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Europe: United in_equality?

Contributions from the project
#EUmeetsEurope –
A Transdisciplinary Approach
to European Integration



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Angelika M. Korzeniowska [PL]
Living beyond the stars together
A sound and space journey through European music

Artur Kamarouski [BV/PL]
When people ask me where I'm from
Poems

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Feature

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Discussion résumé

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A brief experimental treatise on love as the solution to the
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Essay

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Woman with the EU flag
Animation



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#EUmeetsEurope – a Transdisciplinary Approach to European Integration

Europe and *the EU* are often used as synonyms. This equation testifies to the EU's self-image and ambition to be a pan-European integration project. In practice, however, these aspirations encounter strongly diverging realities across European countries and societies. Persistent inequalities cut deeply into the very foundations of the European project – democracy and human rights, economic prosperity, climate and environmental protection, and ultimately peace and security.

The project *#EUmeetsEurope* is based on the idea that the discussion of pivotal issues of European integration – understood as Europe growing together politically, economically, socially and culturally – must involve the continent as a whole. It should not end at national or EU external borders, nor should it be conducted exclusively among experts. *#EUmeetsEurope* therefore aims to create a variety of avenues for approaching current European questions.

This first edition of *#EUmeetsEurope* gathered together a group of 12 researchers, practitioners, journalists, writers and artists from different parts of Europe, both from within the EU – and in particular the Weimar Triangle – and the countries of Eastern and Southeast Europe that are not (yet) members of the Union. At an opening seminar that took place at Genshagen castle from 2 to 5 November 2022, participants were familiarised with and held discussions about each other's work and approaches – and the role played by European issues in this context. They explored different dimensions of the overarching topic "Europe: United in_equality?" and, revolving around this topic, conceived their own projects. The idea was not only to enter into dialogue, but also to *interact* with each other, to work together or inspire each other's work and, most importantly, for participants to approach this topic with their own means of expression. This resulted in a variety of contributions – research papers, analyses and essays, literary texts, audio (visual) feawtures, images and illustrations, a musical journey and other artistic performances – that participants subsequently realised in an independent work phase lasting several months.

The works presented in this volume bring together different forms of knowledge on and different points of contact with Europe. While each of them can stand on its own, they relate with and complement each other, thus painting a multifaceted picture of (in)equality in Europe. Both the experience of this encounter of different geographic and disciplinary angles and its outcomes clearly illustrate one thing, namely that transdisciplinary exchange and cooperation are not only a well-intended concept, but have also





proven their worth in practical terms. Reaching beyond our professional or geographical “bubbles” and confronting ourselves with different, at times conflicting, ways of seeing the project of European integration is not only liberating. It allows us to open up ways of reflection and understanding that were previously inaccessible. It is therefore not an optional but an essential ingredient in comprehending the trials and tribulations and also the resources and opportunities that Europe faces today.

The release of this interactive digital publication also kicks off the third and final part of *#EUmeetsEurope*, which will be dedicated to communicating participants' works to various audiences. By intertwining academic, journalistic and artistic approaches in different forms and formats, new and, in particular, young target groups will be invited to engage with European policy issues and explore their own viewpoints towards (in)equality in Europe.

We wish you an inspiring tour of discovery through the contributions assembled in this volume and look forward to your feedback.

Hedvig Morvai

Director, Strategy and Europe, ERSTE Foundation

Theresia Töglhofer

Project Leader, Genshagen Foundation





The participants of the project #EUmeetsEurope,
Genshagen, November 2022

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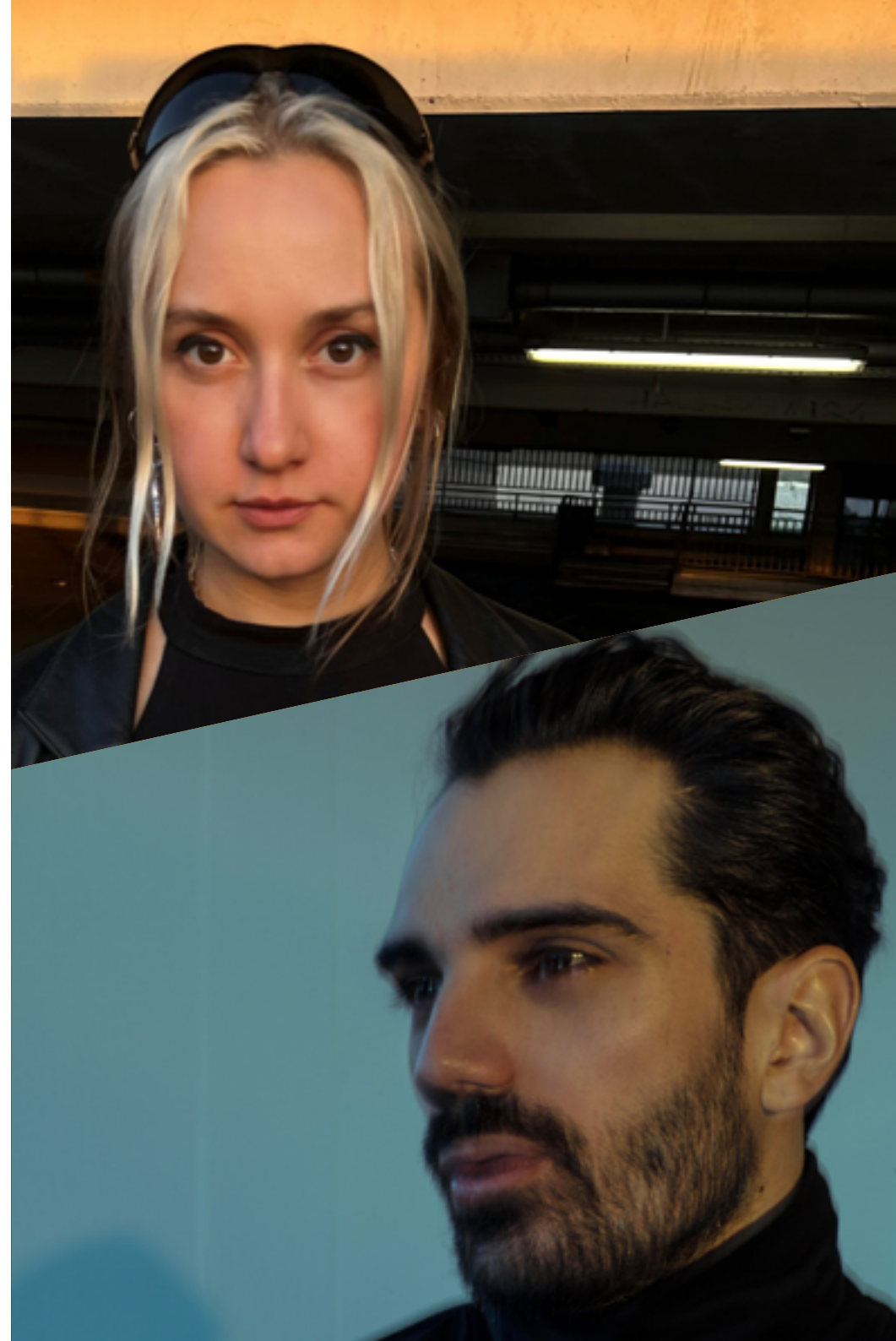
Dance of Urgency, Listening of Urgency: Coming together as a collective body

Bogomir Doringer · Artist, researcher and curator,
Serbia/Netherlands

Mariana Berezowska · Writer, curator, and
co-founder of Borshch magazine, Ukraine/Germany

The following conversation between Ukrainian writer Mariana Berezowska and Serbian-Dutch artist Bogomir Doringer explores Bogomir's ongoing research project 'Dance of Urgency.' Throughout their conversation, Bogomir and Mariana underscore how fragile and uncertain our fundamental right to gather as a collective is. They exchange views on the power of collective mindsets to face adversity, as exemplified by the resilience of Ukrainians in the midst of ongoing tragedy and destruction. It seems there is a shift towards a 'Listening of Urgency' rather than 'Dance of Urgency', yet the act of coming together as a collective body remains at the core of their conversation.

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→ *'Dance of Urgency' focuses on studying crowds and individuals in moments of urgency, investigating how they transform into a unified organism and examining the subtle gestures and movements of individuals within these crowds. Initially, Bogomir's research didn't have a specific political agenda. However, global societal shifts such as the refugee crisis, mass migration, resistance against corruption, gentrification and the climate crisis, along with a limited understanding of the power of dance that he encountered during the project, made him reflect on the socio-political crises of the '90s and the present. This reflection sparked an interest among cultural organisations, festivals and cities in the connection between dancing crowds and social and political resistance.*

Mariana Berezovska: How has 'Dance of Urgency' evolved over the years, and what are the key things you've learned about dance, movement, and the definition of urgency?

Bogomir Doringer: The initial idea for 'Dance of Urgency' came from my personal experiences growing up in Belgrade in the 1990s. At that time, Yugoslavia was in a religious and territorial war, and Serbia was involved in aggression in Bosnia and Kosovo, which earned us a negative reputation. Despite this ongoing unrest and chaos, I felt somewhat protected as a child. Yet everything around me was collapsing and changing – in 1999 when I was just 16 years old, there were bombings. However, there was still a vibrant cultural scene with free cinema screenings and theater performances. Culture served as a way to preserve people's mental health, although there were restrictions and appeals to stay in shelters. In those times, whenever it was

permitted and doable, we would come together and dance at a club called Industrija. As a child and teenager, I took this experience for granted, not fully understanding the gravity of the situation or how life was elsewhere without war.

I didn't initially perceive it as the 'Dance of Urgency'; instead, it felt like a normal cultural participatory experience. However, I recognized it as a way of coming together, of feeling connected and part of something bigger than ourselves. It served as a means of coping with our fears and making a statement against the government and NATO. It was like saying, "You can't bring me down. I am above what's happening." But above all, it was emotionally fulfilling and felt like love — a feeling of being embraced by strangers who shared the same dramatic moments.

After going through the '90s, we saw student protests transformed into the Exit festival¹. At Exit, we celebrated Milosevic's arrest and extradition to an international court, and Western European clubs felt stuck. The music, style, and fashion may have been similar in these clubs, but the energy and resonance of the bodies on the dance floor were not the same. That's when I realised there was something special about what I experienced in Serbia. Through this contrast I could truly grasp its power. And I noticed that the crowd wasn't synchronised, the patterns and constellations of bodies and their proximity didn't resemble what I remembered from Belgrade. So I started thinking about taking a bird's-eye view, as I believed that visually documenting these spaces could provide insights and help identify the differences.

MB: I've been thinking of how a collective mindset rather than an individualistic one impacts how Ukrainians are coping with the ongoing tragedy and destruction. It seems that being part of a collective body and mind has been crucial in the resilience we are witnessing. In comparison, when observing how people in Western Europe react to even minor inconveniences, I doubt they would be able to collectively withstand and resist an invasion the way Ukrainians are doing. I attribute this difference in response to challenges to the varying levels of comfort and security that people are used to, but it also reflects a fundamental difference in mindset. I don't want to romanticise anything going on in Ukraine now, because the level of tragedy is unspeakable, but it's a fact that the Ukrainians, drawing from their collective way of living, are able to come together, support one another, and face adversity with a unified front. I believe your experiences in Yugoslavia in that time have also shaped your perspective on the contrasting dynamics of collective versus individualistic societies and their role in coping with crises. Could you share some thoughts on that?

BD: It's like moving from being an individual "I" to a collective "we," while still preserving a sense of individuality, you know? For instance, the documentary film "Yugoslavia, How Ideology Moved Our Collective Body"²

1 Exit is a music festival in Serbia that started as a student protest and eventually settled in Novi Sad where it is still happening now.

2 Marta Popivoda. 2013. Yugoslavia, How Ideology Moved Our Collective Body. <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/yugoslavia/66241966>



by Marta Popivoda demonstrates how Yugoslavia fostered a strong sense of collectivism. Surprisingly, it didn't intimidate people; on the contrary, it was frequently encouraged through participatory performances, synchronised dancing, music and artistic expression.

However, Yugoslavia differed from other Eastern European countries of that time. As a socialist country with a leading communist party, you could listen to David Bowie and still identify as a communist under Tito or as a pioneer. It was a fusion of various influences and formats. What's intriguing is that even the influence of capitalism was allowed to some extent. It operated on different fronts, but the seamless transition from an individual "I" to a collective "we" was something that, I believe, facilitated the process.

With people slowly returning to the dance floor after the pandemic, it really shows how we can easily forget how to be together and move together but also how our bodies are governmentally owned. And in times of crisis, countries or societies with a more "collective mindset" have a valuable quality because it's something we're trained and raised with. This is evident in the way that these countries were able in the '90s to maintain some political opposition and eventually foster a generation that overcame dictatorship. I was part of that generation that grew up under dictatorship and eventually brought it down.

MB: I'm also curious about the movements and cases you focus on for this research project. It's important to highlight that the project didn't

initially prioritize dance as a form of political protest, but rather explored the power of collective gathering and the synchronicities that take place when people move together. What types of crowds did you initially investigate?

BD: When the idea was born in 2004, I had specific images in my mind that I wanted to capture. But it took 10 years to involve the camera for the first time. Even though I couldn't film the parties I wanted to initially, I unexpectedly gained access to different places. The first party I filmed was Funhouse in Amsterdam, a men-only Christmas edition. Seeing the preview on my small screen, I realized that it didn't matter if I personally enjoyed the party or not. The perspective I captured was unique, resembling an aerial or surveillance view, focusing on the collective body's forms rather than individual faces. This perspective demonstrates how we appear from a divine viewpoint, similar to how God or tech companies **[MB: choose your fighter]** may perceive us in contemporary times.

For a while, I argued that what I documented was not a collective body but merely a crowd. The true collective body, in my opinion, is when these bodies on the ground behave as one, in synchronicity. This doesn't happen often in large crowds; it occurs more in smaller groups or clusters. But it's these moments that drive my project, even though I don't believe I have fully documented them yet. With each crowd, there are different factors at play, such as drugs, party duration, conditions, agreements, training, and times of crisis.

MB: It also sounds to me like exhaustion plays an important role in the movements you look at, and I guess it's important to recognize the brief, transitory nature of the acts of urgency and their physical limitations.

I perceive dance as an archive of movements ingrained within our bodies, released and composed into a dance. It is also an archive of experiences and emotions that guide the body in expected ways.

BD: Exactly. The long duration of the ritual dancing gathering allows for the slow dissolution of things we don't have energy to carry, like ego, style, correct posture, prejudice or fears. It requires a certain deconstruction or dissolving in order to morph into that collective body. In order to truly become one, we need to closely observe and sense each other's movements. It becomes a mechanism or an organic form. Some parties, clubs, or festivals are remembered as moments of unity, while others are not, despite the common expectation. And when we talk about crowds dancing, it's more about the dance of urgency, which can often be seen in street happenings.



I perceive dance as an archive of movements ingrained within our bodies, released and composed into a dance. It is also an archive of experiences and emotions that guide the body in expected ways. By watching and observing numerous dances, we can utilize these visual references to control or guide our emotional body movements. Through the use of mirrors, practice, and attending social gatherings or clubs, we enhance our dance abilities. However, we also adapt to the dances of others. Each club has its own agenda, making certain dances more accepted than others. In a sense, clubs serve as educational spaces and promote specific forms of body politics.

Another manifestation of dance as a practice is evident when you witness women dancing during Iranian protests. It is unlikely their first encounter with dance, as they have likely been secretly training and learning in private spaces, maybe with their families. Then it was performed and released into the streets. So, it did require some form of training. To summarise my idea – dance is more likely or commonly to become a form of resistance, let's say during protests on the street, in cultures where dance is a traditional part of their heritage.

And such movements are often led by those who may not be perfect but are fascinating in their own way. There's a video called "First Follower"³ which highlights this. It features a guy dancing at a music festival; another person joins him, mimicking his moves. The video argues that the first follower plays a crucial role in

encouraging others to join and creating a movement or protest. It demonstrates how one person mirrors the movements of another, and then others join in. The initiator of the movement, the owner of the club, the concept, the choreography and the protest strategy all have an impact on how the movement unfolds.

This applies to various movements happening today, thanks to social media. We see something, imitate it, embody it and perform it. For example, without social media, the protest in Tbilisi in front of the Georgian Parliament in May 2018, when people danced together, would have faced violence and the club would have remained closed. The presence of cameras and the power from outside were important. The same goes for the Iranian protest and even the current situation in Ukraine. Social media helps spread and share information, keeping it visible when it would otherwise disappear from our screens. The presence of cameras and the power from outside were important.

MB: Before our conversation, I thought about the tradition of dance in Ukraine and realized that this style of dancing in a crowd is not inherent in our culture. We are more inclined towards music and sound, focusing on listening rather than physical movement. Also, the current disturbingly noisy environment with air defence alerts and bombings, especially at night when our minds and bodies need rest, makes life so exhausting that some friends even started hallucinating the sounds of explosions. Every loud sound triggers our bodies to react as if it's a potential threat. I

sense that people now yearn for quietness and careful listening to what's happening both externally and internally. So, in today's Ukraine, I would say it's more about an urgent need for listening rather than dancing. I know that you've travelled to Ukraine before and wanted to engage with the music and club scene there for your research too. How do you feel about this now?

