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Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics and International Relations

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Editorial 03/2018

Post-Truth-Telling in International Relations

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We break new ground in this issue of *New Perspectives* with an extensive co-edited special section on 'Post-Truth' and its relevance for politics and international relations. As Editor-in-Chief, I (**Benjamin Tallis**) have been delighted to share the editing duties – and the authorship of this editorial – with **Nick Michelsen** of Kings College. It's been a rich and rewarding collaboration that began in a chance conversation back at ISA 2017 in Baltimore, continued with a high-profile roundtable at ISA 2018 in San Francisco, some low-profile drinks at at the wonderful Gordons Wine Bar in London, and now comes to fruition in this issue of the journal. I'm delighted with how this has turned out and to have such a wonderful array of scholarship – and scholars – in the journal. We present post-truth (and its implications) as seen from the various perspectives of Arendtian ethical politics, critical realism, post-universal international justice, trust and the return of agency as well as the history, and future, of IR as a discipline engaged in or disengaged from the (post-truth) world. It is my proud duty as editor of the journal to thank **Colin Wight, Kjersti Lohne, Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen, Hannah Marshall** and **Alena Drieschova**, **Dagmar Rychnovská** and **Martin Kohut** for their stellar contributions to the special section – and to welcome Nick to our Associate Editor team on a permanent basis.

Before moving on to the substantive introduction for the special section, however, I would like to also draw your attention to the 2018 IMEMO forecast (published online first last year), which we publish here with a special update written in Autumn 2018 by **Irina Kobrinskaya**. These texts from IMEMO – Russia's leading research institute on international politics and world economy (and part of the Russian Academy of Sciences) – provide a unique English-language window on the thinking of Russia's foreign policy establishment. Irina – and her colleagues with whom the main forecast was authored – note that while the 'Russia Factor' may be increasingly influential in international affairs (including by providing a handy scapegoat), it is still misunderstood. The IMEMO reports thus fit nicely with our special sec-

tion on post-truth and offer much that can be interestingly considered from the perspectives our authors offer.

THE STORY SO FAR

Recent events and dynamics in world politics have combined to foster a sense that truth-telling has been one of the casualties of our era. From the election of Donald Trump in America and the conduct of the Brexit referendum campaigns as well as the subsequent Brexit process, to concerns about information warfare in the context of resurgent geopolitics in Europe, truth's absence has been widely seen as key to the travails of our age. There is also widespread anxiety about the future of democratic politics, linked to the apparent new fragility of so-called liberal internationalism. Indeed, this rising pessimism about the future of the international order appears to be the distinguishing feature of what has been termed the 'post-truth era', which is thus of great relevance for IR scholars.

Thus far, responses to 'post-truth' have tended to take three main forms, channelled by well-established traditions of international thought: The first response has been to contend that the issues in question are simply not new, even if they take place in new – and newly degraded – conditions. Truth and politics have never had an easy relationship. Lying and 'Bullshit' have always been a normal part of the conduct of domestic and international power politics, and, in particular, inter-state war in accordance with Sun Tzu's doctrine of deception. New technologies, associated with social media, may have introduced new stakes into the game, requiring that international relations now be understood as a form of combat between strategic narratives fought upon the complex new media terrain. However, while the 'game' may now be played by a larger and diverse group of actors, it has never been about 'truth', but rather about the expression of power, and so it remains.

The second response has been that the norms underpinning the current international order are far more resilient than the level of contemporary anxiety about truthtelling implies. The international society of states, and the contiguous intersecting global regime of human rights and international law, constitute a robust architecture that imposes costs on those who, for example, freely break contracts, or achieve reputations as a systematic purveyors of falsehood (Frost and Michelsen, 2017). Such faith and optimism in the Liberal order, perhaps, risks complacency when significant or key actors in world politics appear to have ceased to acknowledge established normative or legal frames as they relate to truth telling. Indeed, there are clear and ongoing efforts to shift, change or nudge the rules of the game and, as Lohne (this volume) observes, the status of universal truth claims – and the politics of such – is often precisely what is at stake.

The third response is to suggest that the era of post-truth, which amounts to untruth, is a self-inflicted wound, long in the making (see Wight in this volume). Just

when the capacity to 'speak truth to power' is needed more than ever, we discover that this capacity has been blunted by the intellectual trajectories of scholarship and intellectualism over the last three decades. The abandonment of scientific objectivity, at least as an aspiration, it is argued, leaves some scholars with insufficient means at their disposal to combat blunt falsehood. Various iterations of this argument have suggested that critiques' assault on Enlightenment values has left international scholarship as a whole unable to fulfil its mission to be of use in an era of post-truth-telling. Others have argued that perhaps the problem is not so much postmodern destabilization of 'truth' as what scholars have done – or failed to do – with it (see Tallis, 2016). There are risks here of abridging the historical role and social utility of critique but scholarship, and in particular IR scholarship, has a particular responsibility to reflect on what 'post-truth' means today in relation to the legitimacy of its knowledge claims, but also of its very disciplinary existence (see Michelsen below).

INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION, DEMOCRACY AND WAR

Recent years have born witness to a proliferation of state and non-state political actors who are able to effectively intervene in an evolving communications field. This has been seen as particularly of concern inasmuch as it allows for increased potential for hostile foreign interference in the international relations but also the domestic politics of all states in the international society. The broad claim is that such interference has become increasingly easy as a consequence of new information or communication technologies, which have been seized upon by state as well as non-state actors seeking to exploit weaknesses in the liberal order, as well as to undermine its key players. What follows is a sense that actions short of war, but beyond the accepted norms of international competition, have become more common (see e.g., Galeotti, 2016). This is lamented in both the west and the east, though who is held responsible for waging hybrid or information war – and what gets labelled as such – often shifts according to who the speaker is (*ibid.*; Tallis and Šimečka, 2016).

Associated concerns relate to the attribution of hostile informational activity – since the field of action and actors has opened up significantly, identifying who has produced a particular, perhaps hostile communication, and to what end presents a challenge, though not necessarily an insuperable one. Hostile manipulative or subversive communication seems to create a crisis for states but also for international society inasmuch as it contributes to a wider devaluation of the role of Truth-telling in world politics, and with it the decay to a wider set of settled expectations between states which help maintain international interactions within certain bounds that all states are presumed to prefer to keep in place. Not least of these is that direct violence between states remains a relatively abnormal rather than constant feature of

state interaction. If state and non-state actors are able to act, wholly within the informational field, to undermine government, to dis-inform, mislead, fabricate or selectively release data, and/or to undermine or frustrate national interests, then, in some significant way, we have indeed entered a new era.

This feeds into a wider set of arguments that observe a generic decline in trust in democratic societies worldwide. It has been common to observe that democratic societies are beset by a range of intersecting dynamics, across cultural, technological, political, economic and demographic processes, that have led populations to lose faith in many of the institutions which were traditionally believed to provide reliable information, including about international affairs (see Marshall and Drieschova, this volume). As techniques and technologies of communications have evolved in the context of wider social changes, the large established news agencies have found themselves faced by a range of competitors, some very small, and needing to collaborate with diffuse networks that now disseminate content about world politics. Politicians have never been so distrusted, the argument goes, and events such as the British referendum vote to exit the European Union are seen to reflect a widespread belief that international organisations are faceless, dishonest and untrustworthy. As argued by Hannah Marshall and Alena Drieschova below, this history must be unpacked in its specific locations. In the UK, the so called 'Brexit' vote clearly tapped into a pattern of rising societal distrust, even if new technologies also played a significant role. Similarly, hybrid or information war can only be effective as long as it has cracks and schisms within domestic societies on which it can work.

What is at stake in the idea that we may have entered a 'post-truth-telling' era is the possibility that as the benefits of mobilising falsehood are becoming apparent to all actors, professional communicators may have taken on new powers and new roles in world politics. The consequent worry is that international regimes of norm governed behaviour, which maintain international political life within certain clear bounds, begin to break down in the face of the democratization of informational conflict. All kinds of actors are now seen to be able to influence public opinion through new technologies, leading to competitive escalation and wider disorder. If the manipulation of foreign public opinion has increasingly become standard practice for all states, how can this seriously function without the systematic manipulation of domestic public opinion also? This PR-ification of global politics appears to be closely associated with the rise of populist demagoguery world-wide, as politicians become increasingly adept at harnessing new technologies borrowed from advertising, like data-mining and micro-targeting, to persuade their audiences (see Hyvönen, this volume).

As noted above, there may be less about this that is new than the current pervasiveness of technological dystopianism might imply. Hannah Arendt (1967[2010])

noted half a century ago that it was then already a commonplace to recognize that "truth and politics are on rather bad terms." Lies have always been regarded as necessary and sometimes justifiable tools of political and military commerce, just as rhetoric has always been a central part of political life. It is also a commonplace to note that truth is often the casualty of political expediency, as Hyvönen notes below in his reflection on Arendt's legacy. It was Arendt's observation that facts and the events they are related to are fragile because they are, by their very nature, arbitrary and contingent; there are always things that could be otherwise. This contingency is precisely what underpins the political relevance of facts for Arendt. All governments have an interest in the elimination of inconvenient facts and can only do so by transforming them into opinions. This is what is meant by 'spin'. Opinion may be disputed or manipulated, whilst brute facts may not. Put simply, Hannah Arendt argued, "it may be in the nature of the political realm as such, to be at war with truth in all its forms", to act in hostility to it – and to awkward truth tellers (Arendt, 1967 [2010]).

This is to locate the contemporary rise of 'information war' within the historical weave of international politics. There is, in international politics, nothing new about propaganda, spin, nation branding, ideology, or the attempt to define uncomfortable fact as mere opinion. Releasing factually accurate information for strategic ends, becomes an act of information *war* inasmuch as it is claimed to be a part of a systematic campaign of disinformation or false information. So, 'information war' is always a term of ethical critique which is deployed by state communicators to mark the presence of the intent to mislead, lie, or misinform. The very term is to some degree *expletory* in function. Much the same may be said for the accusation that something constitutes 'fake news', as Donald Trump shows when lamenting his critics in the 'fake news media' (Althuis and Haiden 2019). The tendency to present that with which you disagree as an intentionally fabricated falsehood is not, of course, new to international political discourse either. Blunt falsehoods, however, tend over time to be noticeable, as Arendt observed, and to show up of their own accord in the historical record. Liars, disseminators, manipulators, and fake news spreaders run the gauntlet of being found out in world politics. For both weak and strong actors in IR, there are also considerable benefits to being recognized as reliable or credible. You can continue to function effectively in world politics only as long as some audiences, domestic and international, still find you credible.

Arendt suggested that the great challenge in modern politics may be to preserve oneself from one's own lies. Persistent spin and misinformation about conduct of world politics have long posed a challenge to other actors, as can be seen in, e.g., the British self-perception (forged over many decades) and its effects in the lead up to, conduct and aftermath of the Brexit referendum (Manners, 2018). But with the techniques sharpened during the last century in the advertising and 'nation brand-

ing' industries it has become possible for the very boundaries between truth and fiction to blur, even for the enunciators of manifestly fictive statements. Such blurring is greatly facilitated, today, by the manner in which new user-content-driven platforms and news sites borrow content from each other, and thus appear to provide multi-source corroboration for claims. This gives rise of the phenomenon which Castells refers to as 'electronic autism', which isolates social imaginaries and political opinion-groupings from one another online into hermetically sealed worlds (Castells, 2009). Some blatant untruths, such as the 'fact' of Obama's missing birth certificate for example, gain traction with repetition. It may be an effect of the pervasiveness of social media that self-deception, or maintaining partial perspectives, has become increasingly necessary to success in political communications. In politicians' attraction to stories that suit them, state strategic communicators may increasingly fool themselves, which may give rise, on the one hand, to popular cynicism, but on the other to frightening levels of credulity for convenient untruths. The dangerous implications of rising credulity in policy circles may far outweigh the implications of rising public cynicism. Perhaps it is the return of passionate 'truth'-telling that should concern us most today?

STRATEGIES, SUSPICIONS AND SCHOLARSHIP

There are grounds for suspicion of the increasingly common representation of international relations as about competitive storytelling or strategic-narrating. What is apparently new in the current environment is that what an actor argues is increasingly less important than their ability to establish the temporary authority of their narrative amidst the chaos online. This obviously breeds fragility in international relationships, and instability in international order. It is in this context that communications expertise matters, as a problem for scholars and in particular for IR scholarship. As Rychnovská and Kohut highlight below, expertise in information war, counter-radicalization and counter-subversion are a growth industry. Expert networks are often opaque yet their influence on events, as well as on framing policy responses to events, can be significant. Expertise in communications matters, inasmuch as it defines the spheres of practice where truth and power now directly meet (see Michelsen and Colley, 2019).

The concept of a 'strategic narrative' is an idea that seems to chime with the long-standing academic demand that scholars and policymakers should *pay more attention to discourse* (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle, 2014). It is not by accident that this idea has been institutionalised amongst practitioners and policy makers just as many IR scholars are turning away from matters of discourse for being 'old hat'. A curious loss of faith in the value of work after the linguistic turn within 'critical' IR today has accompanied the rise of post-truth politics 'out there' in the real world. This returns us to the role of the scholar in a 'post-truth era': How can scholars respond

to the demands of this age? How have they responded in the past, and what new conundrums are there for the practice of academic critique in particular?

The articles and essay contributions in this special issue address the problem of post-truth-telling from a variety of standpoints. Colin Wight gets us off to a spirited – and provocative – start with a polemical essay[1] against the rise of post-truth in academia, which he associates with standpoint epistemology and the ideology of lived experience as a condition for truth claiming. Academia, Wight argues, cannot function if it believes that the ideal of objective truth is simply a cipher for ideology. Wight sets out the case for philosophical realism, and explaining why we cannot live, let alone study, International Relations without some ontological sense of a "reality independent of human thought." Wight traces post-truth politics back to its roots in academic debates. Whilst the post-truth condition is obviously not just down to academics, he argues that we clearly have some responsibility in having set the conditions for post-truth and have a correlated responsibility to "say that some perspectives are better than others and explain why".

Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen opens the series of peer-reviewed research articles on post-truth with a reading of Arendt and an attempt to settle the issue of conceptual definition: What does the concept of 'a post-truth politics' mean? How can we distinguish careless speech from lies or, indeed, 'bullshit'? Hyvönen suggests that we treat "post-truth as an event of crystallization that brings into view a longer trajectory". In distinguishing post-truth and careless speech from spin, propaganda, PR, paranoia, and simple 'bullshit' (as Harry Frankfurt defines it), Hyvönen establishes the grounds for an assessment of the role of truth telling in politics today, grounded in a rigorous philosophical treatment of Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault, amongst others. Moreover, he links the rise of post-truth to a wider decline in the 'immaterial public infrastructure' of Western societies, which suggests ways in which post-truth may be addressed socio-politically.

Doing so, however, will be challenging and would likely be challenged by those with vested interests in particular constellations of power/knowledge. Rychnovská and Kohut conduct a social network analysis of expertise in information war currently in operation in the Czech Republic. Their paper examines the securitization of informational disorder in the context of a wave of anxiety about Russia's contemporary role in Europe. In deploying social network analysis to study expertise in this area, Rychnovská and Kohut show how a community of Czech information war experts has evolved and is structured, and they seek to shed light on the role of these actors in framing debates and setting the agenda for public policy. In this way, we see the political impacts of the rise of anxiety about a so-called post-truth condition as well as the ways in which such anxiety serves certain actors and agendas rather well. Their analysis also suggests the ways in which those claiming to be truth-tellers obscure as much as they reveal, which can have political consequences for states as

well as populations. For example, by framing these issues as external threats, what internal cracks and schisms does Czech policy fail to address?

Hannah Marshall and Alena Drieschova take a close look at the British vote to exit the European Union, and the argument that this decision is emblematic of post-truth politics. They argue that two factors are at stake in this event, which suggest that 'post-truth' may be an appropriate term in this case: technological changes combined with public distrust of national and international institutions to foster a new kind of voter; passionate, engaged, but also credulous or wilfully blinkered. A combination of "a decline in trust of politicians and experts with social media reliance" has, they argue, "driven the public to emotionally charged, value-based decision making." This article concludes that one of the lessons of Brexit should be that scholarship pays "heightened attention to the people as active shapers, not just passive recipients, of the political regimes they live in." In critical IR scholarship, which is often dominated by structuralist thinking, this return of agency is a refreshing take on the ill wind of post-truth.

Nicholas Michelsen then turns the discussion towards the significance of the 'post-truth' condition for the academic field of IR. Taking as his launch point the centenary of the academic discipline's supposed founding after World War One in the hope of usefully preventing war, the article charts the complex history of IR's accounts of the usefulness of its intellectual labour. Michelsen observes that this history shows the initial 'publicist' orientation of the discipline giving way to the victory of monist truth-seeking over communicability. This in turn has led to today's cacophony of mutually and externally unintelligible IR theories, a predicament that merges with the conditions of a post-truth world. In this situation, he suggests, it is now more important than ever for IR to recover the 'publicist' register that has been marginalised in the discipline of IR's disciplinary self-understanding. In this sense, he argues, "the centenary of 1919 provides an opportunity to rekindle debate about IR's usefulness by focussing attention on how the discipline might better communicate with diverse global publics in our so-called post-truth era".

Kjersti Lohne closes out the special section with a personal political reflection on the challenges that beset scholars engaging with the world in the post-truth era. She reflects on the challenges of researching and teaching about international criminal justice and military tribunals in an age when the very idea of universality is, like truth, under attack from all sides. What once seemed critical and emancipatory, laying out the challenge to universal claims about humanity and law, now appears part of the corrosive common sense of our era of 'alternative facts'. But we can't simply forget our critical insights, can we? Lohne reveals how this tension creates 'moments of awkwardness' when engaging through both research and teaching.

How we deal with such awkwardness and difficulty will determine how IR scholars respond to the challenges – and opportunities – of post-truth. This will, in turn,

have significant consequences for the discipline of International Relations and its relevance in and use to the world beyond academia.

ENDNOTES

[1] The Research Articles (Hyvönen; Rychnovská and Kohut; Marshall and Drieschova; Michelsen) were blind peer reviewed, whereas the essays (Wight; Lohne) were not.

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Post-Truth, Postmodernism and Alternative Facts

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since post-truth was declared to be the word of the year by the Oxford English Dictionary in 2016 there has been an explosion of commentary on the issue (Ball, 2017; D'Ancona, 2017; Davis, 2017; Keyes, 2004; Levitin, 2016). Although the dictionary account of the term is clear, its use in much of the subsequent analysis has piled confusion on top of confusion. When the term initially emerged, I had thought that it would be a temporary phenomenon. I expected it to glow brightly and then disappear ever so silently from the public gaze. After all, who could seriously believe that truth did not matter? We depend on truth in every moment of our lives. Anyone wanting to test the truth of that assertion is welcome to attempt to cross roads without checking to see if it is true that there is no traffic hurtling towards them. Alternatively, how about, is this fluid truly water, or poison? Our continued existence and our communications depend on truth. Not only that but in what is one of the oldest paradoxes known to philosophy, truth cannot be denied without affirming it; is it true that there is no such thing as truth? So, can anyone seriously think that truth does not matter?

The answer to that question came in a stunning exchange between Rudy Giuliani, President Trump's lawyer, and NBC host Chuck Todd. The exchange began with Mr Todd asking Mr Giuliani whether the Trump team was stalling about a possible testimony at the inquiry led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into alleged meddling by Russia in the 2016 US election. Mr Giuliani replied: "I'm not going to be rushed into having him testify so he can be trapped into perjury... When you tell me that he should testify because he's going to tell the truth and he shouldn't worry, well that's so silly because it's somebody's version of the truth. Not the truth."

When Todd countered that "truth is truth", Mr Giuliani exclaimed: "Truth isn't truth". So Truth apparently isn't truth (Morin and Cohen, 2018). Giuliani's comment on truth was met with outrage and scorn from all sides of the political spectrum, and left without further explanation, deservedly so. However, one day later Giuliani clarified his meaning. His explanation comes down to a version of "he said, she

said"; a position that in the context of attempts to reduce the #metoo movement to just that, probably resonates with everyone (Murray, 2018). On the surface, and extending the principle of charity to Giuliani, his position makes some sense. But it also reveals how impoverished the debate around truth has become. What is missing, and has been for some time, is both a view of truth as multi-dimensional and an acceptance of the concept of 'objective truth' that is not epistemological. Under the dead weight of identity politics, we now seem happy to take seriously claims that I can have my truth and you can have yours (Fukuyama, 2018; see also Hyvö-nen, this volume). Standpoint epistemology and the concept of 'lived experience' both add to this view of truth as only ever something that is either subjective (my truth, your truth) or intersubjective (our truth), but never the truth (objective truth).

However, without the concept of objective truth as a standard against which to hold subjective and intersubjective claims to be in possession of the truth, then all truth claims have to be taken at face value. For what grounds do we have to reject them? I cannot provide a complete answer in a piece such as this, but I do want to scope out the beginnings of a diagnosis. To that end, the piece first sets out a brief defence of objective truth, although what I mean by that will, I suspect, be very different to how it is typically understood. Then, I will briefly examine the role of academics in the post-truth era and suggest that while postmodernism is not to blame, it is not entirely off the hook either. Much of what follows is highly schematic, and word limits preclude me from a more nuanced discussion. Hence the polemic.

KNOWLEDGE, REALITY AND OBJECTIVE TRUTH

A classic distinction, dating back at least to Plato, is that between Doxa and Episteme. Doxa is an ancient Greek word meaning common belief or popular opinion. Plato used the concept of Doxa to criticise Athenian democracy, believing that common belief and popular opinion were easily manipulated. Plato, it seems, was an early theorist and critic of populism, an issue, of course, that has contemporary relevance with the post-truth era. Plato set Doxa against Episteme or knowledge. For Plato, Doxa and Episteme were in opposition and Doxa represented a threat to the purity of real knowledge. Aristotle took a different view and believed that Doxa was a necessary moment on the road to knowledge and coined the term Endoxa to denote received knowledge that has passed the test of time and been subject to a crucial critique through argument. The Greeks also used another term for knowledge, which refers to a particular personal kind of knowledge. This was Gnosis; knowledge based on personal experience. Again, this relates to standpoint epistemology, as well as the idea much abused in contemporary debates around 'lived experience'.

The difference between Doxa and Episteme is central to epistemology. What is the difference between believing something and knowing something? There is no easy answer to this, although philosophers have debated the issue for centuries. However,

there is no doubt such a distinction is necessary, and we probably all make such distinctions all of the time. Science can be understood to have formalised this distinction and devised a set of procedures that allow the distinction, with varying degrees of confidence, to be quantified. Note, however, that science rarely if ever claims to know something with 100% certainty. In this sense, science can be understood to be a process that specifies differing levels of uncertainty without ever reaching the position of certainty. Alternatively, as Sophie Lewis and Allie Gallant have put it, "In science, the only certainty is uncertainty" (Lewis and Gallant, 2013). However, this level of uncertainty was based on Episteme, not Doxa. Or to put it another way, science has a set of robust procedures that allow it to differentiate belief (Doxa) from knowledge (Episteme). In the post-truth era, on the other hand, Doxa and Gnosis seem to have displaced Episteme, at least in the public domain, as the dominant form of knowledge. This idea of Doxa as the dominant set of beliefs has, of course, been raised by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977) and used to effective ends in practice orientated IR (Monk, 2018). But the role of any properly reflexive social science should, at a minimum, be to examine those dominant beliefs and subject them to scrutiny and critique in the hope of moving beyond Doxa to Episteme. Whether the contemporary social sciences can fulfil that role is another matter.

Ironically, presumably what accounts for Doxa and Gnosis' appeal among non-scientists is that while Episteme deals with varying degrees of uncertainty, both Doxa and Gnosis provide certainty. If someone believes something, it is not possible that he or she can doubt that that is their belief. So if you experience (Gnosis) something as a microaggression that offends you, it makes no sense to say you are not offended. What we can do is to say that that belief is wrong, or that the feeling of offence is misplaced if we take into account the context in which the microaggression is thought to have occurred. Both of these gestures point to something external to the Doxastic belief and the Gnostic experience. They both point to a reality beyond the belief and a reality beyond that which is experienced.

I have tried to point out the necessity of this commitment to philosophical realism in a series of exchanges with David Campbell (Campbell, 1999; Wight, 1999a), Roxanne Lynn Doty (Doty, 1997; Wight, 1999b), Friedrich Kratochwil (Kratochwil, 2007; Wight, 2007a; Wight, 2007b), and Patrick Jackson (Jackson, 2008; Wight, 2008; Wight, 2013). I am not going to go so far as say that I knew post-truth was coming, but I always thought it was possible. Being proved right gives me no feelings of pleasure.

Of course, no one rejects the fact of a reality independent of human thought. Surely, all that is being argued is that reality can be described in multiple ways and those descriptions come to take on a reality of their own that then becomes the reality we encounter. So far, so acceptable, although I am not sure what is particularly radical about this position. It is true, but it is also trivial. Also, this does not mean the

independent reality moves out of the picture. The concept of an elephant may be a social construction replete with meaning and cultural significance that varies across time and place. However, it does not matter what a particular culture believes about an elephant if one is bearing down on you; it is probably best to get out of the way. Much the same is true of volcanoes. They can be described as forces of nature or the wrath of the Gods. However, if you are close to one when it erupts the result is the same. Reality does not care much for how we describe it. Getting the meaning of something completely wrong can have severe consequences for us. Getting our descriptions of the world right, or at least as right as possible, is, in most circumstances, what we mean by truth.

This points to something important about how the concept of reality is inextricably linked to the concept of truth, and how confusion over the concept of objectivity obscures this relationship. If we all accept the existence of a reality independent of thought, then what is truth and what is objectivity? Let us deal with objectivity first. There is much confusion about this and the uses of terms such as 'objective reality' and 'objective truth' only add to the lack of clarity on this issue. Many of these confusions arise from some vagueness about the concept of objectivity itself. Objectivity can be understood as a noun that describes a process where decisions and/or judgements are based, as much as possible, on facts and not personal beliefs or feelings. Being objective means attempting, as much as is possible, to maintain an unbiased stance in making judgements. Absolute objectivity may not be attainable in practice, but academics should aspire to it. Thus, for example, it would be wrong for me to award additional marks for a student essay just because I know that that student supports the same football team as I do, just as it would be wrong for me to mark down a student who supports a football team I dislike.

These, of course, are easy examples, and it is often difficult to distinguish the fact that you agree with the political conclusions of an essay from the overall judgement you form of the essay. Nonetheless, I believe all academics do aspire to this kind of objectivity, difficult as it may be to achieve. However, 'objective' is often used to mean something that is beyond dispute; the objective facts, for example; something beyond any and all doubt. We should not confuse the two uses. We aspire towards objectivity, understood as the attempt to not allow our biases to influence our research and judgements, but we can rarely if ever say with absolute certainty that we are in possession of the 'objective' facts.

However, the confusion between these two forms of objectivity and the rise of identity politics is in many respects one of the main drivers of post-truth. Identity politics is a plea for us to give up on any notion of objectivity in the sense of trying to remain unbiased. This is because identity politics privileges social location over facts. Identity politics demands that we see group loyalty as taking priority over facts. Loyalty under identity politics is to the group, not the facts. Indeed, pointing to facts

that run counter to the identity of a group one belongs to, could lead to expulsion from the group. Moreover, this is particularly the case if the very concept of 'objective truth' is denied.

The problem is that the concept of objective truth is tough to defend if it is understood solely as an epistemological category. Academics, quite rightly, refrain from claiming that they are in possession of objective truth. Indeed, few scientists would also claim to be in possession of it. Humans are fallible. No matter how convinced we are about the facts in front of us, there is always a chance we have something wrong. However, this concern about our fallibility should not lead us to reject the concept of objective truth. If we do reject it, we are left only with subjective truth (my truth) or intersubjective truth (our truth, or identity politics) as possible options.

To get around this problem we need to recover an ontological concept of truth, a truth that resides in the way the world is (or was), not in what we claim about the world. For example, consider the case of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370. The unexplained disappearance of this flight is probably the greatest aviation mystery of all time. We do not know what happened. There are many speculative theories but as yet no account of what happened. Nonetheless, something did happen. A suicidal pilot. A terrorist attack. Technical malfunction. Alien abduction. There is a truth about MH370; however, we do not know it yet. The commitment to ontological truth is what grounds the possibility of any and all truth claims being wrong. A commitment to objective truth is what makes error possible. This is a truth we strive to grasp, to bring into the realm of meaning, but such is the distance between it and our pronouncements that we can never say with absolute certainty that we are in possession of it. Even if new evidence were to emerge about the disappearance of MH370, such that we would be confident in a new explanation, there could still be parts of the truth puzzle we do not know. Hence, objective truth is objective, but our knowledge of it is always provisional, fallible, and approximate, never total.

UNDERSTANDING POST-TRUTH

Many of the commentaries on post-truth have attempted to locate the sources of it. Where does post-truth discourse come from, and who is responsible for producing it? There are some trends, processes and events that have contributed to the emergence of post-truth but concentrating attention on the production of misinformation or outright lies is nothing to do with the concept of post-truth. There is nothing new about politicians, elites, and the powerful telling lies, spinning, producing propaganda, dissembling, or bullshitting (Mearsheimer, 2013). Machiavellianism became a common term of political discourse precisely because it embodies Machiavelli's belief that all leaders might, at some point, need to lie (Machiavelli, 1988). Lying is not a political aberration; it is part of the essence of politics itself. Political theorist Leo Strauss, developing a concept first outlined by Plato, coined the term the 'noble

lie' to refer to a lie or untruth knowingly propagated by an elite to maintain social harmony or to advance an agenda (Strauss, 1952: 35).

Questions about the agents of post-truth, and attempts to locate the sources of political bullshit, are not issues concerning post-truth, which is not to say that such questions are not interesting, because they are. They are just not grasping what is new and specific about post-truth. If we look for post-truth in the realm of the production of disinformation, we will not find it. There is nothing new here. This is why so many are sceptical that the concept of post-truth represents anything new at all.

Not all haystacks contain needles. But if this is correct, then where is post-truth located, what is it and how did we get here? Post-truth resides not in the realm of production, but in the realm of reception. If lies, dissembling, spinning, propaganda and the production of bullshit have always been part and parcel of politics, then what has changed is how publics respond to them. The definition of post-truth makes this clear; post-truth refers to "circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016).

While this definition captures the essence of the problem, most academics, particularly those working in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS), will immediately identify one glaring problem with it. This is the concept of 'objective facts' and, of course, the related concept of 'objective truth'. One does not have to be a postmodernist to know that the concept of 'objective facts' isn't objective at all. Anyone with an awareness of the work of Thomas Kuhn (Kuhn, 1962), Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1972; Foucault and Gordon, 1980; Foucault et al., 1997), or Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, 1972; Wittgenstein, 1974) will know that facts are always contestable. If they were not, public debate on complex political issues would be easy. We could identify the objective facts and conduct politics on the basis of them.

Facts are social constructions (Searle, 1997; Hacking, 2000). If there were no humans, no human societies, and no human languages, there would be no facts. If, as seems likely, given our inability to tackle the great environmental issues of the day, humans were to become extinct, there would still be states of affairs and ways the world is, but no facts. However, facts are a particular kind of socially constructed entity, and there is a difference between social facts and natural facts (Searle, 1997). Moreover, the fact that facts are social constructions does not entail that just any claim is a fact. Facts express a relationship between what we claim and the state of the world. Facts are those particular social constructions we use to describe states of affairs. We construct facts to convey information about the world. But this does not mean we can make up any facts we please. What makes something a fact is that it captures some features of the world to which it refers. The validity of our facts is dependent, in part, on their relationship to the world they describe. Something that

fails to describe something accurately, or some state of affairs, is not a fact. Of course, we do not have to claim that our socially constructed facts always describe the world in its totality, or that our facts are accurate. Sometimes we get the facts wrong or select the wrong facts to support our arguments. Of course, there are always other facts we could have highlighted. There might indeed be something like 'alternative facts'.

Alternative facts, isn't that nothing but a Trumpian trope? The idea is not as far-fetched as some might think. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is one of the most influential and widely read academic texts on the history of science. Kuhn's idea of paradigms has seeped into public debate. But Kuhn's idea of scientific 'progress' occurring through a change in paradigm not only legitimates alternative facts; it depends on them (Kuhn, 1962). Each paradigm, according to Kuhn, has its own facts. Facts in one paradigm will not even be recognised as facts by adherents of alternative paradigms. Facts, Kuhn argued, are always relative to the overarching paradigm. As such, Trump and his supporters might legitimately claim to be simply occupying a different paradigm. One can derive a similar position from Foucault's notion of regimes of truth (Foucault and Gordon, 1980; Foucault et al., 1997). Truth, according to Foucault, is relative to the regime in which it is embedded. And regimes of truth differ across time and place. Alternatively, one can approach this via Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of 'language games', where unless one understands the rules of the game, one is unable to take part (Wittgenstein, 1972). Transposed into contemporary political debate, the left and right each have their paradigm, regime of truth, or language game.

Even if we do not accept Kuhn's notion of paradigms, Kellyanne Conway could have meant, as she later tried to claim, that the Trump administration simply had a different perspective on the status of the facts, and a differing view of what facts matter (Pengelly, 2017). Again, most academics will recognise the validity of this idea. There are always multiple perspectives on complex issues. The facts, as we constantly remind our students, don't directly speak for themselves. Which facts matter, and what to make of them, is always a matter of interpretation. Thus, post-truth finds intellectual legitimation in the necessary and critical approach to the construction of knowledge that is an essential element of academia. Academics necessarily, and rightly, take a sceptical attitude to all truth claims. We encourage students to express their opinion. We teach them that alternative views are to be valued. Nietzschean perspectivism is the default position, and we are loath to reach definitive conclusions particularly in ethical and political matters (Hales and Welshon, 2000; Nietzsche, 1918).

However, Nietzschean perspectivism is often misunderstood, although to be fair Nietzsche was not wholly consistent on the matter (Hales and Welshon, 2000). The dominant, some might say postmodern, understanding of Nietzsche's perspectivism

tends to conclude that it leads to a denial of objectivity and rejects realism. I think this is incorrect. Realism is at the heart of Nietzschean perspectivism and leads to objectivity.

> There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing"; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be (Nietzsche, 1918).

Here Nietzsche makes clear that the more eyes (perspectives) that we bring to bear on one 'thing', the more complete (objective) will our concept of this 'thing' be. The 'thing' is the object we are studying, and it is singular, not multiple, and adding perspectives brings objectivity, not incommensurability (Wight, 1996). So although Nietzsche often appears as a staunch critic of the Enlightenment, it is clear that his account of perspectivism implies a commitment to realism and objective truth that the multiple perspectives are attempting to uncover.

However, without this commitment to realism and objective truth, the idea of perspectivism can easily drift into a relativist morass, where each perspective has its truth rather than functioning as one perspective among many on the objective truth. Ironically, it is Immanuel Kant, whose commitment to the Enlightenment is often counterposed to that of Nietzsche, who opens up space for a subjectivist account of truth. Kant's call to arms in the service of the Enlightenment was "sapere aude" – dare to know (Kant, 1784). This was a call for humanity to overthrow its reliance on the Church, the Monarchy and other sources of authority as providing the secure grounds for knowledge claims. Take nothing at face value, and reason for oneself. Taken within the context of the time of its writing Kant's advice seems sound. But our contemporary problem is not the articulation of space to reason for oneself against authoritarian sources of knowledge, but the kind of authoritarianism that comes from the rejection of the concept of objective truth. As Hannah Arendt puts it:

> The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exists (Arendt, 1967: 474).

When the concept of objective truth is abandoned, Kant's plea to reason for oneself becomes the ground upon which 'my truth' and 'our truth' take hold. Alongside this individualised approach to knowledge, the Enlightenment also promoted the idea of inalienable human rights possessed by each and every individual, and re-

vived the ancient Greek idea of democracy: one person, one vote; everyone has their say on political matters (Cassirer, 2009; Habermas, 1987). In this context, it is possible to view post-truth discourse as the radicalisation of the Enlightenment. Specifically, in the realm of knowledge production, it is the democratisation of epistemology.

While democracy might be a political principle worth defending, there is a tension between it and the democratisation of epistemology. Democracy needs a population sufficiently well-educated to be able to sift through the arguments and reach informed judgements. This was the great hope of Enlightenment liberalism, particularly concerning the provision of education. Increased access to education would bring progress and peace. A highly educated populace would make democracy function better. Even though by any standards western populations are now better educated than in Kant's time, we seem to be regressing rather than progressing in terms of democratic practice. This is the post-truth paradox. The more educated societies have become, the more dysfunctional democracy seems to be. The supposed positive link between democracy, education and knowledge seems to be broken.

ALMOST (NOT) BLAMING POSTMODERNISM

How can we explain this paradox, and can we do anything to address it? Although many have been quick to blame postmodernism, in particular, for the emergence of post-truth, the problem is much more extensive than that (Detmer, 2003). Postmodernism is only the most radical version of the idea that we should value, and allow a voice to, all opinions. The political impulse behind this is admirable. Few academics are so arrogant as to claim that they possess the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Allowing others, particularly marginalised others, to express 'their truth' is seen as progressive.

Although many academics will not embrace the extremes of postmodernism, the ethos behind that approach is understandable to most in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. This explains why what seems to many outside of the academy to be a lunatic fringe, has become so influential within the academy. Foucault, for example, is one of the most cited authors in HASS subjects.

To be clear, I am not arguing that Trump and others in his administration have read the likes of Kuhn, Foucault and Wittgenstein. The problem is worse than that. It is a structural issue. Increased access to education has suffused these ideas throughout the social field. Few people who have attended universities in the HASS subjects in the last 30 years could have escaped exposure to these ideas. The incipient relativism that is the logical endpoint of these ideas is now deeply ingrained in western societies.

Of course, academics are not the only source of post-truth. But in a significant way, they have contributed to it. When measuring our impact on society we only

have two options. Either we have some impact, or we do not. For some time now those working in HASS subjects have been concerned to demonstrate how their research and teaching matter in practical ways to society. As the supposed guardians of truth, knowledge and the commitment to science, universities cannot have it both ways. If academics make a difference and publics no longer seem to care about facts, truth and reason, then we cannot be absolved of all responsibility for this situation. Indeed, if we do deny our responsibility, we as good as admit that we have little impact on society.

