

**Global trend:**  
Autocratic regimes  
stifle academic freedom

# BALTIC WORLDS

balticworlds.com

## Shrinking space:

- Surveillance and control in Russia
- Expulsion of students in Belarus
- Dismissals and trials in Turkey

**Special issue**

# Academic freedom under threat

**scholars reporting**

Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

ALBANIA / **BELARUS** / HUNGARY / **RUSSIA** / POLAND / **TURKEY** / EURASIA

## Open societies rest upon critical thinking

**T**hreats against academic freedom is a topic that will be discussed in this issue of *Baltic Worlds*. The values that the academic European world build upon, based in the Enlightenment, are facing restraints and attacks in many countries in the area that *Baltic Worlds* embraces. Repressions often result in fear and sense of loss. In the worst case, such repression succeeds in shutting down the exchange of ideas and critical dialogue.

For ideologies claiming to have all the answers, and easy ones too, critical thinking is an obstacle. For ideologies that feed their positions by creating polarization and undermining the glue of trust in society, dialogue, and particularly dynamic dialogue, is disturbing. Autocratic forces gain and stay in power by shrinking the space for media and civil society – and also for academia. Why? Academia is recognized as a place where ideas are scrutinized and where opinions with loose argument will be falsified and where a deeper and more nuanced understanding is nourished. Neo-liberal and far-right-wing regimes try to filter the spread of ideas and the exchange of opinions that democracy rests upon.

We will here publish reports on threats against academic freedom, but also acts of resistance towards these threats. We have gathered texts concerning several countries, including Russia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Hungary, Albania, Turkey, and Poland. We will also address these trends and their causes in a wider context.

**IN THIS THEME ISSUE**, we present several examples of students and researchers having been expelled, reprimanded, and censored in order to restrict them from expressing their views or conducting research on certain topics, such as human rights, gender issues, and political events. Dmitry Dubrovskiy describes in an essay the various methods and attacks on academic freedom in Russia. He writes that “The topic of human rights has almost disappeared from teaching, and research in the field of queer sociology is in fact banned.” In an interview Gleb Yarovoy describes how he moved to Finland from Russia to be able to teach without being watched. In Belarus, students’ testimonies show that although the methods have changed to be less obvious, the repression continues. The use of informants is common, and this surveillance leads to self-censorship by students and researchers in order to avoid being expelled.

In Turkey, which is a country we include in this issue, there have been severe and outspoken repressions towards researchers. Derya Keskin tells her story of how she was expelled with many other researchers who signed a peace petition and now faces travel restraints as well as other

restrictions. The escalating pressure on academics in Turkey is also discussed by Yasemin Gülsüm Acar. In particular the subject of gender studies has been targeted in Turkey as it has been in Hungary and Poland. In Poland we have here also reports that the subject of anthropology is being erased, and it is now debated how to interpret this development. Apart from certain subjects, whole departments and even whole universities have been forced to shut down or rearrange their courses, such as the case of the Central European University (CEU) in Hungary and the European University in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Oleg Antonov and Artem Galushko explore in their essay the threats against academic freedom and its modus operandi in post-Soviet Eurasia, and they place these threats in the post-socialist experience. Vello Pettai presents the connections between the shrinking spaces for media, civil society, culture, and academia by understanding this as a global trend. Caroline Mezger writes on the vulnerable situation for freedom of speech in Hungary and sets recent developments in a historical context. Gilda Hoxha reports from Albania on the students’ on-going protests for change and influence in higher education and describes this as a rolling stone set in motion.

**LASTLY IN THIS ISSUE** we have posed questions to networks that support scholars at risk and that call for solidarity among academics across borders.

One of the questions we want to further explore is what a scholarly journal such as *Baltic Worlds* can do to offer solidarity, apart from highlighting the situation at large and publishing articles about it, in order to open up for critical dialogue. ❌

Ninna Mörner



### essays

- 4 Russia.** Between the Scylla of conservatism and the Charybdis of neoliberalism, *Dmitry Dubrovskiy*
- 40 Worldwide.** Measuring academic freedom in a regional and global perspective, *Vello Pettai*
- 20 Eurasia.** The common space of neo-authoritarianism in post-Soviet Eurasia, *Oleg Antonov & Artem Galushko*

### interviews

- 12 Gleb Yarovoy:** “I was not prepared to censor myself”, *Pähl Ruin*
- 47 Lauren Crain:** “There is a global crisis of attacks on higher education”, *Ninna Mörner*
- 50 Angelika Sjöstedt-Landén:** “FEMACT is led by an ethos of feminism-across-borders”, *Ninna Mörner*

### commentaries

- 14 Turkey.** “Academics are fired, jailed, and blacklisted”, *Yasemin Gülsüm Acar*
- 16 Turkey.** Criminalization of women’s mobilization & the punishing of Gender Studies, *Derya Keskin*
- 34 Hungary.** Reiner Frigyes Park: A reflection on current events, *Caroline Mezger*
- 37 Albania.** Student protests against neoliberal reforms in higher education, *Gilda Hoxha*
- 44 Poland.** The disappearance of social anthropology, *Agnieszka Halemba & Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz*

### feature

- 30 Belarus.** Expulsion of students as a tool of control, *Marina Henrikson*

### conference report

- 52 Academic freedom.** The very heart of the scientific process, *Ninna Mörner*

### colophon

*Baltic Worlds* is published by the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) at Södertörn University, Sweden.

#### Editor-in-chief

Ninna Mörner

#### Publisher

Joakim Ekman

#### Scholarly advisory council

Thomas Andrén, Södertörn University; Sari Autio-Sarasmo, Aleksanteri Institute, Helsinki University; Sofie Bedford, IRES, Uppsala University; Michael Gentile, Oslo University; Markus Huss (chair), Stockholm University; Katarina Leppänen, University of Gothenburg; Thomas Lundén, CBEES, Södertörn University; Kazimierz Musiał, University of Gdańsk; Barbara Törnquist Plewa, Centre for European Studies, Lund University

#### Corresponding members

Aija Lulle, University of Latvia; Michael North, Ernst Moritz Arndt University Greifswald; Andrzej Nowak, Jagiellonian University, Kraków; Andrea Petö, Central European University, Budapest; Jens E. Olesen, Ernst-Moritz-Arndt University, Greifswald; Olga Schihalejev, Tartu University

#### Copyediting/proofreading

Matthew Hogg, Semantix AB; Bridget Schäfer

#### Layout

Sara Bergfors, Lena Fredriksson, Serpentin Media

#### Illustrator

Karin Sunvisson, Ragni Svensson, Katrin Stenmark, Moa Thelander

#### Subscription

Sofia Barlind

#### Printed by

Elanders Sverige AB  
Printed: ISSN 2000-2955  
Online: ISSN 2001-7308

#### Contact *Baltic Worlds*

bw.editor@sh.se





Odysseus's boat passing between the six-headed monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis. Scylla has plucked five of Odysseus's men from the boat. The painting is an Italian fresco from circa 1575.

Academic Freedom in Russia:

# Between the Scylla of conservatism and the Charybdis of neoliberalism

by **Dmitry Dubrovskiy**

**T**he academic community in Russia was, in many ways, both the creator and the beneficiary of freedom from the ideological dictates of the state and the state censorship of the Soviet era; moreover, we can say that, to a certain extent, the academic community benefited more from the freedom of speech than the rest of Russian society, bearing in mind the direct dependence of the work of the scientist, as well as the journalist, on the level of freedom of speech and thought.<sup>1</sup> The shock reforms and the crisis of the nineties, on the contrary, greatly worsened the situation for scientists and teachers, which could not but cause a serious outflow of personnel from the academic environment. At the same time, starting from the second presidential term of Vladimir Putin, the space of academic freedom, which began to form in the '90s, began to narrow dramatically. The reason for this was the cooling of the political climate in Russia and a sharp narrowing of the space of freedom of speech. And again, this restriction appears to have too a greater extent affected science and education compared to society as a whole. The reason for this was, first of all, that at some point in the nineties

academic freedom ceased to be a privilege that distinguished the Soviet scientist from the Soviet worker and became part of the general freedom. In the situation of a certain refusal of society from political freedom, as well as sharply increased control over science and education, it is humanitarian science that has again become the object of ideological control and dictates.

At the same time, paradoxically, the Russian higher education system has been actively developing projects in the field of internationalization of higher education: there were projects of higher education with international participation (European University at St. Petersburg, Smolny College – The Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Shaninka – The Moscow School of Economic and Social Sciences), strengthening the role of academic exchanges and international research projects. Such projects were actively encouraged by the state, which was interested in promoting Russian higher education, and even invested serious money in the program 5–100–20<sup>2</sup> – which involves getting five Russian universities in the top hundred universities in the world by 2020.

This trend, in turn, faced with the strengthening of the state

## abstract

Independent scientific and professional organizations began to suffer especially after the introduction of the so-called law on “foreign agents”. Ideological control over science, together with espionage, begins to directly influence the state of academic rights and freedoms. The topic of human rights has almost disappeared from teaching, and research in the field of queer sociology is in fact banned. However, the most vulnerable are those who either teach or demand respect for human rights at the university, and then the loss of employment is the result of a direct ideological confrontation with the rector, such as for the author of this text.

**KEY WORDS:** Human rights, academic freedom.



system of control over research and researchers: we are talking about the revival of the “first departments” – that is, the FSB (Federal Security Service) officers in charge of particularly sensitive industries, such as nuclear physics and work in the field of bacteriology, for example. The practice of monitoring the exchange of information and ordinary research has often become a transition to espionage, which also could not but affect the situation for academic rights and freedoms, and the atmosphere in the academy as a whole.

This change affects different groups of teachers and researchers in different ways: as Robert Quinn and Jesse Levine precisely note in 2014,<sup>3</sup> researchers and teachers may demand that they be taught in one way or another, or, without being directly related to teaching or education in the field of human rights, they may simply be confronted with violations of their rights and demand that they be respected. This is the case with the violation of academic rights and freedoms in Russia: those who either teach human rights too responsibly and consistently or those who openly and clearly protest against their violation suffer the most.

### Scylla of conservatism

The strengthening of state control over universities under the slogan of the reform of science and higher education, in fact, revived the Soviet practice of pathological control over all contacts with foreigners. The order “About export control”, signed in 1999,<sup>4</sup> although it generally refers to the control over the export of nuclear weapons, military technologies and other things, nevertheless, intensified the work of the so-called “First departments” (dealing with secrecy) and generally updated the scope of excessive control over the activities of researchers and teachers of higher education institutions. Thus, according to the official provisions of the Law, research in such fields of knowl-

edge, the results of which can be used to create weapons of mass destruction, as well as for preparing or committing terrorist acts, is subject to special control at universities. First of all, despite the rather clear boundaries that the law establishes with respect to the subject of control (this is primarily atomic physics and some types of biomedical research). This did not prevent the author of this article<sup>5</sup> from broadly interpreting disciplines that should be subject to enhanced state control; for example, at St. Petersburg State University, the rector N. Kropachev believed that all con-

tacts with foreigners without exception should fall under the reporting procedures provided by the Law.<sup>6</sup>

**HOWEVER, THE MAIN** victims of the strengthening of the fight against spies were scientists and researchers who had no access to classified information, like for example the researcher of the Institute for US and Canadian Studies, Igor Sutyagin and the physicist from Krasnoyarsk, Valentin Danilov, who were accused of disclosing military secrets.<sup>7</sup> Since that time, espionage cases have arisen constantly, and it is especially significant that in most cases the accused

either did not have access to state secrets, or, as, for example, in the case of the professors of the Baltic State Technical University (St. Petersburg), Afanasyev and Bobyshev,<sup>8</sup> this transfer had been authorized by the state. It is at the same time significant that all organized espionage processes, actually ignore the fact that not only cooperation, but also data transmission, subsequently qualified as “military-technical secrets”, could not take place, according to the law, without the control of special departments, namely, the FSB, which together with scientific staff must include an expert opinion with any action of this kind.<sup>9</sup> In other words, criminal cases are initiated upon the transfer of information that has already been the subject to consideration by the FSB and authorized for transfer to the official partners of the

project (in the case of Bobyshev and Afanasyev, it was China). In exactly the same way, Vladimir Lapygin, who was sentenced in September 2016 to seven years under article 275 (treason) for transferring a demo version of a program to China, a program which even in the full version did not constitute a state secret. He is recognized as a political prisoner by the Russian Memorial.<sup>10</sup> It is significant that the signatories of the letter in defense of his colleague, an employee of the same institution, Victor Kudryavtsev, are now being accused of passing secret data to a scientific institute in Belgium, although the cooperation agreement was agreed upon by the government of the Russian Federation.<sup>11</sup> The Russian team of human rights lawyers “Team 29” drew attention to these processes as examples of completely illegal processes, closed for the public, in which the basic principles of judicial proceedings are constantly violated.<sup>12</sup> A study of the report shows that the main victims of state espionage are researchers and teachers, usually engaged in dual-use technologies, and working in organizations engaged in international cooperation. The active work of the special services in fabricating such cases, supported by experts from the same special services, makes the situation for scientists accused of “treason” almost hopeless, since 99 percent of the cases end with sentences, but the researchers note that “the large number of extremely mild sentences suggests that the evidence base of such cases raises doubts even in the courts that pass sentences”.<sup>13</sup> The laws – known as the “law on foreign agents” and “undesirable organizations” – adopted in the development of the idea of “permanent intervention of the West in the internal Affairs of Russia”, had a double effect on the Russian academic community. On the one hand, a number of organizations directly involved in the research have been affected; but it has had an even greater “cooling effect” on researchers and teachers as well as on public officials.<sup>14</sup> Currently, the fear of communication with “foreign agents” serves as an obstacle not only to cooperation with foreign funds and organizations, but also to partnership with those organizations that are recognized as “foreign agents”.<sup>15</sup>

Independent scientific and professional organizations began to suffer especially after the introduction of the so-called law on



European University in St. Petersburg.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

“foreign agents”.<sup>16</sup> The most famous “foreign agent” among the scientific organizations was the famous Levada-Center, which was almost the only independent center for the study of public opinion. It is significant that the direct reservation of the law on “foreign agents”, excluding scientific research from the consideration of law enforcement agencies, was meaningless. Protests from the scientific community did not lead to anything.<sup>17</sup>

**THE EMERGENCE OF THESE** laws has had an obvious chilling effect on public policies for the licensing of non-state universities. The crisis in relations between the state and the European University in St. Petersburg, recently resolved by issuing a license for educational activities, is quite indicative, both from the point of view of the structure of violations of academic rights and freedoms, and from the point of view of exactly who, and how one tries to deprive one of the best universities in Russia (which is recognized by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation) of accreditation. The fact is that in 2008, the European University of St. Petersburg had already experienced closure due to “fire safety violations”, while the obvious reason for the closure was

#### DMITRY DUBROVSKIY

Expert on human rights in Russia affiliated to the Center for Independent Social Research, St. Petersburg. Previously Lecturer, Bard College (New York), Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University, and Reagan-Fascell Fellow, National Endowment for Democracy. Before that he was Associate Professor of international relations, political science, and human rights at St. Petersburg State University, where he was affiliated with the Andrew Gagarin Center for Human Rights.



PHOTO: VLADIMIR TELEGIN

Dubrovskiy (right) with Vladimir Kostushev, professor, Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg, serving as expert witnesses at the criminal trial against the street art group Voina, known for its provocative and politically charged performance art.



PHOTO: VLADIMIR TELEGIN

Dubrovskiy pondering the case, with Voina's founding member Oleg Vorotnikov behind bars in the background



Dubrovskiy responding to questions from the media.

PHOTO: VLADIMIR TELEGIN





A rally in support of EUSP, St Petersburg.

PHOTO: ANNA KLEPIKOVA

the state's reaction to the grant for the study of electoral behavior in Russia, issued to one of the European University professors by the European Union. Then the decision was taken by the European University to refuse this grant and the crisis was successfully resolved.<sup>18</sup> The crisis of 2017–2018 at the European University was complicated by the ideological battles around the independent university; it was the beginning of the verification procedure by the experts of the *Rosobrnadzor* (Federal Service for Supervision in Education), which first revoked the accreditation, and then also the license, which led to a one-year downtime for the educational institution. It is significant that the attack on European University was started by the infamous State Duma deputy Milonov, author and initiator of the law on “LGBT propaganda”, and it accused the University of financial fraud, and teaching “fake sciences”, such as gender studies.<sup>19</sup> The journalist of the Christian Science Monitor cites the words of political scientist Nikolai Petrov, who notes that paradoxically, since the era of Peter the Great, Russia has constantly tried to use Europe as a source of technology, but has avoided borrowing political ideas.<sup>20</sup> The very course of the crisis, and its end (European University has got license – not state affiliation yet – at the Fall of 2018),<sup>21</sup> shows that independent universities remain the most vulnerable in the policy pursued under the flag of “improving the quality of Russian education”.

**ANOTHER VICTIM** OF this policy of the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science, in detail analyzed by the sociologists of the European University, M. Sokolov and E. Guba,<sup>22</sup> was Shaninka – The Moscow School of Economic and Social Sciences, whose accreditation (that is, the right to issue state diplomas) was withdrawn for reasons entirely contrived.<sup>23</sup>

It must be said that gender studies in general are becoming very vulnerable; this is due to the growing role of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, especially with the constant attempts to increase the “spirituality” of education with the help of “Orthodox culture”, a term that most in fact often replaces religious education.<sup>24</sup> First of all, this is

due, of course, to the homophobic policy of the Russian state in recent years, especially intensified after the adoption of the law on so-called “homosexual propaganda”. At the same time, teachers who dare to raise issues of violation of the rights of the LGBT community experience real difficulties at work, including dismissal. For example, Anna Alimpieva, a teacher at the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, did not have her contract extended, which many observers linked with the fact that she on “gender psychology” with a liberal content, as well as the fact that in the summer of 2017, on the Russia-24 TV channel, there was a story that this teacher “receives Western grants” and “approves of LGBT and non-system opposition”.<sup>25</sup>

No less serious and conservative turn that has occurred in the study of religion and especially in the application of religious studies for applied purposes. The conservative turn ended with the emergence of theology departments at secular universities in Russia, where, of course, there is no other theology than orthodox. This was accompanied by a special formulation of the new ideology of human rights, which was presented by the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, in which, of course, there is no place for LGBT people, euthanasia and other rights “unnatural” to the doctrine of human rights of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, rights which are internationally recognized. This circumstance, I must say, affects both the development of the educational programs, where a number of humanitarian disciplines are under attack. As a result of this development, there are such departments as the Department of theology at the Moscow State Institute for Engineering and Physics, the Department of Orthodox Medicine, State North Medical University (Arkhangelsk), or the emergence of such an exotic discipline as “Orthodox sociology”.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, religious scholars who are involved in religious extremism in one way or another become victims of questionable dismissals and nonrenewal of contracts, no matter on which side – the prosecution or the defense – they spoke. Recently, both liberals like Doctor of Philosophy, Professor Ekaterina Elbakyan,<sup>27</sup> who defended Jehovah's Witnesses, accused of extremism, Doctor of Sciences, Professor Alexander Panchenko, whose conclusions on the activities of the religious group “Evening light” diverged from the conclusions of the “official experts” of St. Petersburg State University, but also Professor, Doctor of Sciences, Larisa Astakhova, who, on the contrary, doubted the “religiosity” of the Church of Scientology,<sup>28</sup> lost their jobs. The most vivid motive for persecution for independent scientific judgment was manifested in the non-renewal of the contract for Alexander Panchenko, who was at the time the Professor of St. Petersburg State University, and headed the program “Sociology and anthropology” at the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences of St. Petersburg State University. Panchenko himself describes this story on his Facebook page as follows:

**Due to the fact that the Prosecutor's office opened a case on recognizing the texts of a Pentecostal pastor as extremist. The expert opinion on the case by the prosecution was written on behalf of the Center for opinions**

**of St. Petersburg State University, and, as the author notes, “contained gross errors and, without a doubt, was biased and tendentious”. Due to this, “I agreed to participate in the expert work and together with a specialist in linguistics I wrote a “responding” conclusion, which significantly shook the position of the prosecution. Signing the expert opinion, I did not hide that I work at St. Petersburg State University. On the contrary, I believed that this should be a kind of alarming signal, indicating the low level and the bias of expert opinions, which seem to support the academic authority of the university. However, the bureaucrats of St. Petersburg State University held a different opinion: in August this year, the university administration struck me off the list of teachers without explanation”.<sup>29</sup>**

Thus, there is a tendency for censorship to extend to the expression of any opinion that in one way or another does not coincide with the opinion of the authorities or, most likely, with the opinion of law enforcement agencies.

In connection with the establishment of conservative and protective ideology in higher education begin to transform or make entire disciplines disappear as “irrelevant” for a special Russian civilization. Thus, the topic of human rights<sup>30</sup> almost disappears from teaching, and research in the field of queer sociology is in fact banned. The place of religious anthropology in many universities has taken on an aggressive sectarianism, directly addressed in their programs to the Orthodox sectarians.