I sense that people now yearn for quietness and careful listening to what's happening both externally and internally. So, in today's Ukraine, I would say it's more about an urgent need for listening rather than dancing.

BD: The situation in Ukraine is so disturbing and dire that I often find myself at a loss for words. There's a conflict within me. I question if I can make my observations and continue my project during such challenging times. It goes beyond anything I've experienced before — it's war, it's aggressive, with dead bodies and rape and a constant atmosphere of tension and fear. It's very different from the situation in Georgia where I did a big part of the research for the 'Dance of



Urgency', where the fight was more directed against the government, the police, and the regime. With Ukraine, I find myself unsure of how to approach it. Honestly, I'm still figuring it out.

MB: For me personally, as a Ukrainian and a cultural writer, it's very important that the narrative of 'resistance' and 'struggle' doesn't get overused or appropriated when the Western media projects start producing content about the culture in Ukraine in the wartime. It already felt overused before, when every major platform wrote about the 'revolution' in the Ukrainian cultural scene after 2014. I understand that this narrative may have been more appropriate after the Maidan, when there was a sense of resolution and triumph amidst the drama. The current situation is heavily tied to bodily experiences, but it's also incredibly traumatic and disturbing. And so, discussing movement, dance, and assembly needs to be approached with sensitivity. How we move in this moment calls for careful consideration. All these experiences get stored in your body, and you become protective of your personal space. Coming together as a crowd, whether at a rave or a family gathering, holds significant importance now, as it cannot happen anywhere and at any time. It takes on a ritualistic meaning and carries more weight than during the COVID pandemic, where the danger was invisible. Here, you are a target of aggression that makes you fiercely guard your boundaries, even your own skin.

BD: There has been a lot of use of the term 'safe-spaces' in a context of nightlife and club-culture. Are clubs in time of war there to provide a sense

of kindness and healing? Maybe extra care and to embrace each individual, holding space with an audio-visual exposure with the purpose of care and healing?

MB: Under these circumstances, the act of dancing or engaging with others becomes even more sensitive. Your body feels fragile, and the dynamics of dance need to be approached differently. For example, the recent Cxema event in Kyiv, usually known for its raw warehouse look and the young bodies marching to techno, was focused on house music and took place during the daytime (because everything now happens during the day in Ukraine because of the strict curfew). The aesthetic was also focused on warm, colourful lighting, aiming to create an atmosphere of kindness and lightness. It's all part of the ongoing conversation and adaptation to aggression and destruction. So the act of urgency becomes an act of gentleness. The invasion and the destruction will have significant consequences for the young people involved. So for me now, it's about recognizing this fragility and understanding that it may lead to complete exhaustion, changing how people move, engage with each other's bodies and respond to the dance.

Everything feels more sensitive and fragile, and any form of invasion, whether it is of boundaries or personal space, carries a heightened sense of urgency. Bodies have become more guarded and closed off as self-protection becomes vital.

The invasion and normalisation of death and destruction will undoubtedly have profound consequences on the experience of sex and sexuality. Speaking from my own perspective and that of my closest circle, I cannot generalise, but it is evident that the need for intimacy and sexual encounters has changed and has become more challenging. Everything feels more sensitive and fragile, and any form of invasion, whether it is of boundaries or personal space, carries a heightened sense of urgency. Bodies have become more guarded and closed off as self-protection becomes vital. For example, the dark rooms at the K41 club are now closed, which I believe is not only due to the practical costs of maintaining club spaces but also connected to the prevailing need for sensitivity. People yearn for a sense of safety and care,

3 Derek Sivers. "First Follower." 11 February 2010: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fW8amMCVAJQ>



desiring careful touch and treatment. The urgent need to feel protected and nurtured has become central in the damaging experiences of the war.

BD: When I was a teenager in Yugoslavia, my generation and the crowd I was a part of, believed we were fighting against the bad guys through protests. However, despite our efforts, things weren't changing. This added a layer of mental exhaustion and desperation, which is crucial to consider when discussing the dance of urgency in this context.

Reflecting on my own experiences, although I didn't face the same extreme dangers as in Bosnia at that time or as in Ukraine today, my childhood was still marked by division and a strong pressure to conform in terms of behaviour and appearance. The invasion of space wasn't through foreign military, but through changing values. Additionally, the prevalence of drugs and disturbing stories of youth being exploited also strongly impacted us at that time. So when speaking of the dance of urgency, I must admit that when the project initially started, the last thing I wanted to discuss was politics, protests, and resistance per se.

MB: So originally, the project's idea was to explore crowds as a microscopic sample and analyse their essence. And this exploration didn't necessarily have to carry a social or political agenda, or solely focus on resistance as it's seen in the media now, right?

BD: No, it didn't. When I started the project, this topic wasn't as prevalent as it is now. Surprisingly, about ten years ago, there was minimal attention given to dancing crowds and their connection to social and political resistance. I even received responses from arts and social studies experts stating that there was no correlation between dancing crowds and resistance. However, the narrative gradually shifted around the time of the refugee crisis and the tension it brought, which directly impacted and altered the EU. It was then necessary to adapt and address the new interests of a younger generation. As my talks and events gained popularity, the crowd grew. Additionally, the events of 2014 were significant for Ukraine, further highlighting social and political movements and resistance.

So, when I refer to the dance of urgency, in my footage, I often zoom in to capture seemingly motionless people. But upon closer inspection, we can see micro-movements and subtle gestures. Sometimes the gestures navigate, sometimes they invite, and sometimes they exhibit self-care. They slowly explore the space. It's not just about grand movements but also about micro-movements. The bird's-eye view is helpful because it allows me to zoom in and extract small moments from the larger context.

Another aspect I aimed to challenge was the notion that dance always stems from joy. The dance of urgency delves into the realm of fear, where dance encompasses not only happiness but also sorrow, trauma, and uncertainty. It explores the experiences of LGBTQ individuals,

women, and people of colour. It raises questions about who has the freedom to move and who doesn't. The urgency can take on different forms and variations. It can arise from a state of war or extreme climate change.

'Dance of Urgency' became a part of the discussion for the festivals and institutions that want to bring together popular culture and social and political matters. Honestly, I think that's because it's the easiest way for people to understand it at this point. When we start discussing dancing as a way to explore the invasion of our bodies by different people, politics, and values, or as a means of resolving trauma through dance, it becomes quite challenging for many to grasp what's really going on unless they have personally experienced it.

MB: I am currently teaching writing to a group of Ukrainians who are willing to write about today's culture, and one of my students shared her wish to write about preserving memories. She wants to focus not only on documenting historical events but also on capturing the genuine emotions and pain without alienating those who haven't experienced them firsthand. It turned out that her father died in the war recently. She said that although everything feels like a bad dream now, like a disturbing blend of reality and illusion, the body remains truthful. That's the one thing she can be certain of: the body doesn't lie.

This conversation between Mariana and Bogomir was held in June 2023 via Zoom.



Fun House party in Amsterdam, I Dance Alone

© Bogomir Doringer, 2014



Awakenings party in Amsterdam, Dance Alone

© Bogomir Doringier, 2016







Mariana Berezovska

is a Ukrainian Berlin-based writer, curator, and co-founder of Borshch magazine. With her deep curiosity for the underground and a sense of community, Mariana's writing focuses on electronic music and culture, stretching beyond production and the dancefloor, and critically examines social responsibility, community, and inequality.

IG: https://www.instagram.com/mariana_berezovskiiii/

Bogomir Doringer

is a Serbian/Dutch artist, researcher and curator. He is doing an Artistic Research PhD at the University of Applied Arts Vienna in an ongoing research project "I Dance Alone," which observes clubbing from a birds-eye-view as a reflection and reaction to social and political changes. He is investigating the collective and individual dynamics of the dance floor and different functions of dance. Bogomir is curator and head of education and research at the Nxt Museum for new media in Amsterdam. He lectures and teaches internationally. Since 2014, he has been co-curator of Envisioning Free Spaces – the public day of the Stadt Nach Acht conference. He contributes to various international music festivals, club programs, and institutions throughout his work and research.

<https://bogomirdoringer.info/>



When people ask me where I'm from (poems)

Artur Kamarouski · Poet, performer, artist and journalist,
Belarus/Poland

I like that this cycle of poems is a true story, full of vivid and painful memories, hopes and dreams. I knew there was nothing better than giving people the opportunity to answer questions they had in mind but might never have clearly articulated. My task wasn't just to retell these stories, but, channelling them through myself, give these stories space and expose emotions.

[read on](#) →





I.

дом – гэта глядзець на знаёмыя рэчы чужымі вачыма
на фотаздымак
дзе ранішняе сонца выходзіць за рамку

дзе можна басанож ці наогул не разбувацца
і даўно памерлая бабуля ставіць на печ
(каб уздымалася) цеста

дзе межы настолькі тонкія
што немагчыма адчуваць сваё цела
якое зліваецца з прасторай, смугою і часам

дзе ён першы раз запрашае цябе дадому
і гатую для цябе
і пасля вы глядзіце бландзінку ў законе

дзе бывае так страшна што нават забываешся дыхаць
і так свабодна
што забываеш як бывае страшна

аднойчы я ехаў на ровары позна ўвечары
а міма несліся фуры
загружаныя рознымі рэчамі
і вецер за гэтымі фурамі быў такі моцны
што я сціскаў рукі – і яны свяціліся ў цемры

I.

home – is looking at familiar things through someone else's eyes
like a photo
where morning sun spills out of the frame

where you can walk barefoot or with your shoes on
and grandmother long ago departed puts dough
on the stove (to rise)

where boundaries are so thin
that it's impossible to feel your body
as it merges with space, mist and time

where he invites you home for the first time
and cooks for you
and then you watch Legally Blonde

where it can be so frightening that you forget to breathe
and so free
that you forget how frightening it can be

I was once cycling late at night
and trucks roared by
carrying various things
and the wind behind them was so strong
that I gripped so hard my hands glowed in the dark





я б думаў лежачы на ўскрайку невядомага леса
што так і не даехаў дадому
і як хутка вялікая сіла на небе пераключае кнопкі ўкл/выкл

маё цела збудаванае з дрэва й камення
я не ведаю навошта мне сіні пашпарт
РЭСПУБЛІКА БЕЛАРУСЬ гучыць нібы вырак
заплюшчваю вочы і бачу:

ціха-ціха крадзецца азіраючыся ліса –
між пустых аголеных дрэў
мой малодшы брат у тоўстым камбінезоне
і сабака Гера
(у гонар старажытнагрэцкай багіні, канешне)
вядзе нас праз сумёты кудысьці наперад

вялікія прыгоды маленькага чалавека
мяне
у свеце дзе я адмаўляю сваім веццем
межы пашпартныя кантролі і візы

дом – дзе не існуе ніякага дома
толькі думка пра гэты дом
створаная ўяўленнем таго самага філосафа

дзе я зноў і зноў перавожу рэчы
з месца на месца
з аднаго цела ў іншае
з аднаго сусвету ў нейкі яшчэ

lying at the edge of unknown woods I would think
that I had never reached home
and how quickly the great power in the sky flips the switch on and off

my body is built from wood and stone
I have no idea why I have a blue passport
THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS sounds like a sentence
I close my eyes and see:

a fox is quietly snooping around
among hollow bare trees
my younger brother is wearing a thick snow suit
and Hera the dog
(in honour of the Greek goddess, of course)
is leading us forward through snowdrifts

the big adventures of a little man
me
in a world where I defy with all my branches
borders passport controls and visas

home – is where no home is
only the idea of home
created in the philosopher's imagination

where I move things again and again
from place to place
from one body into another
from one universe into another





дзе смерць робіцца эпіграфам
кожнай недапісанай кнігі

дзе так часта згадваецца буэнас-айрас
што я і сапраўды адчуваю кончыкам носа вецер

дзе зіма мяняецца месцамі з восенню і вясною
а лета бавіць з табою час у чарговым парку
некалькі прыпынкаў на метро –
і можна сядзець на траве і глядзець
як прыгожыя хлопцы распранутыя да шортаў
ганяюць мячык

а на пашпартным кантролі ты прымушаеш сябе ўсміхацца
бо можа так стацца
што гэтая краіна будзе занадта для цябе харошай
занадта багатай і шчодрай

што я адчуваю жывучы ў чарговай краіне?
толькі сум што тут так рана цямнее

дом – гэта ўздымацца ўгару і марудна падаць
перабіраючы ў роце адпаведныя літары
і не знаходзячы да падзення

калі я быў яшчэ ўнутры жывата
быў семя быў пачатак быў нішто
ўжо тады, я думаю, я выбіраў сабе мову
і неяк так атрымалася

where death becomes the epigraph
of every unfinished book

where Buenos Aires is mentioned so often
that I feel the wind with the tip of my nose

where winter changes places with autumn and spring
but summer hangs out with you in another park
a few metro stations away –
and you can sit on the grass and watch
handsome guys stripped to their shorts
chasing a ball

at the passport control you make yourself smile
because it could happen
that this country will be too good for you
too rich and generous

what do I feel living in another country?
only sadness that it gets dark so early

home – is to get up and fall down slowly
going through all the letters
and not finding them until you fall

when I was inside the belly
was a seed was a beginning was nothing
already then I think I was choosing myself a language
and somehow it happened





што беларуская праплыла побач і знікла за пупавіннем

можа зараз пішу нават не я
не кончыкі маіх пальцаў выстукваюць літары
а сама беларуская мова
якая нарэшце выплыла і ўздыхнула

што можна сказаць пра польскую і грузінскую?
толькі тое што яны ўсё яшчэ блытаюцца ў маім веці

дом – гэта напятая цеціва ў руках вербалоза
я намагаюся ўспомніць:
пошум вады разбураны ганак
класная кіраўнічка што выганяе цябе з лінейкі
(бо ты не так апрануты)
першы пацалунак з хлопцам (імя не ўспомню)
застылая прабабуля ў труне і студзень
а далей страла ляціць і трапляе ў цэль

у якой краіне я б хацеў жыць?
спытаю вясною ў новага лісця

дом – гэта птушка што глядзіць на цябе
адным вокам праз шкло аб'ектыва
выпрошвае зерне і хлеб

гэта яна пытае: з'язджаеш ці застаешся?
і глядзіць і глядзіць
кыш адсюль

that Belarusian swam by and vanished into my umbilical cord

maybe it's not me who's writing
not the tips of my fingers tapping the letters
but the Belarusian language itself
has drifted up and inspired

what can I say about Polish and Georgian?
only that they are still straggling in my branches

home – is a taut bowstring in yew's hands
I try to recollect:
water burbling, demolished doorstep
class teacher who dismisses you from school assembly
(as you're not dressed appropriately)
first kiss with a boy (I can't remember his name)
great grandmother stiff in her coffin and January
and then the arrow flies and hits the mark

what country would I like to live in?
I'll ask new leaves in the spring

home – is a bird that's watching you
one-eyed like a camera
begging for bread and cheese

this is what it asks: are you leaving or staying?
it is watching and watching
shoo!





мае ўяўленні пра месцы сутыкаюцца з рэальнасцю
і выйграюць

я – мячык у руках прыгожых польскіх хлопцаў
мая галактыка багатая на спадарожнікі

мая заплюшчаныя вочы малююць на ягоных руках
падлогу і столь
шэсцьдзясят квадратных метраў адзіноты і напоўненасці

дом – гэта шчасце не задаваць пытанняў
і прадугадваць адказы
выходзіць у бязмежжа без скафандра і падрыхтоўкі

распраўляць зморшчынкі ўзораў
на вечнай драўніне

адразу пазнаваць па вачах
каму самотна і холадна
праходзячы праз праходзячы побач
кранаючы рукою белыя рукі

дом – гэта баяцца думаць пра дом
нібы баяцца дручка пасля першай цыгарэты
нібы баяцца свайго цела пасля першага сэксу

больш нічога няма – і ўсё ёсць
застылыя нібы жэле цягнікі
абарваны палёт самалётаў
кіслая журавіна на языку

my ideas of places collide with reality
and win

I am the ball in the hands of the handsome Polish guys
my galaxy is rich in satellites

my closed eyes draw on his arms
a floor and a ceiling
sixty square metres of loneliness and fullness

home – is the happiness of asking questions
and guessing the answers
going into infinity with no spacesuit or training

unfurling the endless filigree
of wrinkles on wood

knowing from their eyes
who's lonely and cold
passing through passing by
touching white hands with your hand

home – is to be afraid to think of home
like fearing a spank after your first cigarette
like fearing your own body after your first sex

there's nothing left – and there's everything
trains set like jelly
flights severed
sour cranberry on the tongue





і так лёгка нібы гэта зіма ніколі не скончыцца
так і не наступіўшы

II.

што робіць мяне асобай з прывілеямі?