If universities are the societal institutions whose function is to produce and protect knowledge and truth, and if those same institutions are, at least in part, the source of post-truth, what can we academics do about it? We need to be braver. We need to situate these critical approaches to the production of knowledge in context. We need to go beyond merely introducing students to critique and explore with them the validity of arguments. We need to be prepared to say that some perspectives are better than others and explain why. An embracing of multiple perspectives should not lead us to conclude that all perspectives are equally valid. And if they are not all equally valid, we need sound epistemological reasons to choose one over the other. In short, we need to re-examine and reinvigorate the Enlightenment impulse.

Second, we need to recover our commitment to objective truth. George Orwell has been much cited as a prescient figure in understanding post-truth. Orwell believed the following: "The very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world. Lies will pass into history." (McIntyre, 2018) Yet the concept of 'objective truth' has not merely faded out of the world; it has been sent into exile. Few academics embrace the concept today. This well-founded scepticism towards 'objective truth' comes from the confusion between an ontological belief in the existence of objective truth, and an epistemological claim to know it. The two are not synonymous. We can retain our critical stance to epistemological claims about objective truth only by insisting on its status as something that exists but which no one possesses.

As Orwell knew only too well, if the concept of objective truth is moved into the dustbin of history there can be no lies. And if there are no lies, there can be no justice, no rights and no wrongs. The concept of 'objective truth' is what makes claims about social justice possible. The irony, of course, is that most academics will claim to be doing just this. After all, most academics will have no problem in declaring climate change to be human-produced, that women remain disadvantaged in many areas of life, that poverty is real, and that racism is founded on false beliefs.

The issue is not that we all make these universal truth claims; it is that in embracing epistemological positions that tend towards relativism, we have denied ourselves a secure ground on which to defend them, in which case, these truth claims

appear as nothing other than opinions, perspectives, or expressions of the identity we most value. And if academics cannot ground their truth claims on something other than opinions, perspectives or identity, then how can we expect anyone else to do so?

CONCLUSION

Public discourse over contentious political issues seems to be spiralling ever deeper into a position where publics care less about the veracity of claims and more about whether they agree with them. Explaining why this is the case is beyond the scope of this piece. However, I suspect that declining levels of trust in the institutions of society are behind it. However, if there is no objective truth, then no one can be speaking truth to power, in which case, truth-seeking has been replaced by truth production. So while we are probably not in a post-truth age in the sense that truth does not exist, we are in an era where the concept of truth is used in ways that no longer align with what truth has traditionally been taken to mean. And in a situation where objective truth is no longer something we strive to achieve, and if we know all sides of the political spectrum are engaged in producing their own truth, then it makes perfect sense to align oneself with those truths one finds most amenable to one's own value system. Alternatively, to put it another way, if levels of trust in public institutions have declined to the extent that it is now assumed everyone is lying (although note that if there is no truth, there are no lies) then accepting the narrative that fits best with one's worldview makes perfect sense.

But while this seems to be a valid epistemological strategy, it is an ontological disaster zone. Whether we agree to the concept of objective truth or not, the world has a mode of being that stubbornly refuses to bend to our will. If we no longer care about this mode of being, its ultimate revenge will be on our humanistic and anthropomorphic arrogance. Perhaps, given our flights of fancy where we believe that we construct the world in our discourse, that is a revenge that will be wholly justified.

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Careless Speech:
Conceptualizing Post-Truth Politics[1]

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Abstract: The notion of post-truth politics has been insufficiently conceptualized, leaving its empirical viability questionable. As a response to this uncertainty, I seek to elaborate a concept of post-truth politics by comparing facts to public infrastructure, which I understand in an Arendtian fashion: as a condition that both limits and enables opinionated debate. I put forward an understanding of post-truth as a two-sided process brought about by mutually dependent structural factors contributing to the irrelevance of factual truths and a particular political style labelled careless speech. I place post-truth in a historical context and seek to distinguish it, particularly, from Harry Frankfurt's 'bullshit'. Bullshit works within the mindset of carefully crafted advertisement-speak. Careless speech seeks to create confusion and bring democratic debate to a halt. I also explicate some key economic, cultural, and media-related factors that contribute to the emergence of post-truth politics. The third section discusses effective practices of conveying truth in the public sphere. I critically analyze fact-checking, (Foucauldian) fearless speech (*parrhesia*) and storytelling, contrasting them to 'careless speech', and emphasize the need to address political structures in addition to more epistemologically-oriented solutions. I conclude with reflections on the economic-cultural background to factual infrastructure's disrepair, and highlight some future lines of inquiry in IR and Political Science.

Keywords: truth, post-truth, democracy, bullshit, Hannah Arendt, fact

INTRODUCTION: THE SAME OLD SAME OLD?

The empirical viability of the now fashionable epithet "post-truth politics" is questionable. The few scholarly studies thus far published on the topic have shed some light on the persuasiveness of "alternative facts" (Rodriguez Barrera et al., 2017) and the reasons behind the electoral success of Trump and the Leave campaign (Hopkin and Rosamond, 2017; Montgomery). Nevertheless and while the situation is evolving, it is still the case that "as yet, very little scholarly literature" has been published that would engage "directly with the concept of post-truth politics" (Lockie, 2016: 1).[2] I go further and argue that there is no satisfactory *concept* of post-truth at all, let alone of its politics.

While the term appears in an increasing number of studies, its meaning is mostly derived from popular discourse such as op-eds or the Oxford Dictionaries' defini-

tion.[3] I argue that for the term to do any scholarly work – which would allow us to think the phenomenon through or conduct empirical research on it – a more direct and thorough conceptual engagement is needed. Concepts, after all, are devised to make phenomena more clearly visible so that they can be properly analyzed. Engaging in the task of conceptualizing post-truth politics, furthermore, has the potential to productively broaden the ways in which truth is approached in Political Science and International Relations (IR).

My argument here is neither that we have entered a post-truth *era* (I suggest we leave eras to historians) nor that post-truth politics has emerged out of thin air. The present situation can be described as a continuation of a longer process of devaluing truth in political discussion. I propose we approach post-truth as an event of crystallization that brings into view a longer trajectory that has not fully captured our attention before. In other words, we should neither exclaim the emergence of something completely unforeseen, nor deny at the outset that anything noteworthy has happened regarding our relationship to truth. While lying has always been a part of politics, this does not mean that it is an ahistorical constant in terms of its specific forms. The reverse of truth, as Michel de Montaigne suggested, "has a hundred thousand shapes, and no definite limits" (Montaigne, 2004: 35).

While popular analyses of post-truth are incoherent, inflated, and somewhat vague, I insist with Hannah Arendt that we need to "become very humble [...] and listen closely to the popular language" because it alerts us to the possibility that a new event has occurred. It does this usually by coining and accepting a new word (Arendt, 1994: 311–312, 325n8). However, popular buzzwords often become clichés and their usage becomes so widespread that they escape meaningful definitions, which easily produces a skeptical reaction in social scientists. Yet, our skepticism often turns into analogical thinking that strengthens established thought-patterns, analytical frameworks, and research programs. This tends to make us *prima facie* inattentive to whatever novelties political experience may present to us. We dissolve the 'unknown' all too comfortably into the 'known' (e.g. totalitarianism into tyranny, post-truth into mere lying) (Arendt, 1994: 325n8; Nietzsche, 1968: 328/§608).

I therefore think we should grasp what Arendt called the "third impulse" of understanding, and at least entertain the possibility that there is, in Jane Suiter's words, an "important qualitative difference between the post-truth politician and the spin doctors of yore" (Suiter, 2016: 1; see also McIntyre, 2018: xiv). Naturally, this statement needs further explication. Thus, the present article seeks to carefully bring into view the novel aspects of our current predicament, distinguishing them from other phenomena, and, in a non-reductionist fashion, locating them into a historical and worldly context.

I suggest that post-truth ought to be understood as an erosion of simple factual truths, truths that technically anyone could verify.[4] Drawing from Arendt, I suggest that factual truth has a limited but indispensable role to play in pluralistic politics. Facts are comparable to the material environment, which both enables and limits democratic debate in important ways. I put forward an understanding of post-truth as a two-pronged process. Structurally, it emerges from several economic, media-related, and cultural factors that erode the 'common world' and make truth increasingly irrelevant in public discourse; from an agential point of view, it coincides with what I call "careless speech". The two sides are mutually dependent and symbiotically amplify each other.

Careless speech forms an antinomy to "fearless speech", the courageous act of telling the truth in the face of danger that Michel Foucault (2001; 2011a) analyzed in his lectures towards the end of his life. Careless speech also relates to an Arendtian understanding of 'care for the world' as a precondition of democratic politics (see, e.g., Honig, 2017: 38). For Arendt, the world is a shorthand for the common, political in-between space that both brings us together and separates us. It is a space in which things become public, i.e. objects of meaningful disagreement, and open themselves up to different perspectives. Crucially, the common world does not sustain itself, but requires care, attention and attendance. One of the main modalities for such care is democratic debate. Such debate is based on the acknowledgement that the participants disagree on something (an event, practice, law, or social development) that lies *between* them but shows itself differently to each of their perspectives.

Against the background of care thus defined, careless speech is meant to be taken literally as being "free from care", unconcerned not only with truth but also with the world as a common space in which things become public. It means an unwillingness to engage with other perspectives, a reluctance to accept that speech has repercussions and words matter. It involves creating uncertainty over whether what is said aloud is actually meant; it means believing that anything can be unsaid. Like Harry Frankfurt's notion of 'bullshit' – frequently invoked in reference to post-truth – careless speech is indifferent to its truth-value. Unlike the former, however, careless speech does not build on carefully crafted empty statements that sound good but are nearly devoid of meaning. Rather than trying to persuade, careless speech seeks to create confusion and bring democratic debate to a halt.

The first section of the article discusses the notion of truth and its relationship to politics. The second section provides a short genealogy of post-truth politics, distinguishing it from the previous modes of political mendacity (totalitarianism, propaganda, Public Relations [PR], and 'bullshit'). It also discusses structural factors contributing to the emergence of post-truth. The third section ponders possible channels for effectively conveying truth in the public sphere.[5] The concluding sec-

tion rehearses the key arguments of the article and offers some suggestions for further research in IR, political science, and political theory.

THE POLITICAL FACE OF TRUTH

The label 'post-truth' has been applied to the actions and *modi operandi* of a relatively broad variety of actors (the Leave campaign in the Brexit referendum, Trump, Orbán, Putin), and consequently, different types of truth have been evoked or, more regrettably, lumped together. Is post-truth about deviating from the 'truth' of liberalism? The death of expert knowledge? In order both to discern the potentially new elements in post-truth politics and to assess its significance for democratic politics, it is pivotal to make clear what kind of truth is in play.

Throughout the twentieth century, there was a movement in various strands of philosophy towards emancipating politics from the 'tyranny of truth'. So perhaps what we have today is the long-awaited liberation army? According to critics such as Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, all references to truth necessarily imply an idea of The Way Things Really Are, and hence lead to an anti-pluralistic essentialism (Rorty, 1989; Vattimo, 2014). However, what was rejected by these writers was both a very particular idea of what truth is and an equally particular idea of what role truth could play in politics. Truth, for them, is a conversation-stopper, a reference to inhuman authority that is supposed to dictate the direction our politics should take.

Influential for our current understanding of truth and politics is also the reception of Michel Foucault's thought in social sciences. Even though Foucault's own views are much more complex, the key takeaway from his work for many social scientists has been that truth and power are mutually dependent on each other (see, e.g., Foucault, 2014: 9). There is no truth without power, and vice versa, and hence the task of scholarly analysis is to explicate how truths are construed (and constructed), what their power effects are, and what kind of resistance they invite. Arguably, however, the current situation calls for a more careful attention to forms of government by *untruth*.

In the field of (mainly Anglophone) political theory, a movement towards a more multifaceted, rich engagement with truth started to emerge approximately a decade ago as a response to both theoretical cul-de-sacs and the acts of the George W. Bush administration (see especially Elkins and Norris, 2012). In fact, both Rorty and Foucault also provide useful, if somewhat condensed, suggestions in this direction. In an interview, Rorty makes an important distinction between the legitimate political concern for truthfulness and the "really technical" discussion on truth in analytic philosophy (Rorty, 2006: 57; Mendieta, 2017). Foucault, on the other hand, provides an intriguing formulation of the paradox emerging from the relationship between democracy and truth – namely, that democracy is dependent on 'true' discourse, yet the "death of true discourse [...] is inscribed in democracy" (Foucault,

2011b: 184). The questions raised by Rorty, Foucault and recent political theories had, nonetheless, already received an insightful treatment in Arendt's two essays on truth, lying, and politics published in 1968 and 1971. In the attempt to understand post-truth politics, I argue, her reflections are of great value.

In "Truth and Politics", Arendt makes a distinction between rational and factual truth (Arendt, 2006: 227–228).[6] The distinction simplifies a great deal, but it communicates an important insight nevertheless. Rational truths are truths relating to the 'life of the mind', i.e. human mental efforts. This category contains forms of truth whose opposite is not lie, but illusion and opinion (as opposed to philosophical truths) or error and ignorance (as opposed to scientific truths).[7] It also contains the Platonic 'true standards of human conduct' that were perhaps in Rorty's mind when he rejected the value of truth in a pluralistic democracy. Arendt, too, agrees that the philosophical strand of truth is rarely politically relevant, because it pleads to human beings in their singularity. Furthermore, it has more or less ceased to command obedience in the public sphere.[8] Her main concern is with the fate of factual truths, which indeed "constitute the very texture of the political realm" (Arendt, 2006: 227).

By facts, Arendt does not primarily mean what Mary Poovey (1998) has called "modern facts" – namely, numerical representations of scientific and technocratic knowledge. On the contrary, facts emerge from the deeds of plural human beings, as the Latin word *factum* ("things made", deed, action) suggests. This close relationship to action makes them contingent. Facts have "no conclusive reason whatever for being what they are". Moreover, factual truth depends upon testimony, on witnesses telling what they saw "with the eyes of the body" rather than the "eyes of the mind". This makes factual truth very vulnerable. Because of their contingent origin and their dependence on witnessing, "[f]acts and events are infinitely more fragile things than axioms, discoveries, theories. [...] Once they are lost, no rational effort will ever bring them back" (Arendt, 2006: 227, 233–234, 238).

Arendt characterizes politically relevant facts with such epithets as "brutally elementary data" and "modest verities". In the same fashion, Bernard Williams has talked about "plain" and "everyday truths" that are commonly known, but not defined by certainty (Williams, 2010: 10–12, 40). Arendt gives two particular examples for what she means by these elementary factual truths: that Germany invaded Belgium in the First World War, not the other way around, and that, contrary to later Soviet historiography, there was a man called Trotsky who played a significant role in the Russian Revolution (Arendt, 2006: 227, 234). That such facts are simple does not mean they are either self-evident or 'given'. Indeed, because of their inherent contingency, factual truths "are never compellingly true" and "never beyond doubt" (Arendt, 1972: 6). Furthermore, given that they are dependent on testimony, storytelling and historiography, their existence is without a doubt socially constructed. Facts are established, not found. Like everything else in politics, facts are *appear-*

ances, not a reflection of things as they are prior to any contact with human per-spective. Consequently, there are no absolute criteria demarcating truth from opin-ion, value, or the frame/discourse within which the facts are placed or from which they emerge.

Yet, this does not mean that we could have equally well established the opposite. Indeed, Arendt appears committed in her belief that factual truths of the "Germany invaded Belgium in August 1914" type are not easily contestable. She draws from the roots of *factum* in the word *fieri,* referring to becoming, and suggests that facts are what has *become*. From the perspective of the temporal present, they are what they are – and hence *haunt* us (Arendt, 2003: 270). It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the epistemic and philosophical complexities relating to this view. In terms of epistemic validity, it suffices to say that – *at least implicitly* – most schol-ars (and most others) tend to subscribe to some form of 'everyday realism' when it comes to facts in the abovementioned category. *These* are not the kinds of facts that usually invite inquiry into "what gets constructed as the factual" (Gholiagha, 2017: 25).

Politics, in Fact

What concerns us here is the *political* face of factual truths, and the mode of ob-jectivity demanded by political criteria. A skeptic might argue that if the types of fac-tual truth just described are indeed seldom analyzed from the perspective of power-relations and the social construction of 'the factual', it is because they are, mostly, irrelevant. The verities they contain are so 'modest' that nothing interesting follows from them. This argument, however, ought to be repudiated from two seem-ingly opposite perspectives.

On the one hand, factual truth – once it is established – acquires a status that from a political perspective appears as peremptory and despotic, because it is be-yond debate. The "validity" of an opinion, according to Arendt, consists of the amount of different viewpoints and other opinions it is capable of imagining and taking into account, as these make it more than a simple subjective fancy. A fact, in contrast, simply is what it is.[9] And whereas disturbing opinions can be rejected or ar-gued with, "unwelcome facts possess an infuriating stubbornness that nothing can move except plain lies" (Arendt, 2006: 236). Once something has been established as true, the debate cannot any more (at least primarily) be about its existence. Con-sequently, it is a deeply problematic and highly political act either to lie about the fac-tual data or to turn questions of fact into matters of opinion. As attempts to "change the record" such acts can and should be considered forms of political action (Arendt, 2006: 245). Something like this can be detected in the attempt to counter uncom-fortable facts with 'alternative facts', as if the facts themselves were a matter of opin-ion.

On the other hand, the clash between truth and politics only appears on the lowest level of human affairs, i.e. interest and power politics.[10] In a proper political discussion:

> Facts inform opinions, and opinions, inspired by different interests and passions, can differ widely and still be legitimate as long as they respect factual truth. Freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute. (Arendt, 2006: 234–237)

This explains the somewhat surprising conclusion according to which the seemingly anti-political notion of truth turns out to be more important for politics than the explicitly political principles of justice or freedom. Factual truth constitutes the basic fabric of that common world within which politics materializes. The world may be unjust or deprived of freedom, but it will not "be able to survive without men willing to do what Herodotus was the first to undertake consciously – namely, λέγειν τα ἐόντα, to say what is". (Arendt, 2006: 225)[11]

Democratic formation of opinions, in other words, requires that some facts are settled. This is the properly political task truth can perform. What Arendt means is nothing like the liberal market place of ideas, which is sometimes evoked as a process that leads to 'the truth' in the public sphere (Williams, 2010: 212–213). Instead of being distilled from the plurality of perspectives, truth invites and makes possible the expression of different viewpoints. Factual truth stands at the *beginning* of the processes of agonal debate, of wooing and persuasion, not at their end. Opinions depend on a minimal ground of shared facts so that they can be opinions *about something*, that is, different perspectives on something shared and not subjective whims. Thus, denying facts means undermining the basic infrastructure of politics.

What is at stake is the "common and factual reality itself, and this is indeed a political problem of the first order". Without its basis in facts, "the political realm is deprived not only of its main stabilizing force but of the starting point from which to change, to begin something new". Change is essentially about responding to past events and practices with an intention of changing the world. Without some stability, the new has no room to emerge; all that is left is a wobbling movement, an eternal present characterized by "constant shifting and shuffling in utter sterility" (Arendt, 2006: 232, 253–254).

Facts become meaningful only through the process of exchanging opinions about them, but opinions exist only when tested against each other, which in turn requires a shared factual background. In this understanding, non-fact-based opinions are not, strictly speaking, opinions but prejudices. This relates to the particular type of objectivity that, according to Arendt, corresponds to politics. Instead of the clinical God's-eye view we tend to associate with the word, objectivity in politics refers to

an ability to conceive the common world as constituted through multiple perspectives (Arendt, 1998: 137). Consequently, a political approach to factual truth must balance between anti-pluralistic objectivism and a subjectivism that does away with shared facts.

In order to concretize this idea of objectivity, we could compare factual truths (or *matters* of fact) to "public things", as the latter are defined by Bonnie Honig in her recent book. In Honig's usage, this phrase refers to the material infrastructure, (*very*) broadly construed, that gathers people together both physically and symbolically (Honig, 2017: 14–19, *passim*; see also Burdman, 2017: 8–9). Extending this notion of 'public things' to the immaterial realm allows us to see how the 'despotic' character of factual truth is similar to the limiting conditions of the material things that enable the constitution of a public. Facts thus become an enabling constraint, a limitation that at the same time performs the role of facilitating, encouraging and stimulating debate. A destruction of these limits would spell doom to the very conditions of possibility of these activities.

Similarly, taking care of the facts, telling the truth, can be conceived of as a practice of caring for the world. Indeed, it is "no less a world-building activity than the building of houses" (Arendt, 2003: 163). And as it is with physical infrastructure and political institutions, facts become a heap of meaningless statements if we cease to talk about them from our varying perspectives. The comparison is also helpful in that no one would expect guidelines on *what to do* from the material environment, just as no one would completely ignore the limitations it poses on our actions. Facts cannot resolve politics, but they ought to define the situation within which debate is burning. Still, the amount of potentially politically relevant facts, their combinations and the legitimate opinions they invite is countless. Politicizations, contestations and interventions of various types are capable of bringing about new debates about different sets of facts at any given moment.

Defining Post-Truth

Based on this conceptual elaboration, let us return to the issue of post-truth. Post-truth politics, I contend, ought to be understood as a predicament in which political speech is increasingly detached from a register in which factual truths are 'plain'. The idea of a world constituted by shared facts withers away, tampering with our ability to react to political events and to engage in a democratic process of opinion-formation. This definition differs in particular from those that equate post-truth with the death of expertise. It also diverges from what is perhaps the most influential definition of post-truth, i.e. the idea that "appeals to emotion dominate over facts" (Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache, 2016; Oxford Dictionaries, 2016; Suiter, 2016).[12] I do not find it sustainable to present emotions and truth as diametric opposites of each other. Defending truth might involve as much emotion as violating it. It is rather

a question of *specific uses* of affectivity in politics that, in part, produces the condition in which there is a decreasing demand for speakers to produce even the *semblance* of truthfulness.

Most potent examples of post-truth politics are instances in which outright lies about things that technically anyone could verify are used – albeit perhaps not always consciously – for various political purposes towards both adversaries and one's own supporters. This can mean, for instance, denying something obvious, trivial, or seemingly uncontroversial or making up an event that never happened. Both tendencies are frequent among the Trump administration, as exemplified by the dispute over the inauguration audience, and key Trump advisor Kellyanne Conway's invocation of a fictive Bowling Green massacre (see, e.g., Washington Post, 2017).[13]

Such claims, I argue, are not primarily attempts to convince or persuade. On the contrary, their main impact is the creation of confusion. They seek to make 'normal' political debate and critical scrutiny of policies impossible. Even the more conventional array of lies produced by Trump can be seen from this perspective. Many of his lies are lies about numbers or audience sizes (not just at the inauguration), misrepresentations of long-term processes in his own favor, or false statements about media coverage. In many of these cases, the originality resides not so much in the content, but in the sheer quantity of these lies, which in this case seems to turn into a quality. The carelessness and numerousness of these lies have the same effect as the denial of simple singular facts. When lies become prevalent enough, the media and democratic audience easily become disoriented, and lose the basic coordinates that usually support critical scrutiny.

By focusing on factual truths as the centers of gravity in post-truth politics, my aim is not to downplay the importance of scientific truths.[14] In fact, at least *some* scientific statements can be regarded as 'factual truths' in the realm of politics without thereby succumbing to anti-political scientism (Arendt, 1978; Burdman, 2017).[15] The existence of human-induced climate change would be the most obvious example of such a factual truth. Given the effective scientific consensus on the matter, and the vast political importance of it, climate change could be seen as a simple fact whose denial immediately becomes a political (even anti-democratic) act, but whose affirmation leaves the door open for opinionated debate over possible courses of action.

The conceptual definition provided still needs to be set into its historical context. What are the similarities and differences between what I have presented as post-truth and the lengthy historical variants of political mendacity? In order to properly distinguish post-truth from such issues as PR, propaganda, and bullshit, I will next turn to a short genealogy of post-truth politics focusing on the twentieth century. The exploration of the predecessors and enablers of post-truth's emergence paves the

way to the inquiry into contemporary modes of truth-telling and the discussion of possible future lines of inquiry in the final sections of the article.

A BRIEF GENEALOGY OF POST-TRUTH POLITICS

"Big Brother turns out to be Howdy Doody" (Neil Postman, 2005: 111)

Political speech has always been about twisting words and language to your own advantage. Lies have been among the basic tools of (power) politics, both domestic and international. However, several authors have suggested that due to economic, socio-political, and technological developments, the twentieth century introduced forms of political mendacity never seen before. I argue that post-truth can be seen as both a deviation and a derivation from twentieth century forms of mendacity. The phenomena discussed in this section – Public Relations (PR), bullshit, conspiracies, and totalitarian use of lies – constitute the key historical precedents and conditions of the possibility of post-truth.

From Totalitarianism to PR: Precedents of Post-Truth

The most radical point of comparison, and at the same time one often evoked in response to Trump, Putin and Orbán, is the totalitarian hatred of factual reality. After all, it was Adolf Hitler who, in *Mein Kampf*, famously noted that 'the masses' are more easily deceived by big lies than small ones (Hitler, 1943: 231–232). Accordingly, William Connolly has suggested that Trump should be read from the perspective of aspirational fascism, i.e. reliance on "grandiose bodily gestures, grimaces, Big Lies, hysterical charges, dramatic repetitions, and totalistic assertions that only he can clean up the 'mess'". Not all of this is related to untruthfulness. The point, however, is that these gestures "function as signals that allow his fans to hear a cluster of claims each time any one signal is repeated" and "create blocks against attending to discordant facts and perspectives" (Connolly, 2017: 11–19, *passim*). Such an effect can also be accomplished with a combination of facts. By putting individual facts together in a tendentious manner, one can easily give one's audience the ingredients of a fictive mixture while retaining one's own ability to claim the emergent meaning was unintended. A gulf is created between what is said and what is meant, which intervenes with the attempts to demand political responsibility.

Another feature of the rhetorical styles of Trump, Putin, and others that resonates with those of the 1930s is the 'Lügenpresse' (Lying Press) trope. The idea of this strategy is to undermine the credibility of media as tellers of factual truth and, consequently, the very idea of non-partisan reality in any sense whatsoever. Trump has indeed admitted that he attacks the media in order to discredit re-

porters so that "negative stories" about him would seem unreliable (see, e.g., Washington Post, 2018).

Yet, there are also important differences between the totalitarian movements, even before they seized power, and the politics we are witnessing today. The uniqueness of the totalitarian "lying world order" (Arendt, 1994: 354; Arendt, 1973: 353) had to do with the perverse combination of fictional elements and the faculty of logical reasoning. Simple but strict deduction was used to compellingly derive the most wonderful conclusions from the premises dictated by ideology. The lure of the movements was largely due to the consistency of the ideological system into which individual facts – true or fabricated – were placed and, sometimes, forced (Arendt, 1973: 351). Once the movement was in power, this 'logical system' was transformed into practice, so that reality was constantly created and recreated according to fictive premises. This eradicated the very distinction between fact and fiction.

The similarities notwithstanding, the logical element often seems lacking in the case of post-truth politics. We might find a semi-coherent worldview (or ideological baggage more casually understood) in Trump – or Putin or Orbán – but hardly an elaborate ideological system in the totalitarian sense of the word.[16] What seems to define their acts is a projected image of sheer power, even power over reality itself, but hardly a logical deduction from ideological premises.

Another important point of comparison is the 'Paranoid Style' of politics in the sense of that which was analyzed by Richard Hofstadter in the American context. This style is a way of doing politics characterized by "heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy" (Hofstadter, 1966: 3). These aspects are strongly present in contemporary politics. Particularly noteworthy is the use of conspiracy theories. Like totalitarian ideologies (in fact, conspiracies played a significant role in the rise of National Socialism), conspiracy theories tend to become coherent, all-embracing world-views. As Jonathan Kay notes, it is rare to find someone who believes only in one conspiracy. Once the trust is broken with the powers that be, it is easy to start seeing "everything through the same distrustful lens". If the government is lying about *one thing* (like the Iraqi WMDs), why would they not lie about other things too (UFOs, vaccines, 9/11)? What is more, the selective use of actual facts to create a fictional narrative of events can easily be more compelling *and* more comforting than the messy contingency of political realities. Conspiracy theories thus allow the denial of certain uncomfortable parts of reality either as somehow non-existing (e.g., 9/11) or illegitimate (e.g. the Obama presidency) (Kay, 2012: 57–64; Hofstadter, 1966: 29–37).

The likes of Trump, Putin and Orbán certainly rely on aspects of the paranoid style. By doing so, they are simply responding to a broader societal trend. Over the recent decades, the role of conspiracy theories has increased, as they have become fueled by the new opportunities created by the Internet (YouTube, blogs, discussion fo-

rums) and the mis-/disinformation websites posing as news media outlets. Trump and his supporters have made a notable use of different conspiracy theories. He made his most visible entrance into politics through the Obama birth certificate conspiracy. Early on, Trump also constantly showed his support for the climate change denialist cause, which continues to affect his policies.

In November 2012, Trump made the conspiracy dimension of his thinking clear by stating: "The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive" (@realDonaldTrump, Twitter, 6 November 2012). During his campaign, he made numerous conspiracy-related accusations against his opponents, most notably those in reference to Hillary Clinton's emails,[17] and suggested that both the media and the elections were "rigged". Even after the beginning of his term as President he has continued to engage conspiracy theories, such as the 'Obama wiretapping allegations'.[18]

Post-truth politics clearly, then, harks back to the tradition of the paranoid/conspiratorial style. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean it is *nothing but* a re-hash of the earlier forms of this tradition. The paranoid style itself has undergone significant historical variation due to, in particular, the evolution of mass media (Hofstadter, 1966: 19–24). As Kay points out, the rise of the Internet and fragmentation of the news media have given this particular style a visibility (and indeed a perceived credibility) that was never before attainable, which has translated into a new kind of impact on national policy and politics (Kay, 2012: 60–62). Even big players like Fox News give conspiracy theories (such as the Obama birth claims) airtime and credibility, especially in programs like *The Sean Hannity Show.* Considering the increased broadcasting opportunities for highly partisan media outlets (especially those on the right) and the echo chamber phenomena produced by social media, one can see that the *changes* in the tradition of the paranoid style are nearly as important as the continuities (on the transformation of the media environment, see Faris et al., 2017). Besides, not all elements of post-truth can be placed under the rubric of the paranoid style. Denial of simple facts, for example, is not always related to conspiracies. Thus, the paranoid style is best conceived as an element that the amalgam called post-truth politics has appropriated.

As a final set of precedents, PR-related 'image-making' and 'bullshit' are also worth mentioning. For Arendt, the former was a key example of the "modern lie", and bore a family resemblance to totalitarian attempts to create facts. The purpose of carefully crafted public images (whether of politicians or states) is to provide a full-fledged substitute for reality created with the aid of "business practices and Madison Avenue methods" (Arendt, 2006: 247; Arendt, 1972: 7–9). PR cherishes facts, but feels entitled to cherry pick those facts that suit its purposes and disregard others, not completely unlike the conspiracy theories discussed above (McIntyre, 2018: 10–11).

Due to the mass-mediated nature of our society, the image created by PR practices is usually much more visible than the 'original', so it tends to manage quite well in the task of substituting for reality, or perhaps overlaying it with a particular, filtered version of it. Indeed, it may happen that the image is defended more passionately that the reality it is supposed to represent, partly because the images also tend to become reality for their makers themselves (Arendt, 2006: 248–251). Arendt suggests that the rise of "what is euphemistically called public relations" during the 1960s and 1970s made Americans "forget the stark, naked brutality of facts, of things as they are", with reference to the Vietnam War in particular (Arendt, 2003: 261).[19] In a way, this substitution of model for reality is worse than the occasional outright lie, not least because it bears some resemblance to the 'emancipation' from reality seen in totalitarian ideology.

The elimination of contingency by carefully managing public images in PR takes us to Harry Frankfurt's useful conceptualization of bullshit, which indeed shares much with PR. Both differ from my characterization of post-truth because of their carefully crafted character, but they are still worth highlighting as precedents. In an interesting recent article, Jonathan Hopkin and Ben Rosamond discuss post-truth politics in Frankfurt's terms. They argue that the economic policy debates over the response to the sovereign debt crisis in the UK are instances of bullshit, which is characterized (unlike lies) by indifference towards the truth-value of statements. In other words, even technocratic argumentation that is often posited as the opposite of post-truth can in fact be seen as a part of the same phenomenon (Hopkin and Rosamond, 2017). However, if we consider the qualities that Frankfurt lists as signs of bullshit, clear differences from what I have been describing as post-truth politics start to emerge.

For Frankfurt, bullshit is "carefully wrought" and requires "thoughtful attention to detail" (Frankfurt, 2005: 22). It cannot be based on whim, but is produced by:

> exquisitely sophisticated craftsmen who – with the help of advanced and demanding techniques of market research, of public opinion polling, of psychological testing, and so forth – dedicate themselves tirelessly to getting every word and image they produce exactly right (Frankfurt, 2005): 23).

It would require a serious leap of faith to apply this description, verbatim, to Trump and other post-truth politicians. Presenting the current post-truth phenomenon in the terms of PR and bullshit leads to an a priori negation of any new elements in what we are witnessing today. Certainly, carefully and deliberately designed public images have not gone anywhere. However, to some extent the image of a post-truth politician could be described as a negation of the most prominent PR and bullshit trends of recent decades. To find archetypal bullshitters, one needs to look no fur-

ther than the likes of Blair, Cameron, (Bill) Clinton, or the neoliberal austerity politicians analyzed by Hopkin and Rosamond. They, however, are not full-blown post-truth politicians. Bullshitters' vocabularies are mixes of banalities, sound-bites created by advertising agencies, common sense 'truths' and corporate jargon: "responsibility", "tightening the belts", "benchmarks", and so forth. Careless speech, on the contrary, rather than selling a nicely packaged respectable character, breaches the very idea of such packaging. Rather than carefully spinning partial facts around a policy program, the political image of the post-truth politician is built around unpredictability, and carelessness regarding detail, but also the systematic use of blatant lies. Its main aim is not to persuade or convince, but to attract attention, confuse, and perplex. A bullshitter prefers not to be called out on their bullshit; the post-truth politician does not care.

Cynicism, Media, and Capitalism: Accounting for Post-Truth

I argue, then, that while bullshit may be the fertile ground from which post-truth politics sprouts, or even an element in it, the two are not synonyms. Equating post-truth with bullshit tends to reduce the issue to the rhetoric of individual politicians. In order to understand the issue more structurally, we need to understand what follows from the conquest of the public sphere(s) by PR and bullshit. Central here is the indifference to the truth-value of statements that, for Frankfurt, separates bullshit from traditional lies, which consciously negate the truth (Frankfurt, 2005: 4, 46–48, 54–61; Postman, 2005: 128). For Arendt, the result is "a peculiar kind of cynicism—an absolute refusal to believe in the truth of anything, no matter how well this truth may be established". In other words, "the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world – and the category of truth vs. falsehood is among the mental means to this end – is being destroyed" (Arendt, 2006: 252–253).

Indeed, something like this has in recent decades taken place in many countries, such as Russia and the US. In addition to the PR campaigns for politicians, the US has seen the emergence of a highly organized PR industry serving corporate interest by "the creation and dissemination of falsehoods supported by a media environment that aids and abets its work" (Rabin-Havt, 2016: 4–7). Along with socially engineered science denial, this has created the more general type of skepticism described by Arendt. Both media and citizens have increasingly adopted the view that there are always two sides to an issue and hence no definitive truth as such. While much of this is US-specific, similar developments have taken place elsewhere.

In Russia, several commentators have described the unique reality of post-Soviet capitalism in terms of living in a simulated reality. A combination of state controlled TV and a general ethos of moulding reality, as pictured in the writings of Peter Pomerantsev and the novels of Viktor Pelevin, creates a world in which "everything

is PR", or as Pomerantsev's title has it, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible* (Pomerantsev, 2015). The 'political technologies' applied by Putin seek to create the impression that everybody is lying anyway, so political struggle becomes a matter of creating the best lies and the most appealing character (e.g. Tallis, 2016: 8–9).

As all this indicates, the role of the media environment and of political communication during the last decades plays a pivotal role when it comes to understanding the conditions of possibility of post-truth politics. Media – not only the news media, but social media, reality TV, on-demand entertainment, etc. – structures our reality. Practitioners of post-truth capitalize on this feature, realizing that politics conceived in terms of entertainment relies – more than before – on the ability to grasp attention, to provide an opportunity for 'the people' to channel the emotions generated by their exposure to the version of reality presented by the current mediascape. They realize, in other words, that political communication is not only – or primarily – about transmitting information: it is about creation of subjectivities, transference of emotions, and crafting of identifications. Communication, in short, is the "constitutive operation of [...] sociality" (Albert at al., 2008: 65).

The erosion of shared facts and common sources of information plays an important role in post-truth politics. There have been other historical periods in which facts have yielded to prejudices and subjective whims. But according to a study of US politics conducted at the RAND Corporation, it is mistrust of information sources and the lack of shared facts that make the current situation potentially unique. Especially for the current disagreement over basic facts and their interpretations no clear precedents were found in the US history. Also mistrust of commonly recognized reliable sources of information "seems to be more pronounced now" (Kavanagh and Rich, 2018: xi–xiii, 72–73). Indeed, Americans' trust in mass media has dropped from 72% in 1976 (post-Watergate/Vietnam) to 32% today (McIntyre, 2018: 86).

It is hard to account for this without paying attention to the vast changes in the media environment. Two things are particularly worth noticing: the shift from newspapers to TV, and the significant evolution of TV news programming itself during the last decades. The former is rather easy to detect. The daily circulation of newspapers in the US has dropped to 36,7% of households in 2010 from 123,6% (*sic*) in the 1950s (McIntyre, 2018: 86).[20] There has been a huge shift from textual to audiovisual culture. In itself, this contains both promises for and challenges to the fact-based debate on political issues. Most relevant for the current argument is the fact that affectively charged images of events (or even fictional representations of them, as in the case of the United 93 flight) have started to shape popular interpretations of political events more than the phenomena themselves (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008: 131; Weber, 2008: 151). It is hard not to construe this as a challenge for facts in politics; but it should not lead us to dismiss visual culture as such. It is more specifically

the evolution of news that seems important for the post-truth phenomenon. Not only have ABC, CBS and NBC lost their monopoly, but the very concept of news has undergone tremendous change. Up until the 1960s and 1970s, news programming had not yet adopted the idea of constant streaming or, even more importantly, of making profit. This left much more time for background work and investigative journalism (McIntyre, 2018: 63–65).