**A SPECIAL PLACE** among the challenges to academic freedom is the historical policy of the modern Russian state, in which “the memory of the victims is replaced by the memory of the executioners”.<sup>31</sup> This directly concerns history as a science, and specific historians. Although the attempt to create a Commission “to counteract the falsification of history”<sup>32</sup> was not successful, the message itself was read: since then, attempts, for example, to investigate general Vlasov of the Russian Liberation Army faced accusations of non-patriotism and extremism,<sup>33</sup> and since a certain time it has meant the possibility of criminal prosecution under the article “rehabilitation of Nazism”.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the greatest repercussion was caused by the case of the historian Kirill Alexandrov, who was denied the degree of doctor of historical sciences for the alleged “rehabilitation” of Vlasov of the Russian Liberation Army because of an entirely historical work, and his article about Bandera and the Banderovites was recognized as extremist and included in a list of extremist materials.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, ideological control over science, together with espionage, begins to directly influence the state of academic rights and freedoms. However, the most vulnerable are those who either

**“TEACHERS WHO DARE TO RAISE ISSUES OF VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE LGBT COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE REAL DIFFICULTIES AT WORK, INCLUDING DISMISSAL.”**

teach or demand respect for human rights at the university, and then the loss of employment is the result of a direct ideological confrontation with the rector, such as for the author of this text.<sup>36</sup> However, another part of the problem is the activity of the Russian state in increasing the workload, reducing real wages and all that is the essence of the so-called neoliberal reforms in the higher education system in Russia, and the pressure on those teachers and employees who protest against such developments.

## Charybdis of neoliberalism

I must say that Russia's accession to the Bologna system as a whole seems to have had a positive effect, but under the slogan of higher education reform at the moment the “optimization” of the staff list of universities and in general, a kind of corporatization of university life. Of course, in general, this is a global process and it affects Russia as well,<sup>37</sup> but in Russia the onset of corporate ethics and neoliberal reforms on the universities faced with the weakness of university independent trade unions (in fact, the country has one independent university union – University solidarity), and with an extremely weak idea of the form and possibilities of teaching and student resistance to economic pressure from the state and university authorities. Among the economic problems of the universities, the leader of University solidarity Pavel Kudukin names the increase in the load, the increase in the number of students, the volume of classroom load. At the same time,

the increase in the workload is accompanied by an actual decrease in wages, while the salaries of rectors are growing, apparently, in the opposite direction of the teaching staff. Finally, the introduction of the so-called “effective contract” leads to the fact that the responsibility of teachers, for example, put receiving and managing external grants (which in connection with the reduction of the funding of science in general is difficult to plan), writing an unthinkable number of scientific works in combination with increased load – all this leads, rather, to a tragic fall of either the quality of education, or the depth and seriousness of publications,

but for the bureaucratic system, apparently, this is not the main criterion for education and science.<sup>38</sup>

In fact, the tradition of the academic precariat<sup>39</sup> is beginning to be established, first of all, through a system of short (annual) contracts, which are de facto the same form of an atypical employment contract as in other countries. The form of an “effective contract” – in which the renegotiation of the contract is made directly dependent on certain “indicators” – raises the question of how much this definition can be extended even to those who receive “long term” – that is, three and five-year contracts.<sup>40</sup> Additional factors that exacerbate the subjective feeling of fear of job loss are both the constant reduction of part-time workers and the forced transfer of half-time for those who previously worked full-time (with the aim of a fictitious

“increase” in wages of employees of state-financed organizations).

It is quite revealing that even mild resistance to such powerful economic pressure on the teachers from the only independent trade union University solidarity leads to excesses; so, when you try to carry leaflets in support of the illegally dismissed from the State University for the teachers’ council – the co-chair of the trade union University solidarity, Professor of Moscow State University, Mikhail Lobanov, and organizing secretary, Yuri Bredelev, were beaten. The beating was supervised by the chief of the university security.<sup>41</sup> However, not only protests against low wages and high workloads lead to layoffs. For example, the protest of the dean of the Moscow State Timiryazev Academy (Russian State Agrarian University) against the building development on the academy’s experimental fields, led to his dismissal, and to sending his supportive students to the police, who clearly intimidated the students who had organized pickets to protest against the dismissal of the dean.<sup>42</sup>

I must say that the use of police and special services was particularly noticeable in the situation of pressure on students in the preparation of the 2018 World Cup. Police pressure was exerted on students who protested against the organization of a fan zone near Moscow University.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the latest events of general civil protests, first of all, the latest in 2018 – March 26, and their continuation in honor of the Russia Day on June 12, seriously affected the situation of the rights of students. Most of the protesters were students and schoolchildren, and they are currently under pressure in the form of all kinds of threats from the university administrations, and from public statements about the inadmissibility of “extremist actions” (meaning civil protests), in some cities even exams were scheduled on Sunday to prevent the participation of young people in the protest.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

The strengthening of authoritarian tendencies – Crimeanalization of public life (especially noticeable after the annexation of Crimea), put the academic community in Russia in difficult conditions.

On the one hand, all protests, both political and civil, are fraught with job losses, or even criminal prosecutions, which are simplified by the new amendments to the law on rallies, marches and demonstrations. On the other hand, the general financial crisis, fear of losing jobs and the weakness of the trade union movement make it almost impossible to put up serious resistance to direct violations of academic autonomy, as well as to regular violations of academic rights and freedoms. Although the logic of corporatism is now threatening in general, also universities in the US and Europe, but in Russia, this logic meets with the logic of authoritarian government, due to the loss of autonomy, directly transferable to the campus, and, at the same time, the weakness of civil society and professional community. In this regard, a rather strange picture is emerging: if in the USSR the academy was rather more free in relation to society as a whole, then in the period of perestroika and the early 1990s

the situation equaled and, finally, the neoliberal reforms of 2000 and the strengthening of authoritarianism in the academy led to the fact that the actual freedom of teachers and students became less than in society as a whole. Apparently, this partly explains the for the external observer incredible picture of the mobilization of student protest in modern Russia, which gives some hope for a change in the situation of democracy in general, and of academic rights and freedoms in the Russian academy, in particular. ✖

Dmitry Dubrovskiy, PhD, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Center for Independent Social Research, St. Petersburg.

## references

- 1 For more on the history of academic freedom in the USSR and Russia, see Dmitry Dubrovskiy, “Escape from Freedom, The Russian Academic Community and the Problem of Academic Rights and Freedoms,” *Interdisciplinary Political Studies*, 2017, no 3 (1), 171–199.
- 2 <https://www.5top100.ru/>
- 3 Robert Quinn and Jesse Levine, “Intellectual-HRDs and claims for academic freedom under human rights law,” *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 18:7–8 (2014), 898–920.
- 4 About export control. Federal Law of the Russian Federation of July 18, 1999, no 183–FZ. CIS database. <http://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=1695>.
- 5 E. Barry, “Russian Professors Chafe at Scholarly Screening,” *New York Times*, October 27, (2009).
- 6 The author, at the time teacher at the St. Petersburg State University, received such clarification of the rector’s office after his interview with the *New York Times*.
- 7 Peter H., Jr, Solomon, “Threats of Judicial Counterreform in Putin’s Russia Demokratizatsiya,” Washington 13:3 (Summer 2005), 325–345 (336).
- 8 Matt Congdon, “Endangered Scholars Worldwide,” *Social Research*, vol. 79, no 1, Politics and Comedy (Spring 2012), v–xvi (viii).
- 9 V.A. Dubrovskiy, “Ekspertniy akt kak element totalitarnoy sistemy,” *Tsenzura v Rossii: istoriya i sovremennost*, Sb. Nauchnykh trudov, vyp. 1, ed. M.B. Konashev, N.G. Patrushev, (St. Petersburg, 2001), 179–181.
- 10 Memorial, “Lapygin Vladimir Ivanovich,” 2016, <https://memohrc.org/ru/defendants/lapygin-vladimir-ivanovich>.
- 11 Grant stal, “Grant stal gosizmenoy: kak uchenogo obvinili v peredache sekretov Belgii,” *RBC news*, August 2. 2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/society/02/08/2018/5b62d1cc9a7947410d61e64b>.
- 12 Ivan Pavlov, “Istoriya gosudarstvennoy izmeny, shpionazha i gosudarstvennoy tainy v sovremennoi Rossii,” doklad, 2018, <https://team29.org/story/izmena/>.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 D. Dubrovskiy, “Foreign Agents and Undesirable Organizations,” *IWM Post*, no 116, Fall 2015, 21–22.
- 15 The author is associated researcher at the Center for Independent Social Research, which has been included in the list of “foreign agents” by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation.

- of re-Stalinization,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 49 (2016), 61–73.
- 32 Miguel Vázquez Liñán, “History as a propaganda tool in Putin’s Russia”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, no. 43 (2010), 167–178.
  - 33 Nick Holdsworth, “Calls for procesution over PhD thesis on Soviet traitor,” *University World News*, March 11, 2016 <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=2016030721405948>.
  - 34 Kurilla, Ivan, “The Implications of Russia’s Law against the ‘Rehabilitation of Nazism’,” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, no. 331, August 2014. [http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm331\\_Kurilla\\_August2014\\_0.pdf](http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm331_Kurilla_August2014_0.pdf).
  - 35 Sova, “Sankt-Peterburgskij gorodskoj sud podtverdil zapret stat’i ‘Bandera i banderovtsy’,” SOVA center, December 18, 2017, <https://www.sovacenter.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2017/12/d38512/>.
  - 36 Luxmoore, Matthew, “Students allege political purge at Russia’s oldest university,” *Al Jazeera*, USA, May 23, 2015 <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/5/23/students-allege-political-purge-at-russias-oldest-university.html>
  - 37 Anna Smolentseva, “Challenges to the Russian academic profession,” *Higher Education* 2003, 45, 391–424.
  - 38 P. Kudukin, “Akademicheskaja nesvoboda.” ch. 2, Radio Svoboda, May 15, 2016, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/27730574.html>.
  - 39 Anna V. Slobodskaya, “Prekariatizatsiya nauchnykh sotrudnikov i pedagogicheskikh rabotnikov vyshego obrazovaniya: formirovanie akademicheskogo prekariata, *Manuscript*, no 7 (93), 2018, 106–110.
  - 40 Slobodskaya, 2018, 109–110.
  - 41 Okolo, 2018, “Okolo prokhodnoj Gosudarstvennogo universiteta upravleniya izbity profsoyuznye aktivisty ‘Universitetskoi solidarnosti’,” *Net Reforme*, April 14, 2014 <http://netreforme.org/news/okolo-prohodnoy-gosudarstvennogo-un/>.
  - 42 Politsiya, “Politsiya prishla v obshchezhitie Timiryazevskoj akademii i doprosila studentov iz-za piketov protiv rektorata,” *Meduza*, December 28, 2017 <https://meduza.io/news/2017/12/28/politsiya-prishla-v-obschezhitie-timiryazevskoy-akademii-i-doprosila-studentov-iz-za-piketov-protiv-deystviy-rektorata>.
  - 43 Dmitrij Dubrovskiy, “Kratzer an Russlands WM-Image,” *RGOW* 4–5/2018: Russland und die Fussball-WM 2018, 21–23.
  - 44 Russia protests, “Russia protests Opposition leader Navalny and hundreds of others held,” *BBC Europe*, March 26, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39398305>.

- 16 Dubrovskiy, 2015.
- 17 Zayavlenie, “Zayavlenie Vol’nogo istoricheskogo obshchestva o vklyuchenii ‘Analiticheskogo tsentra Yuriya Levady’ v reestr inostrannykh agentov,” 2016, <https://volistob.ru/statements/zayavlenie-volnogo-istoricheskogo-obshchestva-o-vklyuchenii-analiticheskogo-centra-yuriya>. For a full list of “foreign agents”, see the website of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, <http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOForeignAgent.aspx>
- 18 Vadim Volkov, “Opposition substitutes: reflections on the collective action in support of the European University at St Petersburg,” in *Understanding Russianness*, ed. Risto Alapuro et al. (Routledge, 2012), 99–110.
- 19 Fred Weir, “Why is someone trying to shutter one of Russia’s top private universities?,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 28, 2017, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2017/0328/Why-is-someone-trying-to-shutter-one-of-Russia-s-top-private-universities>. The author has graduated from the European University in St. Petersburg (1999).
- 20 Weir, 2017.
- 21 D. Dubrovskiy, “Europäische Universität Sankt Petersburg – “Todsicher”?,” *OpenDemocracy*, October 23, 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/dmitry-dubrovsky/europaische-universitat-todsicher>
- 22 Pochemu, “Pochemu Rosobrnadzor zakryvaet khoroshie universitety? Kto imenno ikh proveryaet? Stoit li za etim korruptsiya?,” *Meduza*, June 25, 2018, <https://meduza.io/feature/2018/06/25/pochemu-rosobrnadzor-zakryvaet-horoshie-universitety-kto-imenno-ih-proveryaet-stoit-li-z-etim-korruptsiya>.
- 23 For example, according to the opinion of the experts of the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science, a person with an undergraduate education in history, but who has defended a doctoral thesis in law, cannot lead the Faculty of Law.
- 24 Victor Shnirelman, “Russian Orthodox culture or Russian Orthodox teaching? Reflections on the textbooks in religious education in contemporary Russia,” *British Journal of Religious Education*, 34:3 (2012), 263–279.
- 25 Azar I, Derev’ja rubyat – donosy letyat [Interview with Anna Alimpieva]. *Novaya Gazeta*, October 4, 2018. <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/10/04/78062-derevya-rubyat-donosy-letyat>.
- 26 Dobren’kov, “Christianskaia i pravoslavnaia sotsiologiya,” *Vestnik moskovskogo universiteta*, ser. 18, Sotsiologiya i politologiya, 2012, no 2, 3–2.
- 27 Interview with E. Elbakyan, January 1, 2018: “the contract for working in the Academy of Labor and Social Relations was not renewed, despite that shortly before the dismissal she had successfully passed the competition for a professional post. According to her, “the head of department had been told at the university administration, that there had been a call to the rector with a proposal which she had not been able to refuse, and the head of department himself heard about the dismissal from me”.
- 28 For Larisa Astakhova’s post on Facebook, see [https://www.facebook.com/larisa.astakhova.7/posts/2347100705301895?\\_xts\\_\\_\[o\]=68.ARDrI9F3yHyMCZj9h\\_3SF9zD6a1vzZPPxj2AeDoDHtBz3of\\_vQnD4KLchPfWrf\)tbpiLZkSMYExWzyAqjCrime4uDem4TP4bcNmYJVWV6sfU8IdtbygjBDtK\\_c1EsweBaL8fXuUdfkVtWKdAtKoAnqkm8gkHUHmwymLxUvWJSiNQ&tn\\_=-R](https://www.facebook.com/larisa.astakhova.7/posts/2347100705301895?_xts__[o]=68.ARDrI9F3yHyMCZj9h_3SF9zD6a1vzZPPxj2AeDoDHtBz3of_vQnD4KLchPfWrf)tbpiLZkSMYExWzyAqjCrime4uDem4TP4bcNmYJVWV6sfU8IdtbygjBDtK_c1EsweBaL8fXuUdfkVtWKdAtKoAnqkm8gkHUHmwymLxUvWJSiNQ&tn_=-R)
- 29 A.A. Panchenko’s page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/alexander.panchenko.56/posts/2536486013070135>
- 30 Obrazovanie, “ brazovanie v oblasti prav cheloveka v Rossiiskoy Federatsii. Kratkiy Obzor. Anatoly Azarov, Tatiana Bolotina, Dmitry Dubrovskiy, Vsevolod Lukhovitskiy, Andrei Suslov, September 2015, EU-Russia Civil Society Forum [http://eu-russia-csf.org/fileadmin/Docs/HREducationRussia2015\\_ru.pdf](http://eu-russia-csf.org/fileadmin/Docs/HREducationRussia2015_ru.pdf).
- 31 Dina Khapaeva, “Triumphant memory of the perpetrators: Putin’s politics



# “I was not prepared to censor myself”

Interview with  
Russian university  
professor Gleb Yarovoy

by Pål Ruin



**G**leb Yarovoy is a professor of political science and is currently based at the University of Eastern Finland in Joensuu. His dealings over the years with his former main employer, Petrozavodsk State University, says something about the situation for Russian academics of today. I reached him on the phone from Joensuu in December.

His problems started several years ago. In Petrozavodsk, the University has a special deputy rector for security issues, a former FSB (Federal Security Service) officer. This person has a direct link to the regional branch of the FSB. Yarovoy believes that some students are part of this FSB network and report teachers to the secret police.

The FSB never came up to him criticizing the way he taught or the subjects he chose. But it happened several times that the FSB had heard what he had discussed with the students after class, when they often talked about current events and Russian foreign policy.

“I would guess that in every group of students, there is at least one who is in touch with the secret police. Working at the FSB is well paid, and many students want to go and serve there.”

The FSB person would tell him that “we can’t stop you from talking to the students in this way, but you have to know that it’s not good for your future here at the University if you continue to speak like this”. Yarovoy says it’s a decision a professor has to make, whether one is prepared to censor oneself in this way.

“The University and the FSB do not directly stop you from stretching the limits, but if you do stretch them, there will be consequences. Well, I was not prepared to censor myself, which led to problems.”

When the students wanted to discuss sensitive issues, he did not remain quiet: they could talk about Mr Putin’s autocratic leadership, the power of the Orthodox church, gay rights, and even the annexation of Crimea.

“Criticizing the annexation is probably the most sensitive issue of all, but if the students asked me about my opinion I was prepared to discuss the matter with them and express my opinion.”

Four years ago he came to the conclusion that working in academia is difficult when you also want to freely express your opinions about current national and international affairs. Therefore he started a parallel career in journalism.

“It is easier to find independent media organizations than independent universities. I was tired of struggling at the University and continuously being reported by the students. I wanted to find other ways to express myself”.

But he didn’t want to break ties completely with the University because he enjoyed the teaching.

“They didn’t let me teach the general courses in political science, so I focused on my speciality, the Arctic region. And they gave me only master courses. I think they were afraid to let me teach the youngest students since I could influence their thinking on current affairs”.

Yarovoy was fine with the arrangement, and through his freelance journalism he could still express his views. But the real problems started when he became the regional coordinator for Golos, the main and most well known election watchdog active in Russia that is independent of the Russian government. In the winter of 2016, it was decided that he would be responsible for coordinating the Duma parliamentary elections in Karelia.

In the summer of 2016, a couple of months before the elections, he was warned by friends who have contacts in the FSB:

“They had heard, they told me, that if I continue my work at Golos I will be sacked.”

Officially, the University wasn’t able to dismiss him on these grounds, so they needed another excuse. That summer Yarovoy wanted to attend a conference on the Arctic region in Helsinki. He tried to get a permit to go from the head of the department, and he needed additional signatures from other people. But he never got them – and went to the conference anyway.

“So eventually they found a reason to criticize me for not following the rules of the University. And fired me.”

But he could not accept the decision, so he went to court. And the court gave him right: it stated that he had made a mistake by going to the conference without permission, but the offence was however so minor that it didn’t justify dismissal.

“The judge told me that the whole story was stupid! I am happy that our courts still can convey such an independence.”

But the whole tiresome affair contributed to his decision to accept the offer to do research work at the University of Eastern Finland from August 2018.

“Over the years, I had developed several contacts with colleagues there, people who study boarder issues, which is another field of interest for me. And Joensuu is only 400 kilometers away from Petrozavodsk, so it is easy to go back and forth.”

## The biggest difference teaching in Finland compared to Russia?

“It is of course nice that I don’t face the risk that students will report me to the secret police. Or that the University would warn me not to mention sensitive issues. But the main difference is that Finnish universities give us more time to do research, in Russia we only have time to teach!”

He sees this as one of the major problems in higher education in Russia: the research is done in the Russian Academy of Science, and almost none is carried out at the ordinary universities.

“Putin has said that all university professors should multiply the number of articles that we write for academic journals, we even get better paid if we do – but when does he think we could find the time to write them?”

In Finland he has also agreed to become manager for a cross border project, so for the moment he does not have much time for teaching or research. He will stay in Finland for at least three years; his children get great schooling there and his journalist wife can continue her work. But he has not totally given up on his old University in Petrozavodsk.

“In the spring I have accepted to come and teach a course; I love seeing my Russian students! We will see how long the University accepts having me onboard.”

## Russia has great interests in the arctic region. Has it never been sensitive when you write and teach on the subject?

“I have made critical statements on Russian arctic policy, but I have never had any problems. No, it’s accepted to question this policy.”

## To sum up: in general terms, how free or unfree are Russian universities?

Gleb Yarovoy says that it is impossible to give a clear answer to that question.

“It depends on the size of the university. And it depends where it is located. Generally speaking, the freedom for academics is somewhat greater at bigger universities and in bigger cities. ✕

“I think they were afraid to let me teach the youngest students since I could influence their thinking on current affairs.”

Pål Ruin is a freelance journalist.

# “Academics are fired, jailed, and blacklisted”

Like in many other parts of the world, academic independence and freedom in Turkey have long been influenced by the neoliberalization of universities and state control of the agenda in science and education,<sup>1</sup> including limitations on teaching or publishing on particularly sensitive political issues, such as the Kurdish question. Limits on academic independence have been a part of the Turkish political scene for a number of years. University campuses were often a site of ideological confrontations, and as radicalization continued and conflicts ensued, the post 1980-coup military regime created a state institution called the Higher Education Council (*Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu*, YÖK) to place some control over universities and to limit academic freedom. The state apparatus has continued to “cool” university activity and to restrict academic output since then.<sup>2</sup>

However, since the “We will be not be a party to this crime” petition released on January 11, 2016, calling for an end to curfews in Kurdish towns and a renewed commitment to the reconciliation process with Kurdish parties, the current Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) government has increased its reaction to academics and academia in general by firing, jailing, and starting legal proceedings against academics.

**THE PETITION** was signed by over a thousand academics in 89 universities in Turkey as well as a number of scholars abroad after curfews and an extended state of emergency were issued in mainly Kurdish areas of the country. The curfews came about as the peace process dissolved and clashes renewed in the region. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported serious human rights violations during



Banner for the release of “Arrested inmates” in the protest against the detention of friends who were arrested for the Academicians’ statement on Peace.

the curfews, including numerous civilian casualties (OHCHR Report 2017).<sup>3</sup> As a consequence of the clashes, the report estimates up to half a million people have been displaced.