амерыканскі пашпарт

нямецкі пашпарт

французскі пашпарт

пашпарт з якім я магу ездзіць паўсюль

куды сягае маё ўяўленне

пашпарт

з якім я еду са свайго невялічкага мястэчка

на поўначы Францыі

ў іншыя мястэчкі ў пошуках дома

дома

які я да сёння шукаю

быць французжанкай – мець прывілеі

салёнае масла

бесплатная адукацыя

высокія заробкі і дапамога па беспрацоўі

быць французжанкай – мець прывілеі

рост гарадоў

and so free as if this winter will never end
without ever arriving

II.

what makes me a privileged person?

an American passport

a French passport

a German passport

a passport on which I can travel anywhere

my imagination goes

a passport

which I take from my small town

in the North of France

to other towns in search of home

home

which I'm still looking for

being French is being privileged

salted butter

free education

high salaries and unemployment benefit

being French is being privileged

urban growth





элітарнае грамадства
слабаразвітае вулічнае мастацтва

калі б я мела дастаткова грошай
я б навучылася будаваць дом і збудавала б яго
дом як цела – кантакт з рэчаіснасцю
адчуванне асалоды і болю
дом
які я буду слухаць, кранаць і бачыць
адчуваць востры пах дарагой драўніны
прарастаць у ім

быць французжанкай – ведаць
што кожны дзень людзі паміраюць
спрабуючы перасекчы закрытыя межы

людзі дастаткова адказныя
рабіць свае ўласныя выбары

людзі што прымушаюць мяне
ўсміхацца і плакаць

elite society
underdeveloped street art

if I had enough money
I would learn how to build a house and would build it
home – is like the body: contact with reality
the feeling of delight and pain
home
which I'll listen to, touch and see
feel the pungent smell of expensive wood
germinate in it

being a French is knowing
that every day people die
trying to cross closed borders

people with the freedom and responsibility
to make their own choices

people who make me
smile and cry





III.

мой сябар сказаў мне:
калі ты такая шчаслівая –
загадай жаданне і яно спраўдзіцца

мы ехалі аўтаспынам да Кутаісі
ўвесну
я памятаю
я загадала жаданне
і яно спраўдзілася

магчыма я загадала дом –
побач з сябрамі сям'ёй і кнігамі
побач з морам ракою ці возерам

усё што я адчуваю – хаос
у якім маё цела –
тое што людзі не выбіраюць самі
цела як хаос

цела
з якога я назіраю за старым Тбілісі
павялічваючы дыстанцыю
гэта павінна мяне супакоіць

якое жаданне я загадала?

III.

my friend said:
if you're so happy
make a wish and it'll come true

we were hitchhiking to Kutaisi
in spring
I remember
I made a wish and it came true
indeed

maybe my wish was a home
close to friends, family and books
close to the sea, a river or a lake

the only thing I feel is chaos
where my body
is something that people don't choose by themselves
body as chaos

body
from the inside of which I'm watching old Tbilisi
increasing the distance
it must calm me down

what wish did I make?





IV.

a reality of life
the pacific ocean
the american west coast

месцы да якіх я прывязаны ўспамінамі
людзі з якімі я адчуваю сябе "дома"
паўсюль
дзе мае рукі кранаюць пясок і ваду

маё цела пазбаўлена адчування канкрэтнага месца
падпарадкаванае жорсткім правілам існавання
што значыць быць немцам, пытаю ў яго
а ў адказ цішыня –
цела не спраўджвае мае чаканні
не спраўджвае нічыя чаканні
аўтарытарнае ў сваёй асабістай дзяржаве

баланс целаў у прасторы –
магчымасць адчуць сябе жывым і ўваскрэслым
у пошуках новага паўсядзённага вопыту
жыцця і ўваскрасання

не ўсе межы знікнуць заўтра
але ці магчымая дзяржава ўсеагульнага дастатку?
без візаў і іншых паперак
што апраўдваюць існаванне мяжы
ў прасторы бязмежжа

IV.

a reality of life
the Pacific Ocean
the American West Coast

places to which I'm tied by memories
people I feel 'at home' with
are everywhere
where my hands touch sand and water

my body lacks the feeling of a certain place
subordinated to the strict rules of existence
what does it mean to be a German, I ask him
silence in response
my body doesn't meet my expectations
doesn't meet anyone's expectations
authoritarian in its own state

the balance of bodies in space
is an opportunity to feel alive and risen
in search of new everyday experience
of life and resurrection

not all borders will vanish tomorrow
but is a welfare state possible?
without visas and other papers
that justify the existence of borders
in the boundless world





усё ўва што я веру ўкладаецца ў нямецкую мову
якая выйграе ў французскай і фарсі

што значыць быць немцам, пытаю
і сачу
як на бераг бяжыць хваля за хваляй

V.

мне прыкладна пяць
на выхадныя ў Львоў прыязджае мама
(яна працуе ў іншым горадзе)

ці адчувала яна вяртанне ў наш дом
як вяртанне "дадому"
тое што я адчуваю нават тады
калі вяртаюся ў гатэль падчас доўгага ў ім адпачынку
"дадому" – як месца дзе я застаюся
Германія больш чым Украіна

я стомлены апантанасцю іншых людзей "радзімай"

дзядуля будзіць мяне лёгкім пастукваннем
па драўлянай шафе –
рытм футбольных фанатаў
раз, два, раз-два-тры

рытм адсутнасці барацьбы з візамі
і дазвалам на працу

everything I believe in fits the German language
which beats French and Farsi

what does it mean to be a German, I ask
and watch
wave after wave breaking on the shore

V.

I'm about five
mum comes to Lviv for the weekend
(she works in another town)

did she feel her return to our home
was like coming back 'home'
the thing I feel
even when I return to the hotel during a long holiday
'home' is a place where I stay
rather Germany than Ukraine

I'm tired of other people's obsession with 'homeland'

grandad wakes me up with subtle knocking
on the wooden wardrobe
in football fans' rhythm
one, two, one-two-three

the rhythm of non-struggling with visas
and a work permit





дазволам жыць
рытм пераезду людзей у Германію
і скандынаўскія краіны
рытм ліберальнай палітыкі
што падтрымлівае іміграцыю
кваліфікаваных спецыялістаў
рытм турызму бяз межаў

мы сустракаемся з мамай на аўтобусным прыпынку
пасля яна п'е каву з маёй сястрой на кухні

я хачу адчуваць горад жывым
і ненавіджу верагоднасць вяртання ва Ёўкраіну
і гэта ніяк не датычыць вайны
я проста больш не належу гэтай краіне

водар!

што яднае мяне з водарам кавы на кухні
сентыментальнай адданасцю месцам
вялікімі надзеямі і стратай гэтых надзей

я люблю суразмернасць нямецкіх гарадоў
чалавеку
пачуццё сацыяльнай абароненасці з боку дзяржавы
і ненавіджу бюракратыю і левых радыкалаў

калі мама з сястрою дап'юць каву
мы пойдзем гуляць па цэнтры горада

a living permit
the rhythm of moving to Germany
and Scandinavian countries
the rhythm of liberal policies
that support immigration
of qualified specialists
the rhythm of tourism without borders

we meet mum at the bus stop
then she drinks coffee with my sister in the kitchen

I want to feel the town alive
I hate the chance of returning to Ukraine
and it has nothing to do with the war
it's just that I no more belong to this country

the aroma!

that unites me with the aroma of coffee in the kitchen
sentimental devotion to places
great hopes and the loss of these hopes

I like the proportionality of German towns
to people
the feeling of social protection by the state
and hate the bureaucracy and left radicals

when mum and sister finish their coffee
we'll go for a walk around the town centre





VI.

бывае я ганаруся сваёй краінай
 маёй беднай краінай
 маёй халоднай краінай
 дзе ўвосень і ўзімку можна
 па-сапраўднаму адчуць адзіноту
 і танчыць з ранішнім туманам
 ідучы дадому а пятай летам
 але болей чым прагнозам надвор'я
 я не давяраю змі –
 што яны рыхтуюць для нас штоночы?
 што мне рабіць з гэтымі звесткамі?

што мне краіна, калі я – дзіця Сусвету?
 паглядзі, я магу выбіраць розныя колеры,
 выбіраць музыку
 пад якую зручна ляцець абмінаючы астэроіды

што мне дом, калі маё цела – магічная машына
 з якой мне дасяжны ўвесь вопыт зямнога жыцця?

бывае я ганаруся сваёй краінай
 краінай у якой мяне тройчы абрабавалі
 але што ў мяне скралі?
 вось ён – дом
 месца якое я клічу домам

я гляджу кудысьці ў нікуды з акна самалёта
 і чую – вяртайся.

VI.

it happens that I'm proud of my country
 my poor country
 my cold country
 where in autumn and winter one can
 feel real loneliness
 and dance with the morning mist
 going home about five in summer
 but more than weather forecasts
 I mistrust media
 what do they prepare for us every night?
 what should I do with this news?

does the country matter if I'm a child of the world?
 look, I can choose different colours,
 choose the music
 to which it's comfortable to fly past asteroids

does home matter if my body is a magic machine
 in which all experience of earthly life is available?

it happens that I'm proud of my country
 the country where I've been robbed three times
 but what was stolen?
 here it is – my home
 the place I consider my home

I'm looking into nowhere from the plane window
 and hear: come back



VII.

я вырасла ля возера Охрид
возера Охрид вырасла ў маім сэрцы
і людзі ў ім плёкаюцца нібы вялікія рыбіны

час ад часу я думаю
што мая краіна мяне не хоча
што мая краіна мяне не прымае
за дачку за дзяўчыну за грамадзянку

дзякую
і гляджу як між намі расце
нібы ком у горле дыстанцыя

і сэрца разрываецца на вялікія кроплі
што нідзе няма зараз месца
да якога я прывязаная
нібы вартавы сабака да ланцугу

калі людзі пытаюць адкуль я –
я адказваю: Паўночная Македонія (і сама не веру)

калі б не было ніякіх межаў
я б ляжала на ўскрайку леса
чытаючы Стэфана Цвейга пра ўчорашні дзень
і гладзіла сваёй мяккай рукою ў кішэні пашпарт

VII.

I grew up near lake Ohrid
lake Ohrid grew up in my heart
and people splash in it like big fish

from time to time I think
that my country doesn't want me
that my country doesn't take me
for a daughter for a citizen

I thank it
and watch the distance grow between us
like a lump in the throat

and my heart tears apart in big drops
for there's no place
I'm tied to
like a guard dog

when people ask me where I'm from
I say North Macedonia (and don't believe it myself)

if there were no borders
I would lie at the edge of woods
reading Stefan Zweig about yesterday
and pat my passport in my pocket softly





і думала б пра родных людзей
значыць
думала б пра дом

там
дзе падчас канфлікту
больш за дваццаць гадоў таму
у гандлёвым цэнтры Скоп'е
мая мама сказала мне
(так як кажуць каханым раніцай
кранаючы пвейкамі скуру плячэй)
не размаўляць па-албанску
(яна думала што з намі можа нешта здарыцца)

я думаю што з намі можа нешта здарыцца
і гладжу мяккай рукою ў кішэні пашпарт

I'd think about those close to me
it means
I'd think about home

where
during the conflict
more than twenty years ago
in Skopje mall
my mom told me
(the way they say it to lovers in the morning
touching the shoulder skin with lashes)
not to speak Albanian
(she thought something might happen to us)

I think something may happen to us
and pat my passport in my pocket softly

Translated into English by **Hanna Shakel**
English language editing by **John Farndon**

Artur Kamarouski

Born in Mir, Belarus, in 1991, Artur Kamarouski is a poet, performer, artist and journalist. He is a member of the Krasnyi Borshchevik group of artists and graduated from the Belarusian Philology department of Hrodna State University (2013 and 2014), the CreativeWriting School (2013) and the poetry and translation department of the Young Writers' School W/Rights (2020) of the Union of Belarusian Writers. His poetry has been published in several literary magazines and anthologies in Belarus and Russia. Artur is the author of a poetry collection, "Water Begins to Live" (2020), which was presented with the Maksim Bahdanovič Award as the best poetry debut (2021). Moreover, he was featured in the exhibition Ciahlicy (Minsk, 2018), the international performance festival Performensk (Minsk, 2019) and the international festivals Eve's Ribs (St. Petersburg, 2018 and 2019), Carbonarium (Kyiv, 2019), and Dotyk (Minsk, 2020). He has been in political exile in Tbilisi, Georgia, since 2021 and currently lives in Warsaw, Poland.





A brief experimental treatise on love as the solution to the conundrums of European integration

Lura Pollozhani · Researcher and a PhD candidate on Law and Politics at the University of Graz

This experimental treatise tries to take a first step towards exploring the potential of political love as a solution to the current stagnation of the Western Balkans' integration into the European Union. The function of this political love is targeted towards two areas that are generally overlooked: language and understanding. This treatise proposes a political love across borders that is built upon solidarity with the aim of a more just and equal relationship between the Union and the Western Balkans (and beyond).

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→ The relationship between the European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans is currently in a rut. I will argue that the ingredient that is missing in this relationship is love. Make no mistake, this treatise does not intend to contend that the EU and the Western Balkans are or should be in a romantic relationship. That would be admitting that they are already in a toxic relationship where the suggestion to make would be to take a break. Instead, I would like to make the case for the value of political love as the way out of the current European integration conundrum.

A POLITICAL LOVE THAT CROSSES BORDERS

Firstly, let us define the function of love in this context. The argument of considering political emotions as an important aspect in nurturing a common feeling necessary to the health of democratic and peaceful societies has been eloquently promulgated by Martha C. Nussbaum¹, who called for sympathy and love as a guard against the powers of division and hierarchy that are detrimental to long-term stability. bell hooks² too emphasises the need for love in the political and public discourse. The positioning of love for these two scholars is essential to equality and justice. For the EU, which was founded with the intention of maintaining peace for which equality and justice are imperative, this message should ring clear. For the Western Balkans, which are still reeling from the consequences of war, strengthened by Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the need for this political love is even more urgent.

Political love is the foundation upon which equality and justice are maintained. Nussbaum presents her case within the contours of the state, but I will make the experimental case that a form of political love must cross borders and define relations between states, states and entities such as the EU, and all these entities, whether they be states or institutions and citizens and non-citizens alike. Thus, the function of political love, particularly one that crosses borders, is one that builds on solidarity with the aim of advancing equality and justice for all actors. Solidarity, after all, requires a common feeling and understanding among actors, which is essential to a union of any kind, whether within the contours of a state or of the European Union.

The function of political love, particularly one that crosses borders, is one that builds on solidarity with the aim of advancing equality and justice for all actors.

It is important to emphasise that this relationship does not exist in a vacuum, and that it is not without consequences: citizens are either the collateral damage or the empowering force of this relationship. They are collateral damage

when they are left out of decision making, out of the Union, when their freedom of movement is limited, when their dignity is tested and at times violated – whether in relation to the reality of borders and security, or because of arbitrary and legal violence. Therefore, my positionality as a citizen of a country in the Western Balkans and a resident of a country in the EU is also important, and I will attempt to instil this political love in my own reflections of both the EU and the Western Balkans.

THE LANGUAGE OF POLITICAL LOVE AS THE SOLUTION TO A BETTER UNION

Between the EU and the Western Balkans, this love has clearly been lacking and has damaged the relationship to the point of breaking. It is so fraught that even the EU's renewed flirtations with the region following Russia's invasion of Ukraine are often met with sarcastic incredulity even by pro-EU actors. When it comes to love, most would agree, language and consistency are imperative. Political love is no different.

Language is the principal point of intervention in the relationship between the EU (and its member states) and the Western Balkans. Recently, the Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell, made an

1 Nussbaum, Martha C. 2013. *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
 2 hooks, bell. 2001. *All about love: new visions*. William Morrow.



analogy, for which he subsequently half apologised,³ in which he compared the EU to a garden where everything works,⁴ and the rest of the countries outside the Union as a jungle that could invade that garden. It is a good thing we are not discussing romantic love, because this treatise would abruptly end at this point. However, when it comes to political love, this statement shows a considerable underlying issue that is evident in the EU's relationship with the Western Balkans countries, namely the implied and expressed superiority of one over the other. While one can point out that, in terms of objective facts, EU member states are better off in every metric than the countries of the Western Balkans, the language of superiority carries too many neo-colonial overtones to be constructive for a sense of equality and justice, destroying efforts to build a stronger Union as it is and as it could be.

The language of superiority carries too many neo-colonial overtones to be constructive for a sense of equality and justice.

Sadly (and in a treatise, I am allowed to make normative claims), this sentiment is also repeated by other leaders, which makes it more problematic and indicative of a wider issue. For instance, the statements made by French President Emmanuel

Macron after his country decided to veto the opening of accession talks to Albania and North Macedonia in 2019 could easily be confused with the attitude a parent adopts towards a child.⁵ Indeed, the countries of the Western Balkans are often talked to or about with this kind of language, using terms such as “naughty child” or “student”, or “homework” (how institutions can do “homework” is beyond this author’s understanding).

Let us deconstruct the various ways in which these analogies harm the relationship between the EU and the Western Balkans. To begin with, they establish a very clear hierarchy, which as Nussbaum teaches us is not a friend to political love. This hierarchy sets the EU above the countries of the Western Balkans and places power disproportionately on the side of the former. While there is an inherent inequality in the EU's relationship with the Western Balkans, in that the countries of the Western Balkans want to join the EU, this inequality is one of context and not one of condition. The upshot of this is that the language of hierarchy treats two equal entities as unequal. When a member state of the EU refers to a country of the Western Balkans as less than a country (as a student or child, for instance) because it has not fulfilled all conditions (arbitrary or otherwise) of joining, it establishes a strange definition of a country. Is a partner country considered an equal only when it resembles France, Spain or Germany? Countries of the Western Balkans are countries, in all their imperfectness: that is their condition. The context, the fact that these countries are not members of the EU and need to engage in reform, is another matter.