Since the 1970s, however, cable news, the 24-hour news cycle, and the idea of making profit from news have turned news into entertainment, causing it to succumb to what Neil Postman described as the "now ... this" logic. The result, as Trump famously noted in *The Art of the Deal*, is that some news journalists love controversy more than truth. There is also an incentive to give more space to opinions, because it is easier to fill the airtime with opinions than with well-researched facts (McIntyre, 2018: 82). This has arguably contributed to the blurring of lines between opinions and facts. Postman further claimed that consequently, contrary to the Orwellian fear of truth being concealed, we should fear – with Huxley – that "the truth would be drowned in the sea of irrelevance" (Postman, 2005: xix, 99–120).

Social media adds its own twist to this. Several scholars have argued that social media not only amplifies basic social psychological tendencies towards bias (such as motivated reasoning), but also provides ever more powerful distractions from the emotional distress of contemporary capitalism. And this role makes us less and less receptive to facts (Gilroy-Ware, 2017: 168–185; McIntyre, 2018: 93). Social media has also shaped the whole mediascape, allowing, in particular, the creation of a radical right-wing media ecosystem capable of insulating its followers from nonconforming news and building active links to conspiracy sites (Farris et al., 2017).

REPAIR WORK: TRUTH-TELLING IN A POST-TRUTH CONTEXT

Post-truth politics – like most political phenomena – can be approached as a field of tendencies and counter-tendencies. Hence, before elaborating on some signposts for future research, I want to address – however briefly – the potential practices of effectively conveying truth in public discourse. Under conditions in which mendacity is *not* the dominant norm – let us assume that such conditions exist – truth-telling is not a politically central activity. "The mere telling of facts", Arendt notes, "leads to no action whatever" (Arendt, 2006: 246). This is not to say it is politically irrelevant. Like other non-political activities that ground politics, knowing and telling the truth contributes to the existence of a shared reality; it is a form of caring for the world.

Only on some occasions, however, does truth-telling become a world-*changing* activity. Sometimes the telling of uncomfortable and ignored truths – of social domination, for example – can transform the public realm. And in (exceptional) situations where mendacity is a general political principle, the truth-teller "has begun to

act; he, too, has engaged himself in political business, for [...] he has made a start toward changing the world" (Arendt, 2006: 245–247).

In scholarly literature, Foucauldian ruminations on frank/fearless speech (*parrhesia*) are among the most dominant approaches to truth-telling currently available. Foucault's late work provides indispensable reflections on the relationships between different modes of truth-telling (parrhesiastic/ethical, prophecy, wisdom, teaching), whose mutual combinations form various "regimes of truth" in different societies (Foucault, 2011: 13–28). However, while he pays considerable attention to the tensions between truth-telling and freedom of speech in democratic contexts, Foucault's emphasis is on the self-relation of the parrhesiast. The concrete worldly practices of telling the truth – especially *contemporary* ones – receive little attention from him. Others – most notably Cornel West – have applied the idea in a more tangible manner to various channels of 'speaking truth to power,' from free press to rap music, all of which have made vital contributions "not only to national but international political truth telling" (West, 2005: 39, 179–183).

This, however, expands the meaning of *parrhesia* significantly. Besides, there are reasons to suspect that the very idea of frank speech sits uneasily with democratic values. It is easily transposed into a "rhetoric of anti-rhetoric" and is too focused on the inner, psychological qualities of the speaker. It might even be the case that in our frustration with sweet-talking spin-doctors, we end up electing self-proclaimed 'straight shooters' who sell boorishness as truthfulness. "Free-spokedness", "telling it as it is", and so forth are exactly the qualities also claimed by those who are most inclined to bending the facts in political discourse (Markovits, 2008: 1–8, 33, 74).

In public discourse, fact-checking agencies – such as *PolitiFact* and *FactCheck.org* – have received much attention lately. Indeed, they contain promise, but cannot alone be considered as a solution to the problems of post-truth politics. By nature, fact-checking must remain somewhat reactive. Having to rely on the exact statements of political actors, it constantly faces the problem of distilling the factual substance from political speech, and distinguishing it from opinions and value claims. This can be difficult, and might also be somewhat ineffective unless accompanied by more robust practices of truth-telling.

As social psychologists and thinkers like Peter Sloterdijk have noted, we are quite capable of acting against our better knowledge, and, in any case, may submit to peer-pressure even when the evidence and our senses suggest otherwise (Sloterdijk, 1987: 5–6; McIntryre, 2018: 36–48). Indeed, *knowledge* of something is often not enough. We need not only tellers of truth – we also need a democratic audience capable of "acknowledging" facts and attending to them with due care (Zerilli, 2016: 118, 132–138).

What might be needed are truthful stories that engage their audiences on both visceral and cerebral levels.[21] Affectively poor, 'facts only' journalism does not gener-

ate site traffic because it fails to relate people to their worlds. Besides, fact-checking can lead to a 'back-fire effect' in which the corrections of disinformation help disseminate it, or can even strengthen the belief in it. On the other hand, studies have shown that even for most partisan subjects, a tipping point exists at which they must simply yield to evidence and adjust their beliefs (McIntyre, 2018: 48–51). This can be more effective if the political debate happens in a physical setting rather than online. Besides this, viscerally effective narratives and the rise of narrative journalism in general can also be conceived as constitutive of post-truth and the irrelevance of facts.[22]

Above all, it is central not to construe the issue as too narrowly epistemological. Before worrying about particular politicians getting their facts right, we might consider addressing the reasons behind the rise of the cynicism – such as the waning of the fact/fiction distinction – described in the previous section. Presently, we are approaching a point where we may recognize ourselves in Simon Blackburn's description of Soviet citizens:

> Upon hearing a purported piece of information, the reaction was not 'Is this true?' but 'Why is this person saying this? – What machinations or manipulations are going on here?' The question of truth did not, as it were, have the social space in which it could breathe (Blackburn, 2006: 10).

All this, combined with the preceding discussion about the cultural and economic constellation that contributes to the emergence of post-truth politics, should make clear that there are no easy solutions available. The factual fabric that constitutes our shared reality requires more than the simple act of knowing. Harking back to the material infrastructure metaphor once again, it is crucial to engage in practices of world-building that address the deeper socio-political problems in play. Just as, without our ability to take care of it, the physical world becomes a "heap of unrelated things", facts can also become a collection of irrelevant, unrelated, inconsequential statements without public spaces that would allow us to place them into context, have a debate about them, and acknowledge their weight. This, in turn, requires engaging societal, technological, and economic problems simultaneously with the practices of truth-telling.

LEARNING TO BUILD AFRESH

I have suggested that post-truth politics ought to be understood in terms of devaluation of factual truths in public debate. There seems to be something relatively unique in the contemporary irrelevance of factuality – the lack of a shared reality. This erasure of factuality was critically evaluated by comparing facts to 'public things', the limiting and enabling material environment that hosts democratic politics.

The transformation of the media, the rise of 'merchants of doubt', and various other factors emerging from contemporary neoliberal capitalism offer a perspective on the conditions of possibility of post-truth. What I dubbed careless speech, as opposed to carefully crafted, spotless public images, is a strategic response to these conditions. However, like the conceptualization itself, the argument for the phenomenon's novelty ought to be taken as a suggestion for further research, not as the final word on the subject. In any case, novelty is not necessarily the most pressing aspect of this phenomenon. History can inform our analysis of the present, but the focus should in any case lie in the changing technological, ideological, economic, and political specificities.

The conceptualization of post-truth politics tentatively advanced in this article has several consequences for the ways in which we conduct inquiry in IR and political science. It requires that we start asking different questions in our research. It also calls attention to the ways in which our methodological apparatuses – and the styles of thinking they induce – prevent us from taking note of important political tendencies such as systematic mendacity. As was mentioned before, we are primarily attuned to the creation of facts in and by discourses, their framing or selection. Now, we must learn to study political speech that is largely untruthful. We have to start asking questions such as: what kinds of discourses constitute our shared world in such a way that deviations from commonly 'known' facts are considered politically acceptable or even preferable?

There are important resources especially in critical, post-positivist, and feminist IR and political science for such endeavors. Interesting empirical research could be conducted, for instance, on the differences between the traditional political liar and careless speech. In speech act theory's vocabulary, this could be expressed as a difference of perlocutionary intentions and studied in detail. Further, the resonances between post-truth politics and certain modes of masculinity and misogyny need to be thoroughly explored. Also, work done under the auspices of the 'affective turn' further helps us to avoid the repetition of the dated dichotomies between reason and emotion. This allows analysis to focus on the complex circuits of affects and discourse (textual, bodily, visual, and auditory-sonorous communication) in the production of post-truth and its counter-forces. Such an analysis, accompanied by a narrative inquiry, could shed important light on the impact of mendacity and fact-checking and on successful practices of telling the truth. The full utilization of such resources, however, requires both (1) a reorientation with reference to facts and (2) the assumption of political responsibility beyond 'mere' critique, in the mode of caring for the common world and building the (immaterial) infrastructure that hosts democratic politics.[22]

One potential line of further inquiry worth mentioning relates to the genealogy sketched in the present article, which could be significantly extended (and, no doubt,

challenged and improved). Indeed, there is an urgent need for more research on the cultural, economic and political processes that underlie our current predicament and its future trajectories. This could mean, on the most obvious level, focusing on the changes in the media, and tracking their consequences for politics more systematically than has been done thus far. The impact of social media, in particular, seems worthy of more attention. The role of big business in the production of post-truth politics, through engineered science skepticism, for instance, is also in need of further analysis.

Expanding the genealogy could also imply more careful scrutiny of the cultural-economic background of post-truth politics. Recalling my comparison of facts to public things, it is noteworthy that according to Honig the neoliberal focus on business spirit, austerity, and 'effectivity' has made us less and less capable of imagining a "world-building project that is not entrepreneurial by nature". We have become incapable of appreciating the *publicness* of public things (Honig, 2017: 14–19, *passim*). Something similar is taking place, I argue, in our relation to facts.

Like public things, facts cease to matter to us and cease to receive the care and consideration they demand in democracy. We apply the logic of commodities to the factual matter. We feel entitled to 'purchase' our own 'facts' instead of attending with due care to the sometimes uncomfortable factual infrastructure we share with others. In fact, given that the nature of commodities themselves has changed during the recent decades, one is tempted to take one more step. In a 'service and sales'-dominated economy that sells 'experiences', physical objects play a role that is more ambiguous, fluid, and affective compared to the simple instrumentality of the manufacturing era.

On a phenomenological level, it could be worth considering if our relationship to facts has something *directly* to do with our changing relationship to physical things. We simply have less and less experience of things defined by stubborn objective thereness (think, for example, of physical recordings versus on-demand streaming of music/movies); of public infrastructure demanding our collective attention (not that of the privatized maintenance company), we know even less.

It is my hope that attending to these issues on the level of research will foster our ability to articulate and welcome some of the central, though sometimes uncomfortable, facts of our age when, as Arendt once put it, they have "come home to roost" (Arendt, 2003: 275). Scholars, together with artists, journalists, and others, have always been tellers of difficult truths. This role needs to be adopted with new vigor as well as adapted to contemporary realities.

ENDNOTES

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[2] See, however, McIntyre, 2018. In my view, McIntyre's book is an important discussion opener, but fails to touch upon many of the political subtleties at play in the phenomenon, and also falls somewhat short in the conceptual explication of it.

[3] This definition, which will be criticized below, is the following: "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016).

[4] As others have also pointed out, the "post" in "post-truth" should not be taken to straightforwardly refer to a 'past' in the temporal sense, but rather to eclipse or decay (McIntyre, 2018: 5). Thus, there has never been a golden age of facts, *contra* both critics and proponents of the post-truth diagnosis (Rübner Hansen and Møller Stahl 2016; Suiter 2016).

[5] My interest lies in the political practices of truth-telling instead of the morals of public truthfulness and mendacity, which have been analyzed in some detail by other authors (Bok, 2011; Jay, 2010; Williams, 2010).

[6] To be precise, Arendt says she "shall use this distinction for the sake of convenience without discussing its intrinsic legitimacy", and locates the origin of the distinction in Leibniz (Arendt, 2006: 226).

[7] This statement means simply that *within science itself*, the problem truth (which can be understood in, say, pragmatist terms as well as realistic ones) has to face is not lying and willing deception, but the very limits of our current knowledge that science constantly seeks to overcome.

[8] The cases in which a philosophical truth becomes politically relevant mostly lead to tyranny or to the transformation of the 'self-evident' truths into opinions, like in the Declaration of Independence through the utterance of "*We hold* these truths to be self-evident". The only way to avoid these options is for philosophical truths to become embodied (e.g. in Socrates and Jesus of Nazareth) and thus set an example that can persuade by inspiration (Arendt, 2006: 242–244). This idea interestingly ties Arendt to Foucault's celebration of "living the truth" in his *Courage of Truth* lectures (Foucault, 2011; Prozorov, 2015).

[9] Philosophically, Arendt is here in her Kantian gear – but there is also an interesting overlap between the Kant of the Third *Critique* and Nietzsche on this issue, given that the latter states in the *Genealogy of Morals* that "There is only a seeing from a perspective, only a 'knowing' from a perspective, and the *more* emotions we express over a thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we train on the same thing, the more complete will be our 'idea' of that thing, our 'objectivity'" (Nietzsche, 2003: 86).

[10] Arendt indeed fundamentally challenges the common view that "politics is always *Herrschaft* (dominium)" (Kratochwil, 2017: 8; cf. e.g. Markell, 2006).

[11] For the sake of readability, I have retained Arendt's consistent use of masculine pronouns in direct quotations.

[12] While Laybats and Tredinnick emphasize the inescapability of emotional aspects in decision-making, their (largely borrowed) definition of post-truth reproduces the dichotomy between facts and rationality on the one side and post-truth and emotions on the other (Laybats and Tredinnick, 2016).

[13] In an interview on MSNBC on Feb. 2, 2017, Conway spoke about two Iraqis who "were the masterminds behind the Bowling Green massacre. [...] It didn't get covered." It also, as many were quick to note, did not take place. Conway admitted she had misspoken the next day.

[14] By this term, my aim is not to side with the realist position within the metatheoretical debates of political science. As I hope my explication will make clear, it is possible to talk about 'scientific truths' without necessarily committing to the view that science aims at truth-like propositions.

[15] Relatedly, Williams argues that not all 'plain truths' need to be visible to the bare eye, as some can require the use of instruments (Williams, 2010: 40).

[16] It is worth emphasizing that I am not denying that post-truth politicians have an ideology in the casual sense of the word. My comments relate strictly to the logical, systematic forms of ideology that Arendt detected in totalitarian movements.

[17] There is some evidence that the so-called 'Pizzagate' conspiracy was well received among Trump supporters, even though he did not openly endorse it (it has been speculated that Michael Flynn was forced out of then-President-elect Trump's transition team for having retweeted Pizzagate conspiracy material).

[18] On March 4, 2017, likely reacting to a story on Fox News, Trump tweeted that President Obama had had his "wires tapped" at Trump Tower (see McIntyre, 2018: 166–167).

[19] What the Pentagon Papers revealed, according to Arendt, was the primacy of image over reality, on the one hand, and the power of game theoretical models in decision-making, on the other. Both tendencies played a role in overruling the factual data provided by the intelligence community and the secession of policy from facts (Arendt, 1972: 5–10; Guaraldo, 2008: 208–209). While the field of PR gained a new prominence in politics from the 1960s onwards, it was created in its current form in the 1920s.

[20] The more-than-100% circulation rate is mostly explained by individual households subscribing to two or more newspapers (such as a local and a national one).

[21] Important venues for such acts of truth-telling are satire and comedy (Brassett, 2016; Connolly, 2017: 17).

[22] There is some evidence that presentation of facts in the form of graphs (if the substance allows this) is actually more convincing than narratives by themselves (McIntyre, 2018: 162).

[23] This is in line with the suggestion to move from 'critique' to positive alternatives (Tallis, 2016: 7).

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The Battle for Truth: Mapping the Network of Information War Experts in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: The rise of 'information disorder' that undermines Western political principles has become one of the key political concerns in today's Europe and United States and led to searching for new solutions to the problem of how to fight the spread of mis- and dis-information. The challenges of information disorder, however, are increasingly perceived as a part of the information war – which involves the intentional Russian propaganda using new media. Yet who gets to help our societies build resilience against the information war? This research looks at how this novel problematization of security affects the politics of security expertise. Or, who gains power in this 'battle for truth'? Building on sociological approaches in security studies, this paper focuses on the Czech Republic as a country that has become very active in the fight against disinformation and analyses the network of actors recognized as providing security expertise on information warfare. Based on social network analysis, the research maps the structure of social relations among actors recognized as experts and points out the empowerment of think tanks and journalists, who are able to build social capital, mobilize their knowledge of Russian politics and the new media environment, and design new practices to make the society resilient towards information warfare.

Keywords: propaganda, disinformation, expertise, social network analysis, securitization, Czech Republic

We have to understand what we fight against. We wage a war against irrationality, disinformation, hate speech, incitement to violence, and, in a deeper sense, against the distortion of trust and mutual understanding.

Peter Pomerantsev[1]

INTRODUCTION

The Power of Lies (orig. *Co dokáže lež*) is a 2017 TV documentary co-produced by Czech Television, the public service broadcaster in the Czech Republic, and the Eu-

ropean TV channel ARTE. It speaks of a new war taking place all over Europe defined by the fight for people's minds. This war is supposedly led by the Russian government, which seeks to gain power in its former sphere of influence and undermine the Western democratic order. Instead of using military force, however, the Kremlin supposedly resorts to modern technologies through which it spreads disinformation and thus creates chaos and weakens the target society. The key method used in this regard is *information war*. The documentary looks at what it is, how it works and how we should respond to it by drawing together contributions from different actors, including established Czech and foreign journalists, the Czech defence minister, think tankers, and academics. They speak of how to secure the (Czech) society against this 'bad' information or at least enhance our resilience against the perceived malign influence.

The Power of Lies can be situated at the intersection of two influential current discourses in the Czech Republic as well as elsewhere. On the one hand, it may be understood in the context of a deeper social anxiety about the fragile relationship between politics and truth and the inability of contemporary societies to arrive at a collectively shared interpretation of key political events and phenomena – and this trend led to the present time period being popularly termed as the age of 'post-truth' or 'post-factual' politics (Tallis, 2016; Higgins, 2016; Sismondo, 2017). On the other hand, however, it can also be seen as a part of a new wave of anti-Russian sentiment, as exemplified by the narrative about the Russian-led campaign to spread false and misleading news in order to stir up negative emotions against Western political elites and undermine liberal democracy (Lucas, 2014; Rankin, 2017). Both discourses can be situated in broader concerns shared especially by those we term 'pro-Western liberals', who are typically supporters of the Czech Republic's post-communist economic transformation and political integration in Western political and security institutions and who now tend to complain about the failing trust of contemporary societies in liberal democratic institutions.

The problem of 'information warfare' is thus clearly framed in geopolitical terms and perceived as a security concern, although a burgeoning number of other concepts are used almost interchangeably with it, including the 'spread of disinformation' or 'fake news'. Some actors see these issues as a part of 'hybrid warfare', understood as a strategy "combining military aggression with political, diplomatic, economic, cyber and disinformation measures" (NATO, 2017). Yet what is the effect of this novel problematization of security on our societies?

In our research, we investigate the effect of the described phenomena on the politics of security expertise. As scholars of Security Studies have shown, the emergence of new threats on the political agenda and the endorsement of new security measures enable the rise of specific actors and knowledges employed in dealing with these threats (Huysmans, 2006; Bigo, 2008; Berling and Bueger,

2015; Rychnovská et al., 2017). This paper looks at the current efforts to tackle 'information warfare' from a similar perspective and scrutinizes what kinds of experts and expertise are empowered in this 'battle for truth'. The paper turns to sociological approaches used in critical security research (Adler-Nissen, 2013; Basaran et al., 2016) and to the method of social network analysis (SNA) to study the social sphere of actors recognized as providing security expertise on governing information (dis)order.

Taking the example of the Czech Republic as a country that has become very active (in its governmental self-image at least) in tackling the spread of disinformation (Colborne, 2016, 2017; Tait, 2016; Cameron, 2017), we analyse three specific issues: first, we trace the evolution of the national network of actors recognized as experts at public events; second, we map the structure of social relations in this expert network; and thirdly, we look at the key actors in this network and study the types of knowledge and capital that they mobilize.

Methodologically, our research draws on a mixed methods design. After providing a contextual description of how the network formed, we employ social network analysis (SNA), which was developed in the early 1930's in sociology (Wasserman and Faust, 1994: 15), and analyse data from public events (panel debates, round tables and public discussions) that took place between October 2014 and July 2017 and focused on disinformation and/or (Russian) propaganda to map the expert network. Finally, we identify the key actors in the network and discuss how they make use of their social status and capital in promoting their information war expertise. In adopting this approach, we also seek to show the value of and promote the method of SNA, which is currently underused in security research, but which, as we demonstrate, can help us explore the social context in which security policies are made (Mérand et al., 2010, 2011).

Concretely, the paper will proceed as follows. First, it briefly looks at the securitization of information disorder and situates it in in the current wave of anti-Russian sentiment as well as notions of 'information war'. Second, it engages in a discussion of how to map security expertise and argues for exploring the community of information war experts via SNA. Third, in the analytical part, we trace the evolution of the Czech community of information war experts, map its structure, and discuss the involvement of the key actors in this sphere – and what they personify. Finally, the paper discusses the findings and draws more general conclusions from the research.

SECURITY POLITICS AND THE GOVERNANCE OF INFORMATION DISORDER

In a report published by the Council of Europe, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017: 4) argue that we are currently experiencing "information pollution at a global scale".

The term *information pollution* was originally used by Jakob Nielsen (2003) as a way to describe the overload of irrelevant, unsolicited information that people increasingly face in the age of the internet. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) draw on this concept to describe a social rather than an individual problem, as the information pollution is related to the mushrooming of suspicious websites and social media channels that flood the public space with unchecked information about key political figures, events, and topics (Nielsen, 2003). This pollution is now claimed to have political consequences, as it directly or indirectly affects political processes. For instance, the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, recently asserted that the British referendum about leaving the European Union is a result of precisely these influences (Rankin, 2017).

While the emergence of this phenomenon has arguably been enabled by the rise of new technologies and social media (Cook, 2017), most of the attention with regard to this phenomenon has been paid to the actors, platforms and the "complex web of motivations for creating, disseminating and consuming these 'polluted' messages" (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017: 4). Many scholars, journalists, and politicians tend to link global information pollution with the rise of so-called post-truth (or post-factual) politics, suggesting that factual, science-based explanations lose relevance in the public eye as compared to the emotionally strong yet factually weak narratives spread by alternative media sources (Berling and Bueger, 2017; Corner, 2017).

However, we side with Wardle and Derakhshan, who propose to call the spread of mis-, dis- and mal-information[2] *information disorder*. First, we believe that compared to the notion of post-truth or post-factual politics, the concept of information disorder does not bear the normative ethos suggesting that there has ever been some kind of 'politics of truth' whose era just ended. Second, what we also find helpful is that the term implies that we encounter a structural phenomenon with complex roots and causes rather than a problem caused by concrete types of media or actors which interrupt some normalized state of public debate.

In the current Western (liberal) discourse, the increasing plurality of actors and platforms producing and reproducing 'polluted' discourse is seen as a cause (or at least as a trigger) of *social disorder*. Moreover, it is seen to contribute to the polarization of the society and the occurrence of (supposedly) previously unthinkable events such as Brexit or the election of Donald Trump as the US president. Given the increasing role of social media, which revolutionize the speed and outreach of political communication, the authority of traditional sources of news is disrupted, triggering a widespread confusion over how to deal with information disorder and its political implications (Nyhan and Reifler, 2010; Aelst et al., 2017; Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

This debate, however, has an important ideological component, which turns information disorder into a security problem with a clearly defined perpetrator and

thus a clearly perceived enemy. In fact, many believe that the *information disorder* experienced by the Western societies is a result of an intentional campaign run by the Russian state, which they claim is conducting an information war against the Western public in the social media space (Aro, 2016; Mejias and Vokuev, 2017). This information war is seen as a part of a *hybrid warfare* focused on exploiting the vulnerabilities of Western democracies by combining conventional and non-conventional means (Renz, 2016). Besides the official political attention given to hybrid threats (NATO, 2010; European Commission, 2016), the issue of Russian disinformation campaigns became subject to media attention, with influential Western journalists like Anne Applebaum, Edward Lucas, or Peter Pomerantsev warning against the Russian information warfare and arguing that this new form of propaganda needs to be pushed back with a similar vigour as the Soviet propaganda during the Cold War (Pomerantsev, 2014; Applebaum and Lucas, 2016). This may be read in the context of the broader rise of anti-Russian sentiment in some European countries and the resurrection of geopolitical thinking in the past decade or so (Guzzini, 2013).[3]

Having constructed information disorder as one of the crucial contemporary security problems (related to Russia-led hybrid warfare), many countries and international organizations started to search for appropriate solutions to the problem of how to counter it. The extent to which information disorder is seen as a threat is highly uneven: in some countries (e.g. Sweden), the issue remained marginal, while in others (e.g. the Baltic countries), it has been used to legitimize the rise of new institutions and security practices targeted at building resilience against disinformation and securing the society against 'bad information'. Different national governments gave different responses to the problem, ranging from blocking (promoting counter narratives in the domestic context), confronting (promoting counter narratives internationally) and naturalizing (providing a story from the perspective of the state itself) to ignoring (not paying attention to the alleged information campaigns) (Hellman and Wagnsson, 2017).

The Czech Republic is one of the countries where this issue has gained significant traction, it has emerged as a strong supporter of the fight against Russian propaganda, and its efforts to contain the information war caught the attention of many foreign media (see, e.g., Tait, 2016; Cameron, 2017; CNN, 2017, among many others). While the Czech position towards Russia has been a politically polarizing issue since the end of the Cold War, Russia started to be perceived as a security concern by the Czech Republic especially in the early 2000s, as this was in the context of the heated national debate on building a US anti-ballistic missile system on the Czech soil and the controversies surrounding the Russian energy policy towards Europe (Kratochvíl et al., 2006; Kuchyňková et al., 2015). Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its involvement in eastern Ukraine since then triggered a new wave of anti-

Russia sentiment among some parts of the Czech society and brought to the forefront the narratives on Putin's ambitions to weaken the West and bring Central Europe back to the Russian sphere of influence (Tasch, 2017).

To sum up, the increasing plurality of actors and platforms that shape public debates nowadays is associated with the rise of mis-, dis- and mal-information in public and media spheres. The result of this 'pollution' may be understood as information disorder, a structural problem interconnected with social inequalities and social order. However, in many countries, including the Czech Republic, this issue has been framed as a so-called information war (a part of 'hybrid warfare') and thus narrowed down into a security problem initiated by an external actor – the Russian state. It is in this context that Czech security services, inspired by NATO's new interest in the concept of hybrid warfare, started to focus on the spread of disinformation via alternative media as a key Russian strategy in the hybrid war against Central and Eastern Europe (Daniel and Eberle, forthcoming 2018). This turn opened a window of opportunity for new actors to enter the debate on managing security and propose novel forms of security expertise.

MAPPING THE NETWORK OF SECURITY EXPERTS

Given the entry of new actors into such debates, and the stakes of the issues involved, it is useful to ask who gets to help our societies distinguish good and bad information in the age of information disorder. In this research, we focus empirically on the empowerment of specific actors who are (or have become) recognized as experts in securing Czech society against the risks and threats of information war. As such, we situate our study in the field of research on *security expertise*, which looks at which actors identify risks and threats, and what knowledge and techniques they use, and thus measure, weigh, and assess insecurity. This perspective draws on the assumption that intellectuals, academics, and other kinds of recognized experts do not just react to security problems 'out there', but actively take part in constructing and upholding certain notions of threats and thus contribute to the construction and perpetuation of a specific problematization of security and insecurity in our societies (Berling and Bueger, 2015).

The inquiry into the role of experts and expertise in governing the international/the political has long been one of the core themes of IR. From early functionalist studies of international cooperation by Haas (1958) and Mitrany (1944) to scholars exploring the collective agency of experts via the concepts of epistemic community (Adler and Haas, 1992) and transnational expert networks (Slaughter, 2009), the question of *how experts* influence (international) politics has received much attention among researchers. Research on expertise in IR has been later enriched by discursive approaches investigating the politics of expertise as a result of broader power structures and regimes of truth (Campbell, 1992; Litfin, 1994;

Hansen, 2006). More recently it has been further augmented by practice-oriented studies of expertise, which explore how expert knowledge is produced in specific *fields of expertise* (Huysmans, 2006; Bigo, 2008; Berling, 2011), how it structures the governance of the political (Aradau and Van Munster, 2007; Leander, 2012; Hagmann and Dunn Cavelty, 2012) and how it is embedded in social arrangements (Leander, 2005; Bueger, 2015).

It has been well established that turning a specific political problem into a security issue, the process known as securitization (Buzan et al., 1998; Balzacq, 2011), has great potential for reconfiguring the practices of expertise in political governance (Berling, 2011; Berling and Bueger, 2015). The process of securitization may shape how the authority and subjectivity of specific actors perceived as experts on the given security issue are constructed and performed and how they influence the kind of knowledge demanded in security politics, and how the boundary between knowledge production and political decision-making is built (Rychnovská et al., 2017). In other words, when studying the changing problematization of security, we may ask whose voices are empowered in this process and what vision of governing (in)security they promote.

Securitizing Information Disorder in the Czech Republic

In this paper, we look at the recent debate regarding information disorder from a similar perspective as those outlined above. Specifically, we argue that the current discourse on information warfare may be understood as an example of the securitization of information disorder, and we look at its consequences in terms of which actors get recognized as experts who can speak on this issue. Even though issues relating to information warfare and propaganda have been heavily securitized in the past, especially in the context of the Cold War or the two World Wars, the current debate on these issues focuses on a new type of threat subject and takes place in a very different social, political, and technological context. For that reason, we chose to treat the changing problematization of information war as an example of securitization, or perhaps re-securitization, as its key parameters (the actors involved, the framing of the threat subject, the referent object, implemented and suggested countermeasures, etc.) are undergoing great changes from what they were in the past. Nonetheless, the historical resonance of the 'Russian threat' only aids the dramatization of the argument and the framing of information disorder as a result of a hostile foreign intervention.

In our analysis, we focus on the socio-political consequences of this securitization (cf. Stritzel, 2007) and concretely on actors who perform their expertise on information war at public events. We believe that this practice is relevant from several perspectives: first, the involved speakers position themselves as sources of authoritative knowledge on the issue of information disorder and thus have a great poten-

tial to shape the public discourse; second, these events bridge security policy-making with the public understanding of the issues; and third, these events exemplify how specific audiences and social platforms get entangled in the politics of securitizing information war.

To explore who gets recognized as an expert on governing information disorder, we turn to the concept of *social capital*, which characterizes the degree of embeddedness of an actor in social networks and relations. Following social theory, social capital may be understood as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Based on this reading, one's amount of social capital can be seen as affecting one's position in a field – in our case, it enables the recognition of someone as an expert and enhances their ability to construct the symbolic order, i.e. the system of meaning establishing something as a specific security issue.

The social sphere in which we map the structure of social relations and assess the level of actors' recognition via measuring their social capital is defined by one specific practice: the practice of *performing security expertise on information war publicly* at events such as workshops, roundtables, etc. In our analysis, we included any type of relevant event that did not take place behind closed doors or that would be exclusively for a specific audience. Therefore, we focus on events such as a public debate in a prestigious public library with a group of invited experts (e.g. from the fields of media, academia, and policy-making), a panel debate hosted by a university or a think tank as a part of its public lectures series and so forth.

As such, we follow up on the call in critical security studies for visualizing security practices via social mapping (Loughlan et al., 2014). We build on the Bourdieusian topographical approach to mapping, which highlights the relationality of security arrangements and puts human agents at the centre of the analysis. We do not, however, follow the rather comprehensive Bourdieusian conceptualization of the field and undertake ethnographic research tracing the connections between different actors and institutions and drawing on the practical experiences of social agents as others do (Daniel and Eberle, forthcoming 2018). Instead we look at the network of actors who align themselves with a specific security problematique – in this case, information warfare, disinformation, and propaganda – and claim expertise on this issue in the public sphere. Given the broader geopolitical framing of the Czech debate on these issues as well as a practical need to unify the research terminology, for the purpose of the present research, we call these actors information war experts.

This approach also translates into the methodological apparatus that we use. Our analysis is based on three steps: first, we trace the evolution of the sphere of experts associated with publically speaking about information warfare in the Czech Republic, second, we use SNA to map the expert network, and finally, based on the cen-

trality measures of this analysis, we identify the key actors in the network and discuss how they mobilize their capital and knowledge in the network.

THE METHODOLOGICAL APPARATUS

Our data collection technique is based on the acquisition of open source information found by searching the World Wide Web as well as social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. For an event (and the guest speakers affiliated with the event) to be added to the dataset, it had to meet the following criteria:

1. The event took place in the Czech Republic.
2. The aim of the event was to discuss disinformation and/or (Russian) propaganda in general or in the Czech Republic.[4]
3. Two or more guest speakers (excluding the moderators) were invited to the event.
4. The nature of the event was in the vein of a panel debate, round table or public discussion.

We gathered data on 34 events, which altogether were attended by 106 different speakers and hosted by 19 organizations, and which took place in the period from October 2014 to July 2017, and used this data to create two types of networks.[5] The first type of network is an undirected network made up of guest speakers invited to events. If two or more guests met at a particular event, a tie is created between them in this network. The second type of network is a two-mode network, sometimes also called a bipartite or affiliation network (Wasserman and Faust, 1994; Borgatti and Everett, 1997), where the first mode is the guest speaker and the second mode is the organizer of the event. This two-mode network is then converted to the one-mode weighted graph in which the weight of the edge describes the numbers of experts shared among the connected organizers.

The use of centrality measures dates back to 1948, when at the beginning of the research of centrality was the hypothesized "[r]elationship between structural centrality and influence in group processes" (Freeman, 1978: 215). However, it took several decades to establish centrality measures as a relevant indicator, and Freeman provides illustrations of both cases where the measures worked and those where the results were not genuinely convincing (see Freeman, 1978: 215–216). The reason why we chose centrality measures, particularly 'degree' of centrality and 'betweenness', even though they are imperfect, is that centrality indicates critical positions in the network and these positions are occupied by opinion leaders and influencers (Becker, 1970). Wasserman and Faust (1994: 215–216) specifically tie the actors' centrality (degree of centrality and betweenness) to social influence – i.e. being viewed as a leader.

For mapping the networks, we employ SNA as a method for quantitative mapping accompanied by investigations of actors' roles in the network. Concretely, we move on to investigate the key actors (nodes) in the network based on the *degree, betweenness centrality* and *modularity* (the community detection algorithm). Degree is the sum of social connections that an actor has, since "central actors must be the most active in the sense that they have the most ties to other actors in the network or graph" (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). *Betweenness* demonstrates the importance of a node in the network. According to Borgatti (Borgatti, 2005), "[b]etweenness centrality is defined as the share of times that a node i needs a node k (whose centrality is being measured) in order to reach a node j via the shortest path."[6] Finally, *modularity* measures the strength of a community structure in the network, i.e. to what extent the network is composed of clusters which are more densely connected to each other than to the rest of the network. In our research, communities are calculated based on the modularity classes that determine the shade of the community cluster (cf. Blondel et al., 2008).

For the undirected one-mode network G= (N, E) with N guest speakers (nodes) and E ties (or edges), we measured the actors' degree and betweenness centrality.[7] The reason is that if an actor has a lot of ties to other actors, it makes him or her more visible among the community, and he or she can reach a wider audience. The degree and betweenness centrality were calculated via R, a programming language used for data analysis, and by using the igraph package (Csardi and Nepusz, 2006).

The two-mode network G = (U, N, E) refers to a network G in which we have U organizers, N guest speakers and E ties connecting two different sets of nodes (Wasserman and Faust, 1994: 300). An affiliation network differs from an undirected network by having two sets of nodes instead of one – with the one set of nodes being the guest speakers who are connected through their participation in various public events. In this two-mode network, the ties are not created through actor-actor connections but based on ties they formed via the organizers of the event, thus allowing us to analyse it from an actor-organizer perspective (Wasserman and Faust, 1994: 291–292). The importance of this network lies in its ability to show which organizations share among themselves the most experts who can form or influence their opinion on the issue. This is achieved by converting a two-mode network into a one-mode weighted graph. In the graph, the weight and relative thickness of an 'edge' or 'tie' (i.e. a line connecting two nodes in a graph) depend on how many organizers shared the speakers among themselves.

THE RESEARCH RATIONALE

Having outlined our methods for data gathering and analysis, we now wish to briefly discuss the rationale of our approach. We look at the public performance of info-war

expertise, since we understand experts as intermediaries between different social domains (Bueger and Berling, 2015: 9–11) and wish to explore which actors get to perform the role of these intermediaries, what kinds of expert social networks they become part of, and what audiences they mediate their security knowledge to. In other words, we are interested in the social context and social implications of this securitization rather than the changing threat images and security narratives in public discourse. Consequently, we look at the public performance of info-war expertise via events such as workshops, roundtables, or panel discussions, and not via media appearances, academic writing, writing for the broader public, blogging, etc. In order to capture the expert networking dynamic, we omitted events with only one speaker (excluding the moderator).

Due to this methodological choice, we could downplay actors who are otherwise active in shaping the info-war discourse via different channels – for instance, the Special Forces general Karel Řehka, who occasionally speaks to the media and wrote a book about information warfare (Řehka, 2017), or academics such as Miloš Gregor and Petra Vejvodová (2018), who wrote a book on info-war yet do not attend the events under our scrutiny very often. The same applies to Petr Nutil (2018), who has also recently published a book on disinformation and occasionally participates in the investigated events, but is more active in writing articles for Manipulatori.cz (Manipulators.cz).