Following the petition, YÖK released a statement regarding the petition, stating that it “cannot be associated with academic freedom” (*Hurriyet Daily News*, January 12, 2016). As a consequence 30 academics were detained, their homes raided by police, and their belongings confiscated. Universities opened disciplinary inquiries into signatories, with academics being questioned on their political views. Names, affiliations, and photographs of signatories were shared on major news outlets. Many academics received threats, and others felt forced to leave their homes and cities in order to keep safe.<sup>4</sup> Four academics who read a statement to the press on March 14, 2016, about such rights violations against the peace academics were detained for weeks. While the petition clearly had a wide impact, it was not in the direction expected. The petition focused on the state of emergency and curfews in Kurdish cities, but the attention that came to the petition and to academics became fo-

cused instead on the rights of academics and academic freedom.

**AFTER THE COUP** attempt on July 15, 2016, the government enacted a state of emergency with the stated aim of countering threats to national security arising from the coup attempt. The state of emergency was renewed every three months until it ended after two years in July 2018. Under the state of emergency, the government had the power to issue executive decrees, which were used for the mass dismissal of civil servants, including academics. According to Amnesty International (2017), more than 100,000 civil servants were dismissed through decree law.<sup>5</sup> These dismissals have had a serious effect not just on institutions, which have lost massive numbers of workers, but also on the lives of the people who have been removed from their positions, barred from working in universities across the country, and oftentimes prevented from leaving the country by having their passports rescinded.

Those who have managed to continue working the last few years have experienced increased concerns about surveillance in universities, even in the

classroom, as well as barriers to conducting and publishing research. Academics blacklisted by the government have been unable to receive funding from the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (*Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu*, TÜBİTAK), have been prevented from participating in international conferences, and have been prevented from ethics approval in their universities. It is not uncommon for academics to try to reach out to colleagues abroad in order to bypass the bureaucratic restrictions in their own universities.

With conditions in the country’s academic institutions deteriorating, many of the country’s scholars have been looking to move abroad. Some reports have indicated that thousands have left for the UK, Germany, and France, with others still considering leaving (BBC, December 28, 2017). At least 698 petition signatories have applied for scholarships through the international network Scholars at Risk (personal communication, February 6, 2018).<sup>6</sup>

Those who remain in Turkey have attempted to continue their academic endeavors outside of the universities. A number of small academic collectives have popped up across the country, where academics dismissed from their positions give classes, collaborate on projects with other academics or with students, and have readings and other types of sessions in order to maintain their academic identity. Some members of these collectives had previously participated in academic political events, but others only became politicized after their dismissal from the university. The academic collectives, they say, have provided them the opportunity to give their time and attention to projects they are interested in, rather than having to worry about the administrative tasks they often felt constrained by in the university, though of course they are limited by the lack of financial and institutional support that is often needed to maintain their livelihoods.<sup>7</sup>

Though academics have experienced increasingly difficult conditions, it is often students who have received the brunt of restrictions and censorship in academia



Four academics being charged after signing the petition “We will not be a party to this crime”.

over the years. The increased suppression has impacted them as well; for example, 35 university students from Boğaziçi University in Istanbul were detained in March 19<sup>th</sup> after peaceful anti-war protests. Thirteen of them were held for three months before being released, and the event left a strong police presence at the Boğaziçi campus for weeks afterward. Police also cracked down on faculty, staff, and student protests of mass dismissals at Ankara University on February 10, 2017. One week later, Istanbul Technical University launched disciplinary investigations against 24 students protesting the same decree (Academic Freedom Monitoring Project 2017). Students have reported increased threats of disciplinary action to deter participation in political protests on campus, creating increased pressure to remain silent (Human Rights Watch 2018).

**OVERALL, THE NUMEROUS** rights violations show, among other things, the vulnerability and lack of job security that academics in Turkey face, as well as the lack of capacity of universities to defend academic freedom.<sup>8</sup> In addition to options abroad, moving forward it might be that academics look more and more outside the university for a means to maintain their scholarly activities. In doing so, they strive to maintain their own lines of research while avoiding the more repressive environments of the university. Solidarity networks abroad have supported academics in Turkey by providing small to mid-scale funding, preparing short-term work possibilities, creating research asylums abroad through various Scholars at Risk networks, providing honorary or affiliated memberships to individuals dismissed from their positions, or hold-

ing meetings at annual conferences to keep attention on the subject of academics at risk. With increased concern for academic freedom globally, it seems clear that Turkey is not a singular case and that the subject of academic freedom will continue to be an important issue that will need to be addressed in the future. ✕

## Yasemin Gülsüm Acar

Is a social psychologist whose research interests include political protest and its consequences, political solidarity, politicization and social identity, and intergroup relations/conflict. She received her PhD from Claremont Graduate University in 2015, where she specialized in social identity and identity politicization through collective action. Her current research focuses on group-based perceptions of contemporary political dynamics in Turkey.

## references

- 1 Eylem Çamuroğlu Çığ, “The Boundaries of Academic Freedom in Neoliberal Times” (paper presented at Workshop for Struggling for Academic Freedom in Times of Oppression, Goethe University, Frankfurt, Germany, May 2018).
- 2 Bahar Başer, Samim Akgönül, & Ahmet E. Öztürk, “Academics for Peace” in Turkey: A case of criminalising dissent and critical thought via counter terrorism policy,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* no.10 (2017): 274–296.
- 3 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Report on the Human Rights Situation in South-East Turkey: July 2015 to December 2016. Published February 2017.
- 4 Efe Ekrem Sözeri “Two Petitions Two Academia: Turkish Loneliness and the Universal Values.” Translate for Justice. (2016). <https://translateforjustice.com/2016/02/01/two-petitions-two-academia-turkish-loneliness-and-the-universal-values/>
- 5 Amnesty International: No End in Sight: Purged Public Sector Workers Denied a Future in Turkey. Published May 2017.
- 6 Scholars at Risk Free to Think: Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project. Published August 2017.
- 7 Yasemin G. Acar, & Canan Coşkan, “Solidarity platforms in Turkey and their impact on individual-level mobilization, sources of learning, and the future of academia in Turkey,” *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*: Under review.
- 8 Başer et al. 2017.





The "Kıyafetime karışma" protest in Kadikoy, Istanbul on July 29, 2017.

PHOTO: NESLIHAN\_TURAN

# Criminalization of women's mobilization & the punishing of gender studies

Baltic Worlds 2018:4 Special issue on Academic Freedom

While anti-democratic, anti-women, and anti-feminist movements are on the rise everywhere, they have become urgent matters in some parts of the world. Authoritarian regimes with fascist tendencies are restructuring the lives of women and sexual minorities by both changing laws and removing other historical gains from everyday lives that had been established through the longstanding struggles of these groups. Turkey presents a strong case in this sense with its emergency rule that came into effect after the July 2016 coup attempt and that has lasted for the past two years and has continued with the recent regime change. The country went through a referendum (in April 2017) and national parliamentary elections (in June 2018), both under the emergency rule. The former changed the Constitution and increased the power of the President turning Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential republic. The latter put the 2017 referendum into force by re-electing Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the president. As the leader of the governing party AKP, Erdoğan has been in power for the last 16 years, first as the prime minister and then as the president. Not hesitating to say "women and men should not be treated equally because it goes against the laws of nature" and emphasizing the importance of family and the role of motherhood at every opportunity, Erdoğan and his governments have been trying to eliminate the laws that empower women and to install new policies that would change women's lives in every respect such as labor, education, and personal freedoms.

**THE EMERGENCY RULE** of the last two years has created useful cases to understand what the authoritarian government in Turkey, and perhaps those in other places, are trying to do in terms of women's mobilization and gender studies at the universities. Celebrations of March 8 have been turned into a battleground to intimidate women's mobilization through violent police interventions in peaceful and colorful celebrations of International Women's Day. In addition, it has become increasingly difficult to engage in wom-

en's, gender, and LGBTI studies due to the changing nature of universities and related departments. However, these attempts have not been without resistance.

**THIS PRESENTATION INTENDS** to show the criminalization of women's mobilization and the punishing of women's/gender studies in the universities, as well as the resistance demonstrated through several cases over the last few years in Turkey. Female activists and feminists are generally

**"FEMALE ACTIVISTS AND FEMINISTS ARE GENERALLY PERCEIVED AS A THREAT BY PATRIARCHAL STATES EVERYWHERE."**

perceived as a threat by patriarchal states everywhere. This has become increasingly the case in Turkey as AKP governments of the last 16 years have been implementing or strengthening anti-women, anti-feminist, and anti-LGBTI policies and legitimizing practices and attitudes in line with its views regarding women and sexual minorities. Emphasizing family and motherhood at every chance, AKP governments have been trying to confine women to traditional gender roles while ignoring altogether the existence of sexual minorities. Thus, women who are out, either celebrating March 8 or protesting patriarchal policies or resisting against anti-feminism/anti-fascism, represent bad examples in the eyes of the state. Therefore, any such movements are subject to suppression by law enforcement agencies, especially over the last few years.

**THE AKP CAME** to power amidst claims for a more transparent and democratic state and society, and its first years gave such a feeling to some parts of society at least for a while. However, the AKP governments increasingly embraced authoritarian policies and practices and later adopted even more violent ones when faced with the

prospect of losing power with the 2015 elections that witnessed the success of the unofficial political alliance of the Kurds and the Turkish left following the Gezi uprising of 2013. However, the AKP's revenge came with a big price for both the Kurds and the Left in the following months and years. The applications of the Emergency Rule in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt in 2016 should be considered part of this lasting revenge as well as the outcome of the AKP's fear of losing power.

Therefore, using force during women's rallies is part of silencing all opposition in the country in parallel with the fear of losing power. The involvement of law enforcement in women's rallies has been more obvious and stronger in certain cities, especially in Kocaeli along with Ankara, the capital of Turkey, and Mersin, a relatively left-leaning town in the southern part of the country. İstanbul and İzmir present somewhat different examples as the first and second largest cities in the country. My presentation is based on the facts that mostly took place in Kocaeli, which is an industrial town near İstanbul with a large working-class population and thus a relatively strong labor-movement history, though this has not been very visible in the last decades. It is probably safe to say that this labor history has created a relatively strong tradition of democratic mass organization in the city, which gives rise to organized resistance against anti-democratic practices and thus draws attention from the state and the local law enforcement agencies. Women's rallies should also be perceived in this sense along with the general atmosphere in the country.

**HOWEVER, ANOTHER** important aspect should also be considered in terms of the strong visibility of activist women in these towns: these activists have been the driving force on many occasions explicitly or implicitly, thus alarming the state and law enforcement. The power of the women's movement could be seen during women's rallies through the attention drawn from the surrounding crowd and women joining the rallies from the sidewalks. This is partly because, along with various historical reasons such as the overall success of



the women's movement over the last few decades in Turkey, as one can see from the night walk, women's rallies are full of color, voices, and laughter. In addition, they are not only about some intellectual concerns, but also about everyday matters of every woman such as child care, housework, domestic violence, and the ever-increasing murder rate of women, the latter being a burning issue in the country.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the characteristics of the activist women and their rallies are all against the governing power's desire for a subservient woman and its policies that are in line with that desire.

When I thought about this presentation, I got together with a group of women in town who had been taking part in various women's rallies. Throughout our conversation, they all agreed on one thing, which confirmed my individual perception. All of the women said that they (those in power) are afraid of us.

A teacher active in my union, the Education and Science Workers' Union, even said: "The state perceives us as the most threatening of all". A lawyer drew attention to the legal dimension by mentioning gender justice, a concept the AKP prefers over gender equality: "I want to explain this because it is very important to understand the AKP government's gender policies and practices and the responses given by feminists."

**THE AKP IS SPREADING** its agenda not only directly with its statements and messages, but also indirectly through its



Academics for peace in the UK, France, Germany, Switzerland, and North America are supporting their Turkish colleagues.

government-organized NGOs (in other words, GONGOs). (I guess we can refer to Gramsci and Althusser and some others here, but we do not have time for that; so I will stick with the facts.) These organizations are not independent civil society organizations, and instead they are established to disseminate the government's views with the president's sons and daughters on their boards.<sup>2</sup> KADEM (Woman and Democracy Association) plays an important role in this sense. KADEM prefers to use gender justice instead of gender equality claiming that equality between men and women is against human rights because women's primary responsibility should be taking care of

the family's needs. KADEM's founding president Sare Aydın Yılmaz considers the use of gender justice instead of equality as a new direction in the women's movement.<sup>3</sup> Using religious references, such as *fitrat* (creation) and *takva* (takwa: god-fearing behavior), KADEM's current president openly emphasizes the different natures of men and women, and thus their different responsibilities that lead to a natural division of labor in both the private and public spheres.<sup>4</sup> It is notable that both of these women hold PhDs and have academic backgrounds. This is the degree of gender blindness the governing power in Turkey has been promoting not only through its direct policies and practices, but also through its GONGOs and intellectuals. With this agenda, the AKP governments have no choice other than trying to prevent women from revealing this anti-democratic, anti-feminist, anti-women rhetoric and its implementations loudly in the streets by portraying feminists and activist women as disturbing and as anti-religion, anti-family, etc.

## Indictment

Over 40 women and 4 men are standing trial in Kocaeli based on the March 8 celebrations of the last two years. A little note on the men: because the women's celebrations are not open to men, these men were observers from the sidewalks and were involved in the events following the violent police intervention. Two of these men are colleagues of mine, also dismissed, and another is a graduate

student of mine, while the fourth is a true passer-by. I don't know him, but I was happy to hear what he said during the court hearings (which is another story).

Those who are now facing trial had been detained after the police interventions on both days and were released in the morning hours. I was not among the detainees thanks to my graduate student who pulled me away from the crowd during the 2017 incident, apparently just in time, but instead he was detained and is now facing trial. I was among a big crowd waiting outside until the morning hours for the release of the detainees. Thirty-six women and four men were detained and are now standing trial for the 2017 incident, while the other six women are being tried for the 2018 celebrations.

I am not going to go into details about the legal process and the initial hearings that took place in July. Since the Emergency Rule was established in July 2016 following the failed coup attempt, universities have been witnessing a tremendous purge in Turkey. In line with the government's views, most of the university administrations around the country have been trying to get rid of critical voices. Using the failed coup as the pretext and the opportunities provided by the emergency decrees, the state dismissed thousands of university staff, mostly academics. While most of these dismissals have been allegedly affiliated with the Gulen movement, though without fair trials, around 500 of the dismissed academics are the signatories of the peace petition.

**IT IS IMPORTANT** to emphasize that the majority of the Academics for Peace are women who either engage in women's and gender studies or who provide courses on related subjects in their departments or who conduct unrelated research and courses but with gender awareness. Therefore, it is safe to say that the impact of the dismissals of female academics for peace is far greater than their number. While this impact is most visible in Ankara University, it will take time to establish the extent of the damage, if possible at all, in other universities around the country.

Ankara University lost over 100 academics via emergency decrees, and the

Department of Women's Studies is one of the units most affected.

The current situation is that academics have been dismissed and students have been left without advisors or proper courses, some leaving the graduate programs altogether. In addition, even those who stayed behind in the universities cannot be expected to be as eager as before when considering the circumstances in the universities that are increasingly becoming institutions to disseminate AKP's ideology and views similar to GONGOs.

## “THIRTY-SIX WOMEN AND FOUR MEN WERE DETAINED AND ARE NOW STANDING TRIAL FOR THE 2017 INCIDENT.”

**I WANT TO** tell you about a first-hand account of this nature. An MA advisee of mine who is here with me now had a quite hard time during the last couple of years at the university I was dismissed from. She was about to start writing her thesis when I had to leave the university, over two years ago. She wanted to work on sex workers and their organizations as her thesis subject, and I had only encouraged her and was not there when she was writing. She had a hard time getting her research subject accepted despite her official advisor's overall positive approach in the process. The Institute of Social Sciences, which oversees all thesis and dissertation processes in related programs, rejected her title. When she wanted to start interviews, she could not obtain permission from law enforcement to visit sex workers in official brothels, so she had to limit her interviews with those working in the streets. Even so, she has been subjected to investigation for visiting brothels; I know, it does not make any sense. In the end, she had to agree to another title and remove certain parts in her text to make it acceptable as advised by her official advisors.

I have been her unofficial advisor throughout this process; however, I tried my best not to confuse her too much by acting like the primary advisor because I wanted her to finish and not give up. Though I did not mind my ambiguous position during this time, I felt helpless witnessing the hardship my student went through and not being able to help her enough. In fact, she even kept some of that hardship to herself in order to protect me from more distress, as I found out later and thus felt even worse.

Now some good news. She passed her thesis examination just last week. The whole thing took her longer than usual; however, I am so glad that she finished it and did not give up. Moreover, she asked me if she could defend her thesis one more time in front of a jury consisting of dismissed KODA academics emphasizing that it is more important for her to defend her thesis in front of KODA members and to pass the KODA examination. We happily agreed, even though we are not really keen on exams at KODA and we won't be able to give her any diploma.

I will stop here with this good news. ✖

**Derya Keskin**

Kocaeli Academy for Solidarity

Note: This letter is based on a draft paper presented via Skype at the workshop titled Women and 'The People' (part I) on September 25, 2018 at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden.

## references

- 1 409 women were murdered in 2017, a 25% increase from the previous year. <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/turkiye-de-kadin-cinayetleri-2017-de-yuzde-25-artti/4187800.html>.
- 2 Jessica Leigh Doyle, "State control of civil society organizations: the case of Turkey," *Democratization*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2017), 244–264.
- 3 Sare Aydın Yılmaz, "A New Momentum: Gender Justice in the Women's Movement," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Winter 2015), 108–9.
- 4 <https://www.istekadinlar.com/kadin-orgutleri/kadem-in-yeni-baskani-drsaliha-okur-gumrukcuoglu-oldu-h2359.html>.

**DERYA KESKIN** received her PhD in Development Studies from Marmara University in Istanbul, Turkey, and an MA from the Ohio State University in Columbus, USA. She worked as an assistant professor of Labor Sociology in the Department of Labor Economics and Industrial Relations at Kocaeli University, Turkey from January 2012 to September 2016. She was dismissed from her position through a governmental decree issued under the State of Emergency for signing a petition titled "We will not be a party to this crime," also known as the *Peace Petition* which was a call directed

to the State to end the civil deaths in the southeastern part of the country and to restart the peace process. Her work has been published in journals related to education, labor and the Middle East. Her research interests include women's labor, gender and social policy, religion and women, migration, higher education, academic work and problems in social research. She continues her work within the Kocaeli Academy for Solidarity as the founding member with the other *Peace Signatories* also dismissed from Kocaeli University for the same reason.



PHOTO: MARK LOWEN/BBC



# The common space of neo-authoritarianism in post-Soviet Eurasia

by **Oleg Antonov** and **Artem Galushko**

## abstract

This essay describes the widening common space of neo-authoritarianism, which manifests itself in the synchronic replication of restrictive legislation, authoritarian practices, and legacies in Eurasia. We present preliminary results of our ongoing research that show how Russia and the Central Asian republics of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan synchronically introduced similar anti-democratic measures to restrict freedom of academia, civil society, and political participation in response to major social and political events such as popular uprisings, financial crises, and successful successions of state power. Although the process of “authoritarian learning” has attracted substantial attention in the academic literature, we assert that the previous research does not address common root causes of the weakening democratic institutions in varying cultural, political, and social conditions. The goal of this essay is to introduce a theoretical framework for the comparative analysis of various types of hybrid non-democratic regimes not only in post-Soviet Eurasia, but also in other regions that experience democratic backsliding.

**KEY WORDS:** Authoritarian learning, democratic backsliding, Central Asia, Russia, former Soviet Union, political participation, dissent.

A new community of like-minded autocratic regimes is being born. Despite their economic, cultural, and political differences, the goal of these regimes is not to create an “axis of evil” and subvert democracy per se, but rather to establish a loose alliance of “imitated/fake democracies”, whose international recognition, legitimacy, common authoritarian practices, and shared interests unconstrained by external judicial scrutiny, human rights, and freedoms would make authoritarianism more normatively acceptable and legitimate in the international community. To paraphrase the words of Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, if democracy becomes “the only game in town”,<sup>1</sup> the current issue is whether residents of the “town” are ready to recognize, legitimize, and tolerate other “games” that merely imitate democracy.

It would be entertaining to assume that there is an “academy of authoritarianism” that trains new dictators, organizes “authoritarian exchange programs”, and nominates the “best autocrat of the year”. The reality is, however, more complex than that. Authoritarianism appears to be a result of comprehensive internal and external factors that coincide at a certain point in time and subvert the democratic course of development in a given country or region.<sup>2</sup> It is well established<sup>3</sup> that civic activists of *Kmara* (Georgian: “Enough!”) and *Pora* (Ukrainian: “It is time”) learned from *Otpor* (Serbian: “Resistance!”) and its experi-

ences of overthrowing the Milošević regime. Trained activists then participated in the organization of the *Rose Revolution* in Georgia in 2003 and the *Orange Revolution* in Ukraine in 2004. The key question is whether authoritarian regimes also draw lessons from successes and failures of other autocrats. The global spread of non-democratic practices<sup>4</sup> is no longer the “curse” of developing countries, where authoritarian traditions are often considered to be “business-as-usual”. For example, recent developments in the US have led to discussions about a constitutional failure in one of the oldest democracies in the world.<sup>5</sup> Our essay offers the concept of the *common neo-authoritarian space* as a way of understanding the nature of ongoing democratic backsliding throughout the world.