Another analogy I have heard expressed by a diplomat of an EU member state recently is that of the Western Balkans being the “spice” that the “EU food” needs. Other than the sacrilegious act of invoking food in this manner, this sort of analogy points to another problem, that of the countries of the Western Balkans as external, with a hint of the “less-than” attitude. Spice is not food and is external to food, however much it is necessary. Countries of the Western Balkans being perceived as external and unequal enforces the idea that there is an inherent difference, even a civilizational one, to the countries of the EU. Entities that seek equality and justice, peace and stability must be cautious of the harm of espousing such language and enforcing such sentiments.

3 Borrell, Josep. 2022. *On Metaphors and Geo-politics*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/metaphors-and-geo-politics_en

4 In Context (Youtube). 2022. “*Europe Is a Garden. The Rest of the World Is a Jungle, and the Jungle Could Invade the Garden*”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8SKblpc7kY>

5 Stamouli, Nektaria. 2019. *North Macedonia's post-Macron melancholy*. Politico. <https://www.politico.eu/article/north-macedonia-eu-accession-post-emmanuel-macron-melancholy/>





POLITICAL LOVE AS THE EMBODIMENT OF CITIZENS' ASPIRATIONS

On the side of the Western Balkans, there is the language of mostly opportunistic love. A love that is declarative but often not substantiated by action, or in the proper language of the EU, reform. As many a romantic song teaches us, love without action is mute. As this is, once again, not a romantic letter, I will say that political love without policies that strengthen equality and justice is mute. The countries of the Western Balkans have much work ahead in building the environment for political love. The countries of the EU, too, must continually reflect and rebuild (sometimes shattering old) institutions and policies of equality and justice. After all – this is the bigger picture that we mostly lose sight of – the whole purpose of this relationship is to generate and maintain systems of equality and justice for millions of citizens and non-citizens. Such systems cannot be built by employing the language of its antithesis, namely, instead of a language of love, a language of hierarchy and power.

Indeed, this language is translated into policies, as the countries of the Western Balkans are kept out of the Union through a process that has become increasingly ambiguous in its changing demands. Ambiguity and lack of certainty are detrimental to any relationship because they blur the contours and boundaries that help to maintain healthy relationships. Take the example of North Macedonia, which decided to change its name in its bid to join the EU, only to be slapped with two subsequent vetoes – firstly by France and secondly by Bulgaria – neither of which were based on the

principles of conditionality. What are the agreed boundaries of this relationship? Who sets them? Obviously, the power lies with the EU and there is very little reciprocal discussion on what each partner is willing to give and take.

This use of power on the part of the EU to disrupt efforts to achieve a healthy relationship is treacherous particularly when thinking of its conceptual and ideological power for people residing outside it. Again, I return the focus to citizens, be it the Euromaidan in Kyiv, the Colourful Revolution in Skopje, or more recently the protests in Georgia, the EU has served as the symbol behind which many hopes were and continue to be framed. Disregarding this symbolic meaning of the EU is not only insensitive and irresponsible, but fundamentally dangerous. It is also irresponsible of the governments of the Western Balkans and beyond to only pay lip service to the reforms that their citizens demand. Citizens in Ukraine are dying right now because of this hope and dream: the need for political love, not to be confused with appeasement or complacency, has never been more urgent.

IMAGINING A SHARED FUTURE: PATHWAYS TO POLITICAL LOVE

With this shared responsibility in mind, let us explore what political love between the EU and the Western Balkans would look like. The solutions found would be significant for one of the EU's most elusive goals yet: solidarity. For solidarity to develop, there needs to be a joint imagination of a shared future that benefits the well-being of

the parties involved. Therefore, the EU must firstly re-establish a clear path to integration, which, despite illusions to the contrary (such as the new methodology for accession), is currently lacking. In setting this new, clear path to integration, it is important for the EU to hold discussions with its partners in the region. Namely, the conversations on integration must be open to criticism and input from the Western Balkans countries and their citizens, by EU member states and their citizens alike, with the purpose of making the process more transparent and democratic, distributing ownership of it among all partners.

For solidarity to develop, there needs to be a joint imagination of a shared future that benefits the well-being of the parties involved.

Secondly, the language that leaders and institutions on both sides employ is crucial to the way that this new popular imagination develops. Instead of establishing precedents of disrespect, which are set when leaders resort to derogatory or negative language, thus legitimising its proliferation, precedents must be set for a language of understanding and solidarity. The language of leaders trickles down into relationships between institutions as well as relationships between institutions and citizens, which is why language





carries great responsibility. As many people of the Western Balkans who have applied for a visa or a residence permit for an EU country will attest, they are treated like unwanted persons, who are needed for filling precarious or low-staffed positions, but whose necessity is framed as a nuisance. This treatment is not separate from policies at the top – it is because of policies at the top that such treatment is justified and empowered.

Thirdly, to mediate the inequality and injustice in relations between citizens among Europe, a better understanding of each other also needs to develop. At the moment, the EU is part of the popular imagination of every citizen of the Western Balkans' countries, whereas the Western Balkans are not part of the popular imagination of EU citizens. This includes defocusing the EU-centric approach to teaching history and raising awareness of the histories of the region and beyond. After all, an anti-colonial perspective on history is not only imperative for teaching the histories of other continents, but of the European continent itself. Critical self-reflection and a more inclusive view of the past in both the EU and the Western Balkans countries is needed in order to build a new imagination of a common future based on solidarity, equality and justice.

An anti-colonial perspective on history is not only imperative for teaching the histories of other continents, but of the European continent itself.

Lastly, the EU and the Western Balkans are way past the flirtatious stage of their political relationship. The two have come to a point where they know each other's faults, as well as each other's strengths. They have been in this political relationship for more than twenty years, which is why it is important that the language and political emotions that accompany this journey be taken into account and changed. There is much frustration, tiredness and disappointment on the part of many citizens in the Western Balkans that such a long relationship is stuck in a rut, and they are aware that the reason for this lies with both the member states of the EU and within the region. This emotional aspect must be addressed, and the way to do that is to awaken a language and political emotions that validate and recognise the many individual and collective responses to stagnation in such an important process as EU integration. A relationship based on mutual respect and understanding must be the principle *sine qua non* of mending this relationship, and there is no better way to start than with political love. At a time of constant threat to democracy and to equality and justice, reaffirming these principles through a shared appreciation of political love is the hope that we may have for the future.

Lura Pollozhani

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'People can't afford milk': Moldovans weigh political future as Ukraine war hits economy

Paula Erizanu · Author and journalist, Moldova / UK

In this piece for the Guardian, published in December 2022, Paula Erizanu examines the ramifications of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on neighbouring Moldova and how the cost of living crisis carries political and geopolitical risks for this country of 2.5 million people.

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12 December 2022

Electricity blackouts, stray missiles and 35% inflation: collateral damage from Russia's war on Ukraine has plunged neighbouring Moldova into a crisis that goes beyond higher energy bills. "I see elderly people crying in front of the shop window. It's not that they can't afford salami; they can't even afford the basics like milk," says Carolina Untilă, who works in a corner shop in the suburbs of the capital, Chişinău. Moldova's dependence on energy imports is driving record inflation. Prices of some products have doubled; in her shop, grocery sales have halved, Untilă says.

"Out of a pension, how can you save anything? It all goes on food and medicine," says Ion Istrati, 72, from Borogani in southern Moldova. He is one of many who, faced with gas and electricity prices that are up to six times higher than last year, have applied for government help. "Without the compensation, it would have been grave," Istrati adds. According to opinion polls, more than 40% of Moldovans are struggling with basic costs of living, while an additional 21% of people cannot afford the bare minimum.

To alleviate the burden of winter, as the former Soviet republic weans itself off almost total energy reliance on Russia, the government has had to turn to its western partners for emergency financial support. Russia's state gas company Gazprom slashed supplies to Moldova in October, while reliance on Ukrainian electricity interconnectors has made the country an indirect casualty of the

violence, as Kyiv stopped exporting electricity to Moldova in October after Russian airstrikes on its critical infrastructure.

Moldova's minister for external affairs, Nicu Popescu, estimates that sourcing the alternative winter energy supplies the country needs will cost more than €1bn (£860m). So far, the government has managed to raise a third of the amount from its EU partners.

Ministers are acutely aware that the cost of living crisis carries political and geopolitical risks for this country of 2.5 million people. "Russia's hybrid war in Moldova replicates the energy strategy used against Europe at large, but it also involves the propaganda war, that we see in the media, on social channels, and on the streets, at protests," says the political analyst Igor Boţan. "In response, the government is attempting to diversify our energy sources and get support from our western partners."

Some opposition politicians, particularly in the Şor party, blame the government for the economic hardship and argue that conditions require a return to closer ties to Russia.

Since the autumn, Şor has organised anti-government, pro-Russia protests in the centre of Chişinău. Tens of thousands have turned out, although it has been alleged that some of them were paid to show up.

Şor representatives from central Moldova are accused of meeting Duma officials in Moscow to seek the end of Russia's embargo on Moldovan fruit for their district, Orhei, and a special local gas deal.

The US recently imposed sanctions on the party's leader, Ilan Şor, as part of what Washington called its action to counter Russia's "persistent malign influence campaigns and systemic corruption in Moldova". The UK followed suit last week, naming Şor among 30 international political figures who will be stopped from entering the country or channelling money through British banks. Şor is reported to have fled Moldova for Israel in 2019 after a fraud investigation two years previously led to corruption charges. He has defended the provision of food and transport to those who wanted to join the anti-government protests "against the disgrace, poverty, hunger and cold to which they were condemned".

Both Şor and another opposition leader, Gheorghe Cavaliuc, who left Chişinău for London last summer after the pro-European PAS party won elections, have appeared at the protests via video-streaming. Both politicians claim that any investigations against them in Moldova are politically motivated. But their pro-Russia messages, transmitted via Şor-owned local and Russian TV channels, have caught on with some Moldovans.

Under the stewardship of the pro-western president, Maia Sandu, Moldova has applied for and been granted candidate status for EU membership. However, November polls indicated a dip in





public support for closer integration with the EU, with 50% of Moldovans saying they would vote for membership, down from 65% in the summer of 2021. “We should stay neutral,” says 34-year-old Ana, criticising the Moldovan government’s volatile condemnation of Russia’s conduct in Ukraine. “Our produce used to go to Russia, and gas and electricity were cheaper then,” she adds. About 60% of Moldovan exports now go to the EU and only 10% to Russia.

The blackouts have, however, made other Moldovans turn away from Russia. After a power cut that left parts of the country without electricity for 24 hours in November, on Moldovan social media #bezvas (#withoutyou) became a trending hashtag, borrowing from the Ukrainian president’s defiant riposte to the Kremlin: “Without gas or without you? Without light or without you? Without you!” Even the former pro-Russia Moldovan president Igor Dodon condemned the Russian attacks on Ukraine and said “we should thank Romanians for selling us electricity”.

Throughout November, Moldova bought nearly 90% of its electricity from Romania, after supply from the breakaway Russia-backed Transnistria region, which controls the key Cuciurgan power station, dried up. On 3 December, Romania exported gas to Chişinău for the first time. However, Romania is struggling to cover its own needs.

A temporary deal that the deputy prime minister, Andrei Spînu, called “humane” because it will help avert massive power outages will allow Moldova to trade gas stocks for cheaper electricity from Transnistria.

In the longer term, however, Moldova will have to prioritise the construction of a new electricity interconnector with Romania and develop the renewables sector.

“This perverse war in Ukraine has two facets,” says Boţan. “If Ukraine resists, and we also resist, we have the chance to integrate into the EU ... But now it all depends on our efforts to inform citizens of the opportunities that have opened to us.”

This article was published in [The Guardian](#), 12 December 2022.

Paula Erizanu

was born in Chisinau, Moldova, in 1992, and has studied and worked as a journalist in London for 10 years, collaborating with the BBC, The Guardian, London Review of Books and other publications. She was shortlisted for the UK’s Culture Journalist of the Year Award by Words by Women in 2019. She is also an award-winning Romanian-language author. Her first book, *A diary from the 2009 mass protests in Moldova, This is my first revolution. Steal It* (Cartier, 2010, trilingual edition), won UNESCO Germany’s Most Beautiful Book of the Year award. She also authored a poetry collection, *Take Care* (Charmides, 2015), and co-edited the pioneering three-part anthology *A Century of Romanian Poetry Written by Women* (Cartier, 2019–2021), together with the poet and critic Alina Purcaru. Her debut novel, *The Woods Are Burning*, a fictionalised historical account of the lives of early Soviet feminists Alexandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand, was published in 2021, winning the Young Writer of the Year Award at Romania’s Young Writers’ Gala and being shortlisted for the Sofia Nădejde Prize in Bucharest, Romania, and Festival du Premier Roman in Chambery, France.





Flag for us only

Tomasz Padło · Freelance photographer and Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Arts of the Pedagogical University of Krakow, Poland

In one of the countries at the heart of Europe, several dozen counties and municipalities have introduced resolutions discriminating against sexual minorities in recent years. The areas where these resolutions apply are colloquially referred to as LGBT-free zones. The crossed-out rainbow flag has become an informal symbol of exclusionary attitudes. This prompted me to create an alternative flag for areas where authorities are reluctant to embrace rainbow symbolism.

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I divided this task into several stages:

1. Based on my own research experience, I compiled a list of features and values common to these areas;
2. I documented them photographically;
3. From the photographs, I chose symbolic elements corresponding to the assigned features and values;
4. Using the principles of vexillology, I created a flag based on the colours of selected elements.

After creating the flag, I conducted a survey with a dozen people, asking how they felt when looking at it. The answers describing the flag as sad, washed out and pale prevailed. The survey participants also had an association with sediment formation, landscape and the browning process.

In the title of the project, by using the adverb “only”, I emphasised the exclusion of “them” from the “us” community.

FLAG

FOR

US

ONLY





● Tomasz Padlo

44



#81BDD9



#FFFFF



● Tomasz Padlo

46



#D5D4D2









● Tomasz Padlo

50



#5A624B



51

● Tomasz Padlo



#65000E



• Tomasz Padlo

52



#1F2024



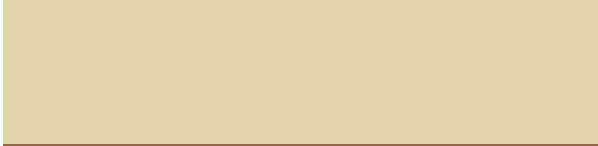
#81BDD9 / Blue – the colour of the sky, a symbol of faith and fidelity. Associated with Mary (Marian blue), which here is an emanation of feminine virtues.



#FFFFFF / White – a symbol of innocence and purity. Difficult climatic and orographic conditions allowed for centuries to isolate the local areas from the threats of the outside world.



#D5D4D2 / Gray – symbolises the warmth of a home and the effects of this warmth, in the form of one of the highest levels of air pollution in Europe.



#727270 / Dark gray – means calming emotions, as well as anonymity in an individualised world. It is therefore a symbol of a community based on collective values.



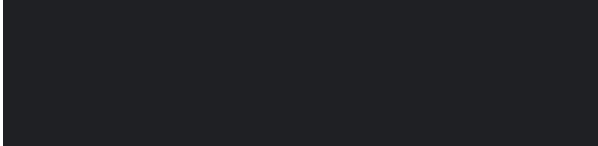
#E3D6AD / Gold – the colour of perfection and uniqueness, a symbol of power. Also the spiritual power over the believers.



#8E6A48 / Brown – the colour of soil and wood, two exploited resources that have been the basis of existence in these areas, to which the locals have a constantly ambivalent attitude.



#5A624B / Green – the colour of nature, including the ubiquitous thuja. The introduced thuja is a proof of being open to otherness. Otherness carefully adapted to the needs of the community.



#65000E / Crimson – a symbol of blood shed for traditional values.

#1F2024 / Black – The sum of all the colours of the rainbow is white, and black means the lack of them. It separates two worlds, protects Us from Them.

SIGN BOOK

The flag was created based on the symbolism of the cultural landscape and the system of values common to the so-called LGBT-free zones that have been created in recent years in one of the countries in Central Europe.

The flag's 3:2 ratio is the result of its widespread use with other flags, and universality is a value in itself.

The flag consists of 9 equal-width stripes of different colors arranged horizontally. Their number is due to the meaning of the number 9, symbolising divine holiness and perfection. Also, 9 is more than the 8, 7 or 6 stripes found in flags that promote competitive values.

Tomasz Padło

is a freelance photographer based in Krakow, Poland, and a co-founder of Bezgranic Foundation, which focuses on the promotion of knowledge through visual arts. He treats photography as a representation of reality, hence his primary focus on documentary photography. After taking up trials with a view to recognising and understanding the Orient, he turned his photographic interest towards imaging the relationship between humankind and the environment. Furthermore, he is a geographer by profession and is working as an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Arts of the Pedagogical University of Krakow. He has studied the problem of perceiving Europe for many years.



