kansalaiset lainsäädäntötyöhön parlamentissa. Tämä johti yhteiskunnan läpinäkyvyyttä ja demokratisoitumisprosessia ajavan Yuksalishin perustamiseen vuonna 2019.

Yuksalishin kansainvälisen yhteistyön kehittämisosaston johtaja Shamshod Yunusov antoi meille perusteellisen katsauksen organisaation toiminnasta. Hänen mukaansa Yuksalishin päämääriin kuuluu vahvistaa uzbekistanilaisten aktiivisuutta sekä paikallisessa että valtakunnallisessa päätöksenteossa. Lisäksi ideana on luoda keskustelufoorumia ja järjestää tilaisuuksia, joissa ihmiset voivat vapaasti tuoda omia aloitteitaan ja ehdotuksiaan esiin.

UNICEF

Uzbekistanin UNICEF:n koulutus-päällikkö, italialainen Alberto Biancoli luennoi Uzbekistanin koulutusjärjestelmästä ja koulutukseen vaikuttavista poliittisista muutoksista.

”Suurimmat koulutukseen vaikuttavat tekijät Uzbekistanissa ovat tällä hetkellä maan perustuslailliset uudistukset ja reformit, nuorten koulutusikäisten kasvava määrä, työllisyysmahdollisuudet sekä sijoitusvelka. Koulutukseen kohdistettavat uudistukset ovat välttämättömiä, jotta

voisimme saavuttaa tulevaisuuden tavoitteitamme”, Biancoli arvioi.

Tashkent Modernism - kävelykierros

Keskiviikkona meitä odotti ohjattu kävelykierros ympäri Taškentia oppaamme Aleksander Fedorovin johdolla. Graafikkona ja taiteellisena johtajana työskentelevä Fedorov pyörittää Tashkent Modernism -nimistä hanketta, johon kuuluu erityisesti Neuvostoliiton aikaisen seismisen modernismin arkkitehtuurin esitleminen kävelykierrosten muodossa. Taškentin modernistisia helmiä voi ihaila myös hankkeen nimeä kantavalta Instagram-tililtä. Fedorovin johtama kierros oli hieno tapa oppia uutta kaupungin arkkitehtuurin historiasta – myös puretuista rakennuksista, jotka aiemmin koristivat Taškentin katukuvaa.

Samarkand

Samarkand on Keski-Aasian vanhin kaupunki ja meille tarjoutui ainutlaatuinen tilaisuus aloittaa kaupunkiin tutustuminen paikallisten avulla: Uzbek-Finnish Pedagogical Institute -korkeakoulun opiskelijat, jotka meidän oli tarkoitus tavata vasta perjantaina, tarjoutuivat matkoppaiksemme aamupäivän ajaksi. Aamupäivä vierähtikin Registanin aukiolla kierrellen ja jutellen. Monikulttuurista ryhmäämme ympäröi kolme valtavaa muinaista madrasaa eli koraanikoulua, joiden korkeus ja kauniit, värikkäät yksityiskohdat olivat henkeäsalpaavat.



Kansalaisjärjestö Rahmdillik

Rahmdillik (uzb. armo) on vaikeissa oloissa eläville naisille ja heidän lapsilleen suunnattu turvapaikka. Järjestö sai alkunsa Bibisora Oripovan halusta auttaa vaikeissa oloissa olevia naisia ja idea konkretisoitui 1990-luvulla hänen perustaessaan Uzbekistanin ensimmäisen naisille ja heidän lapsilleen suunnatun turvakodin. Uzbekistanin nykyinen presidentti Shavkat Mirziyoyev on pitänyt naisten aseman ja sukupuolistuneen väkivallan yhteiskunnallisen keskustelun aiheena vuodesta 2016 lähtien. Hallinnollisella tasolla tämä tarkoittaa muun muassa ilmaisen oikeusavustajan tarjoamista väkivaltatapausten käsittelyssä sekä turvakotien määrän lisäämistä ja niiden toiminnan turvaamista ja kehittämistä. Rahmdillik on saanut hallitukselta erilaisia lahjoituksia sekä enemmän kansainvälistä huomiota.

Kävelykierros Samarkandissa

Vierailimme yhdessä Amir Temurin mausoleumissa, joka olikin henkeäsalpaavan kaunis kokonaisuus. Yhteisen iltapäivän jälkeen hyvästelimme samarkandilaiset paikallisoppaamme ja jatkoimme kukin omiin suuntiimme – osa jatkaen vielä kaupunkikierrosta, osa suunnaten jo kotimatalle. Yhdessä järjestämämme opintomatka tarjosi valtavan hienon mahdollisuuden oppia ja verkostoitua Keski-Aasiassa ja ylitti jo kesäkoulussa asettamamme odotukset.