## Difficulties related to conducting research in authoritarian settings

There are several significant challenges related to any research on authoritarian learning and common anti-democratic practices in Eurasia. First, it is difficult to conduct conventional field research to collect the necessary quantitative and qualitative data on the ground. For instance, authorities in Uzbekistan barred Sergei Abashin, anthropologist from the European University in St. Petersburg, the Russian Federation, from entering the country when Abashin published an article about “national government”, “post-colonialism”, and “post-Sovietness” in Uzbekistan.<sup>6</sup> Alexander Sodiqov, a University of Toronto researcher, was arrested in 2014 in Tajikistan while carrying out academic fieldwork on civil society and conflict resolution in Central Asia.<sup>7</sup> Sodiqov, who was detained by the secret service of Tajikistan, the GKNB, faced charges of “subversion and espionage”.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the local population often perceives international researchers as foreign agents and spies whose job is to interfere in domestic politics.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, conventional field research on the subject might compromise the safety of the field researchers and local participants.

Second, the countries selected for this research are notorious for their lack of transparency and obscure decision-making processes, back-room deals, and absence of clear rules of governance.<sup>10</sup> Under such conditions, it is almost impossible to identify an original source of any policy, legislation, or practice

from the selected jurisdictions. Thus, it is hard to measure or detect the transfer of antidemocratic policies and to differentiate between a “national” practice and one adopted from abroad. Third, one cannot easily equate countries that have varying degrees of economic and political development as well as different potential in terms of their natural and human resources. It is also difficult to compare a multitude of hybrid/non-democratic regimes and to predict a possible course for their development. Thus, there is always the possibility that similar laws and practices have originated independently from each other under the influence of country-specific conditions. Our research seeks to overcome these difficulties by demonstrating a *common authoritarian fingerprint* of similar laws and interests of ruling elites in the post-Soviet Eurasian countries.

## Focus on four Eurasian countries with common trajectories

Our prospective research will cover the following **four countries**: the Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The selection of the four Eurasian countries is based on their geographical position, common history and culture, and their current strong economic, trade, military, and security cooperation in the region. Each of the above-mentioned former Soviet republics has substantial national minorities whose ethnicities and languages are those of the majority populations in the other countries selected for this research. The three Central Asian states joined the Russian Empire (1860s–1917), in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution, they were incorporated into the Soviet Union (1917–1991). Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan were selected from among the Central Asian states because they have common borders with each other. Furthermore, these three Central Asian republics share the Fergana Valley, which has become an amalgamation of common traditions, religion, and cultural identity.<sup>11</sup> This research will also demonstrate that the selected four countries have the same trajectory of post-Soviet transition and potentially approximate each other in terms of their practices of governance, their policies, and their legislation. While Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan remain entrenched autocracies,<sup>12</sup> nowadays one can also observe a recent democratic backsliding in Kyrgyzstan, which used to be

## CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

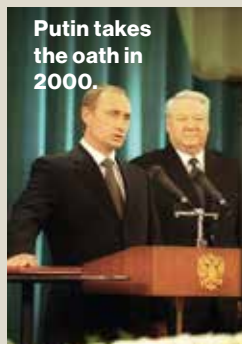


PHOTO: KREMLIN.RU

**May 2000 – Russia:** Putin's first presidential term.  
**September-October 2000 – Serbia:** The overthrow of Slobodan Milošević (the Bulldozer Revolution).  
**November 2003 – Georgia:** the Rose Revolution.  
**May 2004 – Russia:** Putin's second presidential term.



The Rose revolution, Tbilisi 2003.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

**November 2004 – January 2005 – Ukraine:** The Orange Revolution.  
**March-April 2005 – Kyrgyzstan:** The first Tulip Revolution.  
**May 2005 – Uzbekistan:** Andijan protests.  
**December 2005 – Uzbekistan:** Amendments to restrict the freedom of assembly.



The Orange revolution in Ukraine, depicted in a stamp from 2004.

**2008 – Russia:** Financial Crisis.  
**May 2008 – Russia:** Putin's appointment as the Prime Minister.  
**August 2008 – Kyrgyzstan:** Amendments to restrict the freedom of assembly.  
**April 2010 – Kyrgyzstan:** The second Tulip Revolution.



President Medvedev and Prime minister Putin in 2008.



an “Island of Democracy” in Central Asia.<sup>13</sup> The recent political changes in Uzbekistan after the death of President Islam Karimov have created certain expectations that the new leadership of the country will improve the situation in terms of democracy and human rights.<sup>14</sup> Thus, with this geographic focus in mind our research will elaborate on the recent developments in the region of post-Soviet Eurasia.

Previous research on inter-state learning

In general, the academic literature on the “common antidemocratic toolkit”<sup>15</sup> and inter-state learning can be divided into three strains of research. The first cohort of authors emphasizes the unintentional diffusion of practices, policies, and ideas across state borders without direct participation of governments or other actors in the process.<sup>16</sup> Proponents of this approach emphasize the importance of certain conditions such as similarities of culture, geographical proximity, interdependencies, common networks, trade,<sup>17</sup> security, and other linkages that can facilitate the process of diffusion.<sup>18</sup> This strain of research often employs natural sciences terms such as “pandemic”, “contagious”, and “infectious”, while opponents of democratization, in the same vein, talk about the “orange plague” or the “orange virus” to describe the Ukrainian Orange Revolution of 2004 and other “color revolutions”.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, proponents of diffusion emphasize indirect and unintentional exchange of policies, legislative measures, and practices.

The second group of researchers studies the deliberate “negative transfer” of authoritarian policies and practices from one country to another,<sup>20</sup> the “positive direct transfer” of the best legal practices (known as legal transplants),<sup>21</sup> and the EU legal approximation.<sup>22</sup> A good example of the “negative transfer” would be the transfer of repressive practices from the Soviet Union to other countries of the communist bloc during the Cold War.<sup>23</sup>

The third strain of research emphasizes the deliberate promotion of authoritarian practices and policies by powerful states or international organizations on weaker or dependent countries.<sup>24</sup> The most expressive manifestation of such intentional authoritarian promotion would be the concept of the Dark Knight or a country that uses diplomatic, economic, and sometimes even

military means to assert its interests, to promote itself as a role model for other states, and to support neighboring authoritarian regimes.<sup>25</sup> Our project will seek to reconcile all three strains of research by offering a concept that can help identify and analyze common causes of authoritarian learning in Eurasia.

Novelty of our concept and its potential contribution

Our theoretical framework of the “Common Space of Neo-Authoritarianism” makes a threefold contribution to the growing research on “authoritarian learning” and “democratic backsliding”. First, the concept of the “Common Space” does not reject the previous theories of authoritarian learning that essentially focus on direct or indirect inter-state learning via diffusion, transfer, and promotion. The research framework proposed by us emphasizes instead the importance of common interests, needs, totalitarian legacies, learning points, and perceptions of threat after significant social and political events that can trigger multiple forms of both deliberate and unintentional “authoritarian learning”. Second, the idea of the “Common Space” is very timely because it describes the modern phenomenon of hybrid political regimes that imitate democracy by using a variety of common practices, policies, and laws that, despite their formal “democratic appearance”, are in fact aimed at restricting political dissent and participation.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the proposed concept of the “Common Space” of anti-democratic practices goes beyond state borders and overcomes cultural, political, and social differences. Our research seeks to demonstrate that hybrid regimes, despite their varying domestic conditions such as weakness or strength of state apparatus, tend to apply similar authoritarian tactics that have already proven to be effective in preserving past and present autocracies in the region of post-Soviet Eurasia. Our analysis of national legislation and its practical application also demonstrates *an ongoing approximation* of the situation with political participation and dissent in Russia and the Central Asian republics, whose “imitated democracies” draw lessons from the successes and failures of other authoritarian regimes.

Third, the idea of the “Common Space” helps us reassess the role of past totalitarian legacies in the modern world. We call the

“Common Space” of anti-democratic practices Neo-Authoritarian because it reinvents old tools of authoritarianism and makes them more acceptable nowadays by camouflaging autocratic regimes with fake or powerless democratic institutions and by giving authoritarian leaders the necessary legitimacy both domestically and internationally. Taking into account that the “Common Space” of authoritarian practices has cross-generational, intercultural, and multidisciplinary dimensions, it can be an effective theoretical model for the comparative analysis of various types of non-democratic regimes as well as conditions that either facilitate or hinder the spread of authoritarianism in post-Soviet Eurasia and in other regions.

Soviet legacies

Our research confirms the presence of common authoritarian legacies inherited from the Soviet Union in the four selected countries. In this essay we would like to present three legacies that, in our opinion, play a crucial role in restricting political participation and dissent: **a) Elimination of non-conformity; b) A tradition of pro-regime organizations; and c) Soviet-like politically motivated show trials against dissidents.** Our prospective research will demonstrate that all of the above-mentioned communist totalitarian practices have been successfully reanimated to varying degrees in the former Soviet republics selected for our research. For instance, one can observe the deliberate elimination of non-conformity in all areas of life such as academia, mass media, and civil society. In Russia, the government has put a label of “foreign agents” on independent scholars. The most recent examples would be Professor of Political Science Mikhail Savva<sup>27</sup> and Professor of Economics Sergei Guriev<sup>28</sup> who were forced to leave Russia due to persecutions.<sup>29</sup> Russia proceeded with eliminating any independent scientific research by designating as a “foreign agent” its first private sponsor of science, the “Dynasty Foundation” which led to the liquidation of the organization.<sup>30</sup> There are similar restrictive measures against non-conformity in Central Asia.

In particular, Tajikistan restricted academic mobility by issuing a decree to prevent students and scholars from participating in scientific conferences or taking part in other academic programs without special ministerial permission. In a recent attack



Euromaidan, December 1, 2013.

on the independent media in Tajikistan, investigative journalist Khayrullo Mirsaidov faced persecution and deprivation of liberty after he exposed the corruption of local authorities.<sup>31</sup> The Government of Uzbekistan tried to rewrite the history of the Andijan protests of May 2005 by producing doctored “public confessions” about the events on state television.<sup>32</sup> In 2015, the Ministry of Education of Uzbekistan introduced an unprecedented restriction of academic freedom by abolishing the teaching of political science in all universities of the country.<sup>33</sup> In a similar measure aimed at restricting independent civil society organizations, Kyrgyz authorities prosecuted Azimzhan Askarov, an ethnic Uzbek and human rights defender, who documented inter-ethnic violence in the Jalal-Abad region in June 2010.<sup>34</sup> Post-communist elites also rely on Soviet-like “quasi-civic initiatives” to show the “popular support” of the regime.

In Russia, the pro-government youth movement Our People (Russian: “Nashi”) has essentially become the successor of the Soviet Komsomol, the youth branch of the Communist Party.<sup>35</sup> Valentina Matvienko, the head of the upper house of the Russian Parliament (Federation Council) and the former Komsomol leader, has recently emphasized the importance of using the experience of Komsomol in Russia.<sup>36</sup> One can find Komsomol-like organizations in Tajikistan with its Homeland Builders (Tajik:



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

**June 2010** – Osh ethnic conflict.  
**June and August 2011** – **Tajikistan:** Amendments to restrict the freedom of assembly.  
**December 2011 – July 2013** – **Russia:** ‘Bolotnaya Protests’.  
**May 2012 – Russia:** Putin’s third presidential term.  
**May 2012 – Kyrgyzstan:** Abolishment of the previous restrictive law on the freedom of assembly.



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

**June 2012 – Russia:** Amendments to restrict the freedom of assembly.  
**November 2013 – March 2014** – **Ukraine:** Revolution of Dignity (Euromaidan), Annexation of Crimea by Russia.  
**July 2014 – Tajikistan:** Amendments to restrict the freedom of assembly.  
**July 2014 – Russia:** Amendments to restrict the freedom of assembly.



PHOTO: EUROMAIDANPRESS.COM

**October 2014 – Kyrgyzstan:** Amendments to the law on peaceful assembly.  
**September 2015 – Tajikistan:** Ban of the Party of Islamic Renaissance.  
**December 2015 – Kyrgyzstan:** A Bill proposed to restrict the freedom of assembly.  
**September 2016 – Russia:** Ban of Crimean Tatar Mejlis in Russia and in Russian-occupied Crimea.  
**December 2018 – Russia:** Further restrictions on the freedom of assembly.



“Sozandagoni Vatan”), which is a youth wing of the ruling party.<sup>37</sup> Uzbekistan has its Youth Union (Uzbek: “*O‘zbekiston Yoshlar Ittifoqi*”)<sup>38</sup> and the Committee of Women and Girls.<sup>39</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, police detained the leader of the youth wing of the ruling party after he criticized the party leadership and complained about a “communications specialist” from Russia ‘trying to manage (the party’s) internal processes.’”<sup>40</sup> Politicized show trials against the opposition have further limited opportunities for political dissent and participation in post-Soviet Eurasia.

From the four countries selected for our research, only Russia is a member of the Council of Europe and, thus, has to comply with the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. The Court in Strasbourg has already reviewed complaints about politically motivated justice in the former Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> Most recently the Grand Chamber of the Court delivered a landmark decision in the case of the Russian opposition activist Aleksey Navalnyy. In particular, the Court held that Navalnyy’s criminal prosecution and repeated arrests “had actually aimed at suppressing political pluralism[.]...pursued an ulterior purpose...in the context of a general move to bring the opposition under control [in Russia].”<sup>42</sup> Similar politically motivated proceedings took place in Tajikistan against opposition politician Zayd Saidov<sup>43</sup> and human rights lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov.<sup>44</sup>In September 2015, the Tajik Supreme Court banned the opposition Party of Islamic Renaissance as a terrorist and extremist organization.<sup>45</sup> One year later, in September 2016, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation supported a decision to declare Mejlis, a Crimean Tatar elected representative body, an extremist organization and to ban its activities in Russia and in Russian-occupied occupied Crimea.<sup>46</sup> Authorities of Uzbekistan prosecuted opposition leader Sanjar Umarov, who was allowed to leave the country after receiving amnesty in 2009.<sup>47</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, international observers criticized trials against representatives of the opposition Omurbek Tekebaev and Duishonkul Chotonov<sup>48</sup> as well as the former Member of Parliament Sadyr Japarov, the ex-Finance Minister Marat Sultanov and others.<sup>49</sup> These and other common authoritarian practices demonstrate that the old totalitarian legacies continue to play a crucial role in subverting post-Soviet transformations and in undermining democratic institutions in the hybrid regimes of post-Soviet Eurasia.

**Synchronic replication of restrictive laws – peaceful assembly**

The main premise of our research is that hybrid authoritarian regimes in post-Soviet Eurasia have synchronically replicated restrictive laws after significant social and political events. This section presents how Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan introduced similar legislative measures to restrict freedom of assembly shortly after the first “color revolutions”, the “Bolotnaya protests” in Russia, and “Euromaidan” in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. We argue that such events can serve as common learning points for non-democratic countries that draw lessons from the successes and failures of other autocrats’ attempts to ensure the survival, legitimacy, and longevity of their regimes. Furthermore, we assert that the financial crisis



The Tulip revolution, Kyrgyzstan, 2005.

of 2008 in Russia might have accelerated the proliferation of measures restricting the freedom of assembly in post-Soviet hybrid regimes that were already concerned with the prospect of imminent “color revolutions” overthrowing them one day. We agree with the “politics of fear” concept proposed by Vladimir Gel’man, Przeworski’s “authoritarian equilibrium”, and the recent research by Guriev and Treisman that connects a lack of economic growth with increased levels of repression.<sup>50</sup> Our research corroborates these findings by demonstrating the assault on peaceful assembly after popular uprisings and the 2008 financial crisis in post-Soviet Eurasia.

Shortly after the end of the Ukrainian “Orange Revolution” in January 2005 and protests in the Uzbek city of Andijan in the Fergana Valley in May 2005,<sup>51</sup> Uzbekistan amended its Code of Administrative Offences in December 2005 to introduce stricter financial and administrative penalties for “non-sanctioned” (without prior state permission) peaceful assemblies, demonstrations, and rallies. Another “color revolution” called “the Tulip Revolution” took place at the same time in Kyrgyzstan in March–April 2005. The new leadership of Kyrgyzstan amended the law on peaceful assembly<sup>52</sup> in August 2008 to require prior state permission for any assembly, to limit assemblies between 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., to prohibit rallies in close vicinity to the offices of the President, the Parliament, the courts, and other state institutions, and to prohibit the erection of tents.<sup>53</sup> Although these restrictions on protest activities did not prevent the second “Tulip Revolution” of April 2010, Kyrgyzstan initiated many additional measures to regulate peaceful assembly three more times in 2012,<sup>54</sup> 2014<sup>55</sup>, and 2015.<sup>56</sup>

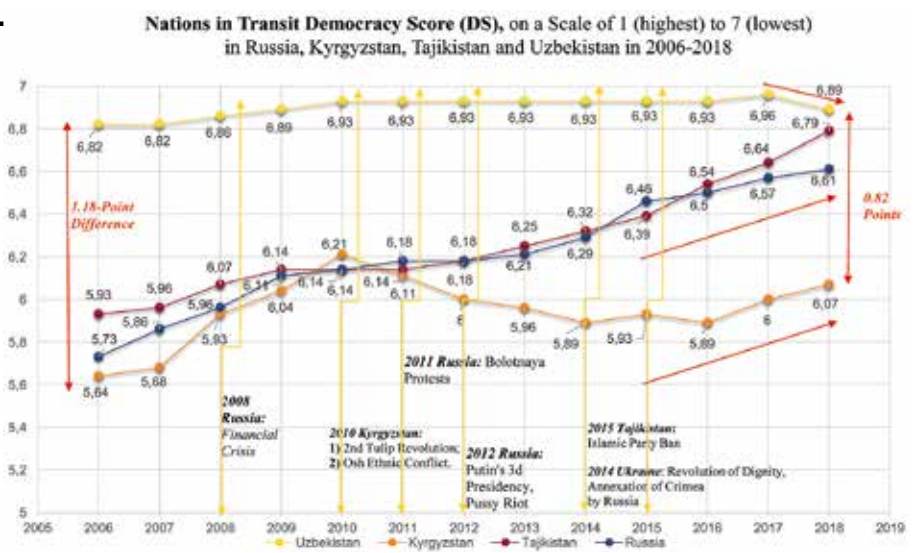
In June 2011, shortly after the second Kyrgyz revolution, Tajikistan amended its Code of Administrative Offences to introduce greater financial penalties for the violation of existing assembly procedures.<sup>57</sup> Amendments introduced to the Criminal Code of Tajikistan in August 2011 envisaged that persons who repeatedly violated the rules on public events could face punishment of up to two years in prison.<sup>58</sup> While the Osh ethnic conflict of June 2010 and the second “Tulip Revolution” led to the abolishment of the previous restrictive law on peaceful assembly in Kyrgyz-

Graph 1.



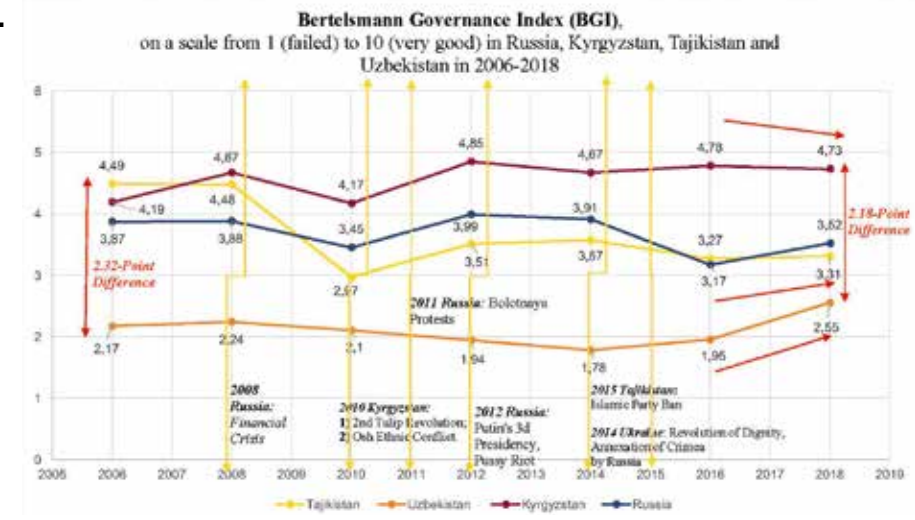
The Press Freedom Index calculated by the Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) measures the degree of freedom available to journalists in 180 countries. It is determined by pooling the responses of experts to a questionnaire devised by RSF.1) Good (From 0 to 15 points); 2) Fairly good (From 15.01 to 25 points); 3) Problematic (From 25.01 to 35 points); 4) Bad (From 35.01 to 55 points); 5) Very bad (From 55.01 to 100 points).

Graph 2.



Nations in Transit by the Freedom House. Countries are rated on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest and 7 the lowest level of democratic progress. The average of these ratings is each country’s Democracy Score (DS).”

Graph 3.



Bertelsmann Governance Index (GI) by the Bertelsmann Foundation ranks the countries according to their leadership’s political management performance and their quality of democracy. Results on a scale from 1 (failed) to 10 (very good).



stan in 2012,<sup>59</sup> in the Russian Federation the protest movement has provoked an encroachment on the freedom of assembly.

Allegations about electoral fraud during the parliamentary and presidential elections as well as Putin’s third presidency sparked mass protests on Bolotnaya Square in Moscow and across Russia in December 2011–July 2013.<sup>60</sup> In response, in June 2012 the Russian parliament adopted restrictive amendments to the law on public rallies and to the Code of Administrative Offences.<sup>61</sup> Human Rights Watch has concluded in its analysis of the amendments that their goal was to “increase the fines for violating rules for holding public events and impose various other restrictions that will make it more difficult and costly for those opposed to government policies to engage in public protests.”<sup>62</sup> This, in combination with repressive practices of the police and courts,<sup>63</sup> makes it difficult, if not entirely impossible, to conduct massive rallies similar to the protests that took place on Bolotnaya Square.