In Georgia, Dancing is a Battle

Louise Cognard · Journalist, France



Louise Cognard



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In order to rediscover the underground, libertarian spirit one enjoys at parties in Berlin, one has to travel even further East, to the very margins of the European continent: To Georgia, where homophobia is still rampant, and neighbouring Russia is considered a constant threat. And yet, Georgian nightlife has retained all its subversive flavour. A report from Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, where going out after dark remains an act of defiance.

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Louise Cognard: En Géorgie, danser est un combat

Pour retrouver l'esprit underground et libertaire des soirées berlinoises, il faut pousser encore plus à l'est, aux confins du continent européen. En Géorgie, l'homophobie est toujours omniprésente, et la Russie perçue comme une menace constante. Là-bas, la nuit a gardé toute sa saveur subversive. Reportage à Tbilissi, dans une ville où sortir après la tombée du jour reste un acte militant.

Bassiani serait-il le nouveau Berghain ? La comparaison avec le mythique club berlinois peut sembler facile. À en croire Resident Advisor, le média en ligne des adeptes du clubbing, la boîte géorgienne fait en tout cas partie des meilleurs clubs techno du monde. Au sous-sol d'un stade de foot, les gens dansent dans le bassin d'une piscine abandonnée en béton massif, dans le plus pur style architectural brutaliste. Des DJ de San Francisco ou Berlin viennent mixer de la techno minimale aux côtés de leurs homologues résidents. Chaque week-end, jusqu'à 2 000 clubbeurs y font la fête.

DANSE GUERRIÈRE

« Ici on se sent libre », dit Miro, 23 ans, en souriant. Il fait la queue devant les grilles du stade pour une soirée Horoom Night, les nuits *queer* du club Bassiani. Il est rejoint par ses amis, tout en joie et paillettes. Certains portent des cornes de licorne ou ont les cheveux colorés, d'autres optent plutôt pour la discrétion d'un simple T-shirt noir. Ici, pas de *dress code*. L'atmosphère est tranquille, les jeunes gens se saluent en s'embrassant sur la bouche. Des gestes *a priori* anodins, mais pas en

→ Could Tbilisi's Club Bassiani be the next Berghain? Any comparison with the legendary Berlin nightclub might seem somewhat facile. According to Resident Advisor, the global online media for clubbing enthusiasts, this Georgian nightclub ranks among the world's best techno clubs. In the basement of a football stadium, punters dance in an empty solid concrete Olympic-size swimming pool, built in the purest brutalist architectural style. Alongside their resident counterparts, DJs from as far away as San Francisco and Berlin come to mix minimal techno. Every weekend, up to 2,000 clubbers come to party here.

WARRIOR DANCE

"We feel free here," says the 23-year-old Miro, beaming. He's queuing outside the stadium gates for *Horoom Nights*, the queer night at Club Bassiani. He has been joined by his friends, all full of joy and glitter. Some are wearing unicorn horns, or have coloured their hair, whilst others have opted for the more discreet look of a simple black T-shirt. There's no dress code. Amid the laid-back atmosphere, young people greet each other by kissing on the mouth. Such affective gestures might strike one as harmless, but not here in Georgia, where half the population still considers any public show of affection between two persons of the same sex as problematic. "I'd never kiss a man in the street," explains Miro.

That's why, in 2016, Giorgi Kikonishvili and Naja Orashvili started to organise a series of queer evenings at Bassiani: "The means we had to combat homophobia weren't enough. We wanted to create something more powerful, more seductive, that would bring Georgia's queer community together. Where better than the dance-floor to bring people together." The evenings are called *Horoom Nights*, after the celebrated Georgian war dance, the *khorumi*. For Giorgi and Naja, dancing is a battle. In fact, the name "Bassiani" is directly inspired by the Battle of Basiani, at which the victorious Queen Tamar fought off the invading Turks back in the 13th century. The second 's' in the club's name is a pun on the indispensable element in any good techno sound: the thumping bass.





Géorgie où la moitié de la population considère encore que toute démonstration affective entre deux personnes de même sexe est problématique. « *Jamais je n'embrasserai un mec en public à l'extérieur* », confirme Miro.

Pour cette raison, en 2016, Giorgi Kikonishvili a commencé à organiser avec Naja Orashvili des soirées *queer* à Bassiani : « *Les outils que nous avons pour combattre l'homophobie n'étaient pas suffisants. Nous voulions créer quelque chose de plus puissant, de plus séduisant, qui pourrait rassembler la communauté queer de Géorgie. Le dancefloor est le meilleur endroit pour réunir les gens.* » Ces soirées sont baptisées *hoom*, d'après une danse guerrière locale. Pour Giorgi et Naja, danser est un combat. D'ailleurs, le nom Bassiani est directement inspiré de la bataille victorieuse de Basiani, menée au XIII^e siècle par la reine Tamar contre l'envahisseur turc. Le deuxième « s » est un jeu de mots avec l'élément le plus important d'un bon son techno : la basse.

En Géorgie, les habitants font un signe de croix lorsqu'ils passent devant une église. Le pouvoir de l'institution orthodoxe est encore très fort. Depuis dix ans, chaque 17 mai, Journée mondiale contre l'homophobie, la transphobie et la biphobie, des prêtres géorgiens et leurs paroissiens organisent une marche homophobe dans la capitale pour célébrer la journée de la « pureté familiale ». Elles finissent souvent dans la violence. En 2021, un journaliste est mort des suites d'une attaque par une vingtaine d'extrémistes. Mais l'organisateur des *Hoom Nights* reste optimiste : « *La dernière marche homophobe financée par l'Église et les mouvements pro-russes a rassemblé entre 2 000 et 3 000 personnes venues de tout le pays. Nous, on réunit jusqu'à 2 000 personnes chaque week-end* », lance Giorgi Kikonishvili, avant de partager un souvenir : « *Je n'oublierai jamais cet homme qui est venu s'excuser une nuit, dans*

In Georgia, people make the sign of the cross whenever they pass in front of a church. The Christian Orthodox Church is still enormously influential. For ten years now, every May 17, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, Georgian Orthodox priests and their parishioners have been organising a homophobic march through Tbilisi in order to celebrate "family purity" day. These marches routinely end up in violence. In 2021, a journalist died as a result of an attack by around twenty extremists. Nonetheless, the *Hoom Nights* organisers remain optimistic: "The last homophobic march financed by the Church and pro-Russian movements drew between 2,000 and 3,000 people from all over the country. We can attract up 2,000 people every weekend," remarks Giorgi Kikonishvili, before sharing an anecdote: "I'll never forget the man who came to the club one night in order to apologise and confessed to me that he had taken part in the homophobic pogrom in 2013. I've dozens of similar stories ..."

"I'M PRO-EUROPEAN"

At the stadium entrance, two bouncers look fixedly at the revellers and check their identity cards. The club's admission policy remains a cloak and dagger affair. As with any good nightclub, they have to cultivate an element of uncertainty. An entrance ticket costs between 40 and 60 laris (between 15 and 21€). The average monthly salary in Georgia is €580. "We've got to support the club," explains Giorgi. He also points out that if regulars provide the club management the profiles they use on social-media networks, they, in turn, can then vet these profiles in order to ensure that they are not posting any homophobic, racist or sexist content, and thereby also allow them to verify the user's identity. This will then enable those who have been vetted to get into the club for free, as is the case with Miro and his mates. For the club team, this system of "validation" affords them a better overview of who the clubbers really are, all while helping them guarantee their "safety."





le club, et qui m'a avoué qu'il avait participé à la manifestation homophobe de 2013. Des histoires comme ça, j'en ai des dizaines... »

« JE SUIS PRO-EUROPÉEN »

À l'entrée du stade, deux videurs dévisagent les fêtards et contrôlent les cartes d'identité. La politique d'entrée reste mystérieuse. Comme pour tout bon club, il faut cultiver l'incertitude. Un ticket sur place coûte entre 40 et 60 laris (entre 15 et 21 euros). En Géorgie, le salaire moyen est de 580 euros par mois. « *Il faut bien faire vivre le club* », justifie Giorgi. Il explique aussi que si les habitués partagent leur profil sur les réseaux sociaux, ils peuvent obtenir une « validation ». Elle permet d'entrer gratuitement, c'est le cas pour Miro et ses copains. Pour l'équipe du club, cette « validation » permet d'avoir un meilleur aperçu des clubbeurs et de garantir leur « sécurité ».

L'organisateur des Horoom Nights défend des fêtes inclusives et égalitaires. *Queers* ou *straights*. Riches ou pauvres. Tout le monde peut venir danser. Ou presque. Un immense drapeau ukrainien flotte à l'entrée du club. Une rumeur court : avec un passeport russe, tu ne rentres pas. La chercheuse Tamar Koberidze estime qu'entre 100 000 et 150 000 Russes sont venus s'installer à Tbilissi depuis le début de la guerre en Ukraine pour fuir le régime autoritaire de Poutine et échapper à la mobilisation. Pour une ville d'1,2 million d'habitants, cela représente 12 % de la population... Ce soir-là, Miro porte un T-shirt à l'effigie du drapeau européen. Ses copains touchent son téton et font mine de se brûler tellement Miro est hot. Il vient au Bassiani après avoir travaillé au vestiaire d'une autre boîte, Khidi, où il y aurait plein de Russes : « *Je voulais leur montrer mon opinion. Je suis pro-européen.* »

The organisers of *Horoom Nights* have been advocating for inclusive and egalitarian parties. Queer or straight. Rich or poor. Anyone is welcome to come and dance. Well, nearly everybody. A huge Ukrainian flag flies over the entrance to the club. Word has it that if you hold a Russian passport, then you won't be allowed in. Ever since war has broken out in Ukraine, according to researcher Tamar Koberidze, between 100,000 and 150,000 Russians have relocated to Tbilisi in a bid to escape Putin's authoritarian regime and being conscripted into the Russian army. For a city of 1.2 some million inhabitants, this Russian contingent represents some 12% of the city's population. This evening, Miro is wearing a T-shirt bearing the European flag. His mates touch his nipple and pretend to burn themselves because Miro is so hot. He comes to Bassiani after working in the changing-room at another nightclub, Khidi, where there are many Russian customers: "I wanted to let them know where I stand. I'm pro-European."

Giorgi casts doubt on the matter, however. Not every Russian is turned away at Bassiani, but he adds: "I'm 35 years-old and, since I was born, we've already fought three wars with Russia. The last one was in 2008. It's not even over yet. And 20% of our territory is occupied by Russian troops, who shift the national boundaries on a daily basis. Rent prices have tripled in Tbilisi since war erupted in Ukraine and also as a result of the massive influx of Russians. To be honest, I'm amazed at the Georgians' patience. We tend to avoid confrontation; we put up with them, but they will never fully integrate into our society."

LIBERTARIAN-TECHNO VERSUS SUICIDAL PUNK

Given how Russians are not exactly welcome at Georgian parties, they have organised their own. At Secret Place, Russian is predominantly spoken. The haunt for "cool kids" who have emigrated from St Petersburg, its walls are covered with caricatures and concert posters. Next to a poster of the group Talking Heads, you can see one of the Kremlin towers blown up by a man who resembles Baron





Giorgi laisse planer le doute. Tous les Russes ne seraient pas refoulés à Bassiani, mais il ajoute : « *J'ai 35 ans et, depuis ma naissance, nous avons eu trois guerres contre la Russie. La dernière remonte à 2008. Elle n'est même pas terminée. Et 20 % de notre territoire est occupé par les troupes russes, qui bougent les frontières au quotidien. Depuis la guerre en Ukraine et l'arrivée massive des Russes, les prix des loyers ont triplé dans la capitale. Pour être honnête, je suis étonné par la patience des Géorgiens. On évite la confrontation, on les tolère, mais ils ne seront jamais totalement intégrés à notre société.* »

TECHNO LIBERTAIRE VS PUNK SUICIDAIRE

Puisqu'ils ne sont pas les bienvenus dans les soirées géorgiennes, les Russes ont inventé les leurs. Au Secret Place, on entend surtout parler russe. C'est le repère des *cool kids* émigrés de Saint-Pétersbourg. Les murs sont couverts de caricatures et d'affiches de concerts. À côté des Talking Heads, on peut voir une tour du Kremlin dynamitée par un bonhomme qui ressemble au baron de Münchhausen. Une ambiance apocalyptique se dégage de l'endroit. Ici, pas de techno libertaire mais du punk suicidaire. Les noms des groupes parlent d'eux-mêmes : Church of Hate, Facial Agnosia, ou encore latemyself.

Le serveur a grandi à Belgorod, en Russie, à 40 kilomètres de l'Ukraine. Il a des proches de part et d'autre de la frontière. « *C'est horrible, j'ai l'impression de voir mes amis s'entretuer.* » Méfiant, il refuse de donner son nom. Il assure que dans ce bar-boîte, tout le monde est le bienvenu, sans discrimination. Des levées de fonds sont organisées régulièrement, une partie des recettes des concerts est versée à l'ONG Motskhaleba, qui aide les Ukrainiens à s'installer en Géorgie.

Münchhausen. An apocalyptic atmosphere pervades the place. Here, punters are not entertained with libertarian techno, just suicidal punk. With band names such as Church of Hate, Facial Agnosia or even latemyself, what more is there to say?

The bartender hails from Belgorod, Russia, some forty kilometres from the Ukrainian border. He has relatives on either side of the frontier. "It's horrible, I feel as though my friends are killing each other." He's wary and refuses to give his name. He assures us that everyone is welcome in this bar and club, without discrimination. Fund-raising events are organised regularly, and part of the proceeds from the concerts is channelled to the NGO *Motskhaleba*, which helps Ukrainians to settle in Georgia. Like any self-respecting hipster, Ivan, 33, is an India Pale Ale lover and takes refuge at Secret Place because he feels at home there. His 23-year-old brother, who volunteered for the Russian army, had just been killed on the front. Ivan has never understood why his brother opted to join the army. A computer programmer, Ivan freely admits to being one of those digital nomads roaming the world without really taking much interest in local politics. To justify himself, he quotes Mark Manson's American bestseller *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*. In other words, if you want to be happy, it's better not to give a shit...

For Georgians like Pikria, this nihilism exhibited by young Russians is a real turn-off: "I don't get it when they tell us that Russia is no longer their country. With all my heart, I'd like to tell them: 'Go fight for your country, in your country.'" To which Vlad, leaning against the bar, retorts: "The Russian police don't see us as citizens, but as objects, they own us, they can do whatever they want with us." Being in the wrong place at the wrong time is reason enough to get locked up in jail for several days.





Ivan, 33 ans, amateur de bières IPA, comme tout hipster qui se respecte, se réfugie au Secret Place, car il s'y sent bien. Son petit frère de 23 ans vient de mourir sur le front. Il s'était engagé comme volontaire auprès de l'armée russe, un choix qu'Ivan n'a jamais compris. Lui est programmeur informatique, il admet faire partie de ces digital nomads qui voyagent à travers le monde sans vraiment s'intéresser à la politique locale. Et cite, pour se justifier, le best-seller américain *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck* de Mark Manson. Sous-entendu : pour être heureux, mieux vaut s'en foutre...

Ce nihilisme propre aux jeunes Russes insupporte les Géorgiens comme Pikria : « *Je ne comprends pas quand ils nous disent que la Russie n'est plus leur pays. De tout mon coeur, j'aimerais leur dire : "Battez-vous pour votre pays, dans votre pays."* » Ce à quoi Vlad, accoudé au bar, rétorque : « *La police russe ne nous considère pas comme des sujets, mais comme des objets, on leur appartient, elle peut faire ce qu'elle veut de nous.* » Être au mauvais endroit au mauvais moment est un motif suffisant pour être détenu plusieurs jours en prison.

EXCLURE LE « GROUPE DOMINANT »

Ce discours n'est pas toujours entendu par les Géorgiens. Les graffitis « Fuck Russia » fleurissent dans les rues de Tbilissi. Depuis l'été 2022, pour entrer dans le club Dedaena, les Russes doivent faire une demande sur le site internet de l'établissement, où il est indiqué : « *Les citoyens russes ont besoin d'un visa pour entrer à Dedaena parce que TOUS les Russes ne sont pas les bienvenus. Nous défendons l'égalité et l'unité, mais nous voulons être sûrs que les Russes impérialistes qui ont subi un lavage de cerveau ne finissent pas dans notre bar. Merci de nous soutenir en remplissant ce formulaire, pour que personne n'ait à passer la soirée avec des c*nnards.* »

EXCLUDING THE "DOMINANT GROUP"

Georgians don't always take this message on board. "Fuck Russia" graffiti is everywhere to be seen in the streets of Tbilisi. Since the summer of 2022, in order to enter Club Dedaena, Russians must apply via the club's website, which states: "Russian citizens need a visa to enter Dedaena because not EVERY Russian is welcome. We stand for equality and unity, but we want to ensure that no brain-washed imperialist Russians end up in our bar. Please support us by filling in this form, so that nobody has to put up with assh*les for an evening."

In revenge, hundreds of Russian trolls posted bad reviews on the Google. Some of them even hacked the club's website so as to rename it "Denazification Bar" and changed its web-address to redirect users to the Kremlin's official website. In Georgia, choosing a bar means choosing sides.

The French version of this article was published in [Usbek & Rica](#), spring 2023, nr 39.