Uudestaan Uzbekistaniin?

Matkamme Uzbekistaniin oli erittäin onnistunut ja pääsimme sisälle maan historiaan ja kulttuuriin pintaa syvemmälle. Vaikka tänä päivänä maa vieläkin kohtaa haasteita demokratiakehityksen osalta, näimme paljon positiivista ja vahvistuvan kansalaisyhteiskunnan. Uzbekistanilaiset olivat hyvin kiinnostuneita meistä ja Suomesta, ja etenkin koulutusyhteistyö tuntui olevan heidän prioriteettejään. Tutustuimme moniin paikallisiin ja rakensimme suhteita paikallisten opiskelijoiden kanssa. Toivottavasti vielä jonakin päivänä pääsemme tapaamaan uudestaan! Meille kaikille jäi ihania muistoja matkastamme ja voimme lämpimästi suositella käymistä Uzbekistanissa. Toivottavasti mahdollisimman moni uusi VIExpert-opiskelija päättää osallistua ensi vuoden ekskursiolle, jonka kohde päätetään tämän vuoden kesäkoulussa! 



THE
CHILDREN
AND
WOMEN
OF THE
DECREE

The legacy of Ceașescu's demographic policy

Text – Giulia Panfilo

The enforcement of Decree 66/770 in Romania

On September 27, 1966, the Romanian Executive Committee, under the communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, deliberated on prohibiting pregnancy termination in Romania. Until then, abortion not only remained legally permissible but stood as the sole resource for contraception women could resort to. However, with this measure, Ceaușescu harbored ambitions far from family support or the preservation of human life. His vision? To propel the population to a staggering 20 million, while sculpting and nurturing the Romanian New Man (Omul Nou), a model citizen with a socialist and eugenic twist. Ironically, Ceaușescu was unwittingly nurturing the very generation that would depose him in 1989.

The decree was enacted in 1967 and proscribed abortions in Romania even in dire circumstances. Abortion was permitted only if a woman was over 45 or already caring for four children. A surge in births between 1967 and 1971 ensued, fervently chronicled by the regime. However, by 1973, the birth rate plummeted for the first time since the abortion ban of 1967. In response, Ceaușescu instructed prosecutors and local militia, the Securitate, to intervene in hospitals whenever a woman experiencing pregnancy-related bleeding sought assistance.

Securitate's modus operandi was grim: subject the suffering women to mental and physical torment, extract confessions regarding their abortion providers, and, if deemed necessary, let them perish in the quest for truth. Many women would claim self-inflicted abortion procedures. Occasionally police officers would authorize emergency curettages, observing the procedure firsthand. The psychological duress, compounded by fear, weighed heavily on both doctors and women. Working women were also subjected to monthly gynecological control to detect early pregnancy and monitored until birth impeding any chance of abortion. In 1974, Romania was lauded as a paradigm of population expansion, and even selected by the UN to host the World Conference on Demography and Development. Bolstered by increasing external support from the West and good relations with the Soviet Union, Ceaușescu persisted in his nationalist crusade, ruthlessly sacrificing the lives of Romanian women.



Pregnancy test used by the regime to investigate early pregnancy stages among women (Credits: Florin Iepan)

Women's voices from the Decree time

When pro-natalist policies are enforced, abortions do not cease to exist. Women seeking pregnancy interruption find themselves in unsafe, often incompetent hands, risking their lives in the process. Romania was no exception. After 1967, a shadow industry of abortion practitioners emerged, thriving behind closed doors and at the expense of women themselves. Clandestine abortions were frequently administered by doctors, midwives, nurses, and in the direst scenarios by unqualified individuals driven solely by financial gain. The praxis was, indeed, initiating the abortion at home, causing internal bleeding as if it had been a miscarriage, and heading to hospitals to have a curettage (scraping the embryo from their uterus). The most common methods included the insertion of substances into the uterus including mustard, tea, antibiotics, plant leaves, and even lemon juice. While these substances were believed to possess abortive properties according to Romanian folklore, they also posed severe risks of toxicity and infection.