The “Euromaidan” protests, the illegal annexation of Crimea in February–March 2014,<sup>64</sup> and the military conflict in eastern Ukraine<sup>65</sup> coincided with further restrictions on the freedom of peaceful assembly. Tajikistan amended its law on peaceful assembly<sup>66</sup> in July 2014 to deprive foreign citizens and persons without citizenship of the previously guaranteed right to participate in public rallies.<sup>67</sup> In July 2014, Russia passed a law<sup>68</sup> that introduced criminal liability for persons who repeatedly violated the rules on public events, increased financial penalties, and expanded the scope of application of the existing repressive legislation and its arbitrary interpretation.<sup>69</sup> The trend towards further penalization of protests in Russia continues, and the lower house of the legislative assembly (state Duma) has recently passed a bill<sup>70</sup> to punish the involvement of minors in public events that are not sanctioned by the state.<sup>71</sup> These and other legislative measures and practices demonstrate some common trends with regard to the freedom of assembly in post-Soviet Eurasia. One can observe the synchronic adoption of legislative measures aimed at limiting the freedom of assembly shortly after popular uprisings in the region. Moreover, the adopted national measures look similar to each other in the sense that they restrict peaceful assemblies by requiring prior state permission to hold a rally or a demonstration,<sup>72</sup> by introducing excessive regulations, by punishing those who do not follow them with financial penalties, by criminalizing organizers of rallies, and by targeting social groups that can potentially cause “unrest”.

International quantitative rankings

We have selected three international quantitative rankings on press freedom, democratic transition, and governance that, in our opinion, are important indicators of post-Soviet transformations in the four countries selected for our research. The World Press Freedom Index prepared by Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) measures the degree of freedom available to journalists in 180 countries.<sup>73</sup> Graph 1<sup>74</sup> demonstrates on a scale from 0 (good) to 100 (very bad) the freedom of the press in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan between 2006 and 2018. This international index shows that before 2013 the ratings of each country

improved and deteriorated on numerous occasions without a strong correlation between the four selected countries. After 2013, it appears that the rankings of the four countries reached a point of “stabilization” at which the individual scores of each country no longer changed dramatically and stayed close to the scores of the other countries. Furthermore, while in 2006 the maximum difference between the countries was 41 points, the maximum difference had shrunk to 29.84 points in 2018.

The Nations in Transit Democracy Score (DS) compiled by the “Freedom House” evaluates post-Soviet democratic transformations in the 29 formerly communist countries from Central Europe to Central Asia on a scale of 1 (highest score) to 7 (lowest score).<sup>75</sup>Graph 2<sup>76</sup> illustrates that in this quantitative measure the rankings of the four countries are also similar to each other. For instance, Russia and Tajikistan received almost identical rankings every year, and the scores for Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan almost overlapped in 2009, 2010, and 2011. Furthermore, it appears that the four countries are converging, with the rankings of Kyrgyzstan (the most democratic country) and Uzbekistan (the weakest country in terms of its democratic progress) vacillating towards the “middle ground scores” received by Russia and Tajikistan. Like in the previous graph, the difference between the countries shrank from 1.18 points in 2006 to 0.82 points in 2018.

The Bertelsmann Governance Index (BGI) by the “Bertelsmann Foundation”<sup>77</sup> ranks 129 countries on a scale from 1 (failed) to 10 (very good) according to their leadership’s political management performance and quality of democracy. Graph 3<sup>78</sup> shows a development trajectory that is almost identical to the rankings displayed in the previous graphs. In particular, Tajikistan and Russia have maintained the “middle ground” with similar scores, while Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have vacillated towards a hypothetical point of convergence with Russia and Tajikistan. The BGI shows a similar trend of approximation between the four countries that have moved from a 2.32-point difference in 2006 to a 2.18-point difference in 2018.

The international quantitative rankings reveal three common trends in post-Soviet Eurasia. First, the four selected countries have very similar scores that remain in the same range of poor rankings indicating the democratic backsliding in the region. Second, the recent rankings illustrate that the selected countries have followed a similar trajectory/vector of development. Despite the “ups and downs” of their own rankings, the three Central Asian states remain in the “orbit” of Russia<sup>79</sup> without being able to set their own course in the region. Third, all three indexes show a clear trend of ongoing approximation between the four countries, whose rankings have moved closer and closer towards each other and, hypothetically, might meet at a common point of “convergence” in the future.

Conclusions

While the principle task of our essay is to provoke discussion and attract academic attention to the phenomenon of “authoritarian learning” in Eurasia, we expect that there might be several criticisms of the “Common space of Neo-Authoritarianism” as described here. One possible critique could be that the similarity

of laws, old legacies, and practices is just a coincidence and the result of a global diffusion of ideas without the major involvement of state actors. While some similarity might be attributed to the Soviet history and common challenges in the region and in the world nowadays, our response to this criticism is that even if the “authoritarian similarities” discovered by us are “accidental” , a “coincidence” of such proportions at the level of national laws, policies, and practices deserves special consideration and explanation. Although ideas and practices indeed spread faster in the globalized world, it would be useful to explain what factors facilitate democratic as well as authoritarian diffusion across countries and regions.

Another possible criticism might be that similar practices, policies, and laws have no single place of origin and operate not only in Eurasia, but also everywhere else in the world. The response to this criticism would be that our task is not to find the place where the common practices originated. On the contrary, our goal is to demonstrate the ongoing process of authoritarian replication and synchronization as well as to motivate further academic research and discussion on this topic. Furthermore, instead of looking for a single country where a practice originated, our research demonstrates the *common authoritarian fingerprint* of similar quantitative rankings, legal terminology, practices, policies, and timeframes of their adoption. The last and the most “appealing” criticism might be that the similarity of laws and practices has always functioned like this in this part of the world. One can argue that the ruling elites of Central Asian states have often borrowed practices from abroad and have depended on more powerful states like Russia, with whom they have synchronized their domestic and foreign policies. Even if this criticism is true, we still need to understand the driving force behind such “business-as-usual” and what can be done to stop the spread of authoritarianism to other countries and regions.

The main preliminary finding of our research is the synchronic replication of anti-democratic practices and the potential approximation of transitional regimes in post-Soviet Eurasia. Given the ongoing proliferation of non-democratic hybrid regimes in the world, the concept of the “Common Space of Neo-Authoritarianism” can offer a useful theoretical model for the comparative analysis of such regimes. Most importantly, it provides an insight into the most recent anti-democratic developments and conditions that have triggered the spread and improved the resilience of authoritarian ideologies and non-democratic regimes worldwide. ❌

Oleg Antonov is a visiting researcher at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University.

Artem Galushko is a researcher at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University, funded by a Swedish Institute scholarship.

Acknowledgement: Both authors are thankful for valuable input and inspiration from professor Joakim Ekman, director at CBEES, Södertörn University.

references

1 Juan J Linz and Alfred Stepan. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

2 Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Christopher Walker, *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

3 Matthew Collin. *The Time of the Rebels: Youth Resistance Movements and 21st Century Revolutions* (Serpent’s Tail, 2007).

4 See the Project “Resurgent Dictatorship. The Global Assault on Democracy”, available at <https://www.resurgentdictatorship.org/about-us/>, last accessed on 19.12.2018.

5 Howard Schweber, “Constitutional Failure,” *Huffington Post* (blog), Sep-tember 18, 2013, available at [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/howard-schweber/constitutional-failure\\_b\\_3949657.html?](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/howard-schweber/constitutional-failure_b_3949657.html?guccounter=1) guccounter=1, last ac-cessed on 2.02.2018.

6 Alec Luhn. “Uzbek President Bans Teaching of Political Science.” *The Observer*, September 5, 2015, sec. World news. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/05/uzbekistan-islam-karimov-bans-political-science>, last accessed on 11.11.2018.

7 Alexander Cooleyand John Heathershaw. *Dictators without Borders: Power and Money in Central Asia*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017) 187.

8 Chris Rickleton. “Tajikistan: Dushanbe Still Silent on ‘Disappeared’ Schol-ar,” *Eurasianet*, 2014, available at <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-dushanbe-still-silent-on-disappeared-scholar>, accessed 11.11.2018.

9 Philipp Lottholz and Joshua Meyer, “‘Friend’ or ‘Foreign Agent’? On the Limits of Field Research in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan – Exeter Central Asian Studies Network.” Available at <https://excas.net/2016/04/friend-or-foreign-agent-on-the-limits-of-field-research-in-post-soviet-kyrgyzstan/>, last accessed on 11.11.2018.

10 Stephen Hall and Thomas Ambrosio. “Authoritarian Learning: A Conceptual Overview.” *East European Politics* 33, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 143–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2017.1307826>. See also White, Stephen, and Ol’ga Kryshchanovskaya. 2011. “Changing the Russian Electoral System: Inside the Black Box.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 63 (4): 557–578.

11 Frederick Starr, Baktybek Beshimov, Inomjon I. Bobokulov, and P. D. Shozimov, eds. *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia*. Studies of Central Asia and the Caucasus (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2011).

12 See the Freedom House ‘Nations in Transit’ 2018 Report, according to which “[i]n Eurasia’s entrenched autocracies–Belarus, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan–personalized regimes keep a tight grip on power, suppressing political competition and targeting independent activists and journalists who dare to speak out.” Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/nations-transit-2018>, last accessed on 01.10.2018.

13 Pamela Spratlen, United States Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic. Democracy in Central Asia: Supporting Kyrgyzstan’s “Island of Democracy”, Fall 2014, The Ambassador’s Review, available at [https://s3.amazonaws.com/caa-production/attachments/479/C\\_Pages-10to13\\_Spratlen.pdf?1412346330](https://s3.amazonaws.com/caa-production/attachments/479/C_Pages-10to13_Spratlen.pdf?1412346330), last accessed on 2018.11.09.

14 Catherine Putz. “Central Asia’s Democratic Backslide Continues, Except for Uzbekistan.” The Diplomat. Available at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/central-asias-democratic-backslide-continues-except-for-uzbekistan/>, last accessed on 25.09.2018.

15 In particular, Christopher Walker introduced the concept of the “common antidemocratic toolkit”. Walker effectively argues that “[a]bove all, authoritarian rulers are preoccupied with regime survival, and they study and learn from other authoritarian regimes, both past and present, in order to maintain power.” In Christopher Walker. 2016. The Hijacking of







# Expulsion of students as a tool of control

by **Marina Henrikson**



The Belarusian State University, Minsk.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

In order to silence dissident voices within Belarusian higher education, students with uncomfortable political views are often expelled. International critique has resulted in a decrease in the number of expulsions, but the repression continues. The university administration merely has changed methods and nowadays focuses on the students with a capacity to lead others.

The university administration is able to hold on to the climate

of repression when they target certain students with more influence, and they succeed in creating a climate of fear that prevents other students from engaging in any sort of dissident activities.

Yuri Lukashevich, Deputy Chair of the BPF Party, was expelled from the Belarusian State University in 2017. He was at that time the leader of the youth wing of the party, BPF Youth. He argues that the decrease in the number of expelled students should be perceived as a pragmatic choice on the part of the government.

“In comparison to 2006 or 2010, when we saw large anti-government protests in Belarus, the number of expelled student has decreased significantly. This has not resulted in less repression, and the authorities simply realized that if they force out, let’s say, a thousand students then the EU will react and many young people will leave the country. If, on the other hand, they expel only five or ten students the EU will not pay any attention but they will scare the rest of the students”.

Lukashevich, whose case has been brought to the attention of the network Scholars at Risk’s (SAR) Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, was expelled from the University in March, 2017.<sup>1</sup> At that time he was engaged in the preservation of Kurapaty, a historic location where Joseph Stalin ordered mass executions, and thus a memorial site for the victims of communist repression.

The authorities planned to construct a business center on the site, which resulted in widespread protests of which Lukashevich was a part. He argues that the memorial site is important for the Belarusian nation.

“Representatives of our nation, and not only ours, were killed there. It is very important to remember these people, not only from a moral point of view, but also in order to prevent anything similar from happening again. If we forget, it could happen again. It is very important not to allow any kind of mockery of their memory. This is a place for sorrow for our people, not a place for business centers and restaurants”.

As a leader of BPF Youth, with all the public attention that entailed, he was in the spotlight for the authorities’ attention. The university administration subsequently became informed of Lukashevich’s participation in an unauthorized rally. He was at that time studying at the Faculty of History and was summoned to the deputy dean of the faculty and eventually got two reprimands – one for the participation in the rally and the second for truancy.

He admits that he skipped classes, but not as many as the university administration states, and Lukashevich argues that other students who had more absences were not reprimanded. In the end, after many twists and turns he was expelled for truancy and for late payment of university fees. The university claimed the expulsion had nothing to do with his political activities. He thereafter sought to re-enroll several times without success and is currently not studying.

## Official reasons for expulsions

The university administration often motivates the expulsions with absenteeism on the part of the selected students. Sasha Kuzmich, the 2018 International Secretary for the Belarusian Students’ Association, BSA, says that the general position of Belarusian civil society, including the BSA, is that these expulsions are foremost politically motivated.

Kuzmich tells us that in 2006, when large-scale protests erupted after President Alexander Lukashenko claimed a large majority win that resulted in his third term in office, hundreds

of students were expelled as a result of their participation in the protests. In 2010, when the country again saw large street protests due to Lukashenko entering his fourth term in office, dozens of students were expelled.

In 2015–2017, there were at least 12 cases of politically motivated expulsions of students according to a joint statement by the Germany and Switzerland-based human rights organization Liberico Partnership for Human Rights, the Belarusian Students’ Association, and the Belarusian Human Rights Center Viasna.<sup>2</sup> In connection to nationwide protests in 2017, demanding an end to the taxation of the unemployed, a number of students were detained and many of them were subsequently expelled from university when released from prison.

In 2018 one student was expelled, according to Dzmitry Salauiou, board member of the Human Rights Center Viasna. Hanna Smilevich, who was expelled from the Belarusian State University, was the newly elected leader of BPF Youth at the time of expulsion – the same position that Yuri Lukashevich held earlier. She does not hold this position anymore. The current leader of BPF Youth is Denis Mandik, who has previously been expelled from the Belarusian State University of Technology.<sup>3</sup>

Sasha Kuzmich from the Belarusian Students’ Association argues that the actual expulsions are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to repression within higher academic institutions. The students are not always expelled but could be threatened and silenced in other ways. For instance, they could be summoned to the university administration for a discussion about attitudinal and

behavioral adjustments. Sometimes the university also contacts their parents to evoke pressure. Kuzmich says that the control on the part of the university administration is severe.

“Universities in Belarus are very depressing places. Some activities are allowed and others are not, and every activity could possibly be stopped. The university administration is checking students’ social networks to see if they post things that are not allowed, if they criticize the government and so forth. This leads to self-censorship among students. Those who do not follow the rules are a vulnerable group.”

Thus, few dare to question the rules, and even fewer ignore them, because those students risk being targeted and expelled. According to Kuzmich, nobody has yet been expelled for “liking” or re-posting somebody else’s comments on social media sites. It is the most visible activists, people engaged in party politics, the opinion leaders who are the main victims of repression, but the other students are indirectly affected by the atmosphere of fear created by the expulsions.

In order to keep control over the students, the universities commonly have some sort of ideological department and a vice-rector for ideology. Kuzmich argues that this makes universities part of the ideological vector of the Belarusian government. She states that if, for example, the country commemorates Belarus’

**“IN 2015–2017, THERE WERE AT LEAST 12 CASES OF POLITICALLY MOTIVATED EXPULSIONS OF STUDENTS.”**





Viasna launched the campaign “Teaching Repression a Lesson” together with student organizations and human rights organizations.

role in World War II, the universities will also organize such events due to them being part of this vector.

Furthermore, as argued by Lukashevich, the people in charge of the ideological departments often work for or are at least closely connected to the Belarusian secret service, the KGB. He says that the ideological departments’ main task is to identify dissidents and remove these people from the university by way of intimidation, persuasion, blackmail or expulsion. They also seek to spread a message about the positive development of the Belarusian state, President Lukashenko’s contribution to such development, the bad shape of the rest of Europe, and the need to feel grateful for the state of the Belarusian government all while undermining political opposition.

### Consequences for those expelled

The repercussions for the students who are expelled are severe and life changing. They are, for instance, not able to work within the profession for which they originally studied. According to Dzmitry Salauyou from Viasna, some students try to re-enroll at university after having been forced out of university but are often quickly expelled again. Consequently these students are often forced to study abroad, for instance in Poland or Lithuania.

In the spring of 2017, Viasna launched the campaign “Teaching Repression a Lesson”, together with student organizations and other human rights organizations. The main aim of the campaign is to work towards the abolishment of repression within Belarusian universities. The focus is on overturning the practice of expelling students due to their civil engagement, even though other threats against academic freedom are also raised.

In June, 2017, Viasna, together with other national as well as foreign NGOs, appealed to several foreign partners of Be-



Hanna Smilevich was the newly elected leader of BPF Youth when she was expelled from the Belarusian State University.

larusian universities to give a positive contribution to Belarus’ adherence to the values enshrined in the principles of the Bologna Process and the Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform. Such principles entail, for instance, academic freedom,

university autonomy, and academic mobility. Belarus joined the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in May 2015. International partners and donors must take into account the reality of repression within universities and to a greater degree cooperate directly with the students and representatives of the academic community who are not part of the repressive structure.

Additionally, Viasna helps expelled students to continue their studies at

Ukrainian universities, but by way of distance learning. The reason for focusing on distance learning is that many students wish to continue their civil engagement in Belarus and therefore do not want to leave the country for several years to study. The students are engaged in a fundraising project called “Cappuccino for higher education”, in order to finance their participation in the distance learning courses.

Students also plan to construct an informational blog, write articles at the site, and work towards the transfer of Ukrainian experiences of reforming higher education to Belarus. Dzmitry Salauyou states that Viasna has good contacts with organizations and experts in Ukraine that can assist in this matter.

### International support

The repression within Belarusian higher education has received varied international attention. According to Lukashevich the repressive situation gets a certain amount of international publicity due to the work of different human rights organizations, especially through the activities of Viasna. Some EU countries are



Sasha Kuzmich is the 2018 International Secretary for the Belarusian Students’ Association, BSA.

following the developments within Belarusian higher education more closely than others, however.

“In my personal opinion, particularly Sweden and Poland are paying a lot of attention to the matter and consequently offer support. By and large, all other countries are behaving as if nothing has actually happened, or alternatively they produce statements saying that they are concerned and are paying close attention to the matter”.

In his view, the Belarusian government has been able to go on with the repression without any real consequences. There has been insufficient international solidarity or mobilization to stop the Belarusian authorities from pursuing their goal of intimidating the students.

According to Sasha Kuzmich from BSA, critique from the international community would have little if any effect because the government pays little attention to such criticism.

“The Belarusian government really does not care. It has done nothing to fulfill the criterias set out by the Bologna Process, and it has not changed its attitude concerning the expulsion of students. International critique could, however, show the expelled students and civil society in general that there are people around the world supporting them.”

Furthermore, she argues that there are several issues of concern; the educational system is problematic in general.

She explains that, for example, around 90% of the curriculum is being decided beforehand leaving students with very few electives; universities accept almost all students that wish to enroll and do not expel even the most unmotivated students who do not do the required tasks, that is, so long as these students are not oppositional political activists; and during election times the students are often forced to take part in early voting or otherwise risk losing their dormitories, generally presented as a gift from the university administration.

University education is considered very important in Belarus with around 80% of school graduates choosing to enroll at university after graduation, according to Kuzmich. The fear of



Dzmitry Salauyou, board member of Viasna.



Yuri Lukashevich, former leader of BPF Youth.

expulsion and the subsequent problems of establishing yourself in the labor market have serious repercussions for the development of academic freedom in the country.

“All these developments may not look very dramatic in isolation, but together they do create a very serious situation within universities. If you are seen as uncomfortable you are pushed out of the system, and this creates a lot of fear. In the end there is no one left to protest”. ❌

Marina Henrikson is a freelance journalist based in Stockholm.

Note. All images by the author, unless otherwise stated.

### references

- 1 Scholars at Risk, last accessed October 25, 2018, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2017-03-23-belarusian-state-university/>.
- 2 Liberico – Partnership for Human Rights, “12 cases of politically motivated expulsions of students in Belarus from 2015-2012”, last accessed October 25, 2018, <http://www.lphr.org/en/politisch-motivierte-exmatrikulationen-von-studenten-in-belarus/#>.
- 3 Human Rights Center Viasna, Video recording of Denis Mandik, published October 7, 2018, last accessed November 5, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuTP\\_qFM5SQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuTP_qFM5SQ).

# Reiner Frigyes Park: A reflection on current events

Meandering eastwards from Budapest's rapidly gentrifying and increasingly touristic fifth district towards the city's Eastern railway station (Keleti pályaudvar) and a few hundred meters beyond that, one encounters Reiner Frigyes park. A small grassy area surrounded on three sides by heavily frequented streets, the park is located on the fringes of Budapest's fourteenth district. Also known as the Zuglő district, the neighborhood in many ways forms a testament to Hungary's dashed hopes of the 1990s and early 2000s, when the country's turn towards liberal democracy and the "West" attracted international investment, new forms of entrepreneurship, and the establishment of non-governmental and educational institutions dedicated to dialog, the promotion of human rights, and the free exchange of ideas.