There are two key limits of this approach. First, we were able to investigate only publicly accessible events and events for which we were able to find a guest list. This restricts the scope of the experts and organizers that we identify as relevant in the process of info-war securitization in the Czech Republic. In particular, several events were held behind closed doors – these were especially the cases where attendees such as members of the secret services, state employees or representatives of Allied armies were present. A prime example of such an event is the StratCom Summit, which was organized by a wide range of state and non-state actors. Second, we focused only on the practice of public performance of security expertise and did not scrutinize the broader and less visible part of the social network of info-war experts and their audiences. As such, we are not able to reconstruct from our data which actors build social connections to concrete policy-makers and may thus more directly influence the process of policy-change.

THE CZECH NETWORK OF INFORMATION WAR EXPERTS: MAPPING AND ANALYSIS

The interest in information warfare in the Czech Republic has undergone a dramatic change in the past few years. This can be documented by the number of events (including public debates, roundtables and conferences) dedicated to this topic (Figure 1) and, relatedly, by the number of actors who started to position

themselves as possessing relevant knowledge on disinformation, information war, and/or (Russian) propaganda in the Czech Republic. We look at these events to trace the evolution of the expert community, its key features, and its overall effect on shaping the relations between (security) policy-making, media, civil society, and the public.

Figure 1: The numbers of public events on information war, propaganda, and disinformation organized per quarter between 2014 and 2017
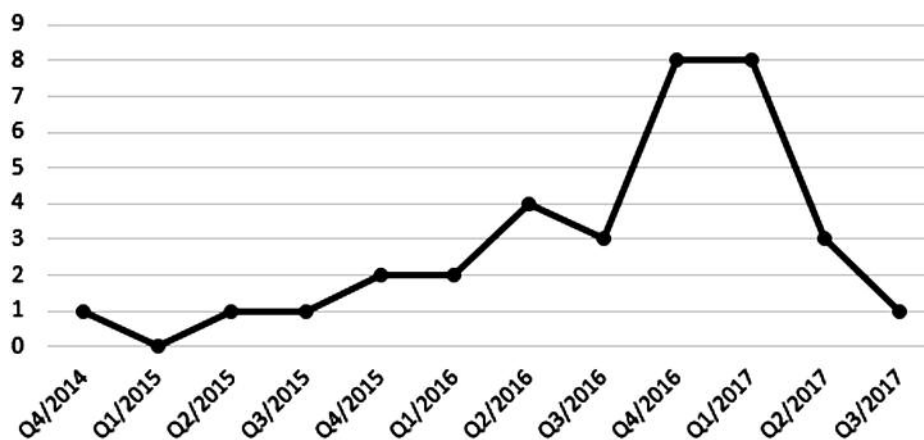
Evolution of the Network

The community of information war experts began to develop in 2014 as a response to the Russian annexation of Crimea, which was widely covered in the Czech media and which fuelled a new wave of anti-Russian sentiment, especially among right-wing and liberal political elites, media, and members of the public. Charles University in Prague was the first institution to respond to this interest by hosting a public debate on it. The debate took place in October 2014 and was attended by academics and researchers from Charles University in Prague specializing in the (geo)politics of the Russian Federation, armed forces and technologies. Interestingly, this was the first and also the last public debate in which an academic who studied propaganda before the annexation of Crimea was present. From then on, Czech public events dealing with propaganda focussed only on current Russian propaganda.

The formative period for the emerging expert network was unquestionably the year 2015. In February 2015, an updated Security Strategy of the Czech Republic was released (MFA, 2015). Compared to its prior version, this strategy covers two new threats: "weakening of the cooperative security mechanism and of political and international legal commitments in the area of security" and "extremism and

growth of interethnic and social tensions" (MFA, 2015: 13–14). According to this narrative, the spread of disinformation and propaganda is a means to weaken 'the cooperative security mechanism' as some states that try to challenge the international order resort to hybrid warfare, combining military and non-military methods such as disinformation intelligence operations, and political and economic pressures.

This expression of political attention to disinformation as a source of insecurity opened a window of opportunity for new actors to provide expertise on issues of propaganda and hybrid warfare. The first to answer the call was the think tank European Values (Evropské hodnoty), which organized a roundtable under the patronage of the MP Marek Ženíšek from TOP 09, an economically neoliberal but socially conservative party. This roundtable had an international dimension, as Jakub Kalenský, a representative from the EU's East StratCom (and a Czech national), and members of think tanks from the Visegrád Group met there to discuss the strategy for fighting myths emanating from Russian propaganda (Václav Havel Library, 2016). The growing interest in the issues regarding hybrid warfare translated also to other NGOs, such as the humanitarian and human rights promoting organization People in Need (Člověk v tísni), which organized a debate with the journalists Ondřej Soukup from *Hospodářské noviny* ('The Economic Newspaper' – the Czech equivalent of the *Financial Times* [HN]) and Ondřej Kundra from the leading political weekly magazine *Respekt* (Jsns, 2015). These two actors would, over time, play an important role in shaping the perception of Russia's influence in the Czech Republic.

At this time, we can also track certain early outcomes of the think tanks and journalists, who started to engage in public events with different approaches to providing information on the the topic. Ivana Smoleňová was among the first people who had systematically studied disinformation and propaganda in the Czech Republic and Slovakia before May 2015, focusing on the so-called alternative media and the arguments and narratives used in their texts (Smoleňová, 2016).[8] An important initiative was launched in late 2015 by the think tank European Values, which introduced its 'Kremlin Watch' program, as a part of which they monitor the disinformation activities of Russia in the Czech Republic on a weekly basis and created a list of disinformation websites with pro-Russian content (Janda and Víchová, 2016).

In January 2016, the then Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka from the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) commissioned a revolutionary National Security Audit, whose results were presented to the public later in the year by him and the then Minister of Interior, Milan Chovanec, who was also a Social Democrat. This document aimed to identify internal security threats to the Czech Republic and propose suitable measures in high-risk areas (Vlada.cz, 2016). Foreign disinformation cam-

paigns were evaluated as a serious internal security threat and one of the recommendations for countering these forms of hybrid warfare was that the Czech Republic ought to "[e]stablish departments within relevant Government institutions for the evaluation of disinformation campaigns and other manifestations of foreign power influence" (MoI, 2016: 61).

One response to this call was the foundation of the Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats (Centrum proti terorismu a hybridním hrozbám, CTHH), which was set up in January 2017. The CTHH did not begin its mission under favourable circumstances, however, as the Czech President Miloš Zeman suggested that the CTHH would infringe free speech (Lopatka and Jones, 2017); also, the public did not perceive the CTHH positively (Sattler, 2017; Kotalík, 2017). Therefore, Eva Romancovová from the CTHH, a previously publicly unknown state bureaucrat, had to explain the nature of the centre to the media and also participated in several public debates about hybrid threats. However, it is clear from our dataset that as early as August 2015, Romancovová became a part of the info-war expert network, as she participated in a roundtable organized by European Values (Evropské hodnoty, 2015).

At the end of 2016, the public interest in the issue of disinformation and propaganda rose considerably, to a great extent due to the speculations that the US presidential elections were greatly affected by information disorder. The magazine *Respekt* toured the Czech Republic from March to November 2016 hosting debates which dealt with various topics of domestic politics, including disinformation and the Russian influence in the Czech Republic, and later published a special issue on disinformation (Respekt, 2016, 2017). Similarly, the think tank Association for International Affairs (Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky [AMO]) also began to focus its activities on countering disinformation, mainly abroad. More specifically, AMO held seminars for Ukrainian students and journalists to train them to fact-check information in the media and negate disinformation about the events in Ukraine. This concept was then transferred to the Czech Republic for students of pedagogical faculties, and in addition, AMO undertook a Czech version of StopFake (ČTK, 2017).

By the end of 2016, European Values together with the National Convention on the EU[9] organized a roundtable on propaganda and security in cyberspace. However, as shown in Figure 1, despite the frequency of public events related to disinformation significantly increasing at the turn of 2016 and 2017, interest in the topic gradually decreased after that.

Mapping the Network
To explore the field of information war experts further, we proceed to a quantitative mapping of this network. We start our mapping by looking at the organizers of the

public events on information warfare. In other words, we show what kinds of institutions initiated the public debates on this topic and thus created a platform for these debates to take place. Figure 2 provides a key insight in this regard, as it maps the network of organizers of these events. The size of the node suggests the relative importance of the institution in this network[10] and the edge numbers show how many guests each pair of particular organizers shared.

As we can see, the key organizers of the public events on information warfare are the following: the think tank European Values, Charles University and the magazine *Respekt*, the two NGOs People in Need and the Scout Institute Prague, the cultural centre La Fabrica and the think tank Prague Security Studies Institute (PSSI). Most of these organizers can be seen as politically liberal thinking spaces which seek to shape the public debate on important social issues. What the graph further tells us is that there is a disproportional exchange of experts between the events – the European Values think tank and the National Convention on the EU shared a very high number of speakers in comparison to the other parties.

Figure 2: The two-mode network of organizers
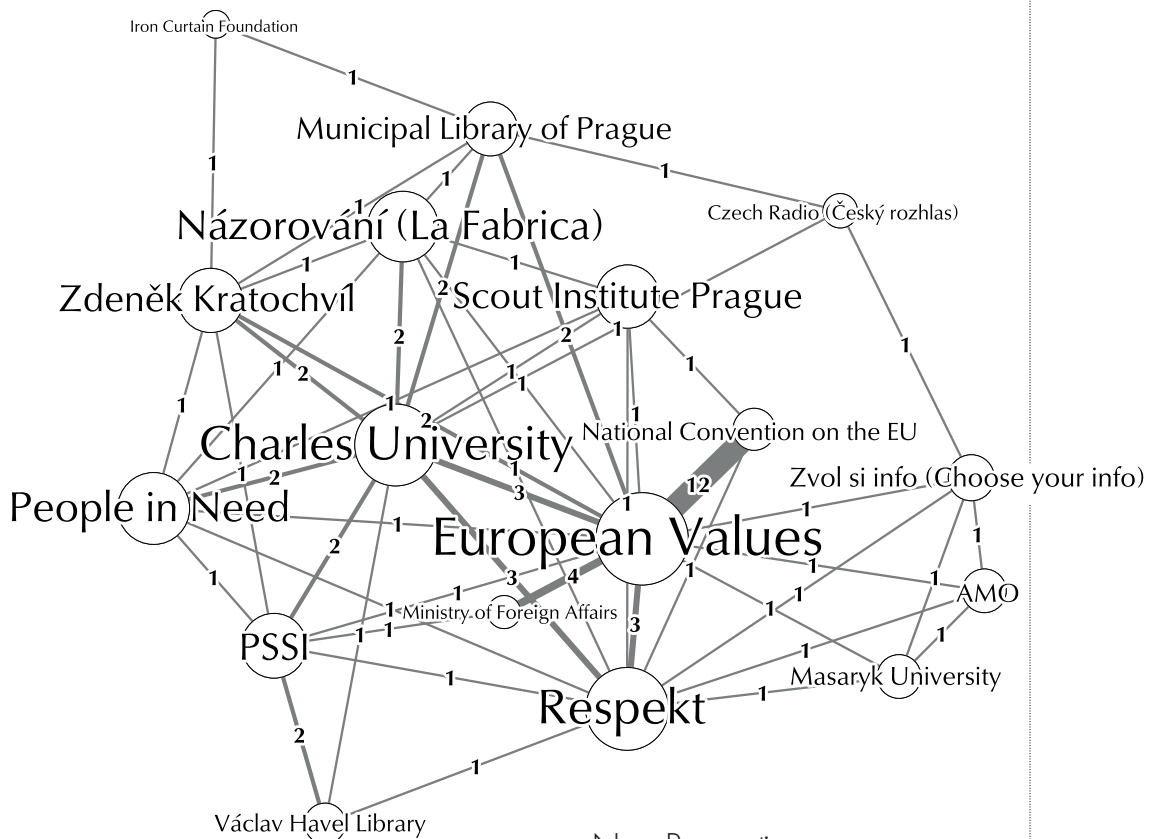
Our further interest lies in the participation in these events on information warfare. Namely which participants act as the recognized speakers – as the experts? We look at this issue from two perspectives – first, by exploring the social connections within the network (Figure 3), and then by looking into the professional affiliations of the actors (Figure 4).

Figure 3: An overview of the network using the community finding algorithm (modularity)
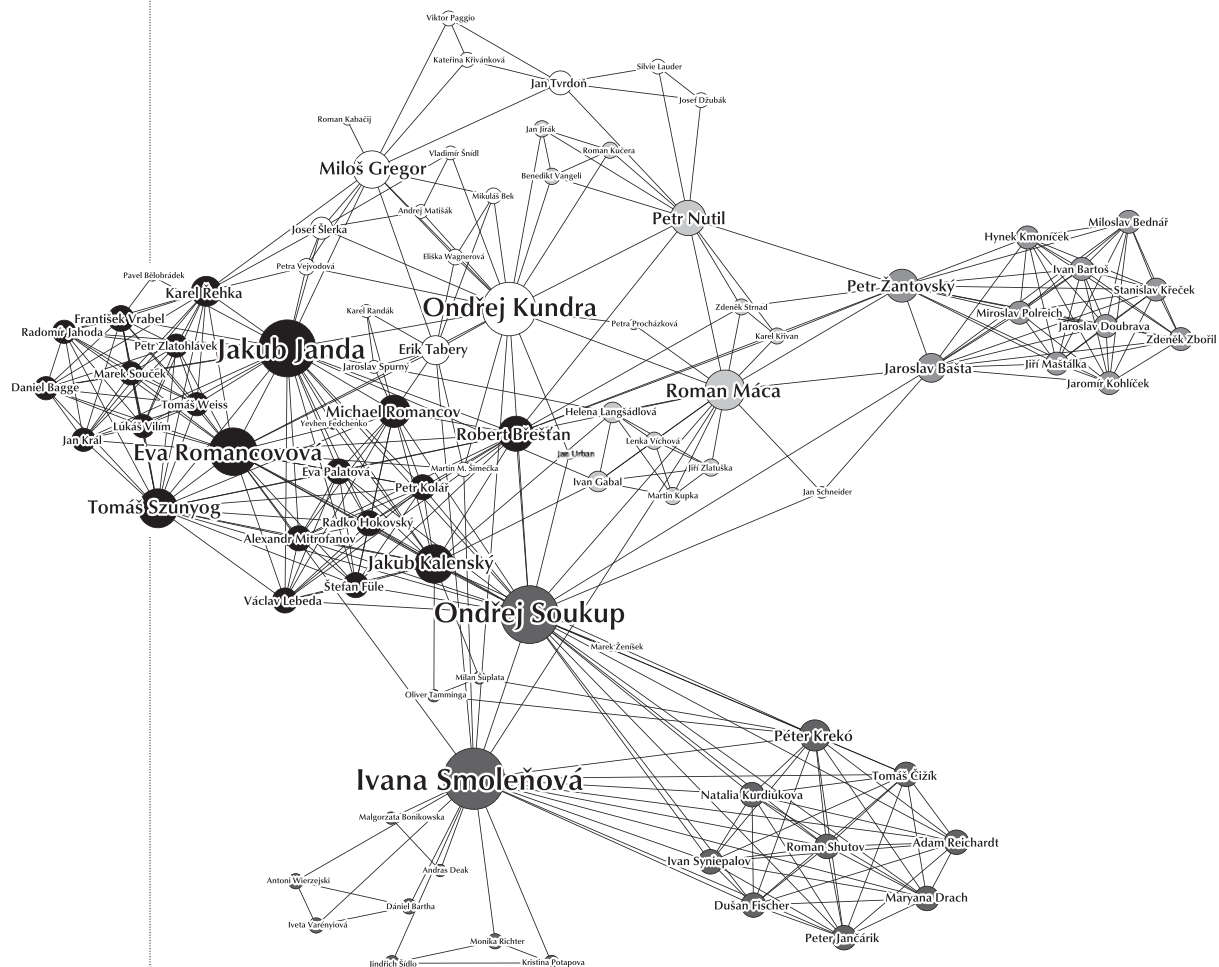
The analysis of the social structure, i.e. the functioning of specific communities operating within this broader network, is shown in Figure 3. From the graph, we can see which communities, on the basis of the interconnectedness of particular nodes, the actors fall into. The size of each node is again calculated and denotes the relative importance of the actor in the network. As we can see, there are four

communities (clusters) within the main network that can be distinguished based on the calculated interconnectedness of particular actors. These communities are rather separate, and they have important 'gatekeepers'. Each community has its specific characteristics so in order to have a better understanding of the network, we have created an almost identical map, but this time, instead of analysing communities we assigned to each node shade attributes based on the actor's occupation (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: The one mode network of actors connected through participation in public events on information warfare
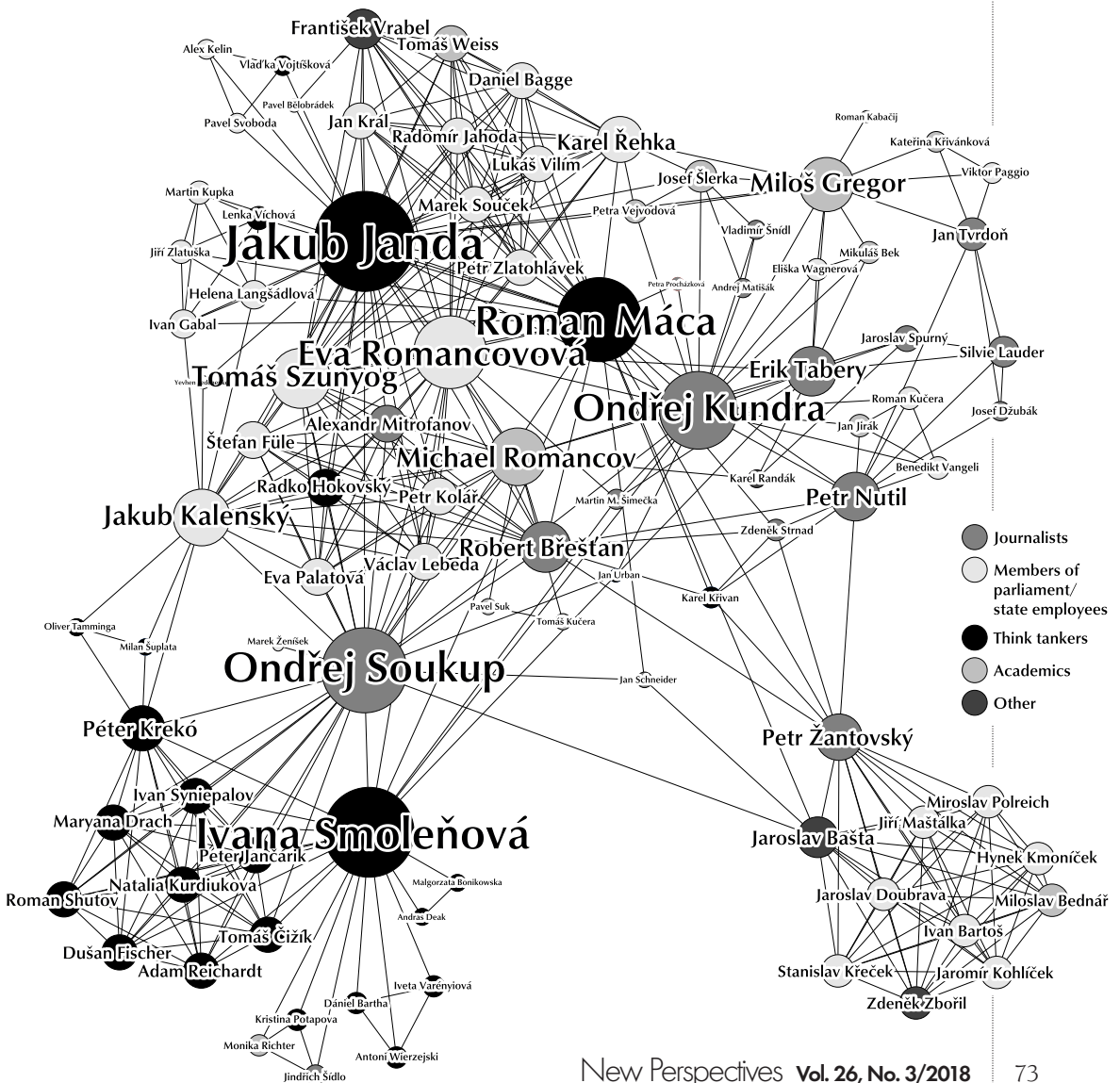
Figure 4 maps the typology of actors involved in the network according to their professional affiliation and shows how social relations are built between actors from distinct social spheres such as state bureaucracy, media, think tanks, or academia. The shading attributes are assigned based on the actors' occupations.

From this map, we can observe that there are several key actors in the network who are either journalists or think tank activists. Jakub Janda, the Deputy Director of the think tank European Values, is apparently a key partner for professionals from the state bureaucracy. However, when comparing the individual graphs, we can say that we do not find many journalists or academics in this (black) cluster and so none of them can be considered particularly important in the field.

Besides, we can also see that there is a separate (dark grey) cluster of think tank activists surrounding Ivana Smoleňová, who is an important player researching the influence of Russian disinformation in the think tank PSSI. This PSSI cluster is, however, quite isolated in the broader field and as will be discussed later, its events are rather focused on a stable, yet specific and narrow audience that includes mostly members of various think tanks, mainly those based in the Visegrád countries (V4), i.e. Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland. The reason for that is that PSSI focused on topics in the vein of Russian influence in the V4 countries and Central and Eastern Europe, and therefore their guests consisted largely of international speakers (PSSI, 2015, 2016).

If we look at the 'white' community, it shows a high participation of both journalists and academics. The weekly magazine *Respekt* played a role in forming this part of the network, particularly by organizing debates that are typically attended by journalists who cover the topic of fake news and the relationship between traditional and alternative media. Academics were invited to these debates as well to give insights on various topics like social media, and international and Russian politics (e.g. Michael Romancov, the husband of Eva Romancovová), or they were active in developing the tools for fact-checking (e.g. Miloš Gregor).

Key Actors in the Network

What are the socio-political (and security) consequences of this new network of security experts and the politics of fighting against information warfare that they have engendered and been engendered by? In the third part of our analysis, we look at the profiles of the key actors recognized as expert speakers on information warfare in the Czech Republic and discuss the implications of their security engagement. We transformed the results of our mapping analysis into the scatterplot that is Figure 5, which shows the relationship between the actors' ability to connect nonadjacent actors in the network (betweenness centrality) and the number of their connections in the network (degree). Based on these results, we focus on six actors who score very high in both dimensions, and their involvement in the info-war securitization.[11]

Figure 5: A scatterplot based on the actors' degree and betweenness centrality[12]

THINK TANKERS (AND A BUREAUCRAT)

One of the early agenda-setters writing and talking about Russian information warfare was Ivana Smoleňová, a Fellow at the PSSI, where she leads a project aiming to counter Russian influence and pro-Russian disinformation campaigns in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This researcher established herself as an expert on Russian propaganda especially after writing for the American edition of *Forbes* magazine about Kremlin-organized information warfare targeted against CEE countries, which earned her media attention and enabled the PSSI to organize a series of networking events focused on tackling Russia's information warfare and bringing together business actors, civil society, and foreign experts. However, the PSSI's lack of interest in working closely with Czech policy-makers and security agencies led to the stabilization of a relatively small, specialized audience and a small, specialized group of donors for the PSSI (Daniel and Eberle, forthcoming 2018).

Compared to the PSSI, the think tank European Values has been much more successful in translating its securitizing moves to the policy realm. European Values became especially known for leading the Kremlin Watch programme and creating a 'blacklist' of disinformation websites with allegedly pro-Russian content. Jakub Janda, who previously served as its deputy director and became its director in 2018, is, in fact, the person with the most social relations in the network. He gained much attention among conservative policy circles, the state bureaucracy, and the public by frequently and critically commenting on Russian politics in the media, and he gained international

recognition by initiating the "Open Letter of European security experts to Federica Mogherini: Please start taking the Russian disinformation threat seriously!", which was signed by numerous European journalists, activists, and politicians (Tamkin, 2017)

This think-tank professional soon became a driving force behind the information war rhetoric, as he succeeded in constructing a simple, yet powerful narrative about the need to defend Western liberal democracy from Russian propaganda and presenting his think tank – 'European Values' – as the key Czech platform generating expertise on how to deal with this threat. This gave him the opportunity to present himself as an expert and to provide expertise outside the state administration. As such, he became a perfect ally for a broad scope of actors, including state bureaucrats and the army, as well as foreign partners and international organizations who shared his viewpoint in relation to the info-war. This positioning can be demonstrated by the actor's own anecdote:

> When we presented this review in the autumn of 2015 in Brussels, we called for renewed sanctions against Russian aggression, which attracted the attention of European media. [...] After we presented our report, the representative of the Russian embassy took part in the debate and intensely complained about her not sitting in the panel when in the panel, there was, for example, the Vice-Chairwoman of the Foreign Committee of the Ukrainian Parliament. I told her that unfortunately, if she lied systematically and repeatedly, she would lose her place at the discussion table in a decent society. It was rather a reflex, but it was interesting to see how a representative of a Czech NGO can silence a representative of the allegedly powerful Russia in a fully official forum well covered by the media (Janda, 2017).

Another actor coming from the Kremlin Watch project is Roman Máca, who is close to policy-makers and journalists (see Figure 4), yet is also a popular blogger. He writes critically and with plain language about Russia, disinformation, manipulation, hoaxes and cyberbullying, and argues that media manipulation is responsible for the results of the Czech presidential elections and the potential dissolution of the European Union (Nemtsova, 2017; Týden, 2017). He is known in the field for his well proclaimed anti-Russia stance and his investigative journalism, in which he uncovers and makes fun of the social media profiles of people sharing articles from 'propaganda websites' (Máca, 2017).

European Values started to propagate their activities related to Kremlin Watch with such intensity (via dozens of analyses, press releases, and social media posts)[13] that they soon caught the attention of the Ministry of Interior. Eva Romancovová, a state bureaucrat working at the Ministry of Interior (at the CTHH) and another key actor in our network, endorsed European Values as experts providing knowledge on fighting 'hybrid threats', which became a new agenda for the ministry. This al-

lowed Jakub Janda and his colleagues to serve as consultants and advisors on the National Security Audit, a key strategic document with a chapter on hybrid warfare, in which they pursue their alarmist view of this issue (Daniel and Eberle, forthcoming 2018) and *inter alia* promote digital/media literacy education as a way of fighting propaganda and disinformation (MoI, 2016: 4; Evropské hodnoty, 2018).

Significantly, this threat framing was adopted by other state bureaucracies dealing with 'hybrid threats' in their strategic documents, and the practice of teaching media literacy classes at schools started to be popularized and implemented by various non-profit organizations (Jsns, 2015; ČTK, 2017). Having established this close and mutually beneficial link with the Ministry of Interior (see Figure 4), European Values became a crucial ally for the newly founded Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats (CTHH), led by Romancovová.

JOURNALISTS

While think tank actors forged a close relationship with policy-makers and security professionals, thus spreading their alarmist anti-Russian narrative and propagating the blacklisting of suspicious media or developing media literacy, actors from traditional media helped securitize the Russian threat vis-à-vis the general public. Another frequent speaker at public events on Russian propaganda and disinformation is Ondřej Kundra, who is an experienced and respected journalist writing for the Czech weekly magazine *Respekt*. Kundra has established himself as an investigative journalist and a political commentator writing about Russia, misuse of power in the Czech justice system and secret services, and corruption scandals. His investigative articles and his recent book *Putin's Agents: How Russian Spies Steal Our Secrets* (Kundra, 2016), covering Russian practices targeted at undermining liberal democracy in the Czech Republic, were among the first Czech investigations into disinformation websites and helped set the tone and legitimacy of the later debate on the Russian threat (Daniel and Eberle, forthcoming 2018).

Another key actor in the network is Ondřej Soukup, who is also a recognized journalist specializing in Russia and who highlights his 'first-hand experience' with Russian affairs (Diplomatické fórum, 2017). He draws on his experience of growing up in the Soviet Union (as a then Czechoslovak citizen) and later working as a foreign correspondent in Moscow. He has been a frequent speaker at public events about disinformation and Russia, interestingly attending both 'anti-Russia' and 'pro-Russia' events and thus serving as a widely accepted (albeit generally 'anti-Russian') speaker in such debates.

DIVERSITY, COORDINATION AND INFLUENCE

Returning to our original assumptions, we can see from the actors' portfolios and the network itself that the top positions in the investigated network of info-war experts

are occupied by people who indeed have the possibility to not only influence the public discourse (as journalists, members of the CTHH, and members of think tanks), but also reach state bureaucrats and influence policy-makers via their active networking with the state administration, as is the case of European Values.

The group of information war experts is diverse in terms of their professional experience (three of the key actors come from the think tank sphere, two are journalists, and one is a state bureaucrat), the frequency of their media appearances, and seniority. What they have in common, however, is that they are willing to reach out to different social spheres, propagate a straightforward alarmist narrative about the rise of the Russian threat to liberal Western democracy, and mobilize their knowledge of Russian politics and/or the world of new media.

To some extent, we can say that the activities between European Values, the CTHH and *Respekt* are coordinated. The cooperation between these actors can be seen, for example, by means of their joint appearances at events they organize (Evropské hodnoty, 2015, 2016; Skautský institut, 2016). These actors seek to securitize the issue of information warfare and build different social networks to spread their message to new audiences. The establishment of a specialized unit at the Ministry of Interior, the attachment of a special chapter on hybrid warfare to a key national security document (Daniel and Eberle, forthcoming 2018: 12), and the widespread media and public attention to the issue of information warfare are but a few examples of the influence that this new network has had.

CONCLUSION: THE POWER OF 'TRUTH'

In recent years much political, scholarly, and media attention has been paid to the problem of disinformation and new forms of (Russian) propaganda which are believed to contribute to the polarization of the Western societies and the destabilization of liberal democratic institutions. In this paper, we scrutinized how this new problematization of security affects the exercise of security expertise – in other words, what kinds of actors are empowered to speak as experts on this new security issue? To explore this question, we looked at the public performance of expertise on information warfare in the Czech Republic. Concretely, our study was based on tracing the evolution of the Czech debate, analysing the network of 'information warfare experts' involved in public events, and sketching their involvement as a way to show what knowledge and capital get recognized in the newly formed expert sphere. By doing so, the paper outlined possible theoretical and methodological approaches to studying the changing models of expertise related to the securitization of information disorder and thus sought to contribute to the emerging debate on the politics of expertise in the 'post-factual era'.

Our results are based on a single-country case study and limited data, as discussed before. To provide a more comprehensive answer to the question of who gains

power in this new 'battle for truth', further research can combine productively qualitative and quantitative methods and map the new security landscape related to the attempts to deal with the information disorder and information war. Also, a cross-country comparison or an analysis of the transnational expert network can provide a broader picture, similarly to research focusing on what distinct practices of dealing with information disorder we can find in different countries and how they spread and translate to local contexts.

The findings of our research can be translated to several main arguments. First, the securitization of information warfare in the Czech Republic is related to the emergence of a new expert network comprised primarily of think tanks and journalists who successfully reach out to the public as well as policy-makers. Surprisingly, only a few academics are present in the network and their influence is considered rather marginal. The network is diverse in terms of the professional experience of the actors, yet in it, close ties are built between different, previously much less connected social spheres. The tie between European Values and the Ministry of Interior is a good example of the mutual benefits of these new bridges. On the one hand, European Values shaped the official narrative on Russian propaganda and hybrid threats, came forth with concrete policy suggestions and, in general, provided legitimacy to the hawkish policies of the government (e.g. in the area of migration policy as well as in direct reference to 'internal threats') by giving them their supposedly 'expert' endorsement. On the other hand, the Ministry was crucial in legitimizing the activities of European Values and bringing the issue of hybrid threats and information warfare to the forefront of media attention. Some of the actors in the network were previously known and mostly recognized as experts in their respective fields (e.g. the journalists), but the new connections developed between the different spheres are what amplified the social and political role and relevance of their expertise – a classic network effect.

Second, the diversity of the expert network seems to reflect the type of expertise that is demanded in tackling information warfare and the importance of political backing to the expert narrative. What gets concretely appreciated is the combination of knowledge of new media and Russian politics, and this is underlined by the alarmist narrative about a new wave of the Russian threat to the liberal Western democracy. Albeit different in their ways of spreading this narrative, the 'information war evangelists' share the same belief that liberal democracy is in jeopardy and that a foreign power (Russia) contributes to driving a wedge between various segments of our society by misusing cyberspace and creating information disorder.[14]

Third, our social network analysis shows that there have been not only different kinds of experts, but also different audiences in the debates on information warfare. For instance, while the think tank PSSI speaks to domestic and international civil society and business actors, European Values has a close relationship with the Czech security apparatus and a diverse group of foreign actors and is thus able to act not

only as an agenda-setter shaping the public discourse, but is also invited to contribute directly to policy-making. This contributes to the politicization of the topic among a broader audience (and its potential mobilization), yet it simultaneously supports the argument about the very vague character of the 'hybrid threat' narrative as a precondition for the success of this security narrative (Daniel and Eberle, forthcoming 2018). The effect of this is that a broad variety of new measures can be adopted in different contexts and legitimized by acting against this alleged threat – regardless of whether it is creating blacklists of untrustworthy media sources, pointing to concrete individuals sharing the alleged pro-Russian propaganda, fact-checking tools, or building media literacy.

Finally, another effect of this network is that it cements a specific 'truth' – the narrative of Russia as a dangerous outside actor engaged in threatening activities in the Czech Republic, enhancing the perception that threats to Czech democracy and the wider liberal West come from outside rather than within. The securitization of information disorder and its geopolitical framing turn it into a problem caused by a hostile external actor, which consequently narrows down the thinking on who can deal with this issue and how. This truth is a powerful inspiration for some people and some purposes and against other people and other purposes. When the attempts to clean up the public space so that it would be free from information pollution merge with ideological and foreign-political battles, when the battle against lies becomes a battle for a specific version of truth, and when this battle receives the state's blessing, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to uphold a space for critical voices and open democratic deliberation. In other words, what is allegedly at stake – the liberal democratic order and the principles on which it is based – can be compromised by this new battle. Understanding how this process evolves and what types of actors get involved in it (as well as what kinds of expertise they represent and thus what claim to legitimacy they have) is a key step for being able to intervene in this highly polarized debate and point out what the fight against information warfare does to as well as through our societies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ENDNOTES

[1] An excerpt from the TV documentary *The Power of Lies* (2017). Translation by the authors.

2 Wardle and Derakhshan (2017: 5) define these terms as follows: "Mis-information is when false information is shared, but no harm is meant. Dis-information is when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm. Mal-information is when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere."

3 Much political and scholarly attention is currently also paid to the online propaganda of the Islamic State, which uses social media as a tool for recruitment of new fighters and supporters. These campaigns, however, have very different dynamics as well as goals (Gates and Podder, 2015; Aly et al., 2017).

4 We excluded events focusing on disinformation and propaganda abroad (in a few cases, the event dealt with propaganda and disinformation in Russia and Ukraine).

5 An important part of any research paper that collects open or publicly available data is ensuring that the subjects do not suffer any harm. However, since we only use open sources data, we have decided not to anonymize the actors studied in this paper. The first reason is that their participation in the events, in which they shared their expertise, was voluntary and there are public records of it. The second reason is that we use direct quotes from them and references to their publications to analyse their attitudes. The quotes have been translated from Czech to English by the authors.

6 To put it in simpler terms one can imagine a path from point i to point j. On this path point k serves as a bridge to get from one point to another. Therefore, what betweenness tells us is how many times this point in the network is crossed (via the shortest path) in order to get from one nonadjacent node to another. The final number consequently increases with each path for which this point is used as a bridge.

7 For further reading regarding the mathematical foundations of centrality measures see Wasserman and Faust (1994: 177–191).

8 Examples of alternative media websites include *AC24.cz*, *Aeronet*, *Sputnik News*, *Slobodný vysielač*, and *Zem & Vek*, among others (Smoleňová, 2015: 7).

9 The National Convention on the EU serves to link various government institutions, ranging from government offices and the MFA to think tanks, research institutions, and trade unions.

10 This calculation is based on the PageRank algorithm, which was originally developed as an algorithm that searches for important websites by looking at what other sites they are referencing. In the SNA, we can use this approximation of relative importance for finding popular actors or opinion leaders based on their centrality in the network determined by PageRank (Page et al., 1999).

11 Interestingly, all these actors were invited to comment on information warfare in the abovementioned TV documentary, with the exception of Ondřej Soukup, who was, however, mentioned in the closing credits.

12 Though there are 106 actors in the network in total, note that the actors with a low degree and low betweenness overlap; therefore, we omitted their labels from the plot as it shows that they are not significant players in the network.

13 A number of academics and researchers, including some from the Institute of International Relations Prague (including the Editor-in-Chief of its journal *New Perspectives*, Benjamin Tallis), expressed their concern about the ideological nature of EV practices that are masked behind its analyses, policy memos, and other texts (see Daniel et al., 2016). It should be emphasized that this article, as with all research articles in *New Perspectives*, has been through a blind (anonymous) peer review process independent

from the input of the Editor and managed by an outside academic – in this case, Dr Nicholas Michelsen of Kings College London.

[14] An excerpt from the TV documentary *The Power of Lies* (2017). Translation by the authors.

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Post-Truth Politics in the UK's Brexit Referendum

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Abstract: The term post-truth became the 2016 Oxford Dictionary word of the year, yet many schol-
ars question whether the term signals anything new, or whether post-truth is just lying,
which has always been a part of politics and media. This paper contributes to this discus-
sion by critically evaluating the extent to which the Brexit referendum, the UK's vote to
exit the European Union, was based on post-truth politics. The paper develops the argu-
ment that Brexit is a key example of post-truth politics, and that two key factors ushered in
this new form of politics into the UK: 1) technological changes associated with social
media, which lead to a situation in which a significant portion of the population acquire
their news online, while anybody can post anything online without checks on the accuracy
of the claims; 2) a growing distrust in democratic institutions, political elites, expertise, and
traditional media gatekeepers which leads, in turn, to a loss of trust in established expert
knowledge, leaving the population willing to rely on information originating from ques-
tionable sources. This combination of a decline in trust of politicians and experts with so-
cial media reliance, drove the British public to emotionally charged, value-based decision
making to a greater extent than before, which thus supports the claim that post-truth pol-
itics is indeed a novel phenomenon. Our analysis of the Brexit referendum raises the need
for scholars to study the daily activities of the population and focus on its role as an active
regime shaper.