Translation from French into English: *John Barrett*





Pour se venger, des centaines de trolls russes ont donné des mauvaises recensions au lieu sur Google. Certains ont même hacké le site pour le renommer « Denazification Bar » et changé son adresse pour rediriger les internautes vers le site officiel du Kremlin. En Géorgie, choisir son bar, c'est choisir son camp.

Cet article est paru dans [Usbek & Rica](#), printemps 2023, n° 39.

Écoutez aussi le reportage de Louise Cognard « [Le long métrage: Entre Tchétchénie et Géorgie, paroles de femmes pour défendre la vallée de Pankissi](#) », RTS, 14 May 2023.

Louise Cognard

is a journalist for French TV (France 3 and Arte) and radio. She worked for the web programme Europe 2019 on Arte, a special and temporary collection of programmes dedicated to Europe during the European elections. She also collaborated with radio producer Caroline Gillet on her weekly radio show Foule Continentale. The show was a platform for dialogue and for expressing new ideas for young people involved in civic movements around Europe and was broadcast on France Inter. In the winter of 2020, she boarded a cargo ship crossing the Atlantic to America. During the crossing, she worked as a deckhand and made short documentary films about life at sea. She then travelled through Central America for a year as an independent journalist, looking for alternative ways of living in hippie, boatbuilder and Mennonite communities.





Woman with EU flag

Elliot Raimbeau · Journalist and illustrator, France/USA



Elliot Raimbeau



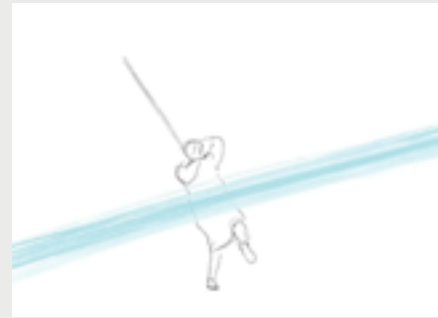
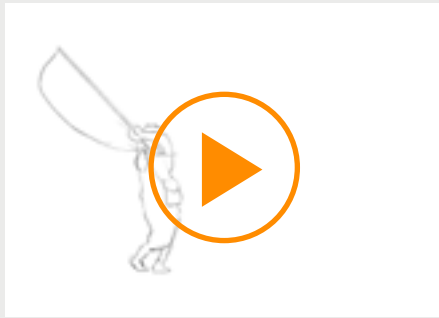
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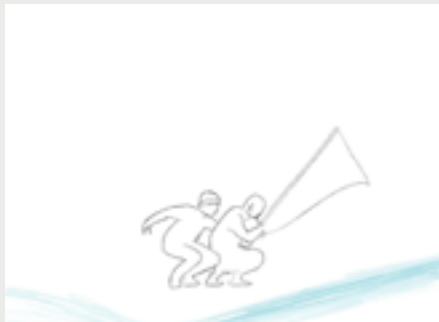
This short animation pays tribute to the demonstrations in Georgia. I was inspired by a video that went viral on Twitter showing a woman with a European flag resisting the deluge of a water canon, first standing alone, then being held and supported by nearby demonstrators. It's a nice metaphor for illustrating strength in unity and the incredible courage of the Georgian people.

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Stills of the animated short.
The video is available on [vimeo](#).



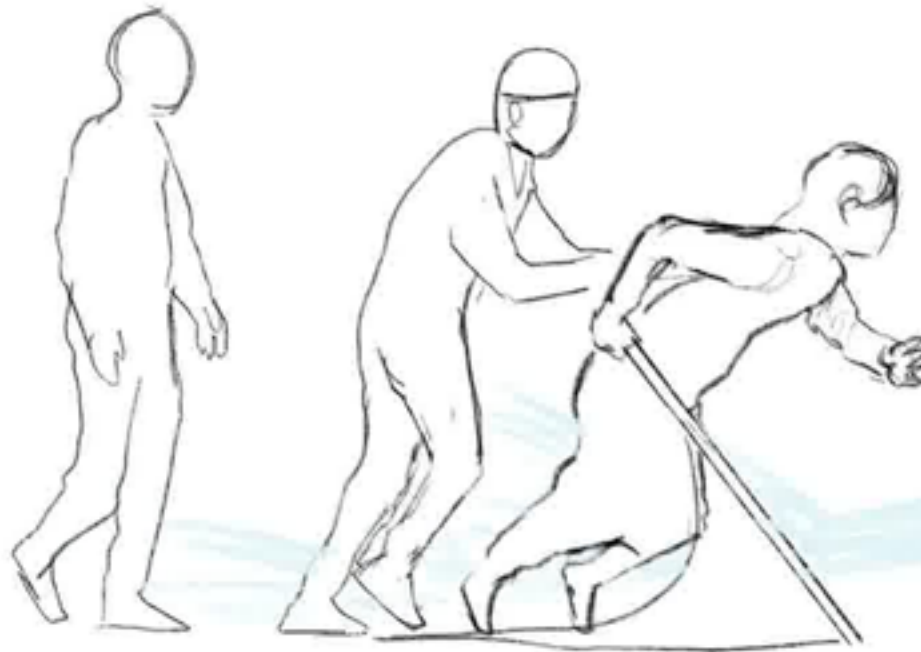
The process of creating the anima-
tion can be also watched [here](#).





Elliot Raimbeau

*is a French-American journalist and illustrator working as a freelancer for investigative documentaries. He makes animations for French television and illustrations for newspapers and has published a graphic novel entitled *Les Tambours de Srebrenica* about the war in Bosnia. He lives and works in Paris.*





Clubs and activism in Georgia – between European aspirations and crisis mode

Tamar Tolordava · Assistant Professor at Ilia State University, Georgia

Georgian activism and clubs as a contributor to it are in crisis. However, recent developments have demonstrated that when discontent is at its peak and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and civil rights are at risk, citizens can mobilise. A panel discussion hosted by the Centre for Advanced Studies of Ilia State University analysed the evolution of Georgian clubs and related activism and addressed the problems they face.

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Georgian protest and activism are no stranger to music and dance. Some of the key protest-related events in the modern history of the country – the Rose Revolution, demonstrations in 2012, anti“agent law” protests in 2023, etc. – were consistently accompanied by music and dance. Georgian protesters sang the song “Destroying the System”¹ and danced united against raids in clubs. Moreover, a few months ago, Georgian youngsters danced to police sirens² while protesting against the adoption of Russian-style foreign agent legislation, continuing to do so until they won – on 9 March, the ruling majority of the Parliament of Georgia withdrew the draft law. The Georgian club and underground scene has always been actively involved in or was a reason for the protests after the Bassiani and Café Gallery night-clubs were raided by the police in 2018.³



Protesters in May 2018, after Tbilisi’s Bassiani and Café Gallery clubs were raided by the police.

Despite some notable successes, it has been acknowledged by many that Georgian activism and clubs have been in crisis. This topic was the subject of a panel discussion hosted by the Centre for Advanced Studies of Ilia State University on 22 February 2023. During the event, representatives

from various clubs, academia and activist groups gathered to discuss the issues currently faced by the clubs and activists as well as the main reasons for the crisis. By sharing their insights and experiences, panellists and attendees of the discussion sought to shed light on the problems faced by Georgian activism and ways to overcome them.

As the moderator, psychologist and activist David Kakhaberi has mentioned, the Georgian underground scene of the 1990s was famous for its counterculture activities and response to the issues that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. An important development occurred in 2009, however, when AlterVision Group’s⁴ project “Newcomers” took place in Tbilisi. Before entering the concert hall, in front of the crowd and journalists, two men who were members of the “Me and My Monkey” group kissed each other. In a homophobic society like Georgia, this was one of the bravest “performances” at that time. According to the World Values Survey, conducted in 2009, 92% of Georgian respondents “would not like to have homosexuals as neighbours”, while for 90% of the respondents homosexuality was “never justifiable”. This fact can be considered to be a turning point in the history of clubs and activism. Today, everything has changed – queer parties are hosted by several clubs and are open to people as long as they respect the key values of the clubs that are based on the principles of universal human rights. These venues are free from homophobia and from any other form of intolerance.

While discussing clubs and their role in activism, a number of important issues were mentioned:

SAFETY AND EXCLUSIVITY

Before 2014, underground and queer parties were relatively closed and exclusive. To address potential risks and guarantee attendees’ safety and security, the organisers maintained guest lists. When one of the most famous clubs in Tbilisi – Bassiani – was established back in 2014, it discovered that guest lists were not working. A different approach was therefore adopted. To enter the club, you have to agree with its core values. This fact, as suggested by Kakhaberi, was a turning point in the history of Georgian night clubs, as they established themselves as a space hosting various civil society groups, causes and initiatives. In 2016, Bassiani, in partnership with queer activists, started a new series of events – Horoom – which are queer nights. Due to safety reasons, attending these events was still exclusive as the social network profiles of the future attendees

- 1 Song “Destroying the System” (სისტემა უნდა დაინგრეს), September 2012: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=JFLKpSeBa9E>
- 2 Georgian protesters dancing to police sirens, March 2023: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=5cYbxRfU5YS>
- 3 Armed police raided two Tbilisi-based clubs allegedly following a lead regarding drug dealing and the use of club drugs. Bassiani posted a statement stating that the accusations were “part of an ‘endless smear campaign’ by right-wing political forces to discredit the club”.
- 4 AlterVision Group organises musical festivals, concerts and social projects. It is the organiser of the biggest open-air music festival in the South Caucasus – Tbilisi Open Air.



of the event were strictly checked. Today, queer events and drag shows are held in different clubs across the city and are mostly open to all citizens. Still, as emphasised by the panellists and attendees on several occasions, safety-related issues remain a challenge, especially for queer people and women.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Over the past decade, Tbilisi night clubs served as a space for intersectional cooperation. People with different backgrounds and interests gathered to make a difference. The two most important examples are the White Noise Movement against harsh drug laws and Horoom Nights, where queer people and their allies have the opportunity to find a safe environment where they can meet, enjoy the music and dance. As one speaker, the researcher Temo Bezhanidze, pointed out, the clubs became spaces where members of the LGBTQ+ community can free their bodies from traumas and also develop some sense of belonging to the community. The discussion demonstrated the evolution of the night clubs from an exclusive space to a forum for intersectional cooperation, where clubs are agoras for activists, as underlined by Giorgi Kikonishvili, co-founder of Creative Collective “Spectrum”. Clubs are giving a voice to the silenced and are advocating equality for all. Moreover, whenever needed, they support activism and social movements in Georgia and are sometimes a leading force in this regard.

COMMERCIALITY

The commercialisation of clubs and queer events was cited as one of the factors contributing to the crisis of clubs promoting activism. As researcher Dato Laghidze has mentioned, whereas values and fighting for them were important for clubs in the past, business interests are now more important and are occupying this space for activism. Clubs are being depoliticised and people are going there only for fun. They have forgotten what the main problems faced by the country are nowadays. This idea was opposed by Naja Orashvili, the owner of the Bassiani club, who emphasised that clubs are not the reason for this crisis. We should ask ourselves where the groups that existed before 2018 that were supported by the clubs are now. Are the clubs the reason for this crisis, or is it the fact that these activist groups have disappeared? And another important question was asked, namely should clubs themselves become a social movement?

Clubs are giving a voice to the silenced and are advocating equality for all. Moreover, whenever needed, they support activism and social movements in Georgia and are sometimes a leading force in this regard.

Soon after this discussion, in the first week of March 2023, the citizens of Georgia took to the streets of Tbilisi and other cities, calling on the government not to adopt the Russian-style foreign agent law that would endanger Georgia’s European aspirations as well as freedom of media and civil society. Over the course of a few of days, the Georgian people protested against these ongoing developments in front of the Parliament. At night, demonstrations were raided by special forces using tear gas, pepper spray and water cannons. However, the demonstrators were not afraid and they came back, standing up to the water canons and dancing to police sirens. This became a night of historic images with one woman, Nana Malashkia, waving an EU flag “while being blasted by a water cannon”⁵, Gen Z dancing amidst police sirens and a 17-year-old girl dodging a water cannon.⁶ As these protests demonstrated, Georgian activism is not dying, and as one poster of a Gen Z protester said “We go to clubs just because of sirens and smoke, you d***s”. Thus, even in this way, clubs have contributed to activism.

Overall, it is true that Georgian activism and clubs as a contributor to these activities are in crisis. Nevertheless, recent developments have demonstrated that when discontent is at its peak and

5 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, The Georgian Woman with the EU Flag, 14 March 2023: <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-woman-protests-eu-flag-/32317343.html>

6 A 17-year-old girl dodges a water cannon during the foreign agent protests in Tbilisi, March 2023: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYtm-BBgBAw>





Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and civil rights are at risk, the Georgian people can mobilise. Still, the problem is that it is sometimes difficult to gather a large number of people when the reasons for the protest are less major than those mentioned above. And there is another question: what if this club activism continues underground and rarely emerges? These are the issues that should be discussed on a broad basis and addressed by civil society and beyond. The discussion hosted by the Centre for Advanced Studies was one step towards addressing these problems.

Tamar Tolordava

is an Assistant Professor at Ilia State University and a researcher and research coordinator at the university's Center for Advanced Studies. She holds a Bachelor's degree from the School of Arts and Science (2011) and a Master's degree in Soviet Studies from Ilia State University (2015), as well as in Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies from the University of Glasgow (2020). In the autumn of 2021, she was a CEES Fellow at the University of Zurich. Her research interests include post-Soviet politics, civil society and social movements, as well as informality and informal practices in Georgia.





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Early findings on migration and protest among Ukrainian activists in Germany

Kostiantyn Fedorenko · Research Fellow at the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS), Berlin

In this study, I examine the perception of migration and activism of eight Ukrainian activists living in Germany. It gathers the original voices of young migrants and refugees who continue to be involved in activism relating to Ukraine. With the exception of one case, the respondents did not report any discrimination in Germany as migrant activists and often mentioned encountering positive attitudes from Germans. Non-refugee respondents have moved to Germany for professional, educational or sociocultural reasons, and generally intend to continue residing there, while two out of three refugees definitely intend to return. None of the respondents reported being let down with their expectations regarding life in Germany; refugees did not have clear expectations, while others were satisfied. The language barrier was mentioned by almost all respondents as the main constraint, with some viewing it as a challenge and refugees seeing it as a problem.

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→ The purpose of my dissertation “From Molotov Cocktails to Farewell Parties: Causes of Emigration for Participants of the 2013-2014 ‘Euromaidan’ Protests in Ukraine”, which I am currently completing at the Berlin Graduate School of Social Sciences at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, is to find out why some former participants of the 2013-14 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine have voluntarily decided to emigrate from the country, despite having been involved in a high-risk social movement. In broader terms, it intends to explore the intersection between migration theory and contentious politics. With Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine in 2022, it has received an additional dimension: what do Ukrainian activists who are supporting Ukraine from abroad today think about the Euromaidan? Did they participate in it? Do they feel that the protests were similar in nature to their activism today? Understanding how activism works in entirely different contexts – and even in different countries – and what connections could exist between these modes of activism could help reach the broader goals of the dissertation.

Furthermore, for the project EU Meets Europe, the decision was taken to include questions that were related to the respondents’ migration experience. The specific questions were: “Does the fact that you are an immigrant/refugee somehow affect your activism?” and “Please tell me about your emigration experience”, with the latter having the following sub-questions: “Why did you choose this particular country?”, “How satisfied are you with your situation here?” and “Did your expectations about emigration differ from what

TABLE 1: BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

No	Means of interview	City	Type of activism	Refugee: yes/no
1	in person	Berlin	refugees, donations, fundraising, demonstrations	No
2	Zoom	Bonn	demonstrations, organising events, awareness-raising	No
3	Zoom	Witten (North Rhine-Westphalia)	family therapist	Yes
4	Zoom	Dresden	demonstrations, refugees	No
5	Zoom	Berlin	organising events, educator at Ukrainian scout organisation	No
6	Zoom	Wilhelmshaven (Lower Saxony)	donations, fundraising, awareness-raising	Yes
7	in person	Berlin	organising events, fundraising, awareness-raising	Yes
8	Zoom	Berlin	awareness-raising, refugees, organising events	No

you experienced?”¹ The intention was, in particular, to find out about the experiences of European activists coming from a non-EU country to an EU member state and being socially active there.

To explore these issues, a small convenience sample of eight Ukrainian activists residing in Germany was interviewed (see Table 1). They had to be at

least 27 years of age by the time of the interview – meaning that, during the Euromaidan, they were

¹ The latter three questions were borrowed from the interview guide of the project MOBILISE (Determinants of Mobilisation at Home and Abroad), with the intention to allow for future comparative analysis.



at least 18 (or close to that age), and were free to decide to participate in it. The upper age limit in the sample was around 40, although precise information on dates of birth was not gathered. Seven out of eight interviewees were female.² The activists were reached via Ukrainian contacts in Germany. It was decided to specifically look for interviewees engaged in different kinds of activism. All of them are educated urban professionals. This seems to be a typical characteristic for Ukrainian activists, as a higher level of education than the national average was also characteristic for the Euromaidan participants.³

It is also interesting that several respondents (R2, R4 and R7) have, in some ways, cooperated with the German state actors, with respondent 4 (R4) eventually even temporarily leaving her usual workplace and being employed by the local government to work with the refugees and R7 receiving funding and space for her projects from the government. R1 works as a researcher at the office of a Member of the German Bundestag, although her work per se is unrelated to Ukraine. While the sample of interviewees is not representative, this engagement on the part of the state actors with different kinds of Ukraine-related activism could be seen as a positive factor. The following parts sum up and analyse answers to the four questions in the interview guide that were related to the respondents' immigration and evaluation of life in Germany.