Today, Zuglő's urban quarters are in a state of dilapidation: shops and businesses, erected in part before 1989, but mostly thereafter, are deteriorating if not closed, their once gleaming façades harboring the pollution and decay of over a

decade of economic decline and social crisis.

On approaching Reiner Frigyes park, one immediately notices an enormous statue. Standing over three meters tall, the statue consists of a massive stone base bearing a bronze map of "Greater Hungary". Swooping over the map is a large bronze turul (a bird of prey central to Hungarian nationalist mythology) carrying a sword in its talons. Above the bird, in turn, is a burnished, copper-colored patriarchal cross, which stands nearly as tall as the rest of the statue combined. Inaugurated in October 2012, the statue was one of the first publicly-funded right-wing monuments to adorn a public square in postwar Hungary, and only one example of the current Hungarian government's determined campaign to reformulate public discourse and memory politics.

Upon its election in 2010, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz Party immediately began implementing its absolute majority in parliament to fundamentally transform Hungary: in 2011, it introduced a new constitution, the Fundamental Law of Hungary, which solidified Fidesz' powers

while enshrining a vision of "Hungarian-ness" based on Christianity, loyalty towards the "fatherland," and "traditional" family values.<sup>1</sup> Citizenship laws were altered to allow hundreds of thousands of individuals with Hungarian ancestry – located primarily in pre-Trianon "Greater Hungary" – to apply for Hungarian citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Private pensions were nationalized, the freedom of the press and judiciary curbed, and school curricula rewritten to disseminate a new national ideology.<sup>3</sup> Anti-migration policies and the 2015 erection of Hungary's border barrier caused international outrage, while propaganda campaigns against migrants, NGOs, and George Soros (founder of the Open Society Foundations) have flooded the Hungarian public sphere.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Prime Minister Orbán's government's maneuvers towards transforming Hungary into an "illiberal democracy" have directly attacked academic freedom and international institutions of research, education, and learning. Since April 2017, for instance, Central European University in Budapest has faced legislation aimed at its closure, while in August 2018 the Hun-

garian government announced its intention to shut down the country's Gender Studies programs.<sup>5</sup>

**HUNGARY'S TURN TOWARDS** the right has been accompanied by cultural politics dedicated to promoting an exclusivist Hungarian nationalism. As early as 2011, the Fidesz government began renaming streets and squares in Budapest to symbolically "re-Hungarianize" the city: Mószkva tér became Széll Kálmán tér, Roosevelt tér became Széchenyi István tér, while streets, avenues, and even buildings across the city received new Hungarian monikers. Budapest's flag was redesigned to reflect the Hungarian red-white-green tricolor and an imagined ancient heraldry. Statues and monuments, too, became crucial to the endeavor: particularly in Budapest's government quarters, statues dedicated to left-wing and socialist figures have disappeared, while historically revisionist monuments have emerged instead. Most prominently, in the framework of the 2014 government commemora-

tion activities of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year of the Holocaust in Hungary, an enormous statue was erected on Budapest's Szabadság tér ("Liberty Square") commemorating Germany's occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944. Depicting the German "imperial eagle" attacking the Archangel Gabriel, who holds an orb representing Hungarian state power, the monument is dedicated to the "memory of the victims" of Germany's occupation of Hungary. The statue's message is clear: as a victim of German aggression (not a former Axis power), Hungary and the Hungarians held no responsibility for the deportation and murder of some 430,000 Jews from Hungary after March 1944. This falsification of the historic record has

stirred considerable resistance. Even before it was unveiled on July 21, 2014, protesters began creating an alternative memorial, the "Living Memorial," through which individuals are encouraged to leave their own memorabilia at the site and to engage in public discussions on the history of the Holocaust, the nature of commemoration, and current political issues in Hungary.<sup>6</sup>

It was in the framework of Fidesz' seizure of power and the unfolding of its nationalist agenda that the monument in Reiner Frigyes park was unveiled on October 27, 2012. Quickly, the memorial became a site of congregation for Hungarian nationalists, particularly those associated with Hungary's far right party, Jobbik.<sup>7</sup>

Online searches of Reiner Frigyes now yield numerous videos, images, and articles propagated by the right-wing scene; Reiner's name, at least in the Internet stratosphere, has become synonymous with Hungarian nationalism, irredentism, and hatred.

This development is particularly disturbing when one consid-



Reiner Frigyes Park.  
PHOTO: WIKIMAPIA

**“QUICKLY, THE MEMORIAL BECAME A SITE OF CONGREGATION FOR HUNGARIAN NATIONALISTS, PARTICULARLY THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH HUNGARY'S FAR RIGHT PARTY, JOBBIK.”**





Béla Bartók and Fritz Reiner, 1942.  
Source: Hart, Fritz Reiner, photographic inlay.

ers who Reiner Frigyes was. Known internationally as Fritz Reiner, Reiner Frigyes was one of the most prominent conductors of the twentieth century. Born in 1888 to a secular Jewish family in Budapest, Reiner's career began in Budapest and Dresden before he moved to the United States in 1922. Over the course of his life, he conducted the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He conducted at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, taught at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, collaborated with some of the greatest composers of his day, and made a range of groundbreaking recordings. Among his teachers was Béla Bartók; among his students, Leonard Bernstein.<sup>8</sup>

**FRITZ REINER WAS** my great-grandfather. It was thus with great dismay that I learned of the monument, which was erected in the park that bears his name, in October 2012. During the preceding two years, fate had already granted me a front-row seat to Hungary's transformation, as I studied history at Central European University. Shortly after my departure from Hungary, the monument was unveiled amid great nationalist fanfare, so far removed from the principles espoused by my family and me. Unwilling to simply submit to this newest demonstration of governmental power, we wrote a letter of protest – written in English and translated into Hungarian – to Zugló's mayor at the time, Papcsák Ferenc. In the letter, we expressed our consternation about the statue, and asked that either the statue or the name be removed from the park to prevent any as-

sociation between Reiner Frigyes and the current government's political program. The letter was never answered. As of September 2018, the statue still stands in the park, with a large plaque nearby designating the area as "Reiner Frigyes park."

Over the past years, I have seen friends, colleagues, and former professors face intimidation and threats to their livelihood.<sup>9</sup> Attacks against institutions like Central European University persist despite international outcries and expressions of solidarity. The reformulation of politics and society in Hungary has now reached well beyond the symbolic sphere to include the very freedom of expression and intellectual pursuits. It seems highly unlikely that the government will remove the statue from Reiner Frigyes park in the near future. However, if the monument does fall one day, we can only hope that it will do so in a global context once again dedicated to the values of an open society, freedom of expression, and democracy and human rights for all. ❏

**Caroline Mezger**

Researcher at the Zentrum für Holocaust-Studien, Institut für Zeitgeschichte – München, and former CEU student.

## references

- 1 Consider, for instance: Dagmar Breitenbach and David Levitz, "Hungary's parliament passes controversial new constitution," *Deutsche Welle*, April, 18, 2011, accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/hungarys-parliament-passes-controversial-new-constitution/a-14998392>.
- 2 Laurence Peter, "New Hungary citizenship law fuels passport demand," BBC News, January 4, 2011, accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12114289>.
- 3 Thomas Escritt, "'Nightmare' in Hungary as government nationalises pension funds," IPE, November 26, 2010, accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.ipe.com/nightmare-in-hungary-as-government-nationalises-pension-funds/38105.fullarticle>; Thomson Reuters, "Hungary press freedom takes another hit as newspaper to close," CBC, April 10, 2018, accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/hungary-newspaper-stops-printing-1.4612656>; Daniel Nolan, "New state-backed textbook casts Hungary's Orban in flattering light," *Deutsche Welle*, November 7, 2016, accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/new-state-backed-textbook-casts-hungarys-orban-in-flattering-light/a-19530908>.
- 4 Lily Bayer, "Hungary steps up anti-Soros crackdown ahead of election," *Politico*, January 17, 2018, accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-steps-up-anti-soros-crackdown-ahead-of-election/>; Palko Karasz, "Hungary's Soros-Backed University Is Reaccredited," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2018, accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/28/world/europe/ceu-hungary-soros.html>.
- 5 "#IstandwithCEU," Central European University, accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.ceu.edu/category/istandwithceu>; Andrea Pető, "'Resistance Alone Is Not Enough' – Women's Rights and Illiberal Democracies," *Social Europe*, September 15, 2017, accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.socialeurope.eu/resistance-alone-not-enough-womens-rights-illiberal-democracies>; Balázs Trencsényi, Alfred J. Rieber, Constantin Iordachi, and Adela Hincu, "Academic Freedom in Danger. Fact Files on the 'CEU Affair,'" *Südeuropa*, vol. 65, no. 2 (2017): 412–436.
- 6 Consider: Andrea Pető, "Hungary 70: Non-Remembering the Holocaust in Hungary," *Culture & History Digital Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2 (December 2014), e016; "Controversial Monument Divides Hungarians, Angers Jewish Community," EURACTIV, accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-europe/news/controversial-monument-divides-hungarians-angers-jewish-community/>.
- 7 Consider, for instance, official footage by the Zugló municipal authorities of the statue's inauguration, filmed October 27, 2012, accessed September 13, 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJRUYrEqov8>.
- 8 See: Philip Hart, *Fritz Reiner: A Biography* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994); Kenneth Morgan, *Fritz Reiner: Maestro & Martinet* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005).
- 9 For a particularly well-known example of such tactics, consider: Keno Verseck, "Die 'Soros-Söldner'-Liste: Orbans Rachezug beginnt," *Deutsche Welle*, April 13, 2018, accessed September 13, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/de/die-soros-s%C3%B6ldner-liste-orbans-rachezug-beginnt/a-43372391>; Colleen Sharkey, "CEU Condemns Attempt to Intimidate Academics, Journalists, NGOs in Figyelo," Central European University, April 12, 2018, accessed September 13, 2018, <https://www.ceu.edu/article/2018-04-12/ceu-condemns-attempt-intimidate-academics-journalists-ngos-figyelo>.

# Student protests against neoliberal reforms in higher education

The debate over higher education reform in Albania started in 2011 where the main goal for this reform was credibility and the adoption of the Bologna system (which is used throughout most of Europe) in Albanian universities. Over the previous two decades, private institutes had been licensed to operate in Albania as universities, but among academicians and the general public these institutes had begun to look more like businesses rather than having the goal of providing quality higher education. In 2013, the new government had stated during the electoral campaign that one of its main goals was higher education reform, including tight control over private universities, fees, and accreditation of academic processes within both public and private universities.

SINCE THEN professors, academicians, and students have discussed and raised their concern about the level of transparency in what such a reform and new laws for higher education should look like. A total of 24 private and public universities were shut down by the new higher education law (Law No. 80/2015 for Higher Education and Academic Research), which was approved in 2015, and pro-

tests by students and professors from the University of Tirana as part of the Lëvizja Për Universitetin (Movement For The University) sought to express their concerns about the unclear processes regarding financial issues within public universities such as students fees for different levels of study and funding for research, university autonomy (most university board members are people who are not involved in academic life), students participation in university decision-making organs, the validity of students' ID cards, etc. Although the protests from 2013 until December 2018 were supported by few pro-

fessors and were small in number, they employed powerful symbolism to gain public attention, and the debate about higher education reform was successfully incorporated into debates on TV shows.

ON DECEMBER 6, 2018, the finance department of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning asked students to pay a new fee (which was higher than the minimum wage) and a new decision from the Ministry of Education for public universities to be applied by January 2019 sought to regulate the exams and modules, and in response a group of students, support-

ed by students from Lëvizja për Universitetin, decided to boycott the lessons and to hold a protest in the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth building. Within three days the protest had grown to up to 10,000–15,000 students from all over Albania, even including students from private universities. Student protest as a form of mobilization from below, excluding categorically political organizations like opposition parties and NGOs, has changed the perception in Albanian society about protesting and decision-making. The political elite must be responsible for their decisions. Public opinion regarding the protest in December of 2018 has had

PHOTO: SAILKO / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



## UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA

The University of Tirana is the largest public university in Albania with 35 000 students. The University includes eight colleges, 50 academic departments, and 41 study programs or majors. Most programs are offered in Tirana; a few smaller affiliated campuses are in other Albanian cities, including Saranda in the southern part of the country and Kukës in the north. The University of Tirana offers three-year Bachelor, one- or two-year Master, and three- to five-year doctorate degree programs, in accordance with the Bologna system. The current campus in Tirana is urban and decentralized. Students dorms are grouped in a separate location called Student City (Qyteti Studenti) in southeast Tirana.



the same value as the student movement in 1990–1991 when the system changed, and Albania became a democratic country, and the students are once again bringing hope to Albania!

**THE STUDENT PROTEST** is a struggle for hegemony towards the professors of the University of Tirana. Arlind Qori works as a lecturer of political philosophy at the University of Tirana, Albania. He is also an activist for the radical leftist organization Organizata Politike; Lëvizja për Universitetin. Here, with Arlind Qori's permission, I quote part of his report<sup>1</sup> regarding the historic dimensions of the protests in December:

“Spontaneity is the key word of this ongoing protest. Nevertheless, within the faculties and the crowd, from the first day of the protest, there were three divergent organizing groups. The first two – in coalition – were the student unions controlled by the two main opposition parties: The Democratic Party (PD) and the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI). Standing in their way was the Movement For the University (Lëvizja Për Universitetin – LPU), an independent student organization which has been the main opposition towards the government's neoliberal reform in higher education.

PD and LSI, by using their student unions, tried to turn the protest in a more overtly political direction, calling for the immediate fall of the government. But for the overwhelming majority of the students the university cause was the priority and they didn't want to be manipulated politically. Unable to use the protest, the PD and LSI student unions called LPU activists communist and Marxist-Leninists who were trying to divide the protest.

For several days it was a half-secret struggle within the struggle against the government. There were skirmishes, small acts of violence and a lot of threats. From

time to time it was like a real war of position, where the PD-LSI student unions and LPU activists were struggling for each tree, to position themselves better in order to transmit their ideas towards the large multitude of students. While organizationally the parts were equal, PD-LSI were in advantage on the violence front (by using small gangsters in threatening and punching some activists, LPU activists were in a considerable advantage in speeches and creativity (almost all the songs chanted in the crowd came from the LPU repertoire).

Nevertheless, due to the students' call for unity, the two organized groups seem to have lowered the volume of their own interne-cine struggle.”

From the students' perspective, the student protest brought a new dimension of political culture to Albanian society. In Albania the political culture is dominated by the political elite, and civil engagement and protest are almost never seen as tools for decision-making by citizens. Albert Pepaj graduated from the University of

## “WHEN THE STUDENTS' PROTEST FIRST BEGAN IN ALBANIA, THE GOVERNMENT IGNORED IT BELIEVING THAT IT WOULD FADE QUICKLY.”

Tirana, Faculty of Social Science, with a master's degree in regional studies. He reflects on the protests:

“Protests have mostly been synonymous with political parties as tools to gain more political power, and this obstacle needs to be overcome. Thus, for us as students in the streets, and also as Albanian citizens, this two-week protest in December was sublime.

“The protest's goal was only to fulfill the students' eight demands, thus excluding any demands for representation or any structural changes or even a dialog

with the government, but the students were still able to provide a new perspective for Albanian society and the Albanian government.”

For Albert Pepaj and many students this unpredicted event was like none other in Albanian society, and it was a lesson for the government, for Albanian citizens-students brought hope for the future and the idea of being politically responsible.

Albert Pepaj: “Moreover, in this protest student mobilization had another lesson to teach to Albanian society and probably Western society: No Violence! No serious incidents were reported during the two-week protest, and this is what Albania has been missing.”

Albanian students studying abroad in Europe supported and followed the protests. Inxhi Brisku is a political science student at Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic and he can tell about the engagement also outside Albania.

**WHEN THE STUDENTS'** protest first began in Albania, the government ignored it believing that it would fade quickly just like the majority of previous protests in the country.

However, the students, having voiced their solidarity with one another and having a strong mobilization among themselves, were not only able to keep the protest going, but also to give national dimensions to the protest. Without overlooking the reasons and circumstances that brought about this massive student reaction, I would like to stress the impact it had on university life as well as society in general.

First, it had a great influence on university life because the students understood the paramount importance of collective organization in a country where individualism prevails, and the main public discourse focuses on the victories that the *individual* – separate from society – can achieve. The students in this case serve as a good example that by being organized and having solidarity and mobilization changes are possible. The echo of this impact has been heard by all of Albanian society, especially marginalized groups who



Protesters outside the Ministry of Education in Tirana.

PHOTO: KRISTINA MILLONA / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

have begun to understand what participating in such protests really means for them.

Another crucially significant factor worthy of analysis is the challenge that the students' protest brought to the dual political establishment in Albania and the neoliberal capitalism imposed. Dominating the political scene in the country for the last 30 years, these two political parties have managed to utilize people's discontent as a means to political ends, and such discontent is used by the opposition party in their favor, which itself would stick to the same policies if it were to take power. The categorical rejection by the students to become entangled with the opposition party during this protest challenged the hegemony of the political parties in public life in the country. On the other hand, the economic core of the students' demands – the fulfillment of which requires political will – is a clear indicator that the neoliberal reforms (including the higher education reforms) have negatively affected the most vulnerable groups in society and have led them to extreme poverty. The challenge to the economic system and to the hegemonic ideology of the official parties, as well as the importance of organization and mobilization, are important influential factors characterizing this protest despite the fact that the protest might

appear to have a more limited focus.

The last day of protest for 2018 was December 18, when the students agreed to pause the protest because of the winter holidays and decided to gather again on January 7, 2019. It has to be mentioned that during the two weeks of protest in December the number of students remained relatively high within the crowd. The last day of the protest coincided with the last parliamentary session, and the Albanian prime minister responded by saying that they should have a dialogue together and that all of the students' demands will be fulfilled. However, to the students such a dialogue was understood as a political tactic to divert the protest's attention and to “manipulate” public opinion regarding the student protest. This was one of the main reasons that the students refused the dialogue. Despite this, Prime Minister Rama started a tour of the universities in Albania insisting on his idea for dialogue, but most of those meetings resulted in failure, and the students either boycotted the meeting (according to the students they were not informed about the prime minister's presence as they joined the meeting with the faculty dean to discuss the situation) or simply insisted that their demands be fulfilled. At the end of December, the government – on the prime minister's initiative – held a special session and approved “The

Pact for the University” that provides for half fees and/or no fees for students with high grade point averages and students with special abilities at the bachelor level, but for the masters programs the fees will remain almost the same or university departments will decide on the fees. In addition, the students' ID cards will be active during 2019, and improvements in the dormitory living conditions have started. According to the students, however, this is too little too late and is not fair. It is expected that the protest will re-start on January 7 with the same intensity, and the students are likely to ask for the repeal of Law No. 80/2015 for Higher Education and Academic Research.

**TO SUMMARIZE**, it can be said that for the first time Albania and Albanian society have had a social movement in which the students shared the same goal but from a higher-education perspective, and in terms of numbers the protest has played an important role in public issues, especially in changing society's perspective on civil engagement. It could be said that Albania is one example where the lack of transparency of government institutions prevents civil engagement from playing its necessary role in the democratization process in which the people hold their government to account for its decisions, but the students (especially LPU) have struggled for more than four years in protest in order to mobilize this social movement. In general, the student movement can be set apart from other kinds of transformative processes by the combination of two forces, namely the need for social change and the force of citizens' power that ultimately leads to social transformation. ✖

**Gilda Hoxha**

Is a lecturer at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Science, University of Tirana and Aleksandër Moisiu University.

## reference

- 1 Arlind Qori's full article is published on the LeftEast website: [http://www.criticatac.ro/lefeast/the-albanian-student-struggle-has-reached-historic-dimensions/?fbclid=IwARoG7zVfPm6\\_rN3TjaMECfkVk3aKH4iCwE5a23fT7tA6U17G1eTzwiiAKRg](http://www.criticatac.ro/lefeast/the-albanian-student-struggle-has-reached-historic-dimensions/?fbclid=IwARoG7zVfPm6_rN3TjaMECfkVk3aKH4iCwE5a23fT7tA6U17G1eTzwiiAKRg).



# Measuring academic freedom in a regional and global perspective

Democratic backsliding has been an abiding and pervasive concern across the post-communist region for almost a decade. Data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset corroborate this phenomenon and show that one of the contributors to this decline is a narrowing of freedom for academic and cultural expression. While not being the sole driver of this recent backsliding trend, the opportunity for open academic and cultural exchange does remain an important principle of basic electoral democracy. Moreover, because it often goes hand in hand with levels of media diversity, it is part of the general health of a society's public sphere. It therefore speaks to the overall vibrancy of critique, oversight and accountability in a democracy.

**THIS COMMENTARY WILL** examine the V-Dem dataset from the perspective of not only how it specifically measures freedom

of academic and cultural expression in the post-communist region, but also how these levels can be compared to other regions of the world. How critical is the situation across Eastern Europe and Eurasia when viewed in a global perspective? How close are the trends we feel on the basis of news reports or single events to actual patterns of autocratization?

The V-Dem dataset provides a unique inroad into these questions thanks to its unprecedented conceptual breadth, geographic spread and temporal reach. (See text box adjacent.) At its core, V-Dem begins with an Electoral Democracy Index, which is principally composed of measures examining freedom of expression, freedom of association, and clean elections. In this respect, it aims to replicate Robert Dahl's original notion of polyarchy, which sought to understand democracy as a combination of contestation (expression and association) and participation (electoral rights).