Keywords: post-truth, politics, Brexit, democracy, media

INTRODUCTION: SEEKING POST-TRUTH?

The Brexit campaign was distinct from other referendums or elections because of
the unexpectedly high turnout from voters who do not normally vote in general
elections. The voter turnout for the referendum was 72.2%.[1] This is in comparison
to a 68.8% turnout in the 2017 General Election, a 66.2% turnout in 2015, 65.1%
in 2010, 61.4% in 2005, and 59.4% in 2001. The referendum was the first major UK
vote since 1997 to go above a 70% turnout (Electoral Commission, 2018). YouGov

polling (YouGov, 2016b) predicted a 52% result in favour of remain with a 48% leave vote, and, on the day of the vote itself a poll for *The Daily Telegraph* showed the same numbers, up from their poll the day before, which showed 51% for remain and 49% for leave (Dunford and Kirk, 2016). Granted these figures predicted a remain victory by a relatively small margin, but other pollsters across the country predicted a remain victory as well. The leave vote took everyone by surprise. The pollsters' error might be due to the fact that some predictions (such as those of YouGov, for example) were partially based on whether the respondents had voted in the last general election. The higher turnout, particularly in the North of England, contributed to the miscalculation of the result (YouGov, 2016a). People who do not normally vote voted in the EU referendum, and they voted leave. This raises the question of what motivated the high turnout and what led the 1.2 million previously disengaged voters to find the leave message more convincing.

This paper develops the claim that the leave vote was motivated by post-truth politics, a politics which seeks to emit messages into the public domain which will lead to emotionally charged reactions, with the goal of having them spread widely and without concern for the accuracy of the messages provided. This form of politics has been made possible by two developments: 1) the development and widespread usage of social media for acquiring information, and 2) a growing distrust in traditional elites as well as expertise. Technological changes in the nature of news and information dispersal have taken place, with new technologies of communication usurping the role of traditional gatekeepers in filtering, checking and monitoring the information which reaches the public, as well as undermining their role in ensuring a degree of accuracy. The quantity of knowledge and information combined with the lack of means for gatekeeping makes for a potentially toxic environment for assessing the credibility of truth claims. The role of technological change is central to proclamations of a post-truth era, which essentially rely on the argument that although information has become easier to attain and is available in unprecedented quantities, there is less capacity to determine its quality. Secondly, at least since the war in Iraq, and following several other crises, such as the 2008 financial crisis, populations around the world have lost their respect for traditional elites and gatekeepers. As a result, emotionally charged voting has become more prevalent.

Together these conditions have created a fertile ground for post-truth politics to spread but we also need to acknowledge the active role the population plays in this new form of politics. It is primarily the population that decides to share and/or respond to false news messages, thus promoting their online popularity. Individual users decide to use social media for acquiring information, they decide not to verify the sources that are emitting that information, and they vote based on value-laden decisions. The 24th June Brexit Referendum in the UK can be interpreted as a

marker of a new age of post-truth politics in which facts, expertise and merit have become less valued than they were in the past (Gaston, 2016). Scholars of politics and international relations thus need to pay more attention to the everyday activities of ordinary citizens and how those shape political decisions, and potentially even political regimes.

Commentators in the UK have argued that the leave campaign knowingly disseminated lies into the public domain, which were perpetuated by the media and amplified in social media echo chambers, which reinforced them in the minds of voters. Matthew d'Ancona (2017), for example, sees the Brexit vote as marking a new age of politics in which the rise of populism associated with the Leave vote has devalued claims to objective truth. The evidence he presents for this argument stems from reading the Brexit campaign, as well as that of Donald Trump, as having been rife with evident falsehoods (d'Ancona, 2017). D'Ancona argues that the problem is a lack of demand for facts and expertise in the current climate. He observes that "'experts' are [increasingly] vilified as an ill-intentioned cartel rather than a source of verifiable information" (d'Ancona, 2017: 5). "Rationality is threatened by emotion, diversity by nativism, liberty by a drift towards autocracy [...] at the heart [...] is a crash in the value of truth, comparable to the collapse of a currency or a stock" (ibid.: 4). The age of populism is seen to be marked by a condition of epistemological relativism, in which facts are determined as true according to the value perspective from which they are viewed (Lynch, 2011: 88). Gaston argues that "the age of post-truth politics fetishizes simple, not effective, plans – and rewards those bold enough to promise them" (Gaston, 2016). According to the *Economist* "the term picks out the heart of what is new: the truth is not falsified, or contested, but of secondary importance" (The Economist, 2016).

Although each of these declarations focuses on different elements of this so-called post-truth era, the common thread is an epochal change in attitudes towards truth. Its role in society is devalued in favour of something else. The Oxford Dictionary states what that 'something else' is when it defines post-truth as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

This article contributes to these proclamations by developing an argument about the extent to which the UK's 'Brexit' referendum to exit the European Union has been shaped by post-truth politics. The paper first develops a theoretical argument of how technological changes towards the increased use of social media for news acquisition, and an increasing distrust in political elites and scientific expertise create the conditions of possibility for post-truth politics. Second it characterises the public debate surrounding the Brexit referendum, and highlights its highly divisive nature, as well as the fact that the population primarily remembered lies issued by

the Leave campaign. Third the paper argues that the Leave campaign's successful strategy was due to a focus on social media messaging. The paper then provides evidence about the public's gradual decrease in trust in traditional political elites and scientific expertise over the last decade, which was at the origin of the public's susceptibility to emotional voting of a particular kind. The last section highlights the establishment's efforts to avert the arrival of a post-truth era. It concludes by raising some points of concern with the contemporary strategy and raises the need for scholars to study the daily activities of the population, and thus to focus on its role as an active regime shaper.

TECHNOLOGY AND DISTRUST: CONDITIONS OF POST-TRUTH POLITICS

The post-truth politics that have marked the Brexit referendum campaign have been made possible by two distinct conditions of possibility. First, technological innovations have resulted in new ways of disseminating information which infringe upon the role of traditional media as gatekeepers for ensuring the accuracy of the information that gets disseminated widely – as well as their monopoly on getting that information. Second, a rising distrust of political elites, traditional media, and expert knowledge leads people to rely on alternative sources of information and to emotionally charged and value-laden decision-making. As Suiter (2016: 26), among others, argues:

> Under the older logic politicians and journalists were co-dependent for coverage and for content with journalists playing a gatekeeping role. The new Web 2.0-hybrid model, which includes social media, blogs, reality TV and so on, negates much of this. Politicians can now communicate directly with the electorate. At the same time trust in the older institutions in both politics and media is continuously declining. Scepticism of the establishment is such that many believe little the media says.

Firstly, the widespread use of social media to acquire information infringes upon the role of traditional media such as broadcasting, TV, and newspapers as mediators, and consequently as gatekeepers for the dissemination of information. Anyone can post anything on social media, and whether the message disseminates widely depends on how often it gets shared, not on how accurate it is. According to an analysis of 126,000 Twitter stories tweeted by around 3 million people more than 4.5 million times, false stories diffused "significantly farther, faster, deeper and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information" (Vosoughi et al., 2018: 1146). False news is more interesting and novel and hence is shared and perpetuated throughout Twitter in a way that the truth is not. The news disseminated through so-

cial media reaches a large portion of the population. According to a poll carried out by Oxford University over half of the respondents prefer to access news through search engines, social media or news aggregators (interfaces that use ranking algorithms to select stories) rather than interfaces driven by humans (homepages, edited/editorial emails and mobile notifications) (Newman, 2018).

Furthermore, readers might not be able to sufficiently judge the accuracy of the news stories they are reading on social media sites by themselves. According to a study from the London School of Economics (LSE), although readers widely acknowledged that 'traditional cues' (data reliability, the author, spelling and tone) are superior for forming an opinion on the reliability of the story, even highly educated individuals used cues such as presentation, number of shares, number of similar articles, and alignment with pre-existing knowledge more widely when evaluating the accuracy of news stories (Ho et al., 2017). According to Ofcom "while lots of people are able to recall the social media site they consumed the news on, some struggle to remember the original source of the news story" (Ofcom, 2018: 2). What compounds this issue is that the social media space functions like an echo chamber, meaning that confirmation bias occurs more easily within the online sphere. People have friends who have similar opinions as they do, and so they only ever access a relatively small proportion of the news items that are trending online, the proportion that is most similar to their own views. Algorithms on platforms like Facebook and YouTube further compound the difficulties, because they create filter bubbles, as people see online content that is most similar to their previous browsing history (Vicario et al., 2017: 8). Moreover, the confirmation bias suggests that once people have adopted misinformation, it is inherently difficult to correct that misinformation, particularly if it supports a viewpoint already held (Nyhan, 2007). In sum, changes in the media environment, particularly the increasing role of social media, have created a fertile ground for the flourishing of post-truth politics.

Second, a rising lack of trust in traditional elites and expertise further compounds these difficulties and creates opportunities for a rise in post-truth politics. Trust can be defined in a political context as the "summary judgement that the system is responsive and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny" (Miller and Listhaug, 1990: 358). In practice political elites create policies and they either receive trust from those citizens who are satisfied with the policies, or cynicism from those who are not (Citrin, 1974). Trust is important for the functioning of a liberal democracy, but a healthy degree of scepticism is also vital: "scepticism stimulates political engagement and signals a willingness to judge political institutions by their own merits" (Meer, 2017). Yet when scepticism reaches too far and transforms into distrust, distrust "may inspire vigilance in and monitoring of a relationship, uncooperative behaviour, or the severing of a relationship" (Levi and Stoker,

2000). Instead of vigilance, apathy and uncooperative behaviour can emerge. This condition forms a fertile ground for the emergence of post-truth politics and protest votes.

In the remainder of this article we will demonstrate that the Brexit campaign took shape on the basis of these two preconditions, and that post-truth politics shaped the campaign in significant ways.

THE PUBLIC DEBATE SURROUNDING THE BREXIT REFERENDUM

The Brexit campaign was "divisive, antagonistic and hyper-partisan..." (Moore and Ramsay, 2017: 168), as has been clear also in its aftermath. Both 'sides' actively accused each other of dishonesty and scaremongering, and these discursive tactics did little to inspire trust from the public in the debate as a whole. Rather, the public were encouraged to distrust political messaging based on constant back and forth accusations and disparagement. And yet, the three key messages the public remembered from the referendum campaign "were components of key arguments belonging to Brexiters:

1. The UK sends £350m per week to the EU,
2. Net migration to the UK had hit 333,000,
3. Turkey and other candidate countries joining the EU.

These controversial topics were hugely salient in the press as well as in personal debates that took place" (Joyce, 2017). The narrative of the Vote Leave campaign had traction with the public in a way the Vote Remain campaign did not, irrespective of the public's apparent distrust of most 'official' messages.

It is worth noting that the three key messages the public remembered are, at best, misleading, and at worst, outright false. For example, the Leave side's widely publicised claim that "[t]he UK sends £350 million per week to the EU is wrong. [...] This figure does not include the rebate, or discount on what the UK has to pay. In 2014 the UK would have paid £18.8 billion without the rebate but ended up paying £14.4 billion. The estimate for 2015 is £12.9 billion. This is £248 million per week, or £35 million per day" (FullFact, 2016c). Yet, in an opinion poll 47% of respondents thought the former message was accurate (whatukthinks, 2016c). Further, the leave campaign argued that Turkey was going to join the EU, and Turkish workers would flood the British labour market. Yet, while Turkey might, in the most optimistic assessments, join the EU several decades from now (Scarpetta, 2016), 58% of respondents in an opinion poll thought it was "very likely" or "fairly likely" that Turkey was going to join the EU within the next decade (whatukthinks, 2016b). These examples point to the influence that post-truth politics had on the UK's Brexit

debate. In the next section, we highlight how social media usage has contributed to this development.

Technology and the Brexit Campaign

Whilst misinformation in election and referendum campaigns is certainly not a new phenomenon, the ubiquity and ease with which information is distributed and found through the means of the internet and social media have multiplied the problem to an unprecedented degree. The social media strategy of the Leave campaign played an important role in driving the swing to Leave. The Leave campaign spent the majority of its resources on direct digital communication. Dominic Cumming sent "nearly a billion targeted digital adverts... and almost all [of the campaign's] money into digital communication" (Cummings, 2016). Data from Twitter suggest that the social media marketing strategy of the Leave campaign was successful: according to Brandwatch, over the 31 days before the referendum, Twitter indicated a significant swing to the leave side based on the hashtags "#voteremain" and "#voteleave" as shown in Figure 1. This data also shows a total of over 5.4 million tweets regarding the EU referendum in the final run up to the referendum (Joyce, 2016).

Figure 1: EU Referendum, Remain vs. Leave related hashtags

EU Referendum, Social data analysis via Brandwatch, 8 May–7 June 2016
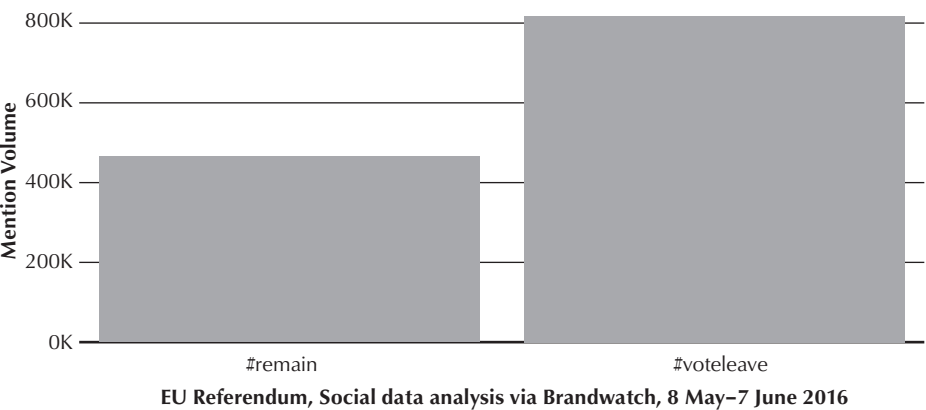
Source: Joyce, Brexit Data: Post-Truth Politics and the EU, 2016.

The Leave campaign may have used political bots, which are "computer-generated programs that post, tweet, or message of their own accord" (Howard and Kollanyi, 2016: 1). Howard and Kollanyi (2016) found "that political bots ha[d] a small, but strategic role in the referendum conversations; (1) the family of hashtags associated with the argument for leaving the EU dominate... (3) less than 1% of [the] sampled accounts generate almost a third of all the messages" (Howard and Kollanyi, 2016: 1). These political bots were typically linked to the Leave Vote. Of the top ten ac-

counts most active on the Brexit issue "it is almost certain that 7/10 accounts are bots. One of them is a UKIP-curated account most probably with some level of automation..." (Howard and Kollanyi, 2016: 4). Research suggests that with respect to the dissemination of information on Twitter specifically, not only was a significant proportion bot-produced, but this content was unreliable and heavily weighted in favour of the vote leave campaign. 'Leave' bots contributed to the high level of Brexit engagement in the social media sphere. Through online investment, the Leave campaign may have been "able to create the perception of wide-ranging public support for their cause that acted like a self-fulfilling prophecy, attracting many more voters to back Brexit" (Polonski, 2106).

Large proportions of the UK population have engaged with the Leave campaign on social media. According to an Ofcom report 64% of UK adults today use the internet to get their news, and amongst 16-24-year-olds that number is even higher at 82% (Ofcom, 2018: 2). Furthermore, social media is the most popular type of online news, with 44% of UK adults using it (ibid.). While the social media environment might have been decisive for the Brexit referendum, traditional media coverage also contributed to the muddying of the distinction between fact and fiction, inasmuch as it emphasised 'balance' in reporting debates: "This so-called 'false balance' in news reporting where journalists simply allow both sides to argue with one another without asserting the facts means truth becomes a matter of opinion or assertion, not fact. This was clear in the BBC's coverage of Brexit through the acceptance of assertions, from both sides of the argument, without evidence" (Suiter, 2016: 27). The RISJ/PRIME research found that in the sampled national print newspapers there was a "dominant pro-Brexit bias" (Moore and Ramsay, 2017: 2). Entangled in this muddying of the waters and the free-for-all of opinion, regardless of facts, is a more general decline in trust of established sources of authority, whether it is trust in information, policy or leadership.

Assessing the Decline of Political Trust in the UK

Public opinion polling further underlines that post-truth politics drove the Brexit referendum and its result. The data show a distrust in politicians, but also a move away from getting information from so-called experts. There are likely to be many reasons for this, including separate events such as the 2008 financial crash, or the Iraq War, but previous analyses have long suggested that trust in democratic political institutions is not only weak, but in decline. The Edelman trust barometer indicates that trust in government, at thirty six percent, is low compared to previous levels, with most people surveyed feeling that their views are not represented in politics today (Edelman, 2018). "Recent survey data demonstrates that government in Britain is perceived as the least trustworthy public authority" (Stoneman, 2008: 2).

A YouGov analysis looking at the trust of the public in politicians and journalists, notes the contrast between the figures of trust before 2003 and the 2012 figures. The comparison showed a fall in trust across the board. Already in 2012 YouGov stated, "In short, something deeper is going on, that goes beyond the individual scandals involving journalism, war, government, MPs' expenses, bureaucracy, banking and the police. They seem to have combined to create a growing impression that virtually all those in positions of leadership are cynically in it for themselves, and less concerned with truth and the public good than they used to be – or we used to think" (Kellner, 2012).

The year 2003 was chosen as the year of comparison for a reason: the debates leading up to the Iraq War were seen as a significant moment in the general decrease of public trust in government – and trust continued to fall over the following decade. The "September 2002 that dossier overstated the firmness of the evidence about Iraq's capabilities and intentions in order to influence opinion and 'make the case' for action to disarm Iraq has produced a damaging legacy, including undermining trust and confidence in Government statements, particularly those which rely on intelligence which cannot be independently verified" (Committee of Privy Counsellors, 2016: 131). Polling carried out in 2003 shows that the percentage of people who felt the decision to go to war against Iraq was *right* did not drop below 40%, and it peaked at 66% in April when US troops entered Baghdad (YouGov, 2015). There was clear support of and trust in the government at this point, which sustained the relatively controversial decision to go to war.

Yet, during the general election in 2005, when the people had more information at their disposal, the majority of them – 53% – swayed to 'wrong' in their answers to the same question (YouGov, 2015). Opinion polls in the decade after the Iraq War indicate a steady decline in trust: "the major domestic legacy of the invasion of Iraq by US and UK forces in March 2003 has been a widespread and growing erosion of trust in the honesty and capacity of the politicians who triggered it. This lack of trust has been particularly significant for the Government in London elected as it was amid widespread expectation that it would bring a new and higher morality to UK politics" (Coates and Krieger, 2004: 5). When the Iraq scandals became clear the public felt duped, and that the systems that were supposed to ensure accountability had broken down.

The Iraq War constituted a historic turning point; yet, the Iraq War alone cannot hold all the responsibility for the decline in trust in the UK. Several other events impacted the apparently fragile trust of the British public. The 2008 recession also had significant implications for trust in government (Liesch, 2016). People hold the government accountable for managing the economy appropriately, and major financial crises such as the 2008 crisis suggest that the alleged experts charged with doing so do not in fact know what they are doing. Since the crash of 2008, public trust in

government institutions and, more specifically, in the 'science' of economics (and policy making based on it) has fallen dramatically (Gillett, 2017). Furthermore, in 2009 the MPs' expenses scandal personalised the issue of trust. It was no longer the system as a whole, but individuals who did not appear trustworthy. In the aftermath of the MPs' expenses scandal an Ipsos MORI poll found that the public's views of MPs' motives were the worst on record thus far, with 62% believing that MPs put their own interests first, and 76% not trusting MPs to tell the truth in general (Ipsos MORI, 2009).

In sum, over the past decade public trust in the government and experts was hit several times by key events such as the Iraq War, the 2008 financial crisis, and the 2009 MPs' expenses scandal. These events caused the public to mistrust academics (and other 'experts'), politicians, journalists, and, indeed, the 'system' as a whole.

The mistrust of traditional elites, their knowledge claims, and their expertise provided a fertile ground for the spread of post-truth politics. In the context of the Brexit vote, this decline in trust was clearly a significant factor. In the run up to the Brexit vote 46% of respondents felt that politicians across the campaign debates were "mostly telling lies." This is in comparison to only 19% of respondents saying they were "mostly telling the truth" (whatukthinks, 2016a). Only 24% of respondents said that experts, economists, or academics influenced their decision on Brexit, 20% were influenced by "Friends and Family", 15% by "British politicians," and 45% by "none of these" (whatukthinks, 2016e). Although 9/10 of all economists argued for the remain campaign, the public voted to leave the EU. Many people thus either ignored the expert advice that – economically – remain was a better option, or chose to prioritise other imperatives above economic ones, with the economic damage forecast by experts not seen as a sufficient deterrent to doing so. In effect, the economists' expert views were either ignored or derided, or did not even manage to get a public hearing because of the technological changes and the changes in the media environment discussed above (Gillett, 2017). Yet, the distrust of political elites and expert knowledge did not result in inaction; quite to the contrary, it resulted in a higher voter turnout, which lead to the UK voting to leave the European Union.

The decline in trust towards traditional elites and expertise can also be seen to have actively fostered the turn to value-based arguments, as the factual sources for justifying actions have been increasingly perceived as untrustworthy. If voters feel that they do not have enough reliable information to help them decide how to vote, they will vote according to their personal convictions and on the basis of their emotions (Western, 2007). Gillett (2017) argues that the Brexit referendum campaign and the 2016 US presidential election were debates in which "values were being contested rather than facts". A rise in 'value-based' decision making is revealed in the polling in the lead up to the EU referendum, which indicated that voting intentions were based not on facts or evidence but on the 'heart'. In opinion polls only 17% of

the public sampled said they will vote "100% with [their] head"; in contrast, 5% said "100% with my heart," and 35% said "50% of each" (whatukthinks, 2016d). Evidence-based considerations were, for many, no more important than gut instinct and emotion. The "resurgence of emotional narrative[s]" facilitated post-truth politics (Crilley, 2018).

The result of the trend towards value-based voting and the increasing distrust in expertise is the rise of the expressive voter. Expressive voters are voters

> [...] who vote as part of their identity, who want to support the team. Emotional appeals are often key for these voters. They may justify their position in relation to some instrumental or policy related reason but this is not why they actually vote. Voters who feel ignored, let down and threatened by change can stand up for themselves and express their discontent by voting for Trump or Farage... The fact that the policies of a Trump or a Farage are unlikely to benefit this group doesn't seem to matter. The very low chance that their individual vote will actually make a difference makes the support seem almost costless and allows the voter to put one finger up to the establishment (Suiter, 2016: 26).

Since 2003 the public has been moving further away from trusting government in general, feeling let down by it. Voters were thus prone to view the referendum on UK membership in the European Union as a vote of no confidence in the entire political elite. Following the publicly mandated policy recommendation of Brexit, the House of Commons had to vote for something a majority of MPs were personally opposed to for the first time in its history (UK in a Changing Europe, 2017).

The Elites Strike Back?

In the wake of Brexit and the accusations of a potential Russian 'interference' in Western elections, the British government has sought to fight back against misinformation campaigns, particularly by attempting to hold the digital media sphere accountable to the same standards as broadcast and print media. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport released an interim report on "[d]isinformation and 'fake news'" "recommending the government work with experts to create credible standards for information that adapt to deal with the fast-moving technological developments" (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2018: 64). The government argued in this interim report that the consequences can be "devastating" if rumours and "fake news" continue to spread on social media, and it acknowledges that the motives for spreading such false information could include influencing political elections (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2018).

Platforms such as Facebook have come under fire for failing to effectively manage or exercise oversight regarding the factual basis of their online content (Gibbons,

2018). MPs from various political parties were recently quoted arguing that tech firms like Facebook, Twitter and Google should be held legally accountable for the distribution of false content on their sites (Buchan, 2018). Social media companies are being forced to react: for example, Facebook announced an expansion of fact-checking and efforts to prevent misleading memes from going viral in advance of the US midterm elections (Facebook, 218). Meanwhile Twitter has suspended 770 accounts to also crack down on fake news (Bernal, 2018).

Yet, a high volume of posts, on average 6,000 per second, will inevitably leave a lot of potentially incorrect information "in the wild" (Boncheva, 2018). There is a danger, of course, of censorship, including in cases where the posts do not meet the criteria of disinformation or fake news, with the judgements involved pertaining to such a high volume of information that there is a real risk of also removing 'accurate' information from the public domain. In extreme circumstances this could represent a breach of the freedom of speech and it is unclear how posts with a mixture of 'facts' and 'value' claims would be affected, not to mention difficulties in disentangling them in the first place. Other political actors might, in turn, instrumentalise the term "fake news," just as Donald Trump does, and thus strategically aim to render it meaningless. In short, there are ongoing struggles about establishing truth claims in politics, and while one vote does not mean the onset of a post-truth era, the Brexit referendum suggests that post-truth politics represents a serious threat to democracy as it is commonly understood.

CONCLUSION

The technological changes resulting in widespread social media usage and consequently a significant change in the media environment, compounded by public distrust in traditional political and media elites, as well as expert knowledge, have formed the conditions of possibility for a post-truth politics to emerge. This post-truth politics has had a significant impact on the public debate leading up to the Brexit referendum, and the UK's popular vote to exit the European Union. Technological developments have clearly played an important role in this, as social media remove the role of traditional media as gatekeepers of accuracy in the media environment. What is more, on social media messages spread on the basis of how much novelty they generate and how much arousal they create, not on the basis of how accurate they are. Social media thus provide fertile grounds for the spread of post-truth politics. With the Brexit process mired in difficulty, and calls for a second referendum growing, it is worth studying whether anything has changed in the current political environment in the UK before launching requests for a second referendum. Another referendum under the same circumstances only runs the risk of accentuating the same trends.

Political elites and the media (social media giants included for fear of tarnishing their reputation and courting the threat of extensive regulation) have responded to

the threat of post-truth politics by bolstering fact checking, seeking to regulate social media sites, and developing algorithms which are supposed to detect fake news. These are laudable efforts, and they might provide some checks on the uninhibited spread of fake news. Yet, the evidence that the UK's political elites and experts are at the tail end of a significant decline in trust should give us pause. A political crisis of trust has been developing for more than a decade and is now well entrenched within the population. This decline of trust is significant and has particularly hit governments, politicians, experts, and traditional media gatekeepers. As a result, voters make emotionally charged and value-laden decisions, often based on information which has been designed to generate emotional arousal and is inaccurate. Technically preventing the spread of fake news will not be enough to restore the public's trust in societal elites. A more thoroughgoing reform of governance and how elites relate to people would be needed for this, although that, of course, is a Herculean task.

At the same time, scholars of politics and international relations need to acknowledge that the population plays an active role in these developments. Ultimately, fake news spreads because individual users decide to share, tweet, and respond to them. Individual users decide to use social media for acquiring information, they decide not to verify the sources that are emitting that information, and they vote based on value-laden decisions. Scholars need to pay heightened attention to the people as active shapers, not just passive recipients, of the political regimes they live in. This also raises the possibility of a substantive return of agency to political and international studies, notably perhaps to 'critical' scholarship in these fields. The 'responsibility' that comes with power and knowledge (Tallis, 2016) is not limited to scholars and politicians, but they must deal with it epistemologically and in government.

ENDNOTES

[1] The highest post-war general election turnout was in 1950 – 83.9% – but the smaller population at the time meant that that only equated to 28,771,124 votes (House of Commons, 2017; Raynsford, 2016: 3).

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International Relations Scholarship at 100: Publicism, Truth-Pluralism and the Usefulness Problem

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Abstract: Revisionist studies have shown that stories about International Relations' (IR) supposed disciplinary birth in 1919 function to obfuscate the history of international thought. 1919 has nonetheless cast a long shadow over how the usefulness of professional scholarship in International Relations has been conceptualised. In this article, I trace how the 1919 birth-story orientated disciplinary constructions of the usefulness of the field as they relate to pluralist approaches to truth-seeking in IR. I argue that the centenary of 1919 reminds us of the publicist as well as pluralist scholarship of the inter-war years. Our discipline's supposed centenary should therefore foster a drive towards better communication with global IR's publics and, in this way, ensure that we are better equipped to deal with the so-called post-truth era.

Keywords: usefulness, 1919, pluralism, publicism, International Relations, IR Century, IR Centenary, post-truth

INTRODUCTION

IR's 1919 is a myth, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't ask what legacy that myth has had, and how it informed later disciplinary developments (Buzan and Lawson, 2015; Carvalho et al., 2011; Hobson, 2012; Armitage, 2013; Ashworth, 2013; Thies, 2002; Quirk and Vigneswaran, 2005; Schmidt, 1998; Osiander, 1998). To paraphrase Peter Novick's (1988: 1) seminal study of the historical profession, for International Relations (IR) "[usefulness] was the rock on which the venture was constituted, its continuing raison d'etre... [yet it] is clearly not a single idea, but rather a sprawling collection of assumptions, attitudes, aspirations, and antipathies". In this article, I argue that the usefulness of IR scholarship today should be understood as intimately tied to its vocation for publicism. I examine how the relationship between usefulness and truth has been constructed in IR theoretical scholarship over the last one hundred years. I argue that the history of debates about the usefulness of IR as a truth-seeking academic endeavour are part of the legacy of the 1919 'birth story', which led to the proliferation of theoretical paradigms that claim equal validity for

diverse accounts of, and approaches to, theorising the international. This is a condition which I term 'truth-pluralism' and which characterises the discipline today (see Levine and McCourt, 2018). Reassessing the legacy of 1919, I argue, establishes the need for a return to publicism as the necessary partner for truth-pluralism in IR.

In the first section I examine the revisionist consensus on 1919. This consensus suggests that the inter-war period, which followed IR's disciplinary 'birth' but preceded its disciplinary periodisation and professionalisation, was characterised by scholar-publicists who were engaged with plural public audiences, and understood their professional role as constitutively related to being effective communicators with those plural publics. Recognising this pre-professional, scholar-publicist mode is important if we wish to understand how the discipline's accounts of its own usefulness – and relations between usefulness and truth-seeking – evolved out of the birth-story of 1919. My principal argument is that the key legacy of the 1919 birth story was a belief that progress towards capturing 'the truth' about the international is the object of IR as a discipline, and that this truth is the source of its utility. This understanding of the discipline, whereby the usefulness of IR is seen as a function of approximating 'the truth' through theoretical progress, I refer to as "truth monism".

In the second section I re-examine the disciplinary great debates which arose out of the 1919 birth story. Concern about the ways in which the pursuit of truth-monism resulted in forms of knowledge which appeared to align uncomfortably with the interests of states, which was expressed by various authors during the 1960s and 1970s, gave rise to greater theoretical pluralism in the 1980s and 1990s. In these latter debates, pluralization was seen as a means to recovering the wider usefulness of the discipline. Theoretical pluralization led to concerns about a narrowing in the audiences IR scholars targeted with their publications. Pluralization created a fractured discipline of theoretical subcultures which largely abandoned any sense of a vocation for publicism. By "publicism", I refer to an understanding of scholarly publication that prioritises communicability with its diverse array of potential publics. These publics may include policy-makers and other interested users of IR scholarly knowledge, but also a more general audience due to a sense of responsibility for public education, as the researchers present their research findings in language that is not only comprehensible to scholarly in-group or practitioner audiences.

In the final section, I examine how the contemporary communicative environment frames the challenge of a return to publicism in the discipline today, and how this intersects with publishing architectures in the field. The article argues that the '1919 birth story' overwhelmingly misrepresents the first 'great debate' as being a contest over the 'truth' of IR. This misrepresentation institutionalised a 'monist' conception of IR's vocation, which institutionalised a victory of truth-seeking over communicability. This in turn led, despite intermittent local resistance, to today's cacophony of mutually and externally unintelligible IR theories, a predicament that

has now unhappily merged with an internet-and-populist-induced post-truth world. In this situation, it is now more important than ever for IR to recover the 'publicist' register that has been so problematically marginalised by the traditional self-under-standings that the discipline of IR has built from the 1919 myth.

THE TRUTH OF 1919

The memory of 1919 has orientated IR scholars' discussions of disciplinary purpose and usefulness. In an era in which the very value of scholarship and scholarly ex-pertise is being questioned, it is worth revisiting this memory. The traditional story attached to the 1919 birth date is that the events of World War I fostered a move-ment to institutionalise the academic debate about what could be done to resolve global political issues. In the immediate post-war period a range of institutions re-lated to the League of Nations and associated bodies drew their logic and signifi-cance from the end of the war – for example, the British Institute of International Affairs, and the Council on Foreign Relations in New York arose out of meetings at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The key moment of disciplinary institutionali-sation is deemed to have been the founding of the Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth, which was first occupied by Alfred Zimmern, who subsequently took the first chair in International Relations at Oxford. In 1926, the chair in International Politics at the London School of Economics (LSE) was first occupied by Noel Baker. In disciplinary histories orientated by the 1919 birth story, the naivety of a suppos-edly predominant group of 'Idealist' IR scholars writing in the inter-war years is sup-posed to have contributed directly to the events of World War II (see de Carvalho et al., 2011: 745). Subsequently, the discipline of IR would be dominated by IR the-oretical 'Realists' seeking to atone for this original sin.

However, a revisionist consensus has emerged over the last twenty years which raises questions about the logical, historical and normative value of this 1919 story-line for narrating the history of IR. Firstly, disciplinary historians demonstrated that it is implausible to suggest that International Relations as an intellectual field emerged after the end of World War I (Olson, 1972: 19). Intellectual debates about concepts such as anarchy or international organisation began much earlier (Schmidt, 1998; Vi-talis, 2015; Hobson, 2012). Little about the intellectual field really appeared only after 1919 (de Carvalho et al., 2011). Furthermore, secondly, whilst the intellectual field emerged well before 1919, International Relations as a professionalised aca-demic discipline taught in universities emerged quite some time after 1919 (Olson, 1972: 13). Whilst some relevant institutions appeared in the inter-war years, IR as a professionalised university subject was really a post-1945 phenomenon (Ashworth, 2013). Thirdly, 1919 is clearly a British-centric birth-date (Ashworth, 2013: 9). 1919ers occasionally have a vested interest in the date, since it establishes the country they live in, or even the university they work at, as a founding location for IR (Booth,

2017). Fourthly, the 1919 birth date is problematically externalist (Thies, 2002). Whilst some adopt a fully internalist approach to disciplinary history (Schmidt, 1998), revisionists have been concerned about reflecting upon the complexity involved in relating historical events (like World War I) to intellectual activities (Quirk and Vigneswaran, 2005: 103). Private foundations, for example, clearly played a more significant mediating role in IR's creation as a discipline than that which the 1919 story-line allows for them (Palmer, 2017; Guilhot, 2011).

Fifthly, and related to the above, the 1919 story articulates IR as a heroic discipline devoted to fostering peaceful relationships in the international realm through truth-seeking. This narrative leaves IR's problematic Eurocentrism unconsidered – as well as glossing over the regular overlap of its truth-seeking endeavours with practices of state hegemony, imperialism or even racism (Hobson, 2012). 1919 is a myth of disciplinary innocence that elides problematization of the field. Tied to this, the 1919 birth story rests on the construct of an intellectual grouping of Idealists who are supposed to have emerged after the end of World War I and who believed that international relations could be remade in light of the truth that this conflict revealed. These Idealists would be critiqued and defeated by Realists, who saw the truth of international relations as unavoidably conflictual, in what has come to be called the 'First Great Debate'. Revisionist scholars have unpicked the construct of the 'First Great Debate', which emerges mainly from a loose reading of E.H. Carr – a point which reinforces the parochialism of the 1919 birth story (Ashworth, 2013: 304; Quirk and Vigneswaran, 2005). Whilst some revisionist disciplinary historians (e.g. Osiander, 1998) observe that what the inter-war scholars had in common has been misunderstood, it is clear that there was no coherent theory of 'Idealism' for Realists to critique (Long, 1991). There is, as Wilson (1998) put it, some "absurdity" in the diversity of thinkers squashed under this label, including Alfred Zimmern, Norman Angell, H. N. Brailsford, Leonard Woolf, Philip Noel-Baker and David Mitrany (see Ashworth, 2006: 280–291). Their common themes of discussion concerning the viability of the League of Nations architecture, or addressing the political economies of imperialism in the aftermath of the Great War did not signify a shared theoretical approach to truth-seeking (Schmidt, 1998: 438; Ashworth, 2006: 297). Quirk and Vigneswaran (2005) develop the argument that the 'First Great Debate' is essentially a retrospective construction which underwrites a teleology of progress towards the Realist theoretical claim to have monopolised the truth about IR (see also Thies, 2002).

Given the above, why not let the centenary of 1919 pass with a whimper? Revisionists have shown it to be a problematic birth date, but they have also shown that the 1919 story casts a long shadow over subsequent IR scholarship. As Quirk and Vigneswaran (2005: 106) note, it is only through identifying the "idiosyncrasies that pervade the history of ideas" that "questions about the nature and purpose of IR scholarship can take center-stage". Whilst the 1919 birth story is a retrospective con-

struction, "it is no coincidence that this [construction] occurs as the discipline of International Relations moves from its formative stage toward a more permanent, organised presence in academia" (Thies, 2002). If the 1919 birth story "had an inhibiting effect on disciplinary development" (Wilson, 1998), it is important (and useful) to identify how this played out in disciplinary debates about the usefulness of IR as a truth-seeking endeavour.