"The Unforgettable Tragedy", accessible on YouTube, paints a poignant picture of the desperate lengths women were willing to go to in the face of abortion laws. Ioana, for example, forced to seek an illegal abortion, had a saline solution mixed with hot water inserted into her uterus, intended to detach the embryo from the placenta and induce expulsion. The procedure resulted in severe septicemia, and her death was only averted by compassionate doctors who performed emergency surgery. Even public figures like Delia Budeanu, a prominent television presenter in 1970s Romania, resorted to extreme measures to terminate unwanted pregnancies. Her "method" involved a plunge into icy water, which nearly triggered her heart attack. Yet, in the face of peril, she declares what was relatable to many women, "It didn't matter at all. The problem had to be solved."

In the late 1960s, a young woman's tragic tale was sensationalized in a regime-backed film aimed at curbing clandestine abortions and teaching "disobedient" women a lesson. Like many pregnant women of her time, she turned to a backstreet abortionist, notorious Transadira Popescu, only to later die of infection. The regime exploited her memory by portraying her and Transadira in a film riddled with half-truths, intended to dissuade women from seeking abortions and to vilify Transadira herself. The film "Ilustrate cu flori de câmp" (Postcards with Flowers, 1975) is set in early 1970s Bucharest and follows the story of Irina and Laura, who seek an abortion from Titina (Transadira's transposition). Irina is disturbed by Laura's apparent detachment from her unborn child, and through her eyes, the film aims to distance viewers emotionally and

Above: "The Unforgettable Tragedy": Ioana Coja recalls her abortion experience (Credits: Ioana Nicolescu)
Right: Poster of "Ilustrate cu flori de câmp" (Postcards with Flowers), 1975

ILUSTRATE CU FLORI DE CIMP

Montajefilm gratuit
o producție a Casei de Film Tral

Film realizat în studierea Centrului
de Producție Cinematografică „București”

scenariul și regia: **ANDREI BLAIER**
imaginea: **Dinu Tănase**
muzica: **Radu Șerban**
decoruri: **Vasile Rotaru**
costume: **Ileana Oroveanu**

cu **DRAGA OLTEANU-MATEI, ELIZA PETRĂCHESCU, CARMEN GALIM,**
ELENA ALBU, DAN NUȚU, GEORGHE DINICĂ, ANA CICLOVAN,
GEORGE MIHAIȚA, PAUL IOACHIM, CONSTANTIN FLORESCU.





Laura and Titina in "Ilustrate cu flori de câmp" (Credits: Florin Iepan)

vilify women seeking illegal abortions. Only as Laura questions her decision does the narrative shift to depict her as a victim. Tragically, it is too late: Laura succumbs to infection (David, 2022). The film served a propagandistic purpose, instilling fear and regret in women considering abortion, as it underscored the dangers of illegal procedures and sowed distrust towards unscrupulous practitioners like Popescu, who was later imprisoned but kept unabashedly boasting of her services.

Building the New Man

When the baby boom swept through Romania in 1969, it brought the propagandistic notion of the New Man, an emblem of the desired next generation of Romanians, molded and educated by Ceaușescu. Daniel Marius Stanciulescu, born as the 20 millionth baby in socialist Romania, symbolized the culmination of Ceaușescu's ambitious policies to bolster the population. However, Daniel's life until 1989 was a facade, an orchestrated portrayal of the perfect socialist child. He was subjected to constant surveillance, exploitation, and excessive mediatic exposure.

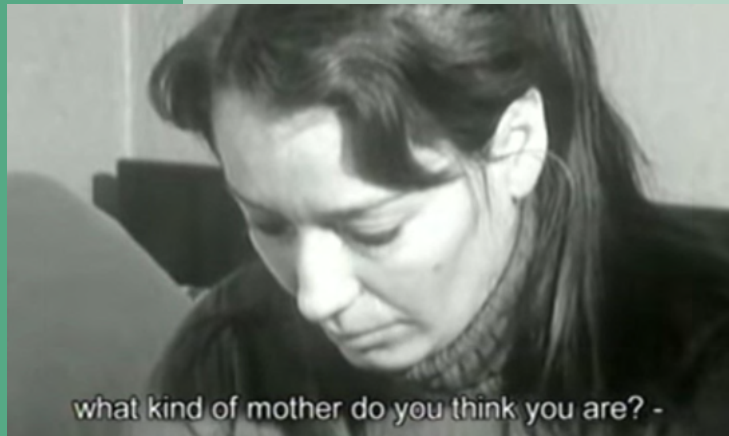
But what characterized the New Man? This new social archetype was envisaged to embody the ideal socialist citizen,