When we look at how countries in Eastern Europe have fared on these three components over the last ten years, we see that declines have emerged most often within the realm of freedom of expression (Figure 1). This is particularly the case for countries like Hungary, Croatia and Serbia, and most recently in Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. In other words, in most countries of the region the problem of democratic backsliding is not the integrity of elections or the opportunities to form parties or civil society organizations. Rather, the decline in democracy comes in the form of no longer having a robust public sphere.

**DRILLING DOWN DEEPER** into this sub-index, we can highlight two of its main components: media diversity and academic expression. Figure 2 shows that by and large these two phenomena develop in parallel: where the range of media perspectives narrows or fewer media outlets regularly

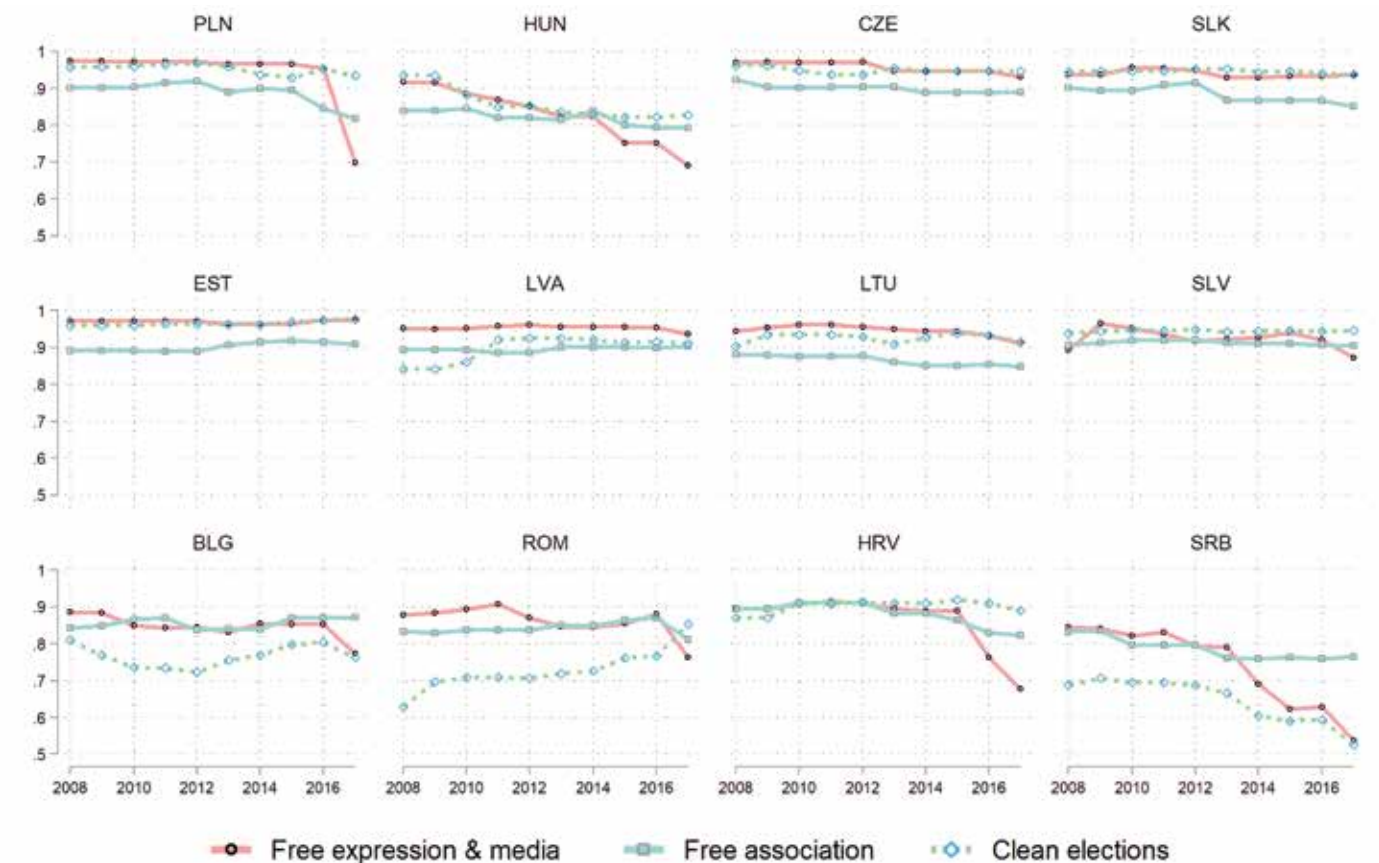


Figure 1: Components of electoral democracy in Eastern Europe, V-Dem database.

criticize the government, the level of academic and cultural freedom also diminishes. However, Figure 2 needs to be read with care because the scales of the two indicators are different. 'Media diversity' (on the left) is a composite of three base variables in the V-Dem dataset (v2mebias, v2mecrit, v2merange) and therefore has a value range from 0 to 1. Meanwhile, 'academic expression' (on the right) is a single base variable (v2clacfree\_osp) and ranges from 0 to 4. However, in the figure the two scales have been synchronized to show the matching trends.

Generally speaking, the assault on me-

dia diversity has been more severe than it has been on the freedom of academic and cultural expression. This is particularly evident in Hungary, Serbia and Romania. At the same time, the fact that the freedom of academic and cultural expression has also slid (using the right-hand scale in Figure 2) from a near 4 to a 3 or below in many countries corresponds to a shift from 'no restrictions' to one where such freedoms are only 'mostly respected by public authorities'. These are the corresponding characterizations given to these numbers on the 0-4 scale (see the V-Dem Codebook, v8).

To be sure, there is still room for the situation to worsen. For example, the next lowest ranking of 2 on the variable for freedom of academic and cultural expression would signify that "strong criticism of the government is sometimes met with repression." Only Poland and Croatia appear to be nearing that danger zone. At the same time, the 2017 levels for these two countries (2.39 for both) put them below the V-Dem average (2.58) and noticeably behind the likes of Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Honduras. In fact, on this variable the countries are also behind a number of

## V-DEM DATASET

The Varieties of Democracy dataset was first released to the public in 2016 as a novel data-bank of more than 400 variables measuring different aspects of democratic development for nearly 180 countries and covering the entire period from 1900 to the present. The variables range from institutional data that

have been taken from previously existing sources (such as electoral results or information about constitutional powers) to new variables that have been assessed by country-experts (such as to what extent there is a rigorous and impartial public administration in a country or how widespread consultation

is among political elites before decisions are taken). Each qualitative variable has been coded by an average of five country-experts for each year and for each country or territory. The result is an incredibly detailed and conceptually nuanced instrument for the measurement of democracy. One of its key in-

novations is to offer five different understandings of democracy – electoral, liberal, participatory, egalitarian, deliberative – each of which is operationalized with its own set of variables and indices. The dataset has become the new standard in the field, both for academic research and policy analysis. See v-dem.net.

**“WHERE THE RANGE OF MEDIA PERSPECTIVES NARROWS OR FEWER MEDIA OUTLETS REGULARLY CRITICIZE THE GOVERNMENT, THE LEVEL OF ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL FREEDOM ALSO DIMINISHES.”**



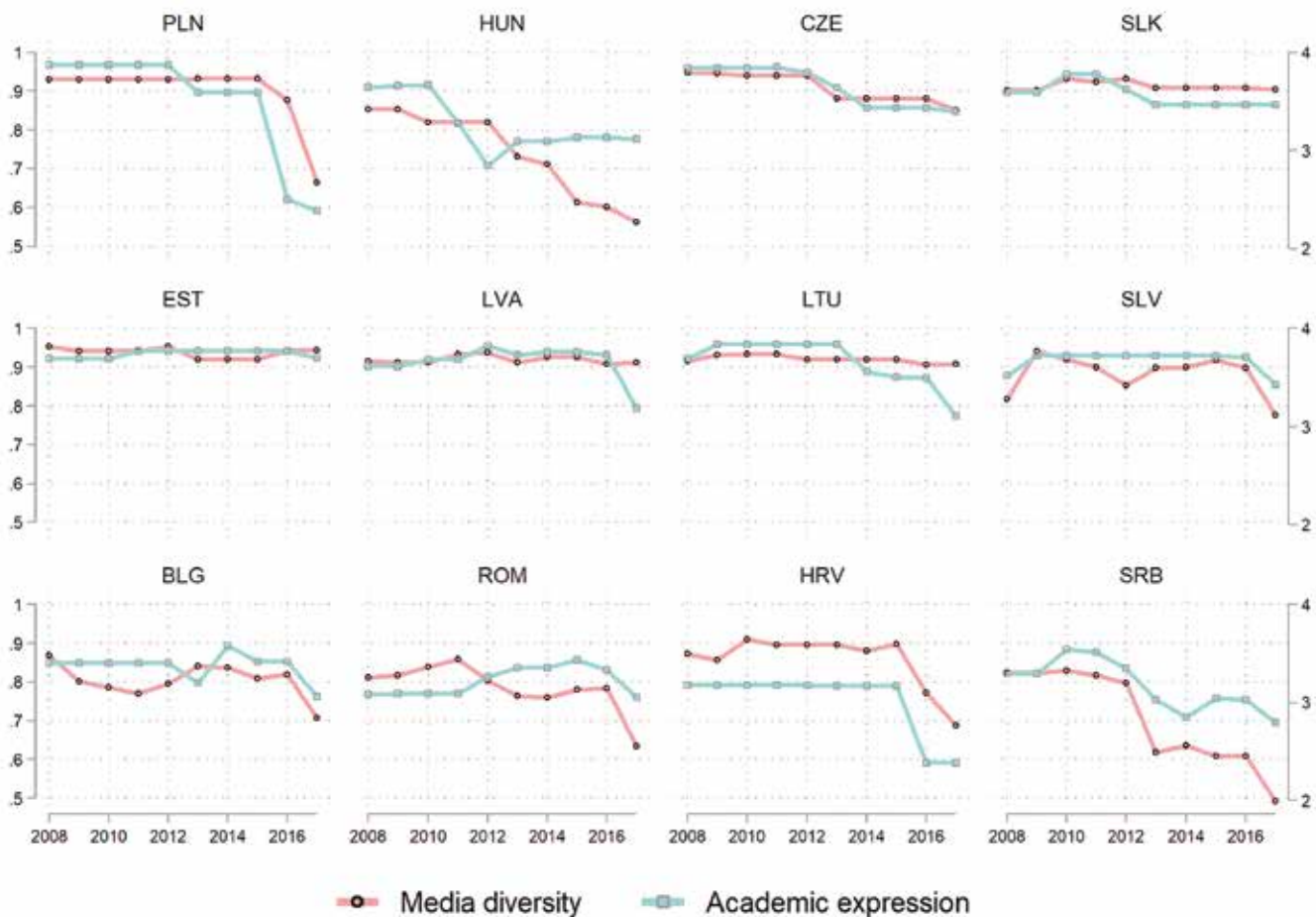


Figure 2: Measures of media diversity and academic expression in Eastern Europe, V-Dem database

Eurasian states such as Georgia, Armenia and Moldova. By contrast, the yearly Nordic average for this entire period never goes below 3.75.

In sum, world-wide levels of freedom for academic and cultural expression are generally above the mid-way point of the 0-4 scale (indeed, the median value for this variable in 2017 was 2.81). In this respect, these liberties are not as threatened as they are for V-Dem’s indicators of media integrity, where average values are

often around 2 or below. In the current era of backsliding, autocratizing leaders are clearly more interested in cracking down on the broad contours of media freedom than they are on academic and cultural expression. Nevertheless, a negative trend appears to lurk also in this realm.

**TURNING TO EURASIA**, where autocracy is more the norm, the data show that freedom of academic and cultural expression

lags well behind the Nordic and global averages for seven of the twelve countries depicted: Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Only Belarus indicates a significant upward trend. Russia, in contrast, shows continued deterioration. Relatively stable and satisfactory countries on this indicator are Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

Surprisingly, the measurement for Ukraine has declined from a regional high

**“AUTOCRATIZING LEADERS ARE CLEARLY MORE INTERESTED IN CRACKING DOWN ON THE BROAD CONTOURS OF MEDIA FREEDOM THAN THEY ARE ON ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION.”**

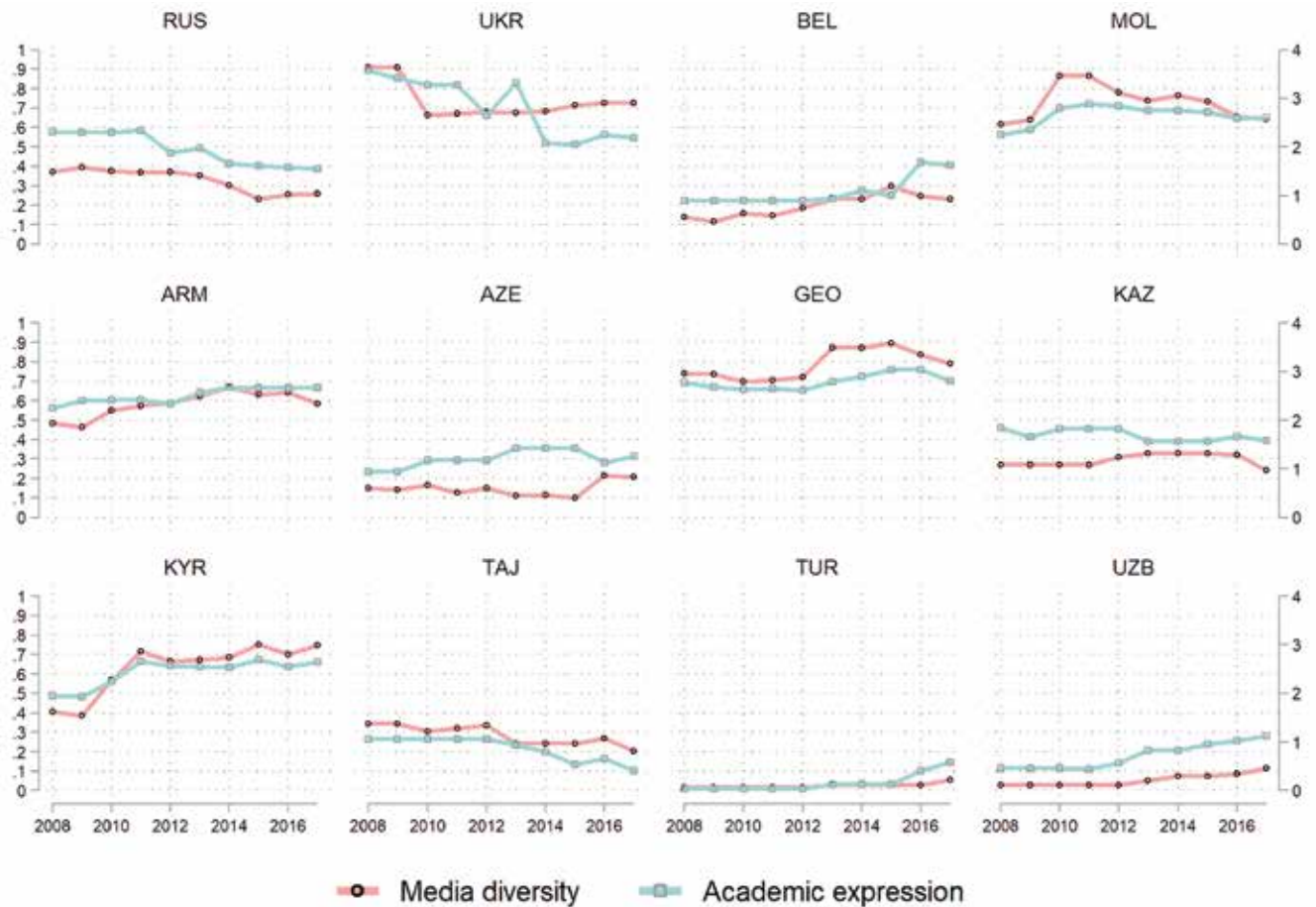


Figure 3: Measures of media diversity and academic expression in Eurasia, V-Dem database.

of 3.57 in 2008 to as low as 2.05 in 2015. In fact, all of the components of electoral democracy (free expression, free association and clean elections) have fallen consistently for Ukraine since 2010. This seems to indicate that the country has gained very little since its vaunted Revolution of Dignity in 2014.

Another analytical point to verify is the specific interrelation between media diversity and freedom of academic and cultural expression. Figure 3 shows that for Eurasian countries the sequencing between these two phenomena is again somewhat mixed. Whereas in some countries (such as Russia and Azerbaijan) the heavier emphasis has been on controlling the media, in Ukraine and Georgia pressure has been greater on academic

and cultural figures to circumscribe their opinions.

**TO SOME EXTENT** one could argue that neither of these two dimensions of expressive freedom need be related. After all, control over the media will go along one set of channels (intimidation of independent journalists, censorship within government-owned media outlets, etc.), while limiting the freedom of academic and cultural expression will follow others (biased funding for research and higher education, politicized decisions regarding the arts).

At the same time, we see that where one element goes, the other soon follows. This indicates that for autocrats these spheres *are* linked because such leaders

are ultimately interested in controlling the full spectrum of expressive freedom. Their desire to suppress critique and to ward off the accountability that derives from it is paramount. Therefore, they will work on both fronts, undermining media structures and stifling academic-cultural institutions. In Eurasia, rulers like Vladimir Putin or Ilham Aliyev have long since gone down this path. In Eastern Europe, Viktor Orbán, Jarosław Kaczyński and perhaps others like Tomislav Nikolić in Serbia have also embarked on this aspiration. ❌

**Vello Pettai**  
Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Tartu and Director of the V-Dem Regional Center for Eastern Europe and Russia.



# The disappearance of social anthropology

In 2018 Jarosław Gowin, the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education, signed a new law called *Konstytucja dla Nauki* (Constitution for Science). One of the accompanying documents to this law introduced a new list of academic disciplines, with neither social/cultural anthropology nor ethnology included as independent disciplines. Instead, those were subsumed under a new label of “sciences of culture and religion” together with cultural studies and religious studies. We are convinced that removal of ethnology/anthropology from the list of disciplines in Poland can have negative consequences for further development of anthropological research in our country. This decision is likely to be highly consequential, especially taking into consideration the fact that anthropology/ethnology has been made a part of “science of culture and religion” – a conglomeration that, to the best of our knowl-

edge, does not exist anywhere else in the academic world and that amalgamates very divergent scientific endeavors.

This is happening in a situation where throughout the world social anthropology has become firmly established as an academic discipline, with more and more departments and associations either being created or, what is especially significant here, changing designations from regionally specific names to (social) anthropology. This happened in 2017 in Germany when Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde became, following a majority vote among its members, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturan-

thropologie and in Russia, where in 2009 a new Laboratory for Social and Anthropological Research was established at the University of Tomsk and where the Ethnology Department of the European University of St. Petersburg changed its name to the Anthropology Department in 2008. It seems that after many years of discussions and doubts about the future of social anthropology, the discipline has become in general more consolidated and self-confident.

Poland, however, has not been at the forefront of this consolidation process, and the present ministerial decision might make consolidation of anthropology in Poland even more difficult and might negatively influence international cooperation. This might be the case especially if we take into consideration that the two disciplines with which ethnology/anthropology has been included under “science of culture and religion”

**“AN ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION TO LUMP ANTHROPOLOGY TOGETHER WITH DISCIPLINES FOCUSING ON HUMAN CULTURAL PRODUCTS HAS ALREADY HAD PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES.”**

## Extract from: “Erasing Polish Anthropology?”, Main and Goździak’s statement in *Anthropology News*:

.../The attack on anthropology is part of a broader attempt to reform Polish academia, in which the democratically elected university presidents will be replaced by rectors nominated by university councils (composed mainly of entrepreneurs and politicians), where free market competition and collaboration with businesses will rule, and where tenure-track jobs will be replaced with flexible employment. These neoliberal mantras are repeated over and over by the politicians involved in the creation of the new law. The wider reform is part of the so-called “good change” (*dobra zmiana*) promoted

by the conservative Polish government and eerily reminiscent of President Donald Trump’s Make America Great Again campaign in the United States.

Many questions remain: Why has the Polish government passed this law? And why has it targeted anthropologists? Is it because anthropologists have undertaken critical studies of the current establishment, knowledge production, gender policies, rising nationalism, and a slew of other “uncomfortable topics”? Are Polish decision-makers following in the footsteps of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has ordered gender studies to be removed from Hungarian curricula? It certainly seems so.../!



ILLUSTRATION: RAGNI SVENSSON

claim very different disciplinary histories, different bodies of theoretical works, and, what is most important, different methodologies and methods than anthropology does.

**WORLDWIDE**, the designation Social Anthropology has gained increasing resonance. This reflects this discipline’s self-understanding as a social science, basing its theoretical claims and research conclusions on investigations conducted directly among and with people and not based solely on analysis of their cultural

products. While the disciplinary borders are always – and should always be – porous or fluid, an administrative decision to lump anthropology together with disciplines focusing on human cultural products has already had practical consequences, namely a cut in “operational costs” (*kosztochłonność*) of the discipline. Apparently, the ministry has (falsely) assumed that religious studies, cultural studies, and social anthropology share methodologies and methods and therefore require the same (and minimal!) amount of money to conduct research

and to train students. For a discipline for which fieldwork is the most important method of enquiry, this can have disastrous consequences. Other consequences include procedures for evaluating the existing institutes of ethnology and anthropology as well as the possibility of granting doctorates and habilitations. Those will be probably granted in sciences of culture and religion, and not in ethnology, and this might hinder the participation of young anthropologists from Poland in international programs and lead to the isolation of the Polish anthropological community. Moreover, although the proponents of this new law claim that it will strengthen interdisciplinary work, in practice its formulations will likely lead in the opposite direction. For example, each scientific journal has been linked to a particular discipline or disciplines, and every researcher also has to decide in which discipline their work is to be evaluated. If they subsequently publish outside their own disciplinary journals, their publications will not count towards their final evaluation score. Thus, the Constitution for Science aims to flatten the structure of Polish science. This can result in easier management, both in economic as well as in political terms, but what is actually at stake is a restriction of academic freedom.