A key finding of revisionist disciplinary histories is that the 1919 birth story occluded the complexity of inter-war scholarship (Ashworth, 2013: 301). The construct of 'a tragic failure of Idealism' as an explanation for World War II obfuscated the continuing attraction to, and widespread sympathy for the idea of a practical emphasis in all of international studies, which remained prevalent after the war. What Spencer referred to as the "constructive imagination" was central to Realist accounts of IR after World War II (Thies, 2002: 157). What Olson (1972: 12) termed the "ameliorative emphasis" of inter-war thought was not alien to scholarship after the war. Thies (2002) argued that a "Utopian Realism" characterised most of the key thinkers involved in establishing a disciplinary IR after 1945 with the support of major US foundations (see also Guilhot, 2015).

Obfuscating the post-war continuity from the interwar years is a central effect of the 1919 birth story. By claiming that the authors of the interwar years were all members of a coherent Idealist theoretical approach who shared the culpability for World War II, Realists could argue that their theoretical approach alone could resolve the problem of usefulness revealed by the failures of Idealism. Idealism's alleged lack of utility, signalled by its inability to prevent World War II, is what supposedly reveals the singular or 'monist' truth of Realism. This account of the early stages of the discipline required rhetorically eliding the ambiguous plurality of scholars who wrote during the inter-war years, and their continuities into the subsequent period, so as to frame the discipline through a narrative of progress towards 'the truth', and thus usefulness.

Disciplinary historians also observe that alongside their substantial theoretical pluralism, the authors of the interwar years shared a sense of the need (for what would soon become 'IR scholarship') to communicate with diverse publics. Osiander (1998) argued that in the period leading up to and during the interwar years, a commonly recognised challenge was that the effects of interdependence were poorly understood by the mass public, and that academics correspondingly had a responsibility to, as Angell put it, overcome the obstacles in the "public mind" that created "mental inertia" (Angell, 1918). This concern for communicating with diverse publics had its roots in the period before 1919, reflecting broader scholarly cultures of the time, but was further fostered by scholarly reflections on the war itself (Quirk and Vigneswaran, 2005). Ginn's work, for example, had brought together the pursuit of education for peace and institutionalist projects (Theis, 2002). As Hob-

son made clear, at the core of inter-war conceptions of academic practice was a sense that "in the long-term [...] the success of the international government rested on an informed world public" (Long, 1991). Zimmern saw public opinion as far from being "necessarily a force for peace". Like Angell, he saw his role as that of educating publics so as to better deal with problems of global industrialization (Miller, 1986; Osiander, 1998). Zimmern disagreed with contemporaries like Woolf because he was more pessimistic about the chances of the publicist promoters of the League of Nations.

The intersection between scholarship and public attitudes was a central and broadly consensual concern amongst inter-war scholars. Carr (1936) explicitly raised such concerns after the war. The inter-war authors wrote about and understood their function as attached to, and centrally interpolated with, a vocation for *publicism* – a sense that their publications targeted a diverse and wide array of publics, and that it was constitutive of their professional role to seek to effectively communicate with those publics (Osiander, 1998: 24). Osiander (1998: 429) argues that the key feature common to inter-war and post-war scholarship was that it was addressed not to an academic community of IR scholars, which did not yet exist, but to a "larger public little interested in methodological disquisitions".

This explicitly *publicist* meter of interwar scholarship is marked in the documentation attached to both the academic and the equally important "non- or quasi-academic" institutions founded in the inter-war years (Olson, 1972: 13). The Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth was explicitly orientated by a commitment to a programme of public education and publicism. This is mirrored in the founding statements of the British Institute of International Affairs, which, as was noted in the editorial introduction to the first edition of the house journal in 1922, was to be a "source of information and a guide to judgment in international affairs, to which the publicist may profitably resort in discharging his function of forming the opinion of the wider public to which he appeals." That "many-sidedness" was also clear at the LSE when the Cassell Chair of International Relations was established there in 1924 (Northedge, 2003). When taking up the 1930 chair at Oxford, Zimmern explicitly called for a publicist vocational remit (Osiander, 1998: 24).

As such, the diversity of theoretical positions and representations of the truth about international relations during the interwar years should not prevent us from recognizing that a broadly common meter of scholarly publicism characterised inter-war IR scholarship *avant la lettre*. This informed the ways in which the subsequent Realist-dominated period took shape. Marxist class-based analyses, Christian pacifisms, legal scholarship, and various liberal internationalisms debated and intersected with a variety of Realist-like analyses during the inter-war years but shared a broad sense of their vocation as defined by a responsibility to engage with plural audiences or publics (Ashworth, 2013). The boundaries between scholarship and think-

tanks were loose and unimportant because there was simply no formalised division between academics, propagandists and policy-promoters.

After World War II, authors following Carr produced rhetorical arguments in a publicist mode which framed the Realist approach as the solution to Idealism's usefulness problem revealed by World War II. This move effaced the pluralism of inter-war scholarship and gave birth to the drive towards a singular all-encompassing or 'monist' truth that would organise the discipline's trajectory and ambitions after 1945. Inter-war IR scholars *avant la lettre* assumed that a confluence of educational functions, policy advisory functions and public engagement functions was implicit to their vocation. The birth-story of 1919 served to elide this publicist meter and the associated attention to a plurality of potential audiences, and foregrounded a construction of the 'failure of Idealists to understand the real truth about IR' in disciplinary histories. This rhetorical coup established the hegemony of Realism as the next stage in disciplinary progress towards the truth, along with the very idea of disciplinarity. The dominant construction of IR's usefulness problem now hinged around the Realists' claim to have monopolised the truth about IR (Guilhot, 2015: 17). Scholars engaged in the formation of IR as a professional academic discipline would thereafter construct the usefulness of the discipline in terms of advancing 'IR Theory,' understood as a project progressively approximating the truth about international relations through a series of 'Great Debates'. The 1919 story contained a core imputation that usefulness is a problem that IR theorists' monist truth-seeking could and must resolve, whereas previously usefulness had been assumed to be the contingent outcome of scholars' pluralist and publicist efforts.

THE HISTORY OF THE USEFULNESS PROBLEM AND THE RETURN TO TRUTH-PLURALISM
Questioning the Usefulness of Truth Monism: 1960s–1970s

The idea that a resolution to the usefulness problem would be secured through IR theory and its pursuit of the monist truth about the international is central to how 1919 was projected into what has often been termed the 'Second Great Debate' in standard disciplinary histories. Rather than emphasizing what divided 'traditional' from 'scientific' scholars during this period, it is more illuminating to look at what concerns about the relationship between usefulness and truth united the IR scholars of the 1960s and 1970s. IR scholars engaged in the 'science versus tradition' debate like Bull, Morgenthau, Kaplan and Singer disagreed on many issues, but they shared a project of critical reflection on the challenges that the pursuit of truth-monism after 1945 had created for the usefulness of international studies.

Morgenthau (1967: 241) argued that IR was distinctive as a discipline in that despite many attempts to invent a general 'theory of IR', it had been characterised by

the "consistent experience of failure". Morgenthau (ibid.: 247) also viewed the disciplinary history of IR as a descent from usefulness. He argued that post-war theories in IR had entered a "new phase [...] marked by a number of academic schools of thought – behaviorism, systems analysis, game theory, simulation, and methodology in general – that have one aim in common: the pervasive rationalization of international relations by means of a comprehensive theory" (ibid.: 242). Morgenthau recognised that "the ultimate purpose is practical: to increase the reliability of production and thereby remove uncertainty from political action", but he argued that this signified the birth of an entirely new account of practicality, which "attempts to eradicate obstacles to pervasive rationalization... by overwhelming them with theoretical devices" (ibid.: 242). Morgenthau argued that theoretical work in this vein was animated by the urge to create "truth utopias" (ibid.: 243). This reconstituted the usefulness problem facing the discipline.

For Morgenthau, 'scientific' IR theories, inasmuch as they are animated by a utopian approach to truth, simplify or disregard politics by turning it into "something else" that is more "susceptible to pervasive rationalization", in most cases, the type of rationalization preferred by and pioneered in Economics. When theory "transforms itself into a dogma" in this way, it loses its ability "to confront what governments do, and what governments and peoples think, about international relations with independent prudential judgements", specifically by banishing the "devils, demons and witches" of belief (ibid.: 247). Morgenthau's (ibid.: 247) central claim was that theoretical work after 1945 had functionally resulted in the collapse of scholarly distance from the assumptions of state foreign policy makers. The pursuit of scientific truth utopias had led to work that "tend[ed] to support the status quo, that is, the official doctrine", providing "a respectable protective shield" for state practitioners (ibid.).

Hedley Bull (1969: 20–38) gave a very similar account of the usefulness problem faced by IR in light of the pursuit of the singular or monist 'truth of IR' after 1945. He rejected the scientific aspiration to "a theory of international relations whose propositions are based either upon logical or mathematical proof, or upon strict empirical procedures or verification" (ibid.: 23). Bull suggested that the use of the scientific approach is far less obviously identifiable with 'official doctrine' than Morgenthau supposed (ibid.: 26). Bull shared with Morgenthau, however, an indictment of the new approaches for their inability to recognise the role of intuitive guesses and judgement in answering questions "which cannot by their very nature be given an objective answer, and which can only be probed, clarified, reformulated, and tentatively answered from some arbitrary standpoint, according to the method of philosophy" (ibid.). The scientific approach, in seeking to establish an objective theoretical viewpoint, was unable to recognise and act upon the recurrent need to rebuild new theories "from the foundations up" (ibid.: 30). An inadequately examined commitment

to truth monism was thus, for Bull, a barrier to useful scholarship. Advocates of the scientific approach "cut themselves off from history and philosophy", which resulted in "an uncritical attitude towards their own assumptions". The result, Bull claimed, was "shoddy thinking and the subordination of inquiry to practical utility" (ibid.: 33). Bull thus suggested that the pursuit of truth monism after 1945 had placed the scholarly distance that is constitutive of the usefulness of IR into question.

Morton Kaplan (1969: 39) believed, by contrast, that scientific methods are applicable to social life, but agreed that "the human capacity to find parallels in history defies our ability to code or to articulate" (ibid.: 42). He emphasised the necessary role of creativity and "intuition" in scientific scholarship. For Kaplan, modern science is always "hypothetical", as it cannot seek or achieve objective certainty or necessity (ibid.: 43). Kaplan was incensed by the implication that thinkers as diverse as Deutsch, Russet, and Schelling could be usefully understood as a singular body of theory to which common criticisms could apply. He, like Morgenthau and Bull, was concerned about the elision of theoretical pluralism in their contemporary field of IR. Kaplan (ibid.: 55) accused Bull of listing "highly disparate methods and subjects with minimal discussion and inadequate or non-existent classification and appl[ying] to them extremely general criticisms".

Kaplan (ibid.: 57) was principally concerned with avoiding "reification" in the form of "practitioners [...] mistak[ing] the models for reality". As he put it, the propensity to "apply very simplified assumptions to very complex events" is a "human tendency" to be resolutely struggled against. He claimed that the theoretical claims made by IR scholars can only *rarely* be seen as directly applicable. Indeed, he saw the scientific method as good for precluding "incautious application" of theories to irrelevant contexts. Ensuring caution about the usefulness of theoretical claims was the principal function he assigned to scientific truth-seeking in IR, so as to avoid "undisciplined speculation" or smuggling in theoretical conclusions about usefulness in advance (ibid.: 58, 59). As for Morgenthau and Bull, Kaplan was concerned about maintaining a distance between a pluralist scholarly field of contingent and provisional truth-claims that must be continuously refined and revisited, and assumptions about policy applicability.

J. David Singer (1969: 63) stated that his position was not to be identified with Kaplan's, yet he clearly shared the same concerns regarding the need to maintain IR theoretical pluralism and scholarly distance as conditions of possibility for the usefulness of IR. As Singer put it, "we can never describe the real world, all we can do is record and exchange symbolic representations of reality. Even though we must (and do) strive for the truest representation, we can never be certain that we have found it. Thus, it is as legitimate to ask whether our models are useful as it is to ask if they are true" (ibid.: 76). Singer argued that all theoretical "models leave much to be desired" and should be discarded when a "more useful one comes along". He

thus emphasised the value of "diversity of style and strategy" across IR (ibid.: 76). He observed that "traditionalists seem much more willing than the modernisers to speak out on matters of public policy, with the latter often hiding behind the argument that our knowledge is still much too inadequate, or that we should not use our status as 'experts' to exercise more political influence than other citizens" (ibid.: 80).

The aim of the scientific method, Singer argued, was "eliminating the possibility that we will come out where we want to come out" (ibid.). The scientific method could ensure that greater humility would be assigned to disciplinary claims about the usefulness of the disciplines' truth-claims. For Singer, scientific methods could lead to the confidence to make radical changes in policy; otherwise decisions were more likely to be made by default in international politics, or from an inertia derived from fear of error. He believed IR scholarship was useful for helping us to understand the various psychological "factors which contaminate foreign policy problem solving and that of other governments" (Singer, 1970: 148). Singer's case for IR as a scientific endeavour was that scientific methods would restrain ill-considered applications of theory, and help maintain scholars' distance from policy makers' irrational assumptions (Singer, 1961: 326).

These four participants in what came to be called the 'Second Great Debate' all advocated for a *plurality of theories* rather than a singular theoretical pathway to the truth about IR, and all emphasised the need to *maintain a space between scholars and practitioners*. They saw these two principles as conditions of possibility for the usefulness of scholarship in this field, sustaining contact and intelligibility vis-à-vis practitioners. Whilst their differences are significant, the traditional telling of the story of the 'Second Great Debate' effaces critical commonalties in how the relationship between usefulness and truth was being viewed by scholars working during this period. The 1960s and 1970s were characterised by a collective taking-stock in IR regarding the key legacy of the 1919 birth story, the pursuit of truth monism. Contributors to contemporary edited volumes in this period articulated this disciplinary common sense by broadly agreeing that good theory was practically orientated, but that this should not lead scholars to understate the dangers of pursuing direct practicality through claiming their work offered users the whole or monist truth about international politics (Young, 1972: 179, 202; see Michelsen, 2018).

The common concern in the 1960s and 1970s was that IR scholarship had become overly attentive to the needs of states, while ignoring anyone else in international society, from legislators to the public sector or private actors in multiple states, who would also find IR research useful (Bobrow, 1972: 205). Karl Deutsch (1971: 11–27) lamented the chasm between the "amount of serious work [which] has been done to provide policy advice for governments and their agencies, …[and that which]… has been done to provide specific policy information and proposals for nongovernmental reform groups, civic organizations, labor unions and the general

public". It was argued that there are many uses for scholarly labour, including sensitization to complexity, conceptualization, factual assessment, generalization, extrapolation of trends, and 'formal theory' production for the purpose of prediction (Young, 1972: 187). The pursuit of 'relevance' to state policy risked hampering this usefulness by simply improving scholars' capacity to sell "bad or nonviable theory" to policy makers on the grounds of weighty claims to monist truth-telling (ibid.: 179, 201). Also, the Cold War had brought risks of intellectual short-termism, hubris and scholarly faddism (Hill and Bershoff, 1994: 222; Levine and Barder, 2014: 868). As Allen Whiting (1972), Stanley Hoffman (1977: 10, 12), and others noted, IR took off as a discipline in America as a consequence of US policy-makers' active insertion of scholars into the policy-making process after World War Two. The failures of US policy in Vietnam were assigned to this process, inasmuch as it made it easier for policy makers to hear what they wanted to hear from supposedly objective IR social scientists (see Halberstam 1974).

Return to Pluralism: 1970s–1990s

IR theory was established after 1945 around the myth of the 1919 birth-story, and it was perceived as useful only inasmuch as it was progressing towards the monist truth about IR. This project experienced a crisis of confidence in the 1970s, which resulted in calls for methodological reflection and greater acknowledgment of the value of pluralism in epistemic approaches. This crisis of confidence accelerated trends towards theoretical pluralization in IR from the 1980s onwards (Waever, 1996; Hoffman, 1989; George, 1989; Lapid, 1989; Zalewski, 1996; Holsti, 1989). Whilst we should not overlook the significant role of approaches like Marxism in the earlier formation of the discipline (Groom, 1984: 207), IR scholars began a pattern of theoretical experimentation in the 1980s which was expressly motivated by the desire to re-engage IR with more diverse users and non-state publics, precisely as authors like Deutsch had recommended in the decade prior.

This pluralist project was forged from the debates of the 1960s and 1970s, and theoretical pluralization was now advocated by authors of various theoretical stripes (Levine and McCourt, 2018). Problematizing the too intimate relationship between IR theory, understood as an aspirationally monist endeavour, and state policy-making was a common theme in 1980s debates (Hoffman, 1989: 60–86; Whitworth, 1989: 265–272). Cox's (1981: 126) claim that "theory is always for someone and for some purpose" was widely expressed, and not particularly contentious. Cable (1981: 301), for example, himself an ex-diplomat, stated in the same year that theoretical research in IR needed to be assessed by asking, "useful to whom and for what purpose?"

The 1980s saw IR scholars seeking to foster different 'kinds' of usefulness by drawing new theoretical resources from French philosophy, Marxian international politi-

cal economy, Frankfurt School critical theory, feminism, and postcolonial or literary theory (George and Campbell, 1990). Breaking with the project of truth monism, the ideal which had determined disciplinary constructions of the usefulness problem after 1945, the theoretical pluralisers of the 1980's advocated for inter-disciplinarity and diversity. Drawing methods, idioms and concepts from feminism, literary theory, geography and philosophy was argued to assist in fostering IR scholars' academic autonomy from state practitioners' assumptions. The usefulness problem as articulated in the 1980s and 1990s was that mainstream IR theorists, operating around the pursuit of a Neorealist-Neoliberal synthesis, had surrendered to the intellectual constraints of Cold War nuclear balancing and the needs of US hegemony (Waever and Neumann, 2005). The pluralisers of the 1980s and 1990s were animated by the desire to ensure a more 'healthy distance' from state policy makers through fostering diversity in approaches to truth-seeking (see Michelsen, 2018).

Adopting interdisciplinary styles of scholarly presentation and communication which unsettled the norms of Cold War foreign policy discourse helped re-establish academics' independence from the state (Erikkson and Sundelius, 2006: 55). The usefulness problem faced by IR was seen to be how "to make room for critical analytical advocacy" whilst resisting the pressures of policy priorities on academic outputs, and the manner in which policy makers often reject out of hand scholarship that does not chime with existing assumptions (Hill, 1994: 20). New theoretical idioms tied to pluralist approaches to truth-telling about IR would allow IR scholars to speak to the suffering, the subaltern and the vulnerable in world politics. Truth-pluralist IR theorists sought to speak to new publics, those struggling against the perceived effects of the established IR theories. The truth pluralisers of the 1980s and 1990s still wanted to be useful, but for a more diverse range of actors.

The push-back was immediate. From the late 1980s it became a widespread trope in disciplinary reactions to what came to be called the 'Third Great' or 'Interparadigm Debate'[1] that IR faced a danger of a 'useless' pluralism tied to rising relativism about truth (Holsti, 1989: 257, 134; Wallace, 1996: 22; Hill and Bershoff, 1994: 4). Faced by approaches that critiqued the settled theoretical traditions and the belief that a single truth of IR could be progressively approximated, a reconstruction of the usefulness problem emerged. It was increasingly claimed, in the United States in particular, that the "divorce" of pluralist theory from policy practitioners had "gone too far" and urgent remedial action needed to be taken (Nau, 2008; Newsom, 1995; Kruzel, 1994).

Several intersecting dynamics were at work here. The rising scale of the discipline had precluded "the kind of clubbable relationship that some scholars had with some practitioners in the 1950s" (Brown, 2006: 677). As George (1993: 11) noted, in professional IR "to get ahead one tries to differentiate one's ideas and scholarly products [...] importance is attached to establishing individual reputation". The academic

job market fostered a need to publish in the 'right' theoretical journals, and this drove all IR scholars to target their publications at narrow peer audiences (Lepgold, 2000: 77, 366–367). This, in turn, supported the expansion of competitor institutions, especially think tanks, which translated the outputs of IR scholarship for practitioner audiences who could afford it, often states (Walt, 2005; Nye, 2008: 655; Nau, 2008: 641; Lepgold, 2000: 372).

Pluralism Without Publicism: 1990s–2018

The new truth-pluralizing theoretical approaches had accreted all the institutional baggage that came with disciplinarity, and accordingly developed their own specialised vocabularies or publishing jargons. The use of increasingly complicated prose within the rising pluralist theoretical schools of IR meant that direct links between the scholars and external users of scholarship became accordingly more tenuous (Reus-Smit, 2012: 525; Brown, 2006). Increasingly, only academics working within each pluralist theoretical in-group, including Gramscian, poststructuralist, feminist, constructivist, and postcolonial approaches, could properly digest, and cared about, what the other academics within each theoretical in-group were saying. The theoretical pluralisers expressly hoped that their concepts and jargons would be ill-suited to misuse by state practitioners, but they were also incomprehensible to most other non-academic publics, including non-state practitioners (George, 1993: 9). The issue was not so much a problem of pluralist 'relativism' about truth, but the apparent disappearance of any shared disciplinary – and extra-disciplinary – modes of communication.

In the 1990s, an accusation became increasingly common: that truth-pluralizing IR scholars had made a choice to turn away from action-guiding work and needed to think again (Nye, 2008: 652). The prescription offered so as to resolve the usefulness problem now facing the discipline was that IR scholars needed to "work harder" to communicate with policy makers, and thus be more useful (Kruzel, 1994: 180–181). It was argued that scholars should improve their communication with practitioners by using less jargon. George (1993) advocated for the value of transitional actors who could facilitate communication between policy actors and academia. Academics needed to learn the presentational forms that user-practitioners could engage with. Increasingly, the 'usefulness problem' facing IR was conceived as a reflection of the expanding chasm between IR theoreticians and one specific public – state policy makers.

However, George (ibid.) had expressly not advocated that all scholars become 'policy relevant', and argued only that they might work more on communication. By the turn of the millennium, it was being argued that IR scholars should universally consider changing the theoretical mode of their work. The suggestion was that all IR scholars should do more case-specific studies and historical parables, in other

words, produce the forms of theoretical knowledge about the international that state practitioners wanted and needed. Jentleson (2000: 130) argued that abstract general theories have very little or no international policy utility. The theoretical abstraction prized by IR's truth-pluralisers was now increasingly equated to policy uselessness. For Jentleson (2000: 145, 132), "mid-range" theory, concerned with contingent local problematizations, was to become the singular vocation of IR scholarship. This refitted, with significantly lower ambitions, the post-1945 belief attached to the traditional telling of the 1919 story – that it was the theoretical form of monist truth seeking which IR scholars adopted that could resolve the discipline's usefulness problem.

Lepgold (in Lepgold and Nincic, 2000: 370) saw that the emerging "consensus" around the turn of the millennium was that "mid-range theory is best". IR theorists were increasingly advised to pursue the "contingent generalizations" which state policy-makers find most useful (ibid.: 370–371). The risks associated with the narrowing of the field and its interlocutors, which had been widely critiqued in the 1970s following the experience of Vietnam, were still recognised, but it was nonetheless concluded that doing more policy-relevant mid-range theory would generically strengthen the discipline (Nincic, 2000: 11–12). Applied theory was seen as "empirically more meaningful and *more focused on the truth of its premises* than a programme of knowledge creation dominated by the reward structure of disinterested theory" (ibid.: 45, my emphasis). There was a caveat that IR scholars should worry about "narrow partisan objectives" influencing their truth-claims, but it was balanced by the assumption that the professionalism of the modernised IR academy would prevent any scholar's crude absorption into state practitioners' biases (Lepgold, 2000: 373, 44).

There is little doubt that specialist vernaculars did arise with the pursuit of IR theoretical pluralization. IR researchers received calls for academics to 'do more mid-range theory' as bearing a danger that policy-makers would reabsorb them in service to the state. The mid-to late 2000's consequently saw an expansion of self-described 'Critical' approaches to IR, particularly concentrated in the UK (Mearsheimer, 2005). This process accelerated after 9/11 through the proliferation of innumerable specialist 'Critical Studies' journals. These new journals were created to be homes for the theoretical pluralisers, who now felt increasingly under assault by those proclaiming that mid-range theory was generically more 'truthy' and therefore useful, and who claimed that fostering theoretical pluralism better served the epistemic interests of publics that did not include state policy makers.

However, there were – and are – clearly grounds to query whether these radical Critical theoretical pluralisers were actually communicating with any publics whatsoever (Holden, 2002: 253–270). Students trained in IR Critical methods were fed a diet of normative arguments for the superiority of denser approaches to the pres-

entation of theoretical analyses, which fostered new generations of Critical academics who saw little value in communicating with a plurality of publics in mind – and sometimes viewed such communication as undermining their critical credentials. Rather than calling for any reconstruction of IR's publicist vocation, theoretical pluralisers settled into local discursive styles and modes, producing work that was targeted at and comprehensible to peer-groups of IR theorists working within the same theoretical subcultures. This was justified inasmuch as pluralist truth-seeking was viewed as a generic good. This was furthermore, in part, a natural function of the rising institutionalization of once marginal or dissident IR theoretical subcultures like Feminism, Poststructuralism and Postcolonialism (Weber, 2014). These dissident theoretical subcultures often saw themselves as useful inasmuch as they were committed to breaking the mould of mainstream IR theory. They remained bitterly opposed by those who advocated for the necessity of a transformative remembrance of the policy world through a discipline revolving around the monist truth-seeking promised by mid-range theory.

This brief history of the usefulness problem in IR has recounted the legacy of the 1919 birth story by tracing the breakdown of its implication that usefulness is a problem that could and must be resolved through theoretical work that progresses ever closer to the monist 'truth about IR'. The 1919 story effaced the publicist as well as pluralist roots of the field, setting IR on a path of truth monism after 1945. Subsequent attempts to recover truth pluralism, and thereby secure the usefulness of the discipline for a more diverse range of actors and agencies, which accelerated after 1980, involved little or no consideration of the vocation for public communication that animated the pre-professional writings of the inter- and post-war years. The centenary of 1919 provides an opportunity to address the limits of advocating for theoretical pluralism without a wider disciplinary commitment to publicism in IR.

THE CHALLENGE OF PUBLICISM IN A POST-TRUTH ERA

In July 2018, a group of leading International Relations scholars in the US took out a full-page advert in the *New York Times* which advocated for the value of the international order and its existing institutions. This public action follows similar public statements on the Second Iraq War and the now collapsed Iran deal. Notwithstanding the obvious impotence that this history of IR scholarly public interventions implies, the fact that leading IR scholars see such actions as necessary suggests something may be awry with respect to the wider societal valuation of pluralist IR scholarship as a useful truth-seeking endeavour. The loose connection between academics' truth-seeking and their credibility as truth-tellers is a central feature of what has been termed our "post-truth era" (Suiter, 2016).

This alone would give cause to reconsider Lawson's (2008: 18) call for a "Public International Relations". Lawson (ibid.: 20) distinguished a "public" IR from the "cult

of the public intellectual", as well as from simply the pursuit of state 'policy relevance'. Instead, the "central point of a more publicly oriented academic enterprise is the fostering of ties with multiple publics" and a "step away from cloistered scholasticism." He argued that a public IR would

> think much more fluidly about the multiple ways in which IR is communicated. Rather than endorsing the homogenization of what is considered to be the 'proper' means of communicating scholarship via niche journals, university presses and other forms of regulated texts, a public IR would be much more open to how communication both with and between international publics and professional researchers takes place (ibid.: 31).

The history of IR's debates about the relationship between truth and usefulness charted above gives further reason to reconsider the need for a 'public IR' today. I have argued above that a central driver behind IR's theoretical pluralisation in the 1980s and 1990s was the impulse to recover IR for its lost *non-state* publics. Of course, pluralization occurred across the social sciences, with fracturing in epistemic approaches taking place in all the social science disciplines (Jahn, 2017). IR, however, is distinctive in that the problem of usefulness has been so central to its disciplinary identity, which is framed by the legacy of the 1919 birth story. The truth-pluralisers that arose out of the debates of the 1970s and 1980s embraced increasingly narrow forms of scholarly communication in the hope of avoiding being of direct utility only to statesmen and women. Pluralisation thus occurred with little attached sense of obligation to effectively communicate pluralist truth claims to more diverse audiences, and this condition cut across IR theoretical approaches.

This condition establishes the challenge of publicism for IR today. To write and publish is at the heart of any academic profession, as is the drive to do so differently than other writer-publishers such as journalists. The challenge of academic publicism, understood as a matter of communicating the outputs of academic truth-seeking with the widest possible range of audiences in mind, would seem to have a special pertinence for IR, however. After all, that IR aspires to a universal public audience for its truth-claims is inscribed into the name of the discipline, concerned as it is with 'relations' that are 'international'. IR seeks to constitute a space for debate about the international, from which explanations and understandings can be offered and disagreed with, and possible actions deliberated by diverse but thus informed *global* publics (see Abraham and Abramson, 2017). As Justin Rosenberg has noted, the uniqueness of the international, as defined by the "co-presence of multiple interacting societies," is IR's signature concern (2016). All global actors, whether they are states, social movements or individuals, need to justify their choices or decisions about actions that relate to the international realm, and must

rely on concepts which IR scholars develop and evaluate. This is why it can be so convincingly argued that IR meta-theoretical research is as 'useful' as specific puzzle- or case-focussed research (Jahn, 2017). However, recognising the usefulness of IR theory *as such* does not address the problem that not all (indeed very little) IR theoretical research reaches any public audiences whatsoever. The reasons for this have been charted above, and are attached to the modes of presentation for its ideas that professional IR scholarship adopted over the last half century as it returned to truth-pluralism.

It is worth noting that various approaches to fostering public communication *have* been pursued by pluralist IR scholars, from academics collaborating with activists and artists to them taking on roles in the professional training of acting diplomats; becoming policy advisors to international organisations, non-state organisations and activist charities; producing short articles for policy-journals, blogs or newspapers; creating briefings; working as consultants; delivering executive educational seminars; or publishing collective open letters as newspaper adverts addressing issues such as the Iraq War, the Iran deal or the value of international institutions. What is critical to note is that the success or failure of these public engagements has little or nothing to do with the IR theory being communicated or its normative content. It is a matter of how effectively the scholars in question were able to communicate the relevance and credibility of their theoretical claims (Freedman, 2017). IR's usefulness to specific actors is not placed in question by 'truth pluralism' as such. I would argue, however, that the usefulness of IR *is* placed in question by a pattern of failure to consider how scholars might communicate effectively with diverse international publics simultaneously, and thus dedicate collective efforts, across theoretical approaches, to a broader responsibility for public education. This is the central legacy of the 1919 story. The 1919 story elided any sense that international theorists might have a special responsibility to communicate so as to be comprehensible to (internationally) plural audiences.

The processes of transmission of IR scholarship from journals into the field of international practice are highly uncertain, as information, concepts, ideas, suppositions, intuitions, misinterpretations, and oversimplifications diffuse into various user-worlds through secondary publications, and increasingly online (Walt, 2005). The settled publishing architecture of the modern academy clearly invites pretenders to scholarly expertise, who (together with journalists) inhabit the liminal space where academic ideas are diffused. It seems likely that the expanding number of avenues for diffusion contributes to the rising popular distrust in claimants to expert knowledge about international affairs, inasmuch as formal academic credentials appear less and less important for the capacity to make credible truth claims online (Seldon, 2010). As Lawson (2008: 20) notes, scholars becoming more effective at communicating with general publics may lead to "unlikable" success

stories such as Samuel Huntington's, but this is precisely a case through which IR scholars could reassess their responsibility for engaging in effective public communication.

Scholars are often called to act as talking heads in television debates. Academics are encouraged to engage in this practice primarily to promote research published in 'serious' academic media, mostly articles and books. However, the entertainment focus of television debates means that commentators tend to be re-called based on their capacity to communicate a snappy top line (Lawson, 2008: 13, 28). Whilst the role of a TV public intellectual can be adopted constructively, the forms of public engagement that TV and associated media foster appear to have played a role in the societal decline in public trust in expert knowledge (Seldon, 2010). The War on Terror, for example, created a surge in claimants to expert knowledge on terrorist issues who emerged out of the plurality of theoretical perspectives, but whose legitimacy as experts is notoriously difficult or impossible to assess within the short TV segments on which they appear.

Alternatively, an explicit commitment to scholarly activism has been central to what Boltanski (2011) refers to as "metacritical" approaches to IR, like Marxist, Post- or De-colonial, and Feminist IR theories. The scholars using such approaches seek to engage, as part of their research practice, in political mobilisation, challenges to government, or direct action (Newell and Stavrianakis, 2017). Holding the "state to account for its actions abroad" may be a motivation, and the argument has been made that this cannot be done by academics in isolation (Herring, 2006). To be useful, self-described Critical scholars enter into 'alliances' with non-academic actors. The challenges here are identical to those faced by scholars when they act as bridges to state-policy practitioners. Practitioner-orientated work is always valued locally inasmuch as it speaks to the structures of common sense that circulate in specific practitioner communities. However, a lack of distance from specific practitioner assumptions always risks entrapping conceptions of the usefulness of IR scholarship within those local structures of common sense, whether the aim is 'critical' or supportive of the state.

There is, of course, nothing remiss or unusual about scholars targeting specific practitioners with their publications and hoping to be useful in specific ways, but the IR scholar cannot predetermine through their choice of theoretical style for whom and what their work will prove to be useful, even if this is because it is effectively "misconstrued" (Cable, 1981: 310–314). All theoretical scholarship has potential uses which will not align with the authors' political or normative preferences, or their intentions (Weizman, 2006). It has been argued that the usefulness of IR plays out over extended time frames and that this is why excessive attention to its usefulness can be a problem, but the ambiguous meanings and interpretations that all readers give to scholarship are also extended through time. Professional IR schol-

ars have been self-conscious of their role as participants in that which they study, but less effective in acknowledging the diversity of the audiences that might be engaged by scholarly writings, and of how international readers may disagree with IR scholars' normative impulses whilst still finding their work useful.

Adopting dense and complicated modes of presentation for IR's scholarly ideas has not precluded their misuse or ensured that the originally intended use of a scholarly output would be realised at a later date. Indeed, as the arguments IR theorists developed have been communicated in increasingly difficult or elusive language, there has been a just as good or a better chance that they might become more open to intentionally misleading representations, as well as to simple misunderstandings. Perfect 'transparency' is impossible, for no amount of precision can guard against misinterpretation, but pursuing the widest possible communicability renders IR scholarship less open to being intentionally misconstrued (McCarthy and Fluck, 2016).

Critical IR scholars sometimes greet the injunction to 'have an impact' on policy with some degree of anxiety and concern (Jones, 2009). These concerns relate to the fear that pursuing relevance forces scholars to write for the benefit of audiences (economic, state or military actors, for example) that they might not wish to serve. Developing specialised jargons for publications did not, however, provide a solution to this problem. As truth-pluralist IR theories became increasingly difficult for non-specialists to comprehend, academic findings developed within these approaches appear to have fostered significantly less than emancipatory aims. This has been particularly clear with respect to research findings concerning discourse, rhetoric and power in international politics, which have been well-learned by state and non-state strategic communicators, propagandists, populist demagogues, information warriors, and public relations nation-branding experts (see Miskimmon et al., 2014; 2017; Michelsen and Colley, 2018; Castells, 2013; also see the Introduction and Colin Wight in this special issue). The populist communications techniques that characterise the politics of the so-called post-truth era suggest a sensitivity to the fluid relationship between truth and power in world politics that few poststructuralists are keen to claim as one of their useful research impacts (see Aradau and Huysmans, 2018; Tallis, 2016).

IR poststructuralist responses to the so-called 'post-truth' condition, and in particular to populists' embrace of multiple truths and alternative facts, have focused on the ways in which scientific credibility may be assembled and understood as socially embedded, whilst refusing to surrender to the claim that there is "only one truth" (see Aradau and Huysmans, 2018: 14). If, however, as Aradau and Huysmans (2018) compellingly argue, the "distinctiveness of science" must be "conceptualized socially rather than just epistemologically or methodologically", then IR scholars' responsibility to effectively communicate with that social world is an issue that

deserves much more consideration. Where IR pluralists' discussions of the 'post truth condition' have examined approaches to scholarly communication with the social world, pluralist public engagement has been viewed only through the prism of "organic" political activism in the Gramscian sense, or the "ironist" practice of deconstructing the knowledge claims of the powerful (Berling and Beuger, 2017). In IR's recent responses to the post-truth condition, the possibility that there may be a relationship between publicism and the value of pluralist IR scholarship *as such* has not been scrutinised.

This issue requires attention because new technologies play an increasingly important role in mediating contemporary pluralist IR scholarship in relationship to diverse global publics. The rise of IR blogs has led to them, in some cases, becoming de facto quasi-scholarly outlets or being used for preparations of texts for publication in more recognised forms, or as post-publication promotional tools.[2] The proliferation of blogs on varied subjects does not, however, guarantee any escape from the sound-bitism of the public intellectual. The fragmentation in IR's theoretical languages corresponds perfectly with the nature of the 'many-to-many' new media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. As Castells (2013) has noted, new social media tools may be routes to 'communication power,' but they are far from democratic. Online microclimates of belief and assumption allow for thought ecosystems to subsist, hermetically sealed from one another. The online world of blogging is a perfect space for the hyper-specialised discourses of IR. As old and new media interact in a fraught cycle, the online space has achieved an increasingly targeted audience segmentation. The distinctive information ecologies within which blogs exist do not offer reliable means for scholars to access multiple publics simultaneously. They mitigate in the opposite direction. Indeed, online content distribution accelerates the fragmentary dynamics within IR scholarship that have marked its history since 1980. Various claimants to having the correct, most emancipatory, or more ethical truth-pluralist theoretical approach mean that online one finds highly differentiated audiences which come into relatively little contact with one another. When they do come into contact, as a consequence of their prior hermetic isolation online, the result is a shrill disagreement rather than a debate. Those audiences which scholars might most hope to challenge, engage and inform are invariably the least accessible.

The algorithms through which content is distributed by online social networks often result in the exclusion of 'disagreeable' content. The emergence of podcasts and vlogging as means for public engagement are thus limited, with any potential for extended access to plural audiences bought at the cost of a narrowing in their received credibility. New media content is shared and distributed based on its entertainment value and inoculated against any effective peer review. In garnering credibility from the scale of viral distribution, and mutual referencing within closed

online theory-networks, new media communications technologies do not foster conditions for publicist IR; they rather further contribute to the democratization of claims to expertise about international affairs, which render the pluralist IR scholar as one voice within a cacophony of equal opinions.