The birth of the 20 millionth Romanian citizen: Daniel Marius Stanciulescu, is celebrated by Ceaușescu (Credits: Florin Iepan)

meticulously crafted to construct the fabric of socialism. He was expected to be robust and healthy, athletic and talented from a tender age. The new generation of "Decreței" was to be extraordinary, with any perceived obstacle to their potential swiftly eradicated – including their own mothers, whom the state had coerced into bearing their children. Shocking testimonies from socialist Romania shed light on children forcibly taken into state custody because their mothers had been deemed unfit for initially considering abortion. Television programs such as "Spotlight" (Reflector) even subjected women to relentless televised interrogation until they confessed their reluctance towards motherhood, subsequently enduring public humiliation. Children were sometimes coerced into participating in these interviews.

Another figure of this era was Andrei Duban, chief of the Pioneer's organization as a child and later a prominent face on Romanian television during his teenage years. Duban had blonde hair, blue eyes, and robust health, emblematic of the regime's criteria for inclusion in the New Man narrative. Conversely, individuals who did not conform to these rigid standards were marginalized, abandoned, or subjected to inhumane treatment.



The "Reflector" journalist questions the woman, whose child would later be taken into state custody (Credits: Florin Iepan)



Famous actor and showman Andrei Duban (Credits: Florin Iepan)

The costs of homogenization

Population homogenization consisted of a neo-Stalinist-inspired social engineering project to converge the best socialist values into the next generation of Romanian citizens. Any impediment to homogenization was to be obscured or eradicated. For instance, the Roma community, highly visible in Romania, could never embody the ideal of the New Man. This led to the encouragement of abortion among Roma women, even in the later stages of pregnancy, as part of an insidious campaign of ethnic cleansing and eugenics.

Another facet of this drive for homogenization was the paramount importance placed on productivity within a socialist society. Every individual was expected to contribute to the nation's workforce, engage in competitive endeavors, and strive for success. Women were reduced, in a Foucauldian sense of biopolitics, to mere vessels for the reproduction of new citizens. No surprise that Margaret Atwood, author of 'The Handmaid's Tale,' noted the parallels between Romania and her fictional dystopia of Gilead (Kligman, 2022).

Anyone deemed unproductive or aesthetically unfit to represent the ideal Romanian citizen was swiftly marginalized. Romanian pro-natalist policies resulted in the abandonment of handicapped children, condemned to lives of neglect and squalor. In March 1990, the world discovered the appalling conditions endured by abandoned orphans and disabled children in Cighid Children's Home in Ghiorac, Western Romania. Hidden away in darkness, these vulnerable children were left to perish in abject conditions. This tragic reality exposed the hollowness of the dictator's professed love for children, which extended only to those deemed suitable for inclusion.

The 1989 revolution – a *parricidal* legacy

In the mid-1980s, as the Romanian leader's grip on power waned and pro-natalist policies lost efficacy, he resorted to even more draconian measures to control women's reproductive rights. In 1986, he declared the unborn fetus as part of a socialist society, motherhood a patriotic duty, and refusal to bear children a crime. At the same time, Romania had the highest maternal mortality rate in Europe, with 159 deaths per 100,000 live births, with approximately 87% attributed to unsafe abortion methods (Hord et al., 1991).



December 1989 demonstration in Timișoara (Credits: Urbán Tamás)

But what happened in 1989? Let us revive the ideological transformation experienced by the so-called "Decreței" generation, born between 1967 and 1971, in the revolution. The tide young Romanians – many of them children of the decree - found themselves in began to turn in December 1989 when the Iron Curtain fell in Eastern Europe. They started taking to the streets against the dictator and tragically over a thousand young lives were lost to his troops. On December 22, 1989, Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, were captured in Târgoviște, 80 kilometers north of Bucharest, only to face a military show tribunal and execution two days later. The executioners, once fervent followers who saw

him as their symbolic father, were largely children of the decree. One of them describes, in “Children of the Decree”, the psychological shift that crossed his mind while tying Ceaușescu’s hands before the shooting with these words: “They were a father and a mother that didn’t deserve me anymore”. The generation born out of the decree ultimately toppled Ceaușescu’s rule. The legacy of 25 years of socialist regime made the old generation anesthetized, most likely scared of taking the streets, while the new one showed signs of change.