**STILL, THIS MINISTERIAL** decision does not have to be interpreted as a deliberate attack on a rebellious discipline, as some authors have suggested (see Main and Goździak’s statement in *Anthropology News*, Dec. 7, 2018),<sup>2</sup> and does not have to be seen as a repetition of events from the socialist past. Rather, this decision can be seen as a part of a zealous drive towards business-like management, evaluation according to fixed criteria, and raising efficiency in science – a drive that is seen not only in Poland and not only in relation to the actions of our present government. Recent years have seen a significant number of protests at universities in many countries of Europe and beyond. Some of them, such as the protest related to the restrictions on the operations of the Central European University in Budapest or problems encountered by the European



University in St. Petersburg, have been justifiably interpreted as caused by political actions of the state apparatuses. Other protests, like those concerning retirement funds for university staff in Great Britain, educational cuts in Denmark, or the low pay of non-tenure track teaching staff in the US, are related rather to the neoliberal capitalist approach to science and higher education, which seems to dominate in governmental attitudes toward present-day academia in general. We think that what happened to ethnology in Poland is rather a form of collateral damage, very unfortunate and harmful damage, but stemming rather from this drive towards efficiency and bureaucratization, coupled with ignorance concerning the nature of anthropological enquiry, than from an intentional wish to destroy a rebellious discipline. Even though many Polish anthropologists work in the field of gender studies and political or engaged anthropology, which are associated with the left side of the political spectrum, we are not recognized as such by public opinion. Our “leftism” is not visible in the public sphere in ways that would make us a target of persecutions on the part of a conservative government. In fact, anthropology is hardly visible in Poland at all.

**LET US REPEAT** – the present reform, including removal of ethnology/anthropology as an independent discipline, is damaging for social anthropology and for academic life in Poland in general. Still, we also have to admit that to a large extent the present situation is our own fault. Throughout this short statement we have used mostly “social anthropology” as a disciplinary designation, but in reality we should have used ethnology, social anthropology, cultural anthropology, and maybe even ethnography – all of which appear in Poland as self-designations in various kinds of academic institutions. On top of this, the association of Polish anthropologists (ethnologists) is called Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze. This is usually translated as the Polish Ethnological Society, but it literally means the Polish Society for Folk (or People) Studies. Now, one can argue that all those are historical names; however, this prolifera-

tion of names leads to confusion among people who are not that much interested in what we as anthropologists actually do, but who can nevertheless decide on our futures.

Moreover, there is too little cooperation between institutes and departments of anthropology (ethnology, etc.) in Poland. There are also internal disagreements concerning its broader academic nature. While it is fair to see this state of affairs as desirable, because respect for diversity is a part of anthropological ethos and methodology, and moreover because discussions and disagreements are sine qua non of any scientific enquiry, we should have realized much sooner that we have to present a consolidated front to the state management. This is necessary if we want to argue for academic freedom and against a parametric game (*punktoza*) that kills academic creativity. It is also true that for too long we have taken administrative decisions as given. Instead of challenging them, we have tried to adapt to them. This has to change. We hope that the disappearance of ethnology/anthropology in Poland will only be temporary and that we will reappear from this crisis with more awareness of what brings all the people who call themselves social anthropologists, cultural anthropologists, ethnologists, or ethnographers together. ✖

**Agnieszka Halemba**

Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw  
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology,  
Polish Academy of Sciences

**Magdalena**

**Radkowska-Walkowicz**

Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw

## references

- 1 *Society for the Anthropology of Europe*, Elżbieta M. Goździać and Izabella Main, December 7, 2018. Available at <http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2018/12/07/erasing-polish-anthropology/?fbclid=IwAR2W Wl9RFdu5eCm2njlqHhpbwiUUD8MLOUAXdg DWmGJX8EDPho-43qXRjPc%20>
- 2 Ibid.



ILLUSTRATION: KARIN SUNVIVSSON

# “There is a global crisis of attacks on higher education”

**Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of institutions and individuals whose mission it is to protect scholars and promote academic freedom. We ask five questions to Lauren Crain, Director of Research and Learning at Scholars at Risk.**

by **Ninna Möerner**

**W**hy create a global network in support of academic freedom?

“The Scholars at Risk Network brings together higher education institutions and individuals around the world to protect scholars facing risks and to promote academic freedom. We are a global network because the threats to higher education communities are not limited to a certain place or time. Since its founding in 2000, more than 4,000 scholars from over 120 countries have requested assistance from SAR. These scholars experience threats ranging from harassment and intimidation, to arrest, prosecution, and death. The reasons they are at risk may vary, some may face threats due to the content of their research or teaching, or





Lauren Crain is the Director of Research and Learning at Scholars at Risk, where she leads development of workshops, trainings, and other educational resources that promote greater understanding of academic freedom and related core higher education values.

because of their status as scholars. And the perpetrators may take different forms, including state actors, non-state groups, civil society, and individual actors. But their intent is always the same: to limit the space for free inquiry and debate, and to assert control over the freedom to think, question and share ideas, at an individual, institutional, or even a global level.

The Scholars at Risk Network was created to bring together the global higher education community in defense of these scholars and the values they represent. By producing new knowledge, developing critical insights, and designing innovations, these scholars and the wider higher education community benefit all of society. Consequently, when their work is threatened or compromised, these risks extend beyond the individual and pose a threat to everyone.”

Could you briefly give examples of the scale and the nature of attacks on higher education communities?

“There is a global crisis of attacks on higher education communities around the world. SAR’s most recent report, *Free to Think 2018*,<sup>1</sup> analyzed 294 reported attacks on higher education communities in 47 countries during the reporting period (September 1, 2017–August 31, 2018). The report draws on data produced by SAR’s Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, which investigates and reports attacks on higher education, including violations of academic freedom and/or the human rights of members of higher education communities in various categories, including: killings, violence, disappearances; imprisonment; prosecution; loss of position; and travel restrictions.

The report highlights targeted threats to scholars and students in Iran, the detention of Uyghur scholars and students in China, and ongoing threats to Turkey’s higher education sector. It also brings focus to legislative and administrative actions that pose serious threats to institutional autonomy in Russia and Hungary, and travel restrictions on scholars in Russia, Israel, the West Bank, and elsewhere, including proposed government travel regulations in Tajikistan that had the potential to chill academic freedom across the entire higher education sector.

The increasing risks to members of higher education communities also map to SAR’s data on scholars seeking assistance: from 2015–2018 SAR has seen a 200% increase in the average rate of applications it receives each month. Presently more than 700 scholars are either awaiting assistance or pending review.

In addition to the violent and coercive threats documented in *Free to Think 2018*, higher education institutions also face threats as a result of more subtle pressures, such as those arising from funding pressures and self-censorship, which have the potential to be just as corrosive to the core mission of the university. Challenges to academic freedom, institutional autonomy, accountability, and other core values run the risk of shrinking the space for free inquiry and undermining the quality of research, teaching, and learning.”

What responses and mobilizations are being developed to fight this trend?

“In response to these growing threats, we also see a global response emerging. Members of the SAR network—now numbering more than 500 institutions in 39 countries—are mobilizing support for these scholars by annually creating an average of 100 placements each academic year. We have created more than 1,100 placements for threatened scholars since our founding. The details of each placement (funding, candidate selection, post-placement options, etc.) vary according to different circumstances, and faculty and administrators interested in learning more about hosting can consult SAR’s *How to Host Handbook*<sup>2</sup> or contact SAR.

At the institutional level, we see more members joining the SAR network, and increasing efforts to form national sections to coordinate activities locally, providing additional support for individual scholars and institutions by sharing resources, network building, and through joint fundraising efforts. Moreover with increasing threats to scholars and institutions around the world, these national sections also send a powerful message about the importance of core values and allow higher education communities to speak out in support of academic freedom, both at home and around the world, with a strong, singular voice.

At the international level we also see growing recognition of the importance of academic freedom, including

in a report<sup>3</sup> adopted by the European Parliament in November 2018 that resolves to give new priority to academic freedom in the EU’s external actions, and calls for concrete EU-led responses, diplomatic pressure, and material assistance for at-risk scholars.”

How can individuals get involved?

“In addition to encouraging their institutions to join the global SAR network,<sup>4</sup> there are many ways faculty, researchers, students, administrators, and other members of the higher education community can support academic freedom on their campus and in their communities.

Faculty, researchers, and students can participate in SAR-affiliated Legal Clinics<sup>5</sup> and Student Advocacy Seminars,<sup>6</sup> which provide opportunities to educate next-generation leaders about the importance of academic freedom. Working with SAR staff, these faculty-led programs help students develop research, advocacy, and leadership skills while making important contributions to SAR’s advocacy work. Individual faculty or researchers can join SAR’s global network of volunteers that produce reports for the Academic Freedom Monitoring Project.<sup>7</sup>

There are also opportunities to engage one’s campus in dialogue about the importance of academic freedom and related values. Students and faculty can invite at-risk scholars to campus through the SAR Speaker Series<sup>8</sup> to hear their stories of perseverance and courage, and can attend other events, including the biennial Scholars at Risk Network Global Congress. They can participate in and help organize research projects, workshops, online courses, and webinars that explore the importance of core higher education values, and examine how they are promoted and defended both on their own campus and also in international partnerships.

No effort is too small. As part of a global movement, any individual can play a valuable role. Increasing awareness on campus regarding the importance of academic freedom will create stronger and more resilient higher education communities, which will be better able to recognize and withstand both subtle and overt threats.”

What can international scholarly journals like Baltic World do to contribute to this work and enable researchers to conduct research even if their academic freedom has been violated?

“Special editions like this one offer an excellent opportunity to raise awareness about the threats to academic freedom, so thank you for putting this together! More scholarly research on this topic is needed, and we welcome any scholars interested in pursuing additional work in this area to be in touch about opportunities to contribute to new research projects. Where possible, scholarly journals could also provide important outlets for at-risk scholars by offering opportunities for independent scholars to publish, by offering fee waivers where possible, and and by allowing scholars publishing sensitive research to do so anonymously. This is particularly important for scholars unable to leave their home country due to travel restrictions. These efforts offer invaluable opportunities for scholars to continue their work, and can also help advance a broader conversation about the importance of academic freedom.” ✕

“Increasing awareness on campus regarding the importance of academic freedom will create stronger and more resilient higher education communities.”

references

1	<a href="https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2018/">https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2018/</a>	0483+0+DOC+PDF+Vo//EN	7	<a href="https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/academic-freedom-monitoring-project/">https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/academic-freedom-monitoring-project/</a>	
2	<a href="https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/how-to-host-handbook/">https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/how-to-host-handbook/</a>	4	<a href="https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/join/">https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/join/</a>		
3	<a href="http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P8-TA-2018-">http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P8-TA-2018-</a>	5	<a href="https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/academic-freedom-legal-clinics/">https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/academic-freedom-legal-clinics/</a>	8	<a href="https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/speaker-series/">https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/speaker-series/</a>
		6	<a href="https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/student-advocacy-seminars/">https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/student-advocacy-seminars/</a>		





# “FEMACT is led by an ethos of feminism-across-borders”

**The academic community is international, and this solidarity crosses borders. Angelika Sjöstedt-Landén is one of the founders of the network FEMACT, that aim to fight the limiting space for academic freedom. We asked her to explain more about the initiative.**

by **Ninna Mörner**

## What is FEMACT?

“FEMACT is a network of gender studies scholars, activists, and critical researchers that works as a platform for sharing and creating new knowledge about how illiberal and anti-gender mobilizations operate in different countries. We also try to work out ways to resist threats against academic freedom. We currently have around 50 members across Europe and in neighboring countries.”

**Could you say more about the call for international cooperation to make it possible for scholars who have been hampered by restrictions to still be able to conduct research? Access to electronic library resources and scholarships for junior researchers and visiting research positions for more senior ones might be part of this structure?**

“The network gathers scholars from countries in which a shift towards illiberal democracy has been fairly successful such as Hungary, Poland, Russia, and Turkey, as well as countries in which this trend is less visible but is nevertheless present. There is much diversity within Europe regarding the ways in which different countries have experienced austerity, unemployment, growth in precarious employment, and cuts in benefits, all of which have disproportionately affected women in countries such as Greece, Spain, and Ireland. FEMACT is led by an ethos of feminism-across-borders and a politics of solidarity. The combination of members makes it possible to share resources across the group. By resources I mean not only monetary ones, and could, for example, be the possession of a passport. Meetings can take place in locations where scholars are based who cannot travel because of the confiscation of their passports – which is the case for much of the Turkish members of the network – or we might need to find online solutions for participating. This is very important for overcoming isolation, which is very common for gender scholars who often are the only ones defined as gender scholars in their department, in their region, or even in their country. This is one of the core things about working together, that someone recognizes what is happening in the different locations and that we can act collectively for one another. We have also seen while building the network that it is very important that membership not be reduced to formal affiliation with an institution such as a university, especially when scholars are locked out of their departments.”



Angelika Sjöstedt-Landén, PhD in ethnology, lecturer in Gender Studies at Mid Sweden University and one of the initiative taker to FEMACT.

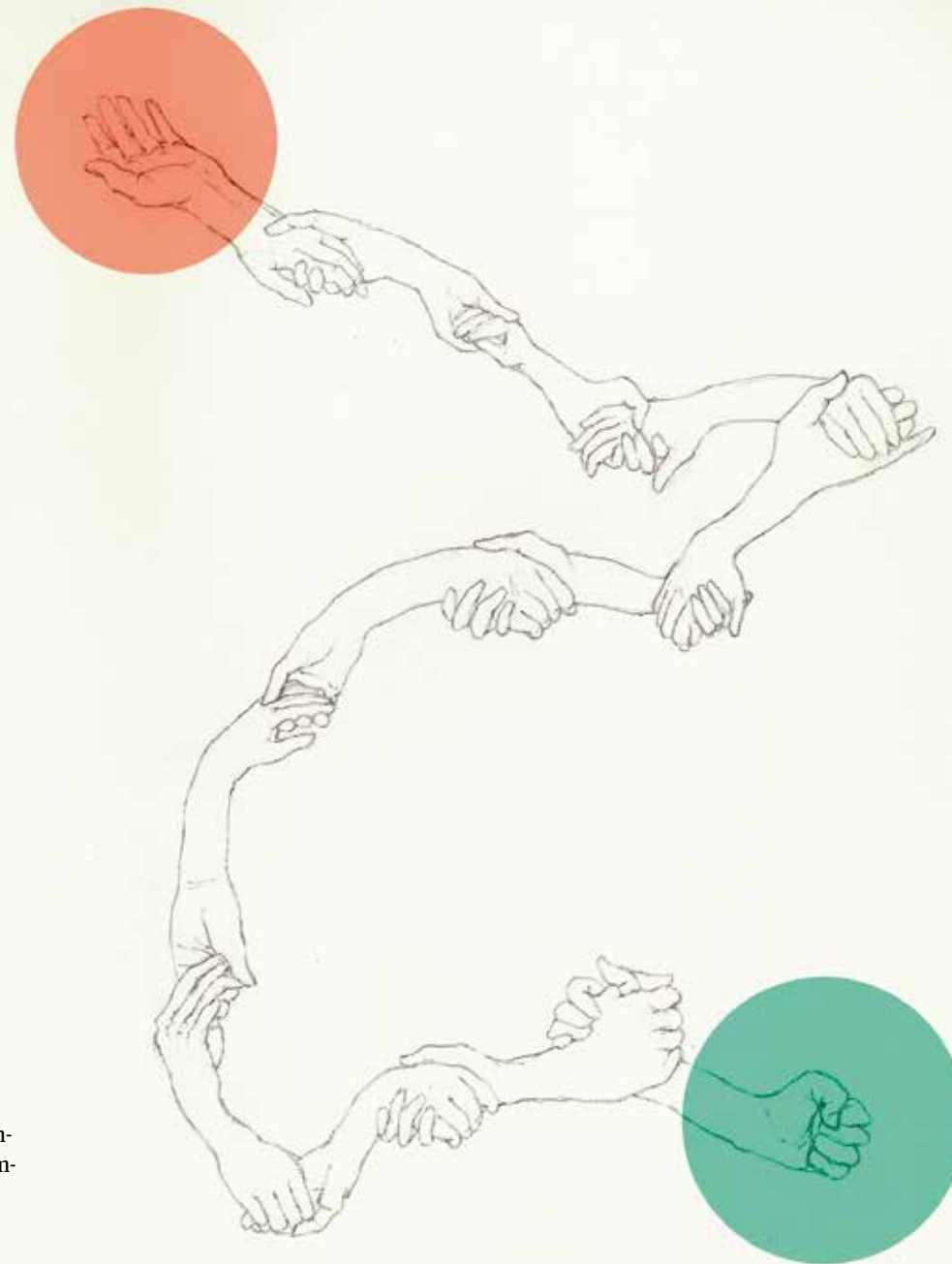


ILLUSTRATION: MOA THELANDER

## What can a scholarly international journal do to contribute to this structure?

“Journals could definitely make their archives open and free to access so that students and scholars can access their catalogues irrespective of departmental affiliation. A closer cooperation between networks such as FEMACT and journals could enable the initiation of more contacts as well as wider knowledge about the conditions scholars are under in different national and institutional contexts. Such understanding could make possibilities for publishing greater. Also, journals could consider publishing in more languages or alternatively offering funds for translation to a greater extent. Requirements for writing in English can be very excluding, and cooperation with journals in different countries that publish in a variety of languages could also be a way forward. It is also very important that current issues of academic freedom are addressed, such as in this current issue of *Baltic Worlds*.”

## Baltic Worlds' statement of purpose

**BALTIC WORLDS** is a scholarly journal published by the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Södertörn University, since 2008. It publishes articles in social sciences and humanities as well as environmental studies, practicing a double-blind peer-review process, by at least two independent specialists. *Baltic Worlds* is listed in the Norwegian bibliometric register (DHB), included in EBSCO databases, DOAJ, and Sherpa/RoMEO.

*Baltic Worlds* is distributed to readers in 50 countries, and reaches readers from various disciplines, as well as outside academia. In order to present multi- and interdisciplinary ongoing research to a wider audience, *Baltic Worlds* also publishes essays, commentaries, interviews, features and conference reports. All content relates to the Baltic Sea Region and the wider Central and Eastern European area, including the Caucasus and the Balkans.

*Baltic Worlds* regularly publishes thematic sections with guest editors, enabling deeper explorations into specific fields and research questions. International scholarly collaborations are encouraged. *Baltic Worlds* wishes to advance critical engagement in area studies and to apply novel theoretical and methodological approaches to this multifaceted field.

The journal's Scholarly Advisory Council consists of international scholars, representing different disciplines and with specific knowledge on the area.

*The Scholarly Advisory Council*



## Academic freedom. The very heart of the scientific process

**U**NESCO's General Conference 2017 adopted a set of Recommendations on Science and Scientific Research, that stresses the importance of academic freedom as "the very heart of the scientific process, and provides the strongest guarantee of accuracy and objectivity of scientific results." To participate in the international community and to travel and exchange ideas and information is also stated as an opportunity that member states should provide researchers with.

The Swedish National Commission for UNESCO and the Young Academy of Sweden arranged a symposium "The Shrinking Academic Freedom in Europe" November 9, 2018 in Stockholm. This symposium was one of many that have been organized lately on the topic threats to academic freedom, which can be seen as a sign and an acknowledgement that there is cause for worry.

**SPEAKERS FROM DIFFERENT** countries and disciplines were invited to give insights into the state of academic freedom in Europe. Among the speakers, two in particular, framed the larger context in which such trends can be placed.

Staffan I. Lindberg, director of the Varieties of Democracy Institute, explained the global trend of autocratic regimes to first attack the rule of law, then the media, then civil society, and thereafter academic freedom. He also pointed out how autocratic



ILLUSTRATION: KATRIN STENMARK

regimes are more subtle today and manage to hold elections that appear like democratic elections, but between elections they impose restraints to control society.

Andrea Pető, professor of gender studies at the Central European University in Budapest, showed how in Hungary the state, or the "polyphor state" to use her term, has constructed a parallel structure that appear as, or mirrors, a democratic state. In the latest CEDAW report, for instance, it might seem that women's rights NGOs are doing well in Hungary. But if one looks closer behind the façade, one discovers that those constructed NGOs have

hijacked the concept of women's rights for the purpose of pushing for issues that are contrary to the women's rights movement's agenda. The claim of women's right to their own body is here mirrored towards the claim to protect the rights of the unborn child, etc. Another typical phenomenon of the hybrid regime is to create a fear of others and then to produce fake news and call for securitization in order to protect the nation from this made up threat. Polarization and fear are the modus operandi, says Andrea Pető, and she further warns that the anti-gender strategy will destroy the liberal values that science as we know it has rested upon since the Enlightenment.

**THE THREAT AGAINST** academic freedom also has an enormous impact on individual researchers. Olga Selin Hünler, a postdoctoral

researcher in cultural anthropology at Bremen University in Germany, told about the individual consequences for researchers after the purge in Turkey after the signing of the peace petition. Researchers have lost their jobs, their passports, their networks, and all prospects for careers or to be part of the scientific community. Many are trapped in Turkey in a sort of limbo, although she herself managed to find a place in Germany. Cross-border solidarity is making a difference, at least individually. ✖

**Ninna Mörner**