The reconsideration of the discipline's approach to books, or rather eBooks, is perhaps a more promising development. Books have become a somewhat paradoxical medium for IR research as the trend towards pluralization increasingly characterized the discipline and its engagements with the usefulness problem. As a book is too lengthy a medium to expect an undergraduate or Master's student to read it in a single pedagogic session, they have departed from the IR syllabus, or are now widely read only in part (this is particularly true of classic texts like *Politics Among Nations* or *The Twenty Years' Crisis*). Introductions to books have tended to become micro-essays designed for this purpose. It has also been observed that policy makers do not read books, preferring executive summaries produced by think tanks and policy journals (Lepgold, 1998). Books, however, retain their symbolic power in academic contexts, and the result is that academics use books to communicate their most difficult and exclusionary theoretical discourses, adding somewhat more digestible introductions that are suitable for student consumption.

Short eBooks might provide a practicable way to balance the demands of peer review with global public accessibility at a relatively low publication cost. Short form series like Palgrave Pivot are already appearing in academic publishing. There is, it is reasonable to assume, a global public appetite for low cost, essay-form eBook series targeted at making critical debates about the uncertain and transforming contemporary global political arena accessible. These books exist but they are all too rarely written by professional IR theorists (see Nagle, 2017, for an example).

In any case, the centenary of 1919 provides an opportunity to rekindle the debate about IR's usefulness by focussing attention on how the discipline might better communicate with diverse global publics in our so-called post-truth era. Improving IR scholars' capacity to sell poor theoretical work to audiences by effectively identifying and arguing in line with their biases obviously does the field of IR no favours. This is as true for those writing for an audience of security professionals as it is for those writing for an audience of rights activists (Young, 1972: 179, 201). Indeed, it is the pursuit of relevance to *individual audiences* that constitutes the usefulness problem for IR theory today. IR scholars need to rediscover their vocation for creating publications that seek to reach and access diverse global publics. This is also the case regardless of the content or political ambition of the work, whether it is devoted to helping policy makers win wars, fostering decolonial or gender-rights activism, or seeking to unpick the foundations of expert claims (Berling and Bueger, 2017). Certainly, rather than claiming to know the real truth about the value of the international order in newspapers, IR scholars might

serve their vocation better by reflecting on the scale of IR's collective failure, over the last one hundred years, to speak in ways that plural global publics could and would engage.

CONCLUSION

The pre-eminent 'IR' scholars of the pre-, inter- and immediate post-war years were publicists. The 1919 ideal elided the sense that their vocation constitutively entailed simultaneously speaking to, and communicating effectively with plural audiences. The discipline subsequently centred around the pursuit of theoretical resolutions to the 'usefulness problem' as it was variously constructed. The project of finding a monist theoretical resolution to the usefulness problem almost immediately began to break down, with authors in the 1960s and 1970s worrying that IR theorists had maintained insufficient scholarly distance from the interests of states. This led to a proliferation of theories in the 1980s and 1990s which sought to expand the potential audiences to whom IR scholars could effectively and usefully speak. Theoretical pluralisation and associated truth-pluralism could not, however, resolve the challenge of speaking to multiple audiences, and led to increasingly specialised jargon. As a consequence, the idea of a 'policy chasm' arose, and with it the call for IR scholars to do more of the mid-range studies and case work that *state* policy makers find useful.

The problem of the usefulness of IR cannot be resolved theoretically, since pluralism integrally implies that usefulness does not derive from scholars' approximation of the truth. Usefulness is a function of IR scholars' approach to the communication of their work. In making the case for a return to publicism, there is no sense in advocating that IR scholars do less theoretical work, pander to a settled policy-maker or other practitioner 'common sense', or write no publications in learned journals for the consumption of other academics. However, IR at this centenary of 1919 would clearly benefit from fostering more effective means of communication with diverse global publics (Lawson, 2008). IR needs to find ways to communicate its debates simply and concisely whilst retaining the collaborative architecture of peer review. I have suggested that short essay-form eBooks may constitute a promising contemporary means by which IR can make pluralism useful through a reinvigoration of publicism, but this can only be part of the response. My argument constitutes a call for action rather than a full programme for disciplinary reform.

The history of IR's engagements with the usefulness problem has resulted in a return to pluralism, but a turn away from publicism. Whilst political activism may have an important role in IR scholarship, and "education [i]s a key tool in breaking the current distrust of scientific results," to engage effectively with diverse global publics, including those "with little or no education", requires consideration of the language we use, and the choices we make in the presentation of scholarly claims about the international (Berling and Bueger, 2017: 6).

To state my recommendations for IR in concrete terms, pluralist IR scholars must write for, and in ways that are comprehensible to, plural global audiences. Otherwise, pluralists may find their publications inadvertently work in the service of global public miseducation, and foster distrust in all IR scholarly communications. Revealing the social embeddedness of all knowledge of the international is undoubtedly useful, but only inasmuch as it can be communicated effectively and clearly to diverse publics (Aradau and Huysmans, 2018). It is the "decay of language," Orwell once suggested, that allows a politics of post-truth to thrive (Orwell, 1949). Without a return to publicism, advocating for truth-pluralism may even serve to bolster the appeal of reactionary international politics, which rests on the promise of the simplicity and security of truth (Mackay and LaRoche, 2018). Publicism is the challenge that the discipline's history of engagements with the usefulness problem has created, and this is how the post-truth era presents itself in IR.

ENDNOTES

[1] I view this as a singular ongoing process of theoretical pluralization, running from the 1980s to the present-day, contra Waever (1996).

[2] For good examples of blogs, see E-International Relations, Duck of Minerva, and The Disorder of Things.

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As the Universal Breaks: Moments of Awkwardness in International Justice

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INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump's presidency sparked a moment of profound anxiety in Western academe. Beyond the failure of positivist science to predict the electoral results (as it also failed to predict Brexit and the failure of the Colombian peace plebiscite), subsequent attacks on the media have challenged the universality of 'facts' and 'truth' as the lowest common denominators for political discourse, causing a debate on the accountability of post-modern scholars in providing tools of deconstruction/destruction. Alongside the analysis of an accelerating political rift within the demos of liberal democracies between, well, cosmopolitan liberals and right-wing nationalists, there is a corresponding delivery of antagonism in international liberal governance with attacks on the universality of human rights, international law, and multilateral governance in general. This short piece delves into these developments through a personal account of intellectual work under the breaking of the universal. It is based on a roundtable discussion at the International Studies Association Annual Convention in 2018 on post-truth and academe. This relationship was not only a pertinent and timely issue (as befits roundtables) but also an unusually challenging one as it immediately upsets two central biases in the social production of knowledge.

The first one concerns the inclination to read change, novelty, and rupture into continuities, nuance, and resilience. The academic imperative to produce scholarship *beyond* the state-of-the-art travels with an urgent temporality, and one which is receptive to moving *with* the velocity of social media in its lust for clicks/citations/downloads/likes/views. With this pace, these 'buzzword' conversations on post-truth, fake news, and the accountability of post-modern discourse for providing tools for right-wing nationalists and intellectuals to deconstruct truth claims seem already a bit devoid of meaning (the unwillingness to take post-modern thought seriously might just as well be blamed, if blame is what is sought). At the same time, recent revelations about Facebook and Cambridge Analytica (The Guardian, 2018)

have been a brutal wake-up call for more attention to how technology changes the conditions of politics today, and carries the potential of increasing democratic participation as well as undermining it altogether by adding fuel to a fire of a politics based on identity rather than ideas, and turning public spaces into different echo chambers that hamper rather than facilitate political deliberation and consensus-oriented discourse. It is therefore important to give careful attention to the continuities and discontinuities of the conditions of politics today. Is 'post-truth' something at all? Where is it? Why now? George Orwell published *1984* in 1949, long before post-modernism became an established intellectual and popular approach. Yet, he brilliantly demonstrated how knowledge regimes are replaced altogether when they no longer serve the interests of power.

The second unsettling of bias within the social production of knowledge is existential, at least for me. These developments confront us with our own claims to authority. Legitimacy, as we know, is not only a normative question, but is profoundly social (Beetham, 2013). If our claims to legitimacy as providers of knowledge in society are dismissed and rejected by large segments of that society, we need to revisit these claims and, just as importantly, the conditions upon which we make them. I therefore very much appreciate this initiative for greater reflexivity, and while it may not always be comfortable – as retrospection seldom is – it seems to be a necessary one.

I thus offer three examples of personal awkwardness, for lack of a better word, in researching and teaching international justice. The overall question that I want to stimulate a discussion on, is what it means to be doing critical and deconstructive work on what we may call global universals – for example, the notions of humanity and human rights that have animated international law-making and global governance – in a time of pushback and rejection of these same global universals. Having worked to show their situatedness in global hierarchies of power, do I now all of a sudden embrace them as they are shoved off the board as Western and, variously, leftist, liberal or neo-liberal politics propagated by elite cosmopolitans such as myself and thus opposed from each side of the political spectrum?

RESEARCHING INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE

For my PhD I researched the role of human rights NGOs in international criminal justice (Lohne, forthcoming). Methodologically, I conducted a networked multi-sited ethnography of this relation, following NGOs around in the spaces of global justice-making – predominantly at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, but also in Uganda and Rwanda, Norway, the UK, Belgium, etc. Being a cultural criminologist by background, and putting punishment at the centre of enquiries into the social, I was interested in what kind of globality is being produced by and through this relation between humanitarian and penal discourses (Lohne, 2018).

I found a serious disconnect between claims to global justice-making, and the situatedness of its discourses, practices, professionals, technologies – spaces even. While this at times involved simple stocktaking exercises, to the extent of seeming trivial, trying "poor countries' crimes in a rich city" (Verfuss, 2004) such as The Hague – in the midst of fortress Europe – has real-life complications for journalists, victims and families, NGOs and the aspiring intern who wants to make a living doing good from the global justice institutions based in The Hague. Who can afford to travel to, live in, and even access The Hague? At the time of research, all of the Court's cases were in Africa, yet out of the ten main NGOs advocating the ICC, only one was represented by an African.

A question thus needs to be asked: who speaks for the global (see, e.g., Spivak, 1988; de Sousa Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito, 2005; Connell, 2007)? While a politics of ideas for cosmopolitanism, for humanity, and for global solidarity exists in the field of international criminal justice, as a politics of presence, of representation, these cosmopolitan ideas are represented by a group of transnational western elites, for the most part. There is a disconnect, a disconnect which becomes a problem when it is imbued with power. In Northern Uganda, to name just one example, the type of justice represented by the international community – by the ICC, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch – was largely rejected by segments of the local – and victimized – population, indeed, by those in whose name international criminal justice is carried out. What they claimed was their recognition as political beings – they wanted to be able to deliberate on the *substance* of justice and not be targeted as humanitarian subjects in need of being managed (see also Clarke, 2009).

These issues – the disconnect between the global and the local – are no news for critical scholars of international law and politics. However, regarding the characteristics of international criminal justice – the situatedness of global justice-making that post-modernist, post-colonial, and Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) scholarship have helped uncover – these elements are readily picked up by antagonists of the ICC, with certain African leaders using the ICC's odour of neo-colonialism as a 'get out of jail free card'. In certain circles, the acronym ICC now stands for the International *Caucasian* Court (O'Grady, 2016), and recent years have seen a pushback with several, mostly African, states wanting to leave the Court altogether (de Hoon and Lohne, 2016). Interestingly, however, this challenge to the project of international criminal justice was exacerbated by Kenya. Two political adversaries – Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto – both found themselves indicted by the ICC after the post-election violence in this country in 2007. In the following election, they joined forces, actively using their ICC indictments to mobilize a politics against the western intervention in Kenya's domestic affairs (Mueller, 2014).

They won, and while this has been used as yet another example of local recipients' rejection of global justice delivery, recent leaks on the Cambridge Analytica website

suggest further complications. According to Cambridge Analytica's managing director Mark Turnbull, they "staged the whole thing" (Auchard, 2018), referring to their self-claimed role in the Kenyan elections and the successful campaign of Kenyatta and Ruto. Subsequently, the ICC was forced to drop the cases against Kenyatta and Ruto for lack of access to evidence, and also for lack of state cooperation (Bensouda, 2014).

TEACHING INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The pushback against international criminal justice is not only articulated by those with personal stakes in it; it has also become embroiled in broader geopolitical developments. It was easier to define global universals during the unipolar world order – one power, one truth. At the "end of history", as Fukuyama (1989) aptly described the end of the Cold War, there was only one ideology left in town – establishing the hegemony of the liberal world order. In this context, the universal travelled smoothly, freed from the conflict and contrariety of an alternative political future. Now, however, the 1990s – the golden age of international law-making – are long gone. Pluralism is back in the game, as expressed by the turn to regionalism and the pushback against international law (as global law) as such.

This breaking of the universal was particularly conspicuous in international criminal justice in 2016. While the African continent remains the most represented region of member states of the ICC, the threat of a mass exodus of African member states loomed over the ICC in 2016, revealing a legitimacy crisis for the Court that was mobilized through an articulated charge of neo-colonialism under the aegis of universal justice. As I had researched the developments and dynamics within the field of international criminal justice in the years prior, this pushback against the ICC came as no surprise. However, I was taken aback at how the breaking of the universal seeped into my classrooms, stirring reflections – and worries – about how to teach critique responsibly.

An anecdote may illustrate this point: I delivered the same research seminar for MA students in Amsterdam two years in a row, yet the students' responses to this class differed tremendously from one year to the next. In 2015, they were intrigued by situated approaches to international justice, humanity, and human rights; in 2016, they conceived of these same notions as western imperialist tools and argued for a non-interventionist approach to violence elsewhere. Where there had previously been constructive criticism towards how the system is made to work (or not), there was now resignation at the level of ideas. This is not to say that everything changed between these two courses, but to show the precarious contingency of their foundation. To my mind, this poses a different set of teaching challenges. It is one thing to explore how the notion of humanity is discursively constituted; it is quite another to find that students have lost faith in its existence altogether.

Through my research and teaching I seek solidarity with global struggles even though I might not want global designs. I want a critical cosmopolitanism, not a cosmopolitanism from above (Mignolo, 2000). In the latter course, it was as if the students were saying that cosmopolitan sensibilities were colonialist in and of themselves, and all of a sudden everything was about a politics of presence and there was nothing about a politics of ideas – meaning that *who* says what trumps the substance of *what* is said, embodying a politics based on identity and not ideas. Yet, as recognized by Phillips well over two decades ago, it is in "the relationship between ideas and presence that we can best hope to find a fairer system of representation, not in a false opposition between one or the other" (1995: 25).

GUANTÁNAMO MILITARY COMMISSIONS

The final moment of awkwardness (for now) concerns my research on the military commissions at the US naval base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where I spent two weeks observing the pre-trial proceedings against five individuals charged with orchestrating the September 11 attacks in 2001 (Lohne, 2017).

While my positionality as a researcher on international criminal justice is that of a (critical) sociologist, and, thus, a non-lawyer, upon arriving at 'Gitmo', I was immediately treated as the 'international law person', with the prosecution team and the defense teams alike on their own accord providing me with stacks of papers and motion overviews of where I would find their references to international law (as I was the only non-US citizen among the group of media and NGO observers, this also speaks volumes about the national space Gitmo indeed is). Independent of the legal actors' forum-shopping and navigation in the national and international landscapes of (il)legality, it was in conversations with interns, NGOs, journalists, lawyers, and soldiers at 'Camp Justice' that I – the critical non-lawyer – found myself defending the universality of international law and human rights in the face of a US discourse (and practice) that so blatantly disregard(s) it. There, I became the international human rights person – the voice for the universal.

In response to my questions on the role of human rights NGOs at the military tribunals, the prosecution at the military commissions pointed to the principled importance of civil society engagement, but stated that human rights NGOs were just one of several interests represented. For them, human rights NGOs are interest groups steeped in political discourse. This is the opposite of how human rights NGOs are conceived in 'The Hague', where it is precisely the rendering invisible of interests and politics that has animated the project of criminal punishment in the name of human rights.[1]

This is the paradox of the force of universals: they may be imperious, but they may be liberating too. Doing critical research on universals entails acknowledging both their emancipatory features and their relationship to domination (Tsing, 2005). But

these moments – concerning my own positionality as a critical scholar and teacher motivated to facilitate defiant research imaginations (Kenway and Fahey, 2009) – are moments that are unfinished for me. Uncomfortable. Dangerous. In spite of living in military tents covered by OPSEC (operational security) posters stating that "Knowledge is Power", I thought a lot more about George Orwell than about Michel Foucault in Guantánamo Bay. The military commission's slogan is "Fairness, Transparency and Justice", epitomizing Newspeak in the dystopian world of 1984 as there is nothing even remotely fair, transparent or even reminiscent of justice happening there. Yet it was said.

AN AWKWARD CONCLUSION

In confrontation with the crumbling force of universality, these moments of awkwardness are exactly that: clumsy, crude insecurities from an academic aspirant. There is nothing at stake but an intellect that has been humbled by interactions – with political exploitation of sociological insight, with teaching academic critique in a slippery civic context, and with a different empirical research field than the one from where I have my analytic breeding. For all I know, it might also be a necessary *rite de passage* for academic maturity, stirring humbleness over discipline, nuance over definites. In researching and teaching situated approaches to the work of the universal in a time of friction, this is certainly a call for more knowledge, more dialogue, and more of what induces consensus rather than conflict. This is so because although contradictory and violent, the demise of the liberal world order includes its real-life promises, its democratic emancipation, and, not least, its normative language. I don't know what is more unnerving: paying lip-service to human rights or rejecting their value altogether. The latter might be more honest, more in tune with the real-politik of the every-day, of conflict of interest on the local and global scale alike.

However, discourse does matter. It is constitutive. It is how we make sense of our living together in the same space and time. Its intent may be set on expansion, but at least not rupture. "The universal offers us a chance to participate in the global stream of humanity" (Tsing, 2005: 1). Can we afford to turn it down?

ENDNOTES

[1] Manuscript on file with author.

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Russia and the World: 2018 IMEMO Forecast

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EDITOR'S NOTE

BENJAMIN TALLIS
Editor-in-Chief, New Perspectives

I am very pleased to present the latest iteration of a long-standing initiative, together with IMEMO, the Russian Academy of Science's Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations. *New Perspectives* is again the only place where you can get this unique, English language insight into the thinking and worldview of the Russian foreign policy establishment. As we were somewhat delayed with this year's publication, meaning that it is in practice less of a forecast than a 'pastcast', we are happy to also present a special 'Autumn 2018' update to the forecast from Irina Kobrinskaya, the head of the Centre for Situation Analysis at IMEMO. This update provides a valuable addition to the main forecast, and in both texts, 'the Russia factor' and how it is (mis)understood around the world is a prominent issue. The update also trails the 2019 forecast, which will be published in Russian in the next months and in English in *New Perspectives* in Spring 2019. The timing of this year's 'forecast' also allows us to do something a little different with our usual forum of responses that will be coming in our next issue: a group of leading Western scholars will not only respond to the 2018 forecast, but provide their own miniforecasts of what lies in store for 'Russia and the World' in 2019. I hope you find this year's forecast and update as stimulating as I did and that it provokes much needed discussion between Russian and Western experts.

RUSSIA AND THE WORLD: 2018

THE 'RUSSIA FACTOR': INCREASINGLY INFLUENTIAL, STILL MISUNDERSTOOD

Russia enters the year 2018 with an independent and active (*assertive*, according to many western experts and politicians) multi-vector foreign policy (Rutland, 2017; SETA, 2018; Secrieru, 2018; Wesslau and Wilson, 2016). The significant role of Russia in world politics and international institutions, and its presence – including military presence – and influence in various regions are increasingly recognized by international actors. In the course of and after the end of the massive military stage of the Syrian conflict Russia has succeeded in strengthening its role as one of the key players and mediators, both in Syria and in the Middle East region in general. This policy of building/maintaining balance (which was predicted and emphasized as a basic pattern of our foreign policy in the "Russia and the World – 2017" edition of the IMEMO Forecast) also proved effective in other areas, including the Asia-Pacific region.

At the same time, Russia's strengthening role led to negative interpretations and perceptions, which were manifested in the excessive and at times false claims relating to the 'Russia factor' in both foreign and domestic policy in the US and Europe. This tendency is likely to remain prominent in 2018, particularly if we take into account the mid-term congressional elections in the USA in November 2018, as well as the recent elections in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy and Sweden. The 'Russia factor' became a tool of 'political technology': it is almost routine, but rather effective due to its primitiveness and the appeal to hardy stereotypes and fears of the past. Neutralizing its negative impact will be one of the important and difficult tasks of the Russian foreign policy in the foreseeable future.

The need to overcome anti-Russian hysteria also becomes increasingly obvious to those realistic Western politicians who think with sufficient perspective. However, this wave is unlikely to be brought down in 2018, nor can we exclude aggravations of the problem, including those in connection with the 2018 the FIFA World Cup (to be held in Russia) and the Winter Olympic Games.

Despite the anti-Russian background, in 2018 it is possible to expect the active participation of Russia in the resolution of several crisis situations by means of bilateral as well as multilateral contacts and formats, including those initiated by Moscow and those within the international organizations – such as the UN or the OSCE. Such crises as well as other risks and threats are unlikely to decrease in 2018, given, *inter alia,* the tensions in Syria, on the Korean Peninsula, in Mexico and in relation to Iran as well as the conflict in Yemen and the ongoing Ukraine crisis; not to mention the likely spike in protests and confrontation in the Middle East and around the world provoked by President Donald Trump's decision to transfer the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, thus recognizing it as the Israeli capital.

Russian foreign policy in 2018 will be influenced by a complex of global and regional tendencies and factors, both long-term and of a transient, situational character, including:

• The decreasing role and impact of international organisations (most notably the UN) and the general degradation of the system of international law, including in relation to arms control and disarmament but also economy and trade
• China's increasing role in and influence on world politics and economics, and the potential aggravation of the US-China rivalry
• The crisis of traditional regional integration associations (e.g. the EU) and the related growth of nationalism and national populism
• The unpredictability and uncertainty stemming from President Trump's foreign policy
• The likelihood, nonetheless, of a toughening of the anti-Russian sanctions by the US
• The high level of conflict and instability in the Middle East
• The growth and proliferation of terrorist threats
• The continuation of the Ukraine crisis

All of this takes place against the backdrop of the presidential elections in Russia, which come at a time of rising Russian influence in the world but also continuing and increasing anti-Russian moods in the West. This combination of trends and circumstances informs the analysis that follows: firstly, of the geopolitical world as seen from Russia – and in which Russia acts or seeks to act – and then, briefly, of the Russian and global economies. These interconnected spheres are both influenced by the increasing importance of 'the Russia Factor' that sees a more influential but still misunderstood Russia engage with the various vectors of geopolitics that are then outlined region by region, first under the 'western vector' and then under the 'Eastern and Eurasian' vector.

Russia's Geopolitical World in 2018

In 2018 the transition of the world order – from the current stage, which is defined as the period of "Post-Truth, Post-West, Post-Order" – will continue (Munich Security Report, 2017). But its future contours, except for the growing role of China, have not yet taken shape and are unlikely to do so before the end of the Trump administration. Today's world is also often called "post-American" (Henriksen, 2017),[1] yet its tone is still largely set by the USA – and President Trump's unilateralism will most likely remain a dominant trend until 2020. The dynamics of 2018 will also be defined by developments in the position of the USA, which are likely to concern Europe and the rest of the world due to the uncertainty they will bring. This uncertainty will, in part, stem from confrontations between the White House and Capitol Hill, which will only be amplified in a year of mid-term elections.

The initiatives and decisions of President Trump will continue to signal often significant changes in the medium and long-term conditions for global trade and in the global economic system as well as in the field of security. Thus, the 2017 Trade Policy Agenda prepared by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) and submitted to Congress can be considered as a signal of the revision of the principles of multilateralism, and the alignment of the terms of trade and liberalism laid out by the Bretton-Wood system and the GATT/WTO towards bilateral agreements. As 'economic patriotism' becomes ever more popular, the Agenda sets out the task "to expand trade so that it becomes more free and fair for all Americans" by means of "focusing on bilateral, but not multilateral negotiations" and thus on protection of US national interests through trade policy (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2017). This, of course, reduces the role of the WTO or any similar mechanism for the settlement of disputes (Ruano, 2017).

Shifts in the US position cause worries in Europe, and not only there, because of their impact not only on economy and finance but also in the political and security spheres. Thus, the TTP was preconditioned by the US 'pivot' to Asia, and the TTIP by the intention to strengthen transatlantic relations in the period of the EU crisis. The US's unilateralism, near open repudiation of its global responsibility (e.g. its withdrawal from the Paris Agreements on climate change) and focus on a national-oriented ('America First') strategy will, as many western experts believe, provoke further growth of nationalism in the world, and attempts on the part of China to fill the resulting vacuum. Meanwhile, Europe will be compelled to rethink its strategy towards 'strategic autonomy'. These tendencies are all likely to be amplified in 2018.

For Russia these shifts are ambiguous. On the one hand, especially if and when the sanctions are cancelled, non-overregulation of trade by agreements in which Moscow does not participate may give it greater freedom of manoeuvre. This is also positive in that Russia will no longer appear as the outsider caught between two American megaprojects. On the other hand, the 'rise' of China (in particular within the projects 'Belt and Road Initiative' [BRI] and the ASEAN Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership [RCEP]) represents a serious challenge for Russia. The US's abandonment or suspension of its participation in trade and economic megaprojects with China will most likely continue in 2018, probably with an increased level of hostility. Beijing has little to worry about from this development, though, as it has no serious financial problems.

In 2018 Moscow seems set to continue on its own course by strengthening its own integration project, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), developing its links to the Chinese BRI as well as signing bilateral Free Trade Agreements (as it has already done so with Vietnam) and expanding its trade with the countries that are members of other associations. Moscow will push forward *the Greater Eurasian Partnership* – its megaproject declared in 2017 – through which it seeks to establish multilateral co-

operation with the members of the EEU, the SCO and ASEAN. This cooperation presupposes different depths, speeds and levels of integration, depending on the readiness of the particular partner state – and it is thus a flexible and open integration format (Kremlin, 2017).

This Eastern vector of Russia's activity is preconditioned not only by the universal re-focusing toward Asia or the long-stated domestic priority of developing the Russian Far East, with the toughening sanctions and restrictions of the West also playing a significant role. Nonetheless, the geographical structure and volumes of Russian trade remained largely stable, which is evident when we compare the period January–October 2017 with the same period in 2016. The trade with the EU only declined slightly as a percentage of the whole in the two years, from 43.2% to 42.7%, with a small increase in the trade with the EEU (8.6% to 8.8%) and a slightly larger one in the trade with China (14.1% to 14.7%). The efforts to expand trade and economic relations with India and Vietnam have yet to yield visible results, as the trade with these two countries remains at 1.6% and 0.8% of Russia's total trade, respectively (Russian Federation Federal Customs Service, 2017).

In general, the IMEMO experts expect military-political tensions to increase. The scale of both NATO and Russian military exercises continues to widen, and at the end of 2017, the alliance took a decision to strengthen its command structures in Europe. It plans to establish an Atlantic regional command to ensure the protection of the sea communication line. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has declared, this is done in order "to have [the] opportunity to deliver troops through [the] Atlantic from North America to Europe. It will include also the command responsible for relocation of troops within Europe" (NATO, 2017). The US Chief of Staff, Gen. Mark A. Milley, suggested that the Pentagon might increase the number of the US Armed Forces deployed in Europe, asserting that "the key, most fundamental task is to deter further Russian territorial aggression against the independent sovereign countries on the continent" (Defense One, 2017). All this is perceived by Moscow as a series of confrontational steps. In the context of further degradation of arms control and disarmament systems, the IMEMO experts see that the aggravation of tension may lead to military incidents and a rapid escalation of the conflict up to its full scale.

There are no basic contradictions among the leading world powers with regard to the situation in North Korea. IMEMO sees the potential for a dialogue between Pyongyang and Seoul. If there is a successful reduction of tension, we expect that Washington's influence in the region may decrease, while Beijing's would grow.

In the Middle East, however, we see little prospect of stabilisation in 2018, given the instabilities that aggravated the situation in 2017: the Saudi-led embargo of Qatar and the bombardment of Yemen, and the retaliation by a missile strike in the latter case; the domestic instability stemming from the power struggles in Saudi Arabia, and the increased activity of the Kurdish independence movement in Iraq, to name

just a few. In addition, we see an increased level of threat to both Israel and Lebanon, and a deep confrontation between Iran and the Gulf states together with the Arab countries caused by both sectarian Sunni-Shiite tensions and regional geopolitics, with a specific reference to fears of an Iranian regional dominance. Thus the situation is aggravated further by the US's support for Saudi Arabia, its rigidly negative position towards Iran and its inflaming of the situation in Jerusalem, as well as by the domestic political tensions in Iran.

Nonetheless, by the beginning of 2017, Russia had strengthened its presence in the region, as well as its position as a mediator, and had completed the 'active phase' of the military conflict in Syria. Consider, e.g., the following: the meeting of the Russian and Qatari leaderships in Moscow right after the beginning of crisis; the 2017 high-level visit to Moscow of the King of Saudi Arabia; the normalisation of Russia's relations with Turkey; and the Russian-Turkish-Iranian summit in Sochi, which discussed Syria as well as other regional problems.

In 2018, however, Russia will face no less difficult problems in the region: ensuring the protection of Russian military bases in Syria; working toward a peaceful settlement in the country; and maintaining the balance in the relations with the partners (Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia), whose interests differ from, if not contradict, each other. Russia's coordination with the US in the region is limited to the joint statement on fighting terrorism (November 2017), even if the interests of the two states coincide more widely.

More widely in terms of coordination between Russia and the West, the Ukraine crisis remains the main stumbling block to restoring a dialogue and normalising relations between them. However, it cannot be excluded that in 2018 Moscow and Washington could shift their positions sufficiently for a compromise on Donbass to be reached. To that end, in September 2017 President Vladimir Putin proposed the deployment of a UN peacekeeping contingent in Eastern Ukraine. The difficulty of negotiating a mandate for this has been shown in the Volker-Surkov and Poroshenko/Klimkin negotiations with American and European partners. While IMEMO sees a fatigue among the European partners in connection with the Ukraine crisis, this does not translate into a readiness on the part of Germany or France to make considerable concessions to Moscow – and the generally negative anti-Russian background also impedes efforts in that direction. Nonetheless, the potential shifts in the positions of the main players may give rise to new and productive negotiating formats, which would be welcomed given the limited dialogue between Moscow and the West.

Russia's Economic World in 2018

The Russian economy entered the year 2017 on a wave of positive expectations connected with the increasing certainty of a world economic revival, the improvement

in global market conditions and encouraging internal indicators. The pressure of the sanctions seemed unlikely to grow and the last nest of 'black swans' became empty: the Eurozone crisis eased, and Brexit and its effects seemed unlikely to unduly trouble the EU.

The world economic revival increased the demand for Russian goods, with Russian energy exports rising by 31% from January 2016 to November 2017, and Russia's exports of metals by 23%, while the prices for these key products grew: the price of Brent Crude increased 2.5 times; that of aluminium increased 1.4 times; and that of copper 1.6 times. Simultaneously and equally significantly, Russia's balance of payments transformed from a 10.8 billion USD outflow in 2016 to an inflow of 13.8 billion USD at the end of September 2017, and its Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) more than doubled from 11.2 billion to 23.4 billion USD in the same period.

Internal factors, however, counteracted the improved external conditions and significantly constrained Russia's growth. Most importantly, the limited domestic demand was held back by falling real disposable incomes (which decreased by 1.3% from January to October 2017). Rising investment could not compensate in growth terms for this sluggish demand, which was also compounded by the policy of the Russian Central Bank, which prioritised keeping inflation low and strengthening the Ruble's exchange rate through maintaining high interest rates. Limiting inflation (according to the Consumer Price Index) to 3.9% was an impressive success, but came at a significant cost (Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service, 2018). Real interest rates for loans running at 20% p.a. and upwards shut most SMEs out of the market, and the rise of the relative price of the Ruble negatively affected the competitiveness of the Russian non-oil export and import-substituting industries.

Increased uncertainty at home and abroad also played a role in Russia's bucking of global economic trends. The domestic uncertainty was largely linked to the electoral cycle of 2017–2018, which meant that politicians' aspirations for stability and growth in landmark indicators will outweigh long-term, strategic action. State expenditure will likely be targeted at supporting the incomes of the population and 'patching holes' in the budget and pension systems, continuing the trend of reducing the national wealth fund despite the growth in oil and gas income in 2017. A further sign of domestic uncertainty is the aversion of Russian businesses to investing and, furthermore, the withdrawal of funds from business and production into bank accounts. It is unlikely that economic actors' confidence will increase after the elections.

Internationally, the uncertainty related to Russia stems in the longer term from the implementation of several large-scale Russian geopolitical projects (especially in the CIS and the Middle East) and expensive infrastructure and image projects (the gas pipelines bypassing Ukraine – 'Nord Stream 2' and 'Turkish Stream', and the 'Force of Siberia', and the preparations for the 2018 FIFA World Cup and the 2019 Winter Universiade in Krasnoyarsk. These are costly, high risk projects with a low probabil-

ity of commercial payback in the case of the infrastructure initiatives. They are also further hindered in the case of the pipelines by the US 'Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act' (CAATSA), which was adopted in the summer of 2017.

The Russian economy, which is not in the best shape, is thus made to bear the additional burden of expenses and risks from Russia's geopolitical activities, and these costs and risks would only increase if the competition with the US escalated into a fully fledged geopolitical rivalry or if the situation in either the South China Sea or the Korean Peninsula were to worsen so that there would be a potential conflict of interests between China and the USA. Viewed another way, however, Russia's possibilities to partake in geopolitical initiatives are determined by its resources, as shown by its weight in the world economy. Measured in 2015 PPP, in 2015 Russia's GDP was 3.26% of the global total, down from a high of 3.67% in 2010 and from its 2000 figure of 3.37%. In the same period (2000–2015), China's share grew from 8% to 17%, and India's 4% to 7%, while the shares of the US and the EU declined to 16% and 17% respectively. Thus, uncertainty in the economic sphere also needs to be taken into consideration in Russia's geopolitical activities.

Increasing Russia's share of global GDP is, however, a priority but will require considerable effort in the long term. IMEMO forecasts that attaining a 4% share of global GDP by 2035 would need a growth of 3.5% between 2018 and 2020 and no less than 5.8% between 2020 and 2035. IMEMO forecasts that in 2018 Russia's growth will remain at 2% and so what is needed is a more realistic target and a more realistic approach than those which are outlined in the currently applicable long-term social and economic development concept.

Nonetheless, despite the inability of the Russian economy to sustain its GDP growth, even amidst a global recovery, some positive economic tendencies could recently be observed. The significant growth in exports of steel (25.7%), chemicals (14.4%), food and agricultural products (20.1%) and construction materials (46.7%) contributed to an overall growth in Russian exports of 25.7% in the first three quarters of 2017 (Frumkin, 2017). Export growth also seems more likely to further contribute to Russia's economic growth than domestic demand, which is likely to remain sluggish. These positive trends have been bolstered by an improved economic policy that has shifted from the import substitution favoured in 2014–2015 to a greater focus on support for exports, particularly of processed and secondary goods. There is still room for further policy improvement, however. Notably improvements could come from decreasing interest rates, rationalising the exchange rate policy and supporting SMEs. Most significantly, stability and a smooth exit from the electoral cycle are needed for such improvements.

IMEMO forecasts that the world economy will grow at a rate of 3.8%, while the IMF forecasts that the rate will be at 3.7%, with both organisations forecasting the

same rates of growth for the remainder of the decade; both of these figures are up from the growth rate of 3.6% between 2011 and 2017 (IMF, 2017). IMEMO sees a long-term trend of *developed* economies growing at faster rates than *developing* economies, which will grow more slowly than in the first decade of this century. Also, world trade is expected to grow at rates exceeding GDP growth.

Unemployment remains the most painful global economic problem, albeit one that is currently decreasing, but IMEMO sees a positive basis for long-term global development through science and technological innovation, which will also be necessary to deal with environmental challenges. The world is only at the beginning of several revolutionary changes in the energy sector, and fundamental changes are afoot in the production of cars and other vehicles: the planned bans of many European countries on producing internal combustion engines, which are to be implemented by 2040, have been complemented by some manufacturers, such as Volvo, implementing timelines in which the bans would be carried out earlier. All of this brings uncertainty but also opportunity in the coming years. The uncertainty, challenges and opportunities all point to the political – and geopolitical – context of global economic development, which is dealt with in more depth below.

GEOPOLITICS: THE WESTERN VECTOR

2017 was marked by elections in both Europe and the US. The shocking presidential election results in the US in 2016 kept the subject on the agenda for most of the year and only towards the end of 2017 did an understanding seem to emerge that Donald Trump's victory was no accident and that his political, economic and security agenda would be of high significance for the future world order. Trump is a leader with a pronounced personality type and so the 'chemistry' or lack of it that he develops with various world leaders is highly important but also makes these relations less predictable. At the same time, the value of his personal contacts – even short, 'on the go' ones, as with Vladimir Putin in Vietnam during the APEC summit – is offset by the Washington bureaucracy and foreign and security policy communities, which seem to emphasise how hard it is to work with such an *enfant terrible*. Former CIA Director John Brennan's comment in an interview is characteristic of this trend in the US establishment: "It's either naiveté, ignorance or fear in terms of what Mr. Trump is doing vis-à-vis the Russians" (e.g. Politico, 2018).

The following section of the forecast deals with the issues raised by the Trump presidency – and other matters – in terms of US domestic and foreign policy before looking at the European aspects of the Western vector of Russia's worldview.

US Domestic Policy

The Congressional mid-term elections will dominate the US domestic political scene in 2018. Legislative activity will give way to electioneering and partisan

squabbles, with their intensity likely to be comparable to that of the presidential election of 2016 owing to the personality of President Trump, whose radicalism will effectively turn the elections into a referendum on the activities of his administration.