“DOES THE FACT THAT YOU ARE AN IMMIGRANT/REFUGEE/UKRAINIAN IN GERMANY SOMEHOW AFFECT YOUR ACTIVISM?”

This question had to be formulated differently for refugees as the word “migrant” caused a rebuke, being associated with voluntary migration and/or with the intention to permanently stay in the host country. However, even among voluntary migrants, respondent 1 (R1) did not see herself as such: *“I have a feeling that my home is both here and there.”*

“I have a feeling that my home is both here and there.”

Only one of the respondents (R5) reported discrimination when answering this question, even if she was not sure how to qualify it: *“there was a woman in our building [where I live]. I hung an inscription [in German: the war concerns us all], went on holiday, and my husband said she took it off. I don't know if that's discrimination.”* Another respondent encountered this in a small town, answering another question: *“there's still a feeling I'm an alien here – in a supermarket, a German stands in front of you [in the queue]. The cashier wishes him a nice day, says thanks for the purchase, smiles. And when it's your turn, she says “Moin”, checks all the goods, and that's it – you*

weren't treated rudely, but you feel that difference. I feel that difference when I talk to my son in Ukrainian, and people stare at you as if you're screaming or beating the kid, doing something uneducated and impolite. Morally difficult.”

Several respondents mentioned the need to adapt to the new mentality or to form new contacts –this was not mentioned as a complaint, however. Respondent 5 said the following regarding Germans not knowing about Ukrainian scouts: *“I think Ukrainians would have maybe reacted the same way in Ukraine if Germans told them about their tasks [important to German activists].”* Respondent 8, in fact, viewed this difference as an opportunity: *“It's not an easy period, but it's a very interesting one. You rebuild your activism with new approaches. And then it becomes interesting when you build a certain basis. You can work as a mediator, an interpreter of meaning between the Ukrainian and the German sides.”*

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- 2 This characteristic was in line with the gender bias experienced during the MOBILISE project, where the majority of respondents answering the online advertisement to apply for an interview were female. A number of additional potential male respondents answered the advertisement but subsequently did not answer or declined the offer. In the context of Ukrainian refugees, this disproportion has a clear explanation since few Ukrainian males are allowed to leave the country.
 - 3 Onuch, Olga. 2014. “Who Were the Protesters?” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 44–51.



“You rebuild your activism with new approaches. (...) You can work as a mediator, an interpreter of meaning between the Ukrainian and the German sides.”

Language was mentioned several times. In answer to this question, respondent 7 said: *“In terms of activism, when we applied for the festival, I know how I would have done it, but I didn't have the language [knowledge], contacts, anything back then.”* Respondent 3, a refugee who worked as a psychotherapist in Ukraine and is now working as a family therapist with Ukrainian refugees in Germany stated the following: *“Even when a translator doesn't come, we manage to communicate [with the colleagues] at the level of empathy, gestures, a mix of English and German, and we understand what we're discussing, where we should move.”* At the same time, however, she complains that there are fewer translators available now as compared to when she started her work.

Even when additional questions were asked to clarify whether the respondents had faced positive or negative experiences in Germany as foreigners, the respondents tended to mention positives or nothing at all: *“I've seen very high support from Germans”* (R1), *“I've not encountered that”* (R2), *“I also don't understand, as a person, people who receive [financial] assistance and complain. I believe*

it's indecent. Do I feel alien here? I don't torture myself with [this question]” (R7). R4 and R5 mentioned the fact that their being Ukrainian (or, to be precise, a recent migrant, in the case of R4) was a benefit, allowing them to help Ukrainians more efficiently. As R4 was employed by the local government to assist Ukrainian refugees, she said: *“We would be the voice of Ukrainian forced migrants who came – between them and the government.”* She does not view this as merely being work, *“because if it was just work, I would have long since left it because it's very tough”*.

R3, R6 and R7, being themselves refugees, expressed their “thankfulness” to Germany for helping them. Specifically, R6 argues that social support from Germany is what enables her activism: *“Thanks to staying in Germany and receiving payments as a refugee, I'm able to be active, help our victory, call for fundraising, write those [social media] posts, because I have a financial... a minimal sum for my child that he and I live off, therefore I have time – except learning the language – that I'm not spending to work, and hence I can dedicate this time to helping my country.”* Interestingly, she, R1 and R7 all criticised refugees who come to Germany and live a private life not caring about Ukraine, i.e. refugees who have chosen “exit” but not a “post-exit voice”.

R3, in her gratitude to German society, makes a comparison to Ukraine that is slightly similar to the abovementioned R5's quip about Ukrainians who would have possibly not understood what Germans are interested in. R3 had this to say: *“People here in Germany (...) don't let us close in our shells. That's wonderful. I believe the country does a lot, and I don't know if we could have done the same*

if refugees came to Ukraine, how we would have treated that, if we would have had the resources [to help them this way].” Furthermore, when answering another question, R5 stated the following: *“I wanted, maybe, the Germans to have been more open to communicating with new people. But I'm not sure if Ukrainians are more open, if someone came to Ukraine, if Ukrainians would have been more open.”*

“People here in Germany (...) don't let us close in our shells. That's wonderful.”

“PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EMIGRATION EXPERIENCE. WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS PARTICULAR COUNTRY?”

A diversity of motivations has been observed among the surveyed Ukrainian activists regarding their choice of destination. Among the refugees, R3 had a colleague in Germany who invited her to come: *“Because during one seminar, I met a charming colleague from Germany, and when the war started, she wrote: ‘Come here, I'll help.’ Hence Germany”*. R6 and R7 stayed in Poland (R6 for several months and R7 for several days with a friend), but chose Germany because it provides social payments to refugees. For R6, Germany is *“actually saving our children. I've heard many stories here. A girl from*





Mariupol gave birth to a child and then in two weeks came to Germany – you can't earn money with a small child, but thanks to those social payments, she was able to survive. So not just shelling, but when you're only with your child, you can't earn money." Here, she expands on her previous position (that social payments provide the necessary freedom for her to be an activist). R7 also found a German contact (in Munich) to stay with for a while.

R4 and R5 had similar stories of deciding to move to Germany; their husbands worked with German partners, with the latter offering employment. However, in R4's case, the work was offered to both (her own skills as a researcher were required in particular), while R5 just followed her husband. While R4 does not expect to leave Germany, R5's husband wants to leave (but she herself does not: *"For me, it's like, we came here [and that's it]. All those thoughts, where's better, where's worse – let's calm down and stay somewhere."*).

R8 was not planning to stay in Germany in the long term either but she was intending to study there; however, she was offered a position at an NGO working on matters relating to Crimea in Berlin, and decided to stay. Her reason was the possible awareness-raising impact of her work: *"There aren't enough people here to talk about issues like Crimea, Donbas and so on professionally – and I'm like, why not?"* She also *"knew the [German] language, was interested in the culture, in the German legal system"*. She was particularly eager to learn about *"the experience Germany lived through due to World War II and partition, including reintegration of the residents of occupied territories"*, which she sees as a relevant issue for her as an activist busy with the issue of Crimea and its future

reintegration. Of the other respondents, only R5 reported previously knowing the language, but only on a basic level; although it could be inferred that R2 has knowledge of the language. R2 also came to Germany to study, is finishing his doctoral studies, and does not plan to return; he just *"applied to different EU countries and was accepted to the University of Bonn. That's it"*.

Last but not least, R1 has made her choice because of her affinity for aspects of the German mentality (*"decency, responsibility, and that Germany acts as a kind of a mediator"*), as well as due to economic reasons. However, in her case, unlike for R6 and R7, this is evidently not about social payments – since she is working as a researcher for a Member of the German Bundestag, which promises a successful career – but about *"economic stability"* that *"some [other] countries of the EU"* do not have.

"HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR SITUATION HERE?"

The voluntary migrants in this sample showed a high level of satisfaction with their lives in Germany. R1 had no caveats in this regard, while R8 mentioned the ongoing war in Ukraine as the issue that prevents her from being satisfied (*"this issue has made me weaker, even though you're physically safe, but some basic safety, that you can get a plane and you're home in two hours, that your close ones are safe, [that's lacking], when your close ones are in danger"*). Interestingly, her answer is very similar to R3's (*"I'm not complaining, generally everything is fine, everything is calm, but we're all waiting for the good changes [regarding the war]"*), despite the

latter being a refugee – possibly R3 might be quite satisfied because she is employed and works in her professional field. R2 is also satisfied with everything aside from a minor caveat (having to move out of his student dormitory soon).

R4 gave an elaborate answer as to why she is satisfied in Germany. Her only caveat is the language barrier. On the other hand, she criticises the Ukrainian mentality, invoking an argument similar to why R1 has decided to move to Germany: *"Ukrainians are used to [corruption, not paying taxes, etc.]. I'm not. Very different views."* Furthermore, she claims that her mum *"is coming back to Ukraine because she doesn't like [life in Germany]. We view things entirely differently. She can't master the language, doesn't like that there's a million [bureaucratic] forms, long waiting times for the doctors. She doesn't want to go to a lot of effort for a better future"*. R4 then invoked decent pension payments for her mother, and subsequently for herself, as an argument for life in Germany being better than in Ukraine.

R5 has claimed that *"there's a lot of what I don't have here, and I'm talking about (...) some inner feelings"* – however, she also sees that *"there's something here that isn't [in Ukraine]. I had the opportunity to start life anew but open myself from a different side"*. Viewing challenge as an opportunity, in different forms, was a recurring theme of several respondents in their interviews.

On the other hand, the challenge might be mentally tougher for the refugees to cope with. As R7 says, *"when I encounter the language barrier, and that's the only thing that strongly restricts me right now, despite all my activity – I often don't understand*





what they say to me – I start to be sad, and, for a period of time, I lose the desire to do anything. (...) For a day, I cannot find energy to do [a task]”.

R6 is the least satisfied with life in Germany out of the sample. As previously mentioned, she feels alien in her town and, moreover, she mentioned the difference between the German “mentality” and her own. She added the following: “*Not knowing the language gets you down a lot, even though I’m trying to learn [it]. I know something on a minimal level, but still.*” In addition, she feels uncomfortable not being home and claims she “*cannot be satisfied because, for my whole life, I’ve always worked and secured my living and I was fine with that, and now I need to live off payments and it’s not a comfortable story for me.*” However, as mentioned, she is very thankful to Germany for the social payments and views it as a country that “*saves Ukrainian children*”.

“DID YOUR EXPECTATIONS ABOUT EMIGRATION DIFFER FROM WHAT YOU EXPERIENCED?”

respondents 6 and 7, as refugees, claimed that they did not have any expectations. R6 mentioned some daily caveats: “*In terms of stereotypes, I was surprised it’s dirty here. I’ve always heard it’s perfectly clean here. I was surprised by non-ideal pavements here, but maybe it’s because I don’t travel, [and] it’s just our town.*” This point is tangentially similar to what R2 said: “*Maybe some situations where you understand stereotypes are only stereotypes.*” However, they have an entirely different level of satisfaction with living in Germany, as R6 is quite dissatisfied and R2 is almost fully

satisfied. R7 said that she knew she would have to “*adapt for a long time*” if she moved to any other country, and that would not be a surprise.

The other refugee, respondent 3, brought in another question: the pre-existing tourist experience. For her, “*we were here [as tourists], have seen here. It’s not really that different*” from her current residence in Germany. We can see a parallel to R2’s answer here; he cites his German friend saying “*When I’m travelling abroad in cities, I feel less as a foreigner than when I go to a German village*” and claims it’s the same for him.

On the other hand, respondent 8 claims that “*when you know generally about Germany, but from books, stories or touristic visits, it’s not the same as living in Germany*”. She goes on to elaborate the “hidden issues”: “*the German bureaucracy, the strict rules, the German mentality that you see from a different side. On the one hand it’s easy to communicate with them, on the other hand it’s hard.*” She also sees this as “*interesting, and in the process you learn a lot about yourself as well*”.

Furthermore, as R8 says, “*that was a revelation to me – how language is important for Germany, and [important] that you share their values, you’re fitting into their eco-system. Because I didn’t think they’re trying to Germanise you so much in Germany. You have to fit certain characteristics, norms. Very good German [language knowledge is required] to be seen seriously, and as a foreigner you would only be seen seriously after a while*”. This quote is interesting because it apparently reflects the experience of most respondents, who reported having issues with the

language barrier, to one extent or another, despite mostly living in international cities. As R5 says, “*I feel this community is quite closed. Language – well, I know some can [do it] without the [German] language; for me, it’s hard without [German] language*” – and she lives in Berlin. R1, also from Berlin, corroborates this: “*When I was moving here, I thought I could communicate [in German] – no, I didn’t understand, I wasn’t understood*”.

We see different views on this issue, however. R1, R4 and R8 mentioned this as challenges to be overcome while R5 sees this more as a problem. However, in the end, according to her, “*there’s nothing for us to complain about, and even with the German [knowledge] we have, we managed to solve these issues [related to residence and work]*”. For R3, the problem is professional in nature, and for R6 and R7 as refugees, the language barrier is a source of negative emotions. R2 is the only respondent who did not report any language issues. R1 and R8 also mentioned bureaucracy as a challenge to their initial expectations, while for R4’s mother, bureaucracy was one of the major reasons to leave Germany and return to Ukraine, even though R4 herself does not approve of this decision.

Overall, none of the eight respondents claimed that they had any clear expectations but were let down by the experience of life in Germany. All of them mentioned some positives, and while for R6 this was just a question of peace and social payments, for others it seemed to be more fundamental; the general mood for non-refugee respondents is that they have overcome certain initial challenges and now have a positive attitude





towards their situation. Seeing this, it could also be expected that non-refugee respondents are very likely to stay in Germany, while R7 could also stay because her son enjoys a better quality of education here. It is, however, difficult to evaluate whether their activism continues; some seem to be generally engaged with Ukraine-related issues (such as respondents 5, 7 and 8) and are therefore more likely to continue unless they are burned out, while others have become more engaged in activism due to the full-scale invasion and might stop being active once it ends. R4 mentioned her work with the Ukrainian refugees as being hard and not something she would have done if she had not seen it as activism.

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Living beyond the stars together – a sound and space journey through European music

Angelika Mika Korzeniowska

DJ and visual artist, Poland

We're living beyond the stars together. ✨

I believe the power of humanity lies in acknowledging and admiring the beauty of variants. For me, music is a vessel between cultures, emotions, landscapes and time. Sharing songs is like souls connecting and visiting each other. I believe the best melodies come from exploring, inspiring and accepting each other.

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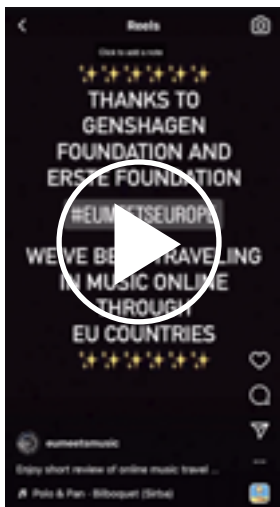
I've made a digital journey through European music on Instagram **@EUmeetsMusic**

<https://lnkd.in/drZNmjwi>

I've posted and collected music from all EU countries over the course of a few weeks. I've also prepared a special post for music from countries that are not – or not yet – part of the EU.

All songs posted during this musical journey on Instagram and links to a dedicated Spotify playlist are saved in highlights. Feel free to check them anytime and dive into the beauty of variants on IG **@EUmeetsMusic**

This is an open project – I would be honoured if you could contribute to it, so feel free to share interesting bands and musicians via @ and # them in comments under the posted countries. 🌍



<https://vimeo.com/user195173291/review/842774163/c88f2aef2e>

<https://vimeo.com/user195173291/review/855656189/107e9b5c6b>

<https://vimeo.com/user195173291/review/855656202/a57f49124c>

EU meets Music

I believe that music has no boundaries. It is a vessel between cultures, emotions, landscapes and time. It's about connection of soul and visiting each other.

It is an art project realized in the frame of **#EUmeetsEurope**, a joint endeavour by Genshagen Foundation and ERSTE Foundation. It's a result of international dialogue about equality and inequality in the EU and Europe as a whole.

We are living beyond the stars together.

I believe the power of humanity is in acknowledging and admiring the beauty of variants. Exploring, inspiring and accepting each other. For me, the best melodies come from those values!

I've collected a few tunes from each country in the EU and I would love you to help me make this project grow. Please feel free to share and tag interesting bands and musicians from the posted countries.

There is also a special post for music from countries that are not – or not yet – part of the EU. Feel free to add your inspirations there too! Despite of the current political situation in Europe, we can still share and inspire each other through sound.

Best!