*A member of the firing squad and child of the decree
(Credits: Florin Iepan)*

The 1989 revolution in Romania stands out as a unique event in post-socialist Europe, characterized by its brutal nature and the televised spectacle of a double execution. As Ceaușescu’s regime fell, marking the bloodiest post-Communist regime changes in Europe, the new government swiftly legalized abortion and contraception, and family planning and mental health facilities were established to

address the trauma inflicted upon women and men during the socialist rule. This article is a testament to legacy in two distinct veins: the children born from aggressive pro-natalist policies are the “legacy” of Decree 66/770, but they were the antithesis of Ceaușescu’s New Man, spearheading the Revolution of 1989 and toppling their symbolic Father (as Ceaușescu was reverently titled). Ceaușescu’s policies led to the birth of countless children who might not otherwise have been born, engendering a sense of enduring gratitude and reverence. However, what unfolded in 1989 was not merely a manifestation of broader regional unrest inevitable in socialist Eastern Europe. Instead, it represented a violent rejection of the paternal figure of the nation. I dare to assert that it can be labeled as parricide – a generation, the “Children of the Decree,” symbolically killing their metaphorical parents. 📖

References

- David, M. (2022): The Representation of the Socialist Abortion Ban as Women’s Reproductive Burden in Post- socialist Romanian Cinema, In: *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 15(3), 1-17.
- Hord, C. et al. (1991). Reproductive Health in Romania: Reversing the Ceausescu Legacy. In: *Studies in Family Planning*, 22(4), 231-240.
- Kligman, G. (1992). *When Abortion is Banned: The Politics of Reproduction in Ceausescu’s Romania, and After*. The National Council for Soviet and East European Research.

[The children of Cighid](#)

[The Unforgettable Tragedy: Confessions from the Decree Era](#)

ШОПСКА САЛАТА

Text & Pictures – Jenni Kirkinen

Dreaming of Balkan food.... Too bad I'm a vegetarian

As a veteran vegetarian, I have faced many hardships regarding my choice of diet while traveling. I have been offered chicken stew where I could just pick out the meat pieces, canned corn and veggie sticks as dinner. Since not eating meat is my personal choice, I have adopted some strategies to survive in places where vegetarian food

can be challenging. However, last December I commenced on a journey through some of the Balkan countries and was challenged by my poor preparation, stinginess to buy a data package, and non-existent language skills. A great combination to have a successful holiday with!

My tips to not starve

- 1) Google ahead and save places where you know you can eat just in case
- 2) Ordering multiple appetizers and side dishes to make a meal
- 3) Girl dinner <3

Ingredients for *shopska salad*

- 1 large cucumber
- 2 tomatoes
- 1 onion
- 1 bell pepper
- Sirene cheese (grated and to taste, you can find this in Bulgarian Supermarkets)
- Sunflower oil
- A pinch of sea salt

During my travels around the Balkans in December and before, I have found some gems which are highlighted in the map. However, there is one shining star specifically I need to spotlight. The very little preparation I actually managed to make for my trip was to watch a YouTube video of the must visit places in Skopje. In this video, *shopska salad* was mentioned as a must try dish in a restaurant. I could not remember the name of the place on the video, but I did find the salad. I went to a random kebab restaurant and ordered the salad with fries and a glass of wine. The server gave me a funny look when I ordered but so would I if someone ordered only a salad at a meat restaurant. When the salad was brought to me, oh boy was I impressed, surprised, and over the moon. I was a bit confused at first since

I received a plate of cheese but considering that I was a mouse in my previous life, I really was just delighted. Underneath the delicious *sirene* cheese, there were equal amounts of cucumber, tomato, and onion smothered with oil and a dash of salt. I swear I could eat that dish for the rest of my life and die happy.

After my trip I decided to educate myself in the delights of *shopska* and it turns out that it is the national dish of Bulgaria... and apparently a few other countries as usual in the Balkans. Good old Wikipedia has told me, and now I tell you, that the colors of the salad represent the flag of Bulgaria. Very similarly the origin story of Margarita pizza including the colors that represent



the Italian flag. The story of the salad includes a Bulgarian state owned tourist company from the late 1940s which wanted to highlight the good life of socialist society by rebranding regional dishes. The adaptation of Greek salad became the *shopska* and at the same time, it conjured national sentiments within the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Whilst my first touch with this magnificent salad was in North Macedonia, I am sure that one day I will be having it in Bulgaria. As I have many unusual travel bucket lists, I consider adding a *shopska* tasting tour around the Balkans as a high priority. 🇪🇺



gazetá sasha