Trump remains a dangerous outsider for many parts of society and, indeed, for the Washington establishment, yet no united bipartisan front has emerged to fight against the President. The Republicans seek to use the President's readiness to make the most unpopular political steps within the country and abroad for the benefit of the party. The Democrats are getting ready to fight against him. Nonetheless, two parallel power structures have formed: one around the President and the second around Congress (Borisova and Zhuravleva, 2017). The election campaign will reinforce this schism.

American society at large is split as well, with Trump continuing to provoke strong reactions. At worst, for many people, he is *'not my president'*. This slogan, popular at the end of 2017, may become one of the slogans for the 2018 campaign. The elections may become a battle of 'two Americas' – the liberal and reformist America versus the conservative America – and voter turnout may be higher than usual at the mid-term elections (Zhuravleva, 2017).

For the Republicans the 2018 congressional elections can be decisive in terms of their future status in the society and the party's orientation and development. The improving economy plays into their hands, with incomes growing and the poverty rate dropping to 12.7% (the same rate as in the pre-crisis year of 2007). At the 2018 elections the party could be subject to major losses, but an unexpected triumph for them, like the one in 2016, cannot be ruled out.

Congress's standoff with the President did not allow the Republicans to fully utilise their unique situation of having control over all the main institutions of the government. Despite this – and the fact that a majority of Americans (52%) opposed it – Trump managed to pass his tax reform, which may well increase the budget deficit in the long run, contradicting the Republican Party policy. However, he is unlikely to be able to further implement his legislative agenda given the public sensitivity regarding health care and immigration, which means that Congress is unlikely to commit itself to those issues in an election year. The President is likely to issue many executive orders but the majority of them will be openly sabotaged at the level of the departments, the judicial system, and state and municipal authorities. Congress, meanwhile, will increasingly try to bypass the White House and work directly with departments and agencies.

The question of relations with Russia and issues regarding its alleged 'interference' in the 2016 elections will continue to be significant in the 2018 campaign, and this issue will provide another way in which Congress will be able to exert at least some control over the otherwise unpredictable President. The unpredictable and

volatile domestic political situation will also inevitably affect US foreign policy in 2018.

US Foreign Policy

A key driver of US foreign policy in 2018 will be President Trump's economic nationalism, which is intended to improve the US economy by boosting the American presence in world markets and exports of goods and services 'made in the USA' as well as strengthening the US's energy independence and attracting inward investments. The substantial planned increase in military expenditure (more than 50 billion USD in the 2018 budget) will also be a significant factor and there is likely to be a further increase of at least 30 billion USD in 2019. Apart from strengthening US military capabilities, this spending is also used as an instrument to stimulate the economy in the defence industry but also through dual-use research and development. Furthermore, President Trump uses such spending as a means to address internal political issues by strengthening relations with Congress and within the Republican Party as well as garnering support from American business. These factors will contribute to the Trump administration's foreign policy in a number of areas, primarily the Asia-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic regions.

The Indo-Pacific

The US is developing an approach that sees the Asia-Pacific, Indian Ocean and South Asian regions as one mega region due to an extensive interpretation of the political, economic, security and, especially, logistical and infrastructural connections between these areas. The US places special value on India, particularly with regard to military and technological cooperation, and it thus seeks to drive Russia out of this market. This approach is primarily driven by Washington's desire to build a new system of checks and balances that will amount to a limited form of deterrence of China, despite the Trump administration's otherwise pragmatic dealings with Beijing.

The US will try to limit China's economic and political influence as well as its opportunities for projecting its military power by increasing its own military presence in the region in the air and at sea, particularly through its 7th Fleet and intensified deployment of ABM elements in the region. This military strengthening is also prompted by the tensions on the Korean Peninsula, which are unlikely to be resolved through a compromise but are also unlikely to see a resumption of bullying or bullish speculation by the two sides. The tensions can also be expected to increase in advance of the annual joint military exercises of the US and the Republic of Korea at the end of 2018.

Besides military deterrence, however, the US is also interested in expanding American companies' (including LNG producers) presence in the Chinese market,

attracting investments from China, bringing Chinese producers into international mechanisms regulating the use of intellectual property, copyrights and other norms and standards, and also in continuing its dialogue with Beijing on a number of regional, global economic and political issues, many of which will be relevant in 2018.

The Euro-Atlantic

The Trump administration has two key sets of aims in relation to this region and America's NATO allies. The first aim is to make the allies increase their military spending up to the NATO target level of 2% of the given country's GDP, which, even if it is only partly achieved, could be presented as a success for the administration. The second aim is to gain the support of the allies for the steps taken by the US in relation to ABM deployment, and air defence systems development and build up as well as other projects. The ABM issue will also depend significantly on the US's relations with Iran (with a compromise between them being unlikely), but also on the extent that both the US and Russia are interested in maintaining the INF Treaty. If the INF Treaty regime fell apart, then it would give the US the best possible argument to persuade its allies that a more active ABM deployment is necessary.

In the economic sphere the Trump administration's relations with EU countries and Great Britain will centre on two main goals, in addition to limiting Chinese trade and investment: reducing trade barriers for American manufacturers and increasing European FDI in the US. These tasks will be addressed primarily through bilateral agreements and initiatives, particularly with Great Britain, France and Germany, rather than the multilateral TTIP framework, although discussions of this partnership will continue. The US is particularly interested in expanding the presence of American companies in European energy markets, especially the gas market, and this can also be seen as a motivation for its strengthening of the sanctions on Russia, which is a key competitor in this field. The dynamics of the US and EU relations with Russia and the situation in Ukraine will also continue to have a considerable impact on transatlantic relations.

Russia

The elections in Russia and the US mean that America's anti-Russian campaign will continue to be an essential element of its foreign policy in 2018. However, there are also several key geopolitical arenas in which the relations will play out. The US's likely withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and further deterioration of the US-Iranian relations will significantly slow down the reaching of a political settlement in Syria and increase the military tension in the Middle East more widely. Any move toward a division of Syria by military or polit-

ical means would complicate the dialogue between the US and Russia and hinder the creation of a new political system in the country, leaving it trapped in the status quo.

In Ukraine, however, there is significant scope for improved relations, particularly if the issue of deploying UN peacekeepers to the East of the country can be resolved. A compromise is possible here and the Trump administration can be expected to exert some pressure on the Ukrainian leadership, which would have to drop its current approach whereby 'war' is used as the solution to internal political questions. Any progress in this regard would pay dividends for the Trump administration, especially in its relations with its European partners, although there is likely to be considerable resistance from foreign policy elites in Canada, Poland, the Baltic states and some Western European allies. Washington will therefore tread carefully, alternating between a substantive dialogue with Moscow and the introduction of new anti-Russian sanctions and military-political initiatives under NATO auspices to provide military and other aid to Ukraine.

Arms Control

The US policy toward Russia will also be significantly linked to arms control, although there are no prospects for an intensified dialogue about it in the near future despite the looming (2021) expiration of the New START treaty signed by the two parties in Prague. Substantive negotiations about arms control will not begin until 2019 at the earliest; that is, they will begin once the Trump administration decides whether to prepare the ground for a dialogue with Moscow in the near future or leave the issue until after the next presidential elections. Washington's position will be determined by questions relating to the modernisation of its strategic offensive capabilities and the upgrading of each of the elements in the nuclear triad. When taking account of the capabilities of China, let alone Russia, the US will not be interested in quantitative reductions of the thresholds set by the Prague Treaty of 700 carriers and 1550 warheads.

ABMs also remain important (generally as well as for transatlantic relations) and it is highly probable that the Trump administration will formulate its new approach to strategic missile defence deployment in 2018–2019. Another likely priority for Washington will be the substantial development of non-strategic defence capacities and optimisation of interception systems, which will, like the strategic aspect, limit the field for political dialogue with Moscow on this matter. The erosion of the INF Treaty regime may well become the most pressing problem in the US-Russia relations in regard to arms control. Particular interest groups in US military and political circles aim to undermine this treaty and are pushing for significant increases in missile defence deployment in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, which again reduces the likelihood of a constructive compromise. A failure to deal with

the two countries' mutual accusations of treaty violations in 2018 will further weaken the regime and could lead to the deterioration of the military and political situation, particularly in Europe.

Europe

Europe entered 2018 with a little more confidence. Despite uneasy expectations in the context of the widespread appetite for protests and powerful campaigns launched by populist, far-right forces, the results of the recent elections in Germany, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Austria, and Czechia have shown that the political centre is still able to resist radicals. For the centre to hold, however, it has been compelled to adapt to new challenges and take account of criticism from the far-right (Baranovskiy and Kobrinskaya, 2017). Substantial challenges – due to the strong representation of radical forces in parliaments and a sharp decline in the popularity of traditional parties (for example, SPD in Germany) – arose when the new coalitions and governments were formed.

However, the problems which caused the growth of anti-elite protests in Europe (as well as in the US, Japan, and Australia) will remain for the foreseeable future: growing social imbalances, rising poverty, erosion of the traditional system of basic values, and erosion of the middle class; the migration crisis; instability of coalition governments (and permanent electioneering instead of real progress in economy and the social sphere); and imbalances in the work of the EU supranational structures. In this context the drive for self-identity – national and/or territorial – will become more acute in the majority of the European countries. This tendency is also manifest in the aspirations of the EU 'newcomers' in CEE to assert their identities more vigorously.

In 2018 Europe will continue to contend with two opposing tendencies which came to light during 'Brexit' and other protests. The first is the formation of a 'core' of countries (first of all, Germany and France) and political forces which intend to consolidate the EU, whether through a traditional or a multi-speed integration union. The second is the trend of disintegration and separatism, as seen in Catalonia as well as in the UK. Contrary to pessimistic forecasts, the EU has shown considerable durability, and polls of young people in CEE as well as Germany show their strong support for EU membership, though it is allied to demands to reform the Union (Institute of Public Affairs, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017). Bertelsmann Stiftung noted that Albert Hirshmann's (1970) model of behaviour in a consumer society – "Exit, voice and loyalty" – is now apt for EU member states facing a choice between Brexit and a sustained protest.

Nonetheless, the EU is emerging from its crises, during which (and despite its contradictions) unity was a necessary condition for preventing the worst-case scenarios from materialising. Several EU member states see the Union's rules as

an encumbrance but this is not yet critical and it is unlikely that there will be any other exits in the near future besides Britain's. Despite this, however, if Euroscepticism gains in influence then a 'loosening' of the EU could be expected as member states will more flexibly interpret the Union's rules at national level to ameliorate the perceived rigidity in Brussels. This will also apply in foreign policy, where common positions will only be found in a few areas, and member states will seek to balance their relations with each other as well as with third countries.

EU members continue to advocate for the resolution of the Ukraine crisis but are unwilling to take further steps to make rapprochement a reality. The Union's profound internal crisis has significantly changed Brussels' approach to its 'Eastern Partnership', and the CEE countries that had strongly supported Ukraine's integration aspirations – Poland, Hungary and Romania – have all addressed their harsh protests to Kyiv, notably in relation to the legislation regarding compulsory education in the Ukrainian language. A new pragmatism was also apparent in the November 2017 signing of the Comprehensive and Expanded Partnership Agreement (i.e. the 'light' version of the Association Agreement) with Armenia, which is a member of the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union. It is not realistic yet to foresee the 'integration of integration projects' (between the EU, the EEU and the BRI) but some Europeans are speaking of it. Interestingly, these Europeans include the former EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle, who had previously insisted on an either/or approach, but who changed his tune when speaking at the Prague Insecurity Conference in December 2017.

This potential is countered, however, by Europe's negative perception and mistrust of Russia, which have become habitual and are unlikely to change anytime soon, despite the economic costs (to EU businesses in some sectors) of maintaining the sanctions. Maintaining the unity on the sanctions will prove increasingly difficult, though, as it becomes clearer that they are mainly for the purpose of economic benefits in the energy sector – notably for US companies – and the decision on Nord Stream 2 will be emblematic of Europe's direction in this regard. Two countries traditionally critical of Russia - Sweden and Latvia – will have elections in autumn 2018 and the 'Russian question' will be mobilised as part of the campaigns. In Sweden this will manifest itself in discussions over NATO membership, which could only increase regional tensions. In Latvia, politicians representing the interests of Russian speakers will assert themselves, but the forward looking among them will not limit themselves to the language community but rather will seek to show that pragmatic relations with Russia are of general benefit, a strategy that is likely to be successful and will hopefully avoid the excess hostility that has characterised the recent relations (Baranovskiy and Kobrinskaya, 2017).

Overall, European relations with Russia are likely to be less heated than in recent times, thanks to the downturn in hostilities in Ukraine, and bolstered by the Kremlin seeking stability in an election year. The Russian leadership is thus likely to keep its distance from the 'understanding Russia' and 'understanding Putin' (*Russland-Versteher, Putin-Versteher*) forces in Europe in order to avoid exacerbating splits in the 'old continent'.

GEOPOLITICS: THE EASTERN AND EURASIAN VECTOR

The 'Greater Eurasian Partnership', the grand project announced by President Vladimir Putin which seeks to integrate the EEU with the BRI, shows and reinforces the profound interdependence of the Eastern and Eurasian vectors of Russian strategy. In 2018, Russia will continue to strengthen and carefully build its partnership relations with China, which have been characterised by Western experts as a "quiet rivalry" (Kaplan, 2017). At the same time Russia will continue to diversify its partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region through bilateral as well as multilateral formats. Creating or maintaining balance remains a priority.

The EEU plays a special role in the formation of the 'Greater Eurasian' space and optimising the union will be a priority for Moscow in 2018, as it will build on the expansion that has already had a positive effect on its development. However, the EEU has also faced problems stemming from multiple sources, notably the Ukraine crisis and its consequences in the form of the Western sanctions, the Russian counter-sanctions and the fall in energy prices. Other problems stem from the model of integration – which is traditional, like the EU's – and the accelerated rate of EEU institutionalisation, which negatively affect the development of the Union given that independence and sovereignty are recent and strongly defended phenomena for many of the countries involved. A more open and flexible approach may therefore be preferable, and in any case it may even be necessary – and driven by the interface with the BRI.

China (which is discussed in more detail below) plays an increasingly important role in the EEU countries through its growing trade and investment there, and maintaining the political and military-political balance in Russia's relations with China is a priority. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) format will be key in this regard, particularly following its expansion to include India and Pakistan as members and the inclusion of Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia as observers. Three states have applied to participate in SCO summits – Bangladesh, Egypt, and Syria – and six countries are its partners in dialogue – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Sri Lanka. It is possible that in a year or two Iran will become the next SCO member country. Despite its broad 'umbrella' character the SCO plays a positive role in ameliorating multiple military contradictions and conflicts, which are sometimes profound. Russia sees the SCO enlargement as not only

an instrument of political and military-political positioning, but also as an additional field for mediation which is very much needed in the organisation itself as well as in the regions represented in it.

Chinese Domestic Policy

The key factor in the Asia-Pacific region will be developments in China and their impact on the country's foreign policy in both political and economic terms. China's political situation in 2018 will be driven by the outcomes of the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in October 2017, which extended President Xi Jinping's mandate for another 5 year term. No significant changes in the government are expected but the congress led to the highest concentration of power in the hands of a Chinese leader since Mao Tse Tung, as evidenced in Xi's ability to amend the CPC's rules, without open resistance, by putting his 'socialism with Chinese characteristics in a new era' on a par with the ideological heritage of Mao and Deng Xiaoping.

Xi's recognition as 'leader no. 3' in modern Chinese history by the congress will be used to promote domestic, mainly economic, reforms aimed at liberalising public and business life, as well as to drive China toward global leadership. The concentration of power will likely allow for further market reforms and boost China's international standing but in the medium and long term it is likely to run up against the limits of 'manual control' over highly diverse economic, cultural and ideological interests which are inherent to Chinese society today and which could become politically destabilising.

Xi has largely jettisoned the figures in the government who remained as the 'human heritage' from his predecessors in the position of the party leader and, contrary to the tradition established in the reform years, has not designated his successor. Possibly the successor will be one of the current crop of 50-year-old Chinese politicians who will be brought up under the leadership of Xi himself, and the March 2018 congress will be an important personnel milestone. IMEMO analysts see that the consolidation of power may bring stability but will be problematic in the fight against corruption, which is used for intra-party score settling and has effects across a large number of fields, including science, teaching and research.

Chinese Foreign Policy

China's bid for global leadership will dominate its foreign policy actions in 2018, including attempts to develop specialised interaction with the US for this purpose and more rigorously seek a solution to the problem of the North Korean nuclear missile program (Mikheev and Shvydko, 2017). US President Trump's visit to China was important for Xi Jinping, as it demonstrated his status as a strong global leader for the 'new era', capable of building better relations with the US – the main global actor

as China sees it. The importance of this visit was emphasised in its designation as "state+" and contracts worth nearly 300 billion USD were signed during the visit, with the greatest importance given to the agreement on the cooperative creation of infrastructure for supplies of oil and LNG to China from fields in Alaska, with nearly 40 billion USD of investments allocated to this purpose.

The US-China relationship is gradually approaching a level which would allow for consequential, coordinated action on major international issues. This has not yet, however, brought the two countries' positions on North Korea into alignment, despite their mutual declaration on the unacceptability of a nuclear armed Pyongyang. In 2018 China will react more strongly to North Korean launches, although the limits of this toughness, particularly in relation to oil deliveries or military cooperation with the US, are not yet clear.

In general, in 2018 Chinese foreign policy will be more active and energetic, which corresponds to the proclaimed status of China as a 'powerful power' and of President Xi Jinpiing as a 'strong leader'.

The Post-Soviet Space
Ukraine

2018 will see moderate economic growth under difficult internal political conditions in Ukraine. With presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 2019, the Ukrainian authorities will seek to reduce the adverse social effects of much needed reforms. The country's high dependence on external financing will remain and the IMF will continue to closely observe its progress in making structural reforms, as it previously failed to satisfy the conditions for receiving a new 3.6 billion USD tranche of money in 2018. A breakdown in cooperation with the IMF is the main macro-financial risk in 2018 and this is increased by the requirements for land reform as well as control of public expenditure, neither of which will be popular with voters.

Intra-governmental conflicts have burgeoned, notably in relation to the activities of the new anti-corruption agency, the office of the General Prosecutor and the Security Service of Ukraine. There was a notable increase in political tension in the country towards the end of 2017 against the background of the rallies and protest actions of Mikhail Saakashvili and his supporters against the authorities in power. However, his 'Movement of New Forces' did not attract mass support – despite widespread discontent, Ukrainians do not want another Maidan, especially not under the conditions of the conflict in the east of the country. President Petro Poroshenko and former PM Yuliya Tymoshenko only attract 7–13% in opinion polls, with no other candidate exceeding 9% (according to the data provided by the polling organisations Rating, KMIS and Sofia) (Ukraine Elections, 2017). Nonetheless, the electoral battle lines are likely to form between 'pro-European' and 'nationalist' forces, with a third, pro-Russian force unlikely to emerge.

The main geopolitical risk for Ukraine in 2018 will continue to be the conflict in the Donbass, which is likely to see periodic, localised upticks in violence rather than large-scale military operations by Kyiv. Citizens are much more in favour of a negotiated than a military solution to the conflict but are adamant about the return of the Donbass under Ukrainian control (Ratinggroup, 2017). The eventual deployment of a peacekeeping mission may become an important stabiliser for the East of the country, but reaching a compromise on this issue is complicated by the forthcoming elections.

Belarus

Accelerating growth rates after two years of recession have led to a slight increase in standards of living as well as bolstering political stability in Belarus. These trends were further augmented by the resolution of the dispute with Russia over energy distribution and transit, which has helped intensify economic cooperation between the two countries and improve their relations more generally. Belarus also significantly improved its relations with the EU and continued developing positive relations with China and other states.

Belarus' multi-vector external positioning has allowed it to become the venue of several large international events, notably a session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) in July 2017 and a meeting of heads of governments of the Central European Initiative countries in December. At the OSCE PA meeting President Lukashenko proposed an expanded OSCE meeting to be held in 2020 on problems of European and global security within the new Helsinki process (Helsinki-2) and expressed the readiness of Minsk to become a venue for any and all events within this initiative, with preparations for this to be launched in 2018.

Research conducted in 2017 claimed that a majority of Belarussians support their country's continued independence but if presented with a choice between integration with the EU and a union with Russia, they show a clear preference for the latter, with 64.5% of the respondents saying that this would definitely or most likely be better, and with only 14.1% saying the same of the EU (Gomel Today, 2017). This outlook can be expected to be stable in 2018 and relations with Russia, Belarus' closest ally, are also expected to remain largely unchanged but this will not hinder the intensification of dialogue between Belarus and the EU. This development has been facilitated by Brussels' more pragmatic approach, which has decoupled its relations with Belarus from conditionality regarding democratisation, human rights and other issues. In the absence of an Association Agreement, the parties are working out their 'Partnership Priorities' for the period up to 2020, which may be adopted in 2018. Moreover, an EU delegation is expected in Minsk in 2018, which may herald an agreement to reduce the price of Schengen visas for its citizens (currently 60

EUR, while its neighbours pay 35 EUR), a step that would be welcomed by ordinary Belarussians.

Moldova

In Moldova, the parliamentary elections will be the main domestic political event of 2018, and they need to resolve the issue of the configuration of power in the country, which constitutionally remains a parliamentary republic, despite the return in 2016 of direct presidential elections. The Democratic Party is likely to remain in power and it retains the support of Moldova's western partners, who see it as a source of internal stability as well as Western-oriented foreign policy. The run up to the elections has seen the traditional use of anti-Russian rhetoric and a series of provocations by Chisinau towards Moscow: the expulsion of five employees of the Russian embassy; the designation of Dmitry Rogozin (Moscow's special representative for Moldova) as a *persona non grata*; and the adoption of a law on fighting "Russian propaganda" (Korrespondent, 2017; RBC, 2017). This ruination of the relations was further shown in the instigation of criminal proceedings and the issuing of an arrest warrant in Moscow against the Democratic Party leader Vladimir Plakhotnyuk, who is accused of being involved in assassinations (Kommersant, 2017). It seems likely that the Moldovan authorities will continue to appeal to national pride and demand that the country stand up to the 'aggressive' Russia as a tool of domestic policy.

Transnistria

The political situation has stabilised in the wake of the 2016 presidential elections, and the political pressure from Chisinau and Kyiv has ceased or lessened considerably. Chisinau had been interested in using such pressure as a way to improve its relations with the EU and the US but went too far in this, which was made clear when its item on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria was not included on the agenda for the UN General Assembly. The region is thus unlikely to come under a renewed external pressure in 2018, which also means there is little likelihood of a political resolution to the frozen conflicts with Chisinau, Tiraspol, and the external players interested in upsetting the status quo on the Dniester.

Central Asia

In Central Asia, 2018 will likely be politically stable with the possibility for an improved regional integration and a deepening of the interstate cooperation. In 2017 an interim agreement on the Kyrgyz frontier was signed, and direct air flights between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan resumed (Caravanserai, 2017; DW, 2017); and "the road map of reconciliation" was signed after a Kyrgyz-Kazakhstan border conflict (Zakon, 2017). Nonetheless there will continue to be considerable involvement of external

forces in the politics and security of Central Asia. Russia will try to bring the region closer to the EEU and the Chinese BRI transport, logistic and economic initiatives.

The South Caucasus

There will also be considerable external involvement in this region, where the situation is distinctly less predictable due to the high number of unresolved conflicts: the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan because of Nagorno-Karabakh. Any change in the existing status quo will be fraught with either new clashes, or the escalation of the conflicts from being 'frozen' to being armed. As in Central Asia, but with a higher probability, there is also the possibility of the emergence of terrorism, an uncontrolled circulation of arms and religious radicalism in the Southern Caucasus. For Russia, the priority in the region is the cooperation with Iran on joint projects, especially in the Russia-Azerbaijan-Iran format, with a particular focus on the development of the 'North-South' international transport corridor.

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The year 2018 – with the preserving of the existing options and the emergence of new options for the active foreign policy of Russia – will be full of challenges, both of a substantive character – for example, in the efforts to reach a peaceful settlement in the Middle East – and of a propagandistic and politicised nature. The latter are related to both the forthcoming mid-term congressional elections in the USA, and the presidential elections in Russia, which draw global attention and are widely covered by the western media. This situation will require from the Russian government a particularly reserved, balanced and forward-looking approach. The Ukraine crisis remains the main obstacle to the normalisation of the dialogue of Russia with its partners in the world. A compromise in its settlement may create new opportunities for the Russian foreign policy and the development of the country in general. It would also be a good opportunity to overcome the anti-Russian sentiments that have accompanied Russia's increasing influence in world politics in recent years.

ENDNOTES

[1] *The Post-American World* is the name of a non-fiction book written by the American journalist Fareed Zakaria and published in 2008.

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Update – Russia and the World, October 2018:
The Autumn of Our Discontent?

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Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this son [or sun] of York.

William Shakespeare, Richard III

SAME AGENDA, RISING TENSIONS

During the first half of 2018, tensions between Russia and the world grew. The structure and agenda of the relations have not changed significantly, but, as noted in the IMEMO forecast, some of the emphasis has changed. Relations with the United States remain key, as does American foreign and domestic policy in general. Increasingly, the competition between the US and China, which sometimes turns into trade wars, affects world politics and the economy. Syria and Ukraine remain on the interaction agenda of the West, and Iran is causing more and more disagreements. Changes in Turkey's domestic and foreign policy have also had an impact on the current and future balance in Syria and the whole Middle East. Finally, two crises – the so-called Skripal case and the missile strike by the United States and its allies in Syria in April – further hardened the West's position against Russia.

By the autumn of 2018 two more nuanced patterns in the Russia-West relations for the near and medium term became visible; these are in many ways negative but also reveal some windows of opportunity. The first regards the Western sanctions, which are already recognised in Russia at both the expert and official levels, as a new reality that is both "serious and long-term" (RIA Novosti, 2018) and thus requires a profound adaptation of Russia's financial, economic and political strategy. The second consists of several dialog formats at various levels and for various problems.

The use and development of emerging options is a difficult task. Consider, for example, the widely publicised pictures of the Cossack choir and President Vladimir Putin dancing with Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl at her wedding. Does this strengthen Russia's position in Europe and its relations with the Alpine Republic, which were already much more constructive than its relations with most other EU countries? Or is it PR in the spirit of assertive policy which worsens the already neg-

ative attitude towards Russia in Europe? Won't the criticism by political opponents of Ms. Kneissl inside the country actually worsen Russian-Austrian relations? Won't Austria's foreign policy become a hostage to its domestic policy, as is the case in the United States? This small episode in a prosperous European country that has, since 1999, shifted to the political right, was used as additional proof of Russian 'interference' in internal European affairs.

In summary, and as the brief updates below show, relations between Russia and the West are becoming more tense; and the 'Russia factor' is further instrumentalised by Western governments for their own ends. Relations have been inflamed by particular flashpoints but, more generally, they are worsening because of diverging narratives and approaches to the key ongoing issues in geopolitics and the world economy. As we note, however, potentially incompatible viewpoints are also emerging within the West, and our 2019 forecast will have a lot to deal with.

CRISES AND DYNAMICS OF RUSSIA-WEST RELATIONS

Several crises or incidents that have escalated rapidly into crises of diplomacy in 2018 have revealed much about relations between Russia and the West. The 'Skripal case' has shown the willingness of the West to use particular incidents to galvanise a collective anti-Russian position, even on the basis of unconvincing evidence. In turn, this has fed into the maintenance of anti-Russian sanctions, which are now a long-term feature of Russia's relationship with the West. There is also a growing military assertiveness in the West, even as it faces a divergence between Europe's pragmatism and America's bellicosity amidst geopolitical and geo-economic uncertainty.

The Skripal Case

Despite the lack of direct evidence of Russia's guilt, as confirmed by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OCPW), the West reacted very harshly to the Skripal case. This harsh reaction cannot be explained by the facts of the case alone; for example, in the position of British PM Theresa May, other unrelated motivations are visible. As was widely reported, May's response to the Skripal poisoning was to declare that "Russia is a threat to us all" and added, when speaking to EU leaders, that "[t]he Russian Threat does not respect borders, and as such we are all at risk" (Politico, 2018). Moreover, a senior British government official was reported as saying that while the UK was "not looking for confrontation or regime change" Russia was now considered a "strategic enemy" rather than a "strategic partner" (ibid.). The Skripal case was thus used, firstly, as a tool for consolidating the European Union and the West as a whole 'in the face of the Russian threat'; secondly, as a means to smooth out the problems and disagreements caused by the upcoming Brexit in 2019, the settlement of which is still far from clear; and, thirdly, to divert attention from the problems caused by Brexit, including the split in PM

May's government, which were demonstrated by the resignations of Foreign Minister Boris Johnson and Brexit Minister David Davis in the summer.

Russian diplomats were expelled from many capitals because of the case. However, some EU countries did not join the diplomatic demarche (by April 2018, nine of the twenty eight EU member states, including Slovakia, Malta, and Luxemburg, did not join it; Greece expelled some Russian diplomats in July, but for different reasons) or joined it only symbolically. Bulgaria stated that Russia's guilt has not been proven, and on the contrary, during the visit to Moscow of President Rumen Radev, even offered to resume the two countries' joint projects that were frozen under the previous government, notably the strategically significant 'South Stream' energy project. The same position was taken by Austria. The official representative of the government said: "We will not take any measures at the national level, we will not expel diplomats. The reason for this is that we intend to keep the channels of dialogue with Russia open. Austria is a neutral country and a bridge between East and West" (Rambler, 2018).

A failed attempt was also made to organise a boycott of the World Cup in Russia in order to spoil the Kremlin's efforts to use the World Cup to improve Russia's image in the world. But in any event, despite many fears and concerns in Moscow, the World Cup went very smoothly and proceeded in a democratic as well as popular way. Also, it is unlikely that this was part of the Kremlin's plans, but a July Levada Center poll showed a significant boost in positive attitudes toward the West after the World Cup – positive sentiments toward the United States, for example, jumped to 42%, up from 20% in May (Levada, 2018).

Skripal, Sanctions and Russia's Economic Problems

With a lag of six months, the United States decided to once again use the Skripal case as a pretext for the latest and also the toughest sanctions (RBC, 2018b). Moreover, the motivation is connected to domestic political reasons: on the one hand, President Donald Trump demonstrates his toughness towards Russia. On the other hand, he does not use Moscow's alleged interference in the American elections as a pretext, as Congress insists. In August, a ban was imposed on the issuance of export licenses to Russian state-owned companies, with the exception of export licenses for products necessary for cooperation in space and to ensure the safety of civil aviation. A second, tougher package of sanctions may be introduced in November. They will affect lending to Russian legal entities, and the export and import of goods. Experts assess their financial and economic consequences for Russia as severe.

Immediately after Washington announced these plans in August, the Russian Ruble fell by 10–12% and panic broke out on the Russian financial market, which was possibly exacerbated by the timing of the announcement: the last two great financial cataclysms to befall Russia (in 1998 and 2008) had also fallen in August.

Nonetheless it was also fuelled by unfavourable domestic circumstances: the slow rate of GDP growth, which, at 1.6%, is insufficient for the planned development of the country (Russian Federal Statistics Service, 2018); the painful and unpopular reforms initiated or announced after the presidential elections (raising the retirement age by 5 years, and increasing the VAT from 18 to 20%, which, together with a sharp increase in fuel prices, will inevitably lead to a jump in inflation); and also the proposal of Mr Putin's economic advisor Andrey Belousov that private large and effective metallurgical and chemical businesses should transfer a significant portion of their profits to the government (it was later agreed that these 'transfers' would be considered as 'investments' into the government projects and would go ahead).

All this has led to a significant drop in the popularity of President Putin and a growing discontent among the population. According to data collated by the Levada Center, Putin's approval rating declined to 67% in July 2018, down from 82% in April. His 'trust rating' declined from 60% in January 2018 to 48% in June (Kolesnikov, 2018). All this means that it will be more difficult to consolidate Russian societal support for confrontation with the West.

At the same time, the awareness that the sanctions are a new and long-term reality has led the government to take a number of proactive measures. Firstly, since the beginning of 2018, Russia has reduced its investments in US treasury securities from 102.2 billion USD to 14.9 billion USD. The Government and the President declared a course on forced de-dollarisation of the economy and shifting the transfer of payments to foreign companies from dollars to the respective national currencies. Secondly, the gold reserves in the country were significantly increased, partly from the funds from the sale of the US government bonds, and by August 2018, the total gold reserves in Russia amounted to 1970 tons (worth 77.4 billion USD) (Bloomberg, 2018) and according to some estimates, Russia possesses 17% of the world's gold reserves, meaning that it is in the 5th place in this respect, ahead of China (Business Insider, 2018).

As stressed in the forecast of IMEMO – and now not only politically but also economically – the decision on the 'Nord Stream 2' remains a key marker of Russia's relations with the West. To what extent will the sanctions affect this project? How far will the German and other European partners follow the Americans in the sanctions?

Divergence in the West?

It is in this direction that further shifts took place in 2018. The reasons for them were changes in American foreign policy, including President Trump's harsh statements at the NATO summit in July. Russia may indirectly become the beneficiary of the new trends. It is not a question of resuming relations in 'a spirit of cooperation'. For Russia, Europe's transition to pragmatism, and its improved consideration of its own interests in its relations with the United States can bring the greatest benefit.

There have already been some changes in this direction. At a high level, they were voiced by German politicians. At the end of August German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas articulated the intention to review the German foreign policy strategy towards the USA: "The time has come to re-evaluate the transatlantic partnership: soberly, critically, and even self-critically" (RIA Novosti, 2018). In a column in the *Handelsblatt* newspaper, Mr. Maas wrote: "the US and Europe have long ago started to grow distant from each other." The Minister noted the deepening divergence between the two continents, stressing that the changes began long before the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and are "likely to survive his presidency", so any strategy to simply 'outstay' Trump will not work. Therefore, it is necessary to conclude a new "balanced partnership" with Washington (Maas, 2018).[1]

The German Minister assigns to the EU the role of "the basis of the international order and a partner for all who are committed to this order". But to carry out this role, the EU has to increase defence spending and consistently build the European Security and Defence Union as a

> part of the transatlantic order and as its own European project. [...] We clearly say to Washington: we want to work together, but we won't let you go over our heads. Therefore, it would be right to protect European companies from legal sanctions. Therefore, it is important that we strengthen European autonomy by creating forms of payment independent of the US, establish the European Monetary Fund and introduce an independent SWIFT system (ibid.).

The articles cited here and the feeling of the German Foreign Minister are not unique. Similar statements are increasingly heard in Europe, as was noted in the IMEMO 2018 forecast. At the diplomatic level, these changes are reflected in the increase in the number of the working meetings of European leaders with high Russian officials. The August negotiations of Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel were preceded by a meeting in Berlin of the Chancellor with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov. Similar theses are also expressed by the French President Emmanuel Macron. Speaking to the French ambassadors on August 27, he said that without a review of the relations with Russia "it is impossible to build and develop Europe in the long term."

The Middle East

In April, the US, French and British air forces launched a massive missile attack on Syrian government facilities in the city of Douma. Russian President Putin called this attack an "aggression against a sovereign state" (Interfax, 2018). Still, amazingly, the crisis ended practically without further damage, including for the Syrian

leader Bashar al-Assad. US President Trump, though he showed Congress and the establishment his determination to use military force, was, in the end, quite pragmatic.

Nonetheless, this tense moment highlighted several points. Firstly, it once again demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the UN Security Council in times of crisis. Secondly, despite the extremely bellicose rhetoric, the parties have maintained contacts at the level of the military and security experts and key advisors. There then followed the July meeting of Trump and Putin in Helsinki, and one of its results was an agreement to keep the US-Russian contacts in the format of working groups. Also, in August a meeting of US National Security Advisor John Bolton and the Head of the Security Council of Russia Nikolai Patrushev took place. Thirdly, it is clear that the Syrian conflict is not only far from resolved but it also remains an element of the geopolitical struggle that will impact on US-Russia relations for the foreseeable future.

The US posture on Iran's nuclear program and the decision to resume the sanctions against Tehran have not yet found support in Europe. Moreover, the EU demonstratively provided Iran with assistance in the amount of 18 million EUR (RBC, 2018a), which was extremely negatively perceived in Washington. For Russia, the problem of Iran is complex. On the one hand, Russia, like the EU, has economic interests in Iran. Moscow also firmly supports the multilateral agreement on Iran's nuclear program, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and sees Iran and its policy as one of the key elements in reaching a settlement of the Syrian conflict, where Russia has established its presence as an actor. On the other hand, Moscow cannot view Iran outside the context of the need to maintain constructive relations with Israel and Turkey. This makes for a complicated situation for Russian foreign policy-making in the region.

Trade, Energy and What Lies Ahead

The rapidly changing basic realities of world politics, including *international trade* (primarily due to the position of the Trump Administration, as indicated by the IMEMO forecast), force Russia to carefully monitor and analyse ongoing developments. Although Russia's economic weight does not give grounds for actions that could change the situation in world trade, the US trade wars with China, and the claims against the US filed in the WTO by China, Canada, the European Union, Norway, India, and Turkey in connection with the increase in duties on steel and aluminium may result in a new format, and in a collective claim in the WTO. At the same time, due to the collapse of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the search for new formats of partnerships continues, especially in the Pacific region, which may also be a very promising direction for Russia.

The Ukraine crisis remains one of the basic problems in Russia's relations with the world. Nonetheless, Russia, which is interested in promoting Nord Stream 2, con-

firmed its intention to continue pumping gas through Ukraine after 2019. There have been no other major developments in this area. We can assume, however, that the possible entry of UN peacekeepers into the Donbass with a mandate that will suit both the Western side and Russia, which was discussed with German Chancellor Merkel, is not an excluded option.

The relations between Kyiv and Moscow remain confrontational, the state of Ukraine's economy is close to dramatic, and the socio-political situation is very fragile. The most widespread opinion about this matter is the expectation that there will be a further drift of Ukraine towards the West. At the same time, there are also other Western expert assessments that point to counter-trends, seeing that as a result of Ukraine's failure to implement deep economic and political reforms, its former elites largely remain in power and there is a chance to normalise the relations between the two countries after the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019 (Moshes and Nizhnikau, 2018).

However, like other future developments, this will be covered in the next forecast – 'Russia and the World: 2019'.

ENDNOTES

[1] The translation from German to English is the author's own.

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