Germany

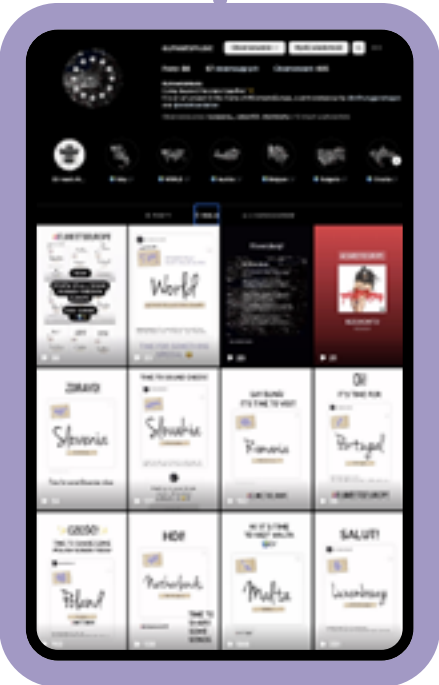
@EUmeetsMusic Germany

Poland

@EUmeetsMusic Poland

France

@EUmeetsMusic France





Self-sustaining inequalities – Europe's political choice

Dominic Afscharian · Research Officer at the Institute of Political Science of the University of Tübingen

In this essay, I explore one way by which inequalities in Europe can sustain themselves through political discourse. I argue that political decision-makers point to existing inequalities to justify actions that further cement said inequalities. Such arguments have recently been used regarding inequalities between (a) individual EU citizens, (b) EU welfare states at large, and (c) EU and non-EU states. I discuss how these patterns are distinctly different from inequality discourses at national level, where there are usually some influential actors aiming to actively reduce inequalities. In the context of EU integration, responsibility for inequality reduction tends to be deflected to those at the weaker end of an unequal relationship. This often goes along with an overemphasis on the assumption that inequalities across Europe are simply an externally given fact. My argument, by contrast, underscores that these inequalities are to some degree also a political choice. This is key, as sustaining and expanding the achievements of European integration will be challenging if no further actions against inequalities are taken. Thus, I conclude that decision-makers currently avoiding actions against inequalities have an interest in reconsidering the responsibilities they are willing to assume – that is, in case they want to strengthen the European project.

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1 INTRODUCTION¹

In the year 2000, the European Union (EU) proclaimed an ambitious motto: it should be “united in diversity” (European Union 2022). These three words echo the EU’s long-standing claim of being an “ever-closer union” (Belgium et al. 1957: 2) while promising its member states to protect their respective uniqueness. This respect for diversity is arguably one of the EU’s major strengths, but there is a real risk of it being used to excuse harmful inequalities. In EU politics, many argue that, out of respect for the diversity of national welfare systems, the EU must stay out of the active resolution of inequalities between its member states. In its extreme forms, however, this stance disregards the responsibilities that go along with European integration. After all, respecting diversity and jointly tackling inequalities are not two mutually exclusive approaches – rather, they depend on each other.

1.1 INWARDS AND OUTWARDS RESPONSIBILITIES

I argue that European integration goes along with responsibilities pointing into two directions: inwards and outwards. To the inside, the EU bears the responsibility of reducing inequalities precisely *because* it promises to foster diversity. If the EU is serious about guaranteeing diversity to all, this requires broadly equal abilities of all to freely make decisions. This in turn, depends on similar opportunities for all. Finally, this presupposes a basic degree of material equality, as opportunities are closely linked to capital. Thus, respecting diversity

does not imply accepting inequalities across the EU, but rather reducing them. Similarly, the EU bears “outwards” responsibilities: as states come together, this can create new divides and inequalities. Those left out can suddenly find themselves in a position that stands in even clearer contrast to the newly formed union of states. This is particularly prevalent in Europe as the EU’s joint approach enhances the collective power of its members while claiming the label of “Europe” to describe what is technically just a sub-set of all European countries. At the same time, the EU praises values of equality (European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission 2017) and universal rights (Council of Europe 1950). Thus, if the EU is serious about such value claims, one might argue that it should also assume responsibility for helping neighbouring countries “catch up”.

In short, while European integration can move Europe’s nations closer together, it can also make existing inequalities visible, emphasise them, or even create new ones. This is not necessarily a problem in and of itself, as the EU could, in principle, actively tackle these issues. Thus, a key question arises: How *do* the newly emerging community of states collectively and its members individually deal with inequalities and divides?

Some may contest the normative claim that the EU bears the responsibilities mentioned above. However, there are also practical reasons for why the EU needs to take inequalities seriously. A union of states that claims to be “united in diversity” cannot simply ignore inequalities if it aims to

maintain unity in the long run. After all, persisting inequalities can put serious strain on the cohesion of societies (Vergolini 2011). Similarly, it would be a fallacy to believe that the EU can just disregard inequalities between its member states and the European nations outside the union. Here, problems can arise in the long term, especially when it comes to further EU enlargement. Inequalities can increase the resistance to enlargement from within the EU, but enlargement might remain desirable for many. Thus, those generally in favour of a strong EU have a vested interest in reducing inequalities to (a) stabilise the current EU and (b) enable further enlargement.

Those generally in favour of a strong EU have a vested interest in reducing inequalities to stabilise the current EU and enable further enlargement.

¹ This essay uses data gathered on the project “FuS – Freedom of Movement and Social Policy in Historical and International Comparison” at the University of Tübingen, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs under the *Fördernetzwerk Interdisziplinäre Sozialpolitikforschung* (FIS).





1.2 UNUSUAL ARGUMENTS: THE EXISTENCE OF INEQUALITIES JUSTIFIES ITSELF

These are only a few examples for why the EU needs to explore through democratic processes to what degree it wants to tackle inequalities. At first sight, it seems like such processes are already underway – the promise of a “social Europe” can be found in materials of parties ranging from Socialists to Christian Democrats (PES 2014; EPP 2019). However, when things get more concrete, the EU’s social dimension is insufficient in the eyes of many ([Graziano and Hartlapp 2018: 1488](#)).

Debates on this matter often revolve around “hard” limitations. It is claimed that the long history of Europe’s national welfare states makes it undesirable ([Crespy 2022: 103](#)) or even impossible for an EU welfare state to arise. Vested interests of EU member states are considered as objectively given and as an insurmountable hurdle to EU social policy. Inequalities across Europe are treated almost as a natural condition. However, this obfuscates a crucial fact that underpins any democratic system: political choices shape political realities. As I argue in this essay, these choices play a crucial role in cementing inequalities across Europe. More specifically, I conceptually explore how social inequalities are debated in the context of European integration: I argue that decision-makers use the very existence of inequalities to justify actions that further stabilise or exacerbate said inequalities. Simply put, the arguments involved form a counterintuitive cycle: because

inequalities exist, actions against inequalities must not be pursued. Thus, inequalities sustain themselves not only through material opportunities and capital accumulation, but also through specific political arguments. This process is distinctly different from a more intuitive logic known from national political competition: strong political movements criticise inequalities and hence pursue social policies to actively tackle them.

To illustrate the logic of self-sustaining inequalities, I explore three constellations in which they occur: between individual EU citizens, between different EU member states, and between EU and non-EU states. For each constellation, I present mechanisms and examples for how the existence of inequalities can be used to justify political inaction. These examples say nothing about how widespread this phenomenon is. However, they alone can be sufficient to block actions against inequalities. I argue that the perspective I provide can foster constructive reflections on the future of “social Europe”. Thinking about Europe-wide inequalities not only as an empirical fact but also as an argumentative strategy emphasises that their existence can be a deliberate political choice. By implication, current inertia in the abolishment of inequalities across Europe is likely less insurmountable than is often insinuated.

2 SELF-SUSTAINING INEQUALITIES

At the core of my argument stands the observation that political actors tend to deal with inequalities differently when it comes to the EU. In many European nation states, strong actors

exist that problematise inequalities and propose actions to reduce them. At the European stage, by contrast, inequalities are often used as an argument to *not* take action – or even to actively cement the status quo. In the following sections, I discuss the concepts behind these different approaches.

2.1 TACKLING INEQUALITIES: THE NATIONAL APPROACH

The first approach is concerned with how national political actors engage with inequalities. Due to the limited scope of this piece, the following paragraphs strongly reduce empirical complexity. In a nutshell, I argue that in many welfare states, there are well-established actors that dedicate themselves to tackling inequalities. In many Western European states, these were often socialist and social democratic movements. Assuming that such actors have access to sufficient power resources, they are likely to pursue the reduction of inequalities. I argue that a theoretically ideal-typical reduction of inequalities by such actors could follow four steps: observation, problem definition, action, and effect. This schematic model serves as a guiding framework for the following sections.

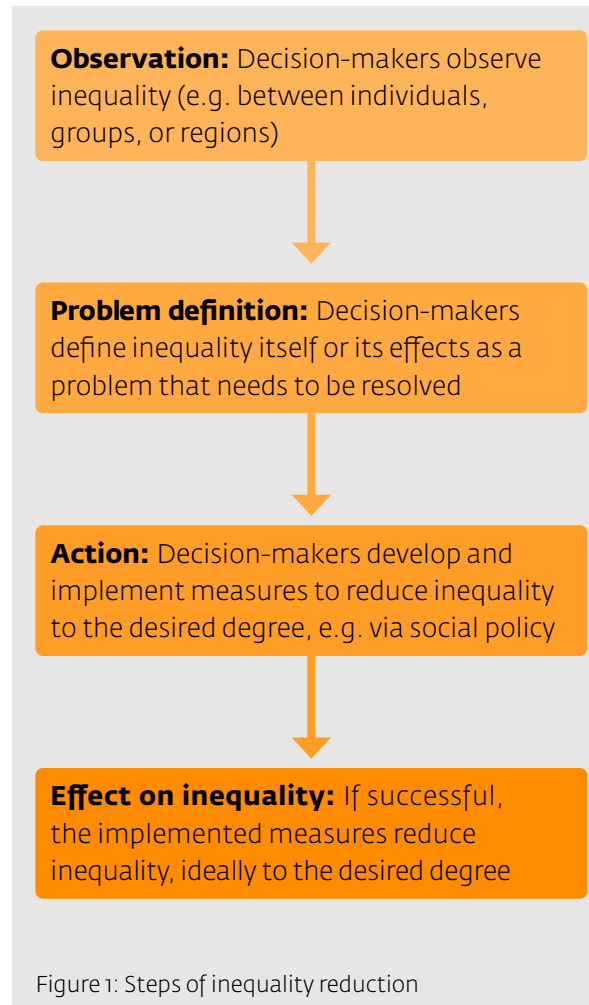
In a first step, decision-makers **observe** inequalities. Different actors likely prioritise different inequalities such as income, wealth, or opportunities. These inequalities can occur between different entities such as individuals, regions, or groups. Once decision-makers have observed inequalities, they engage in **problem definition**.





They might define either the inequalities themselves, or their effects as a problem. This goes along with the setting of goals. Decision-makers derive an imperative that measures should be put in place to reduce the observed inequalities. This then translates into **actions**. Decision-makers develop and implement measures to reduce inequalities as desired, e.g. via social policy and the welfare state. These measures then usually have some **effects**. If successful, they reduce the initially observed inequalities to the degree desired by the decision-makers. Frictions such as political resistance or shortcomings in policy design and implementation can impede on the success of the developed measures. However, decision-makers can learn from these shortcomings and further optimise the measures in question. Either way, inequalities should ultimately be reduced to some extent.

The presented approach is highly ideal-typical and strongly simplified. Thus, it does not aim to demonstrate how social policies function empirically. Rather, it illustrates a logic behind the actions of dedicated actors faced with inequalities in national political contexts.



2.2 THE EUROPEAN CASE: DEFLECTING RESPONSIBILITIES

Intuitively, one might expect a similar process to apply in the context of European integration: decision-makers observe inequalities across Europe, define them as a problem, and pursue measures to resolve them. In fact, political actors

convey in their public communication to do exactly that (PES 2014; EPP 2019). However, the current state of the EU's social dimension suggests something different. EU action against inequalities falls short of national approaches (Crespy 2022: 3). Overall, "social Europe" remains more of a promise than a palpable reality. Readers familiar with European social policy debates might be quick to respond that social policy in the EU is primarily a national competence. Therefore, the EU lacks the institutional capacities to take actions against inequalities equal to those that nation states pursue. Furthermore, one might argue that the EU already does what it can, for instance via EU funds, cohesion policy, or the European Pillar of Social Rights.

While these remarks are valid, I argue that simply pointing at the EU's institutional limitations to explain or justify persisting inequalities falls short of properly capturing Europe's political reality. Institutional limitations might exist, but so does the opportunity to change the status quo through political decisions. Before this background, I argue that EU integration is riddled with arguments which are detrimental to "social Europe". The result of this consists in inequalities that sustain themselves through discourse.

I use the term of self-sustaining inequalities to describe discourses in which the existence of inequalities is used to justify decisions that further cement said inequalities: The observation of inequalities leads to actions that stabilise or exacerbate inequalities, rather than actively reducing





them. In the following sections, I detail the logics behind this phenomenon and explore some examples for it.

3 THREE CONSTELLATIONS OF SELF-SUSTAINING INEQUALITIES

To illustrate self-sustaining inequalities in the context of the EU, I discuss three different mechanisms. They all follow the same basic structure but apply in three unique constellations: between (a) individual EU citizens of different nationalities residing in the same state, (b) different EU member states, and (c) EU and non-EU states. There could certainly be more fine-grained approaches to this. In principle, there is no reason to assume that the presented logic could not also apply beyond Europe. However, the EU constitutes a relatively well-established set of institutions with considerable policymaking capabilities. Thus, focusing on the EU allows me to explore self-sustaining inequalities effectively within the limited scope of this piece. For reasons of simplicity, I stay within the aforementioned model of resolving inequalities: observation, problem definition, action, and effect.

3.1 BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS

The “lowest” level at which I examine self-sustaining inequalities is the individual level. Here, social inequalities occur between intra-EU migrants and non-migrant citizens residing in the same national welfare state. Following the previously presented four steps, national decision-makers first observe inequalities between said groups.

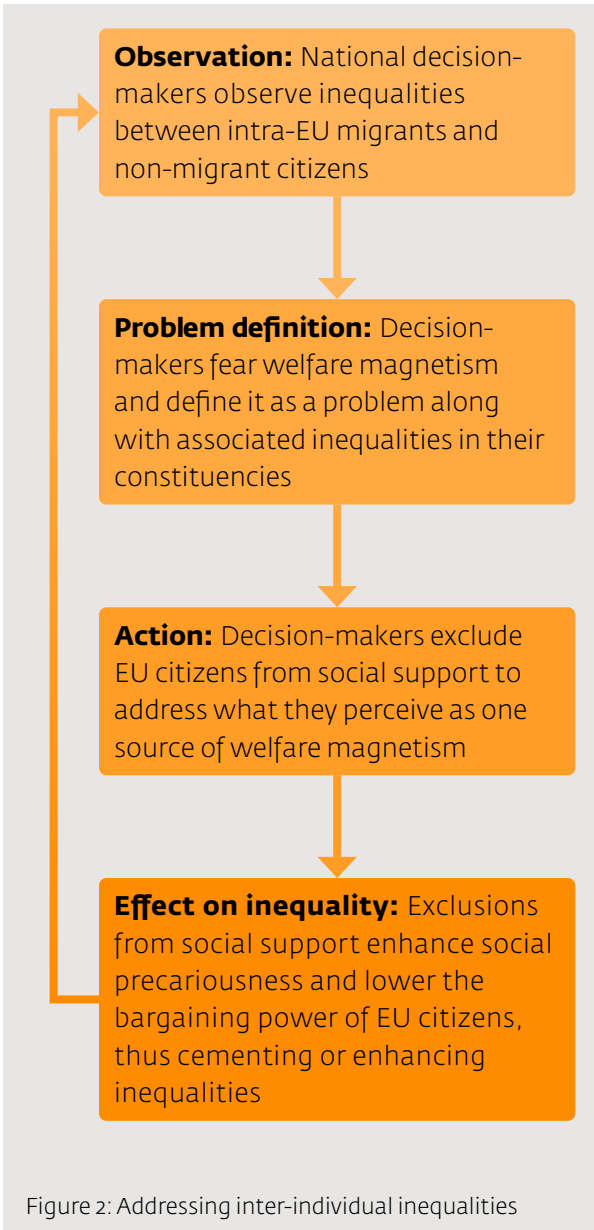
This observation can occur in different ways, ranging from individual observations of visible poverty (e.g. homelessness) over complaints by voters to more large-scale social struggles. Following such observations, decision-makers define inequalities as a problem. Crucially, however, they do not assume responsibility for resolving inequalities, as they consider poor migrants to be a responsibility of another EU member state. Rather than attempting to reduce the inequalities between the individuals involved, decision-makers aim to make inequalities quite literally “go away” by pushing migrants out. Associated with this, they might fear “welfare magnetism” – the empirically highly contested ([Giulietti 2014](#)) but widespread idea that generous welfare states might act as a “pull factor” for poor citizens from other states. Thus, decision-makers define the presence of poorer migrants – not inequalities themselves – as a problem.

Decision-makers define the presence of poorer migrants – not inequalities themselves – as a problem.

The third step – action – is then closely tied to this problem definition: decision-makers do not develop policies to reduce inequalities between

non-migrants and the poorest migrants. Rather, they implement measures intended to keep poor migrants away. Given freedom of movement within the EU, there are, however, legal and practical limitations to actions such as deportations. Thus, decision-makers retreat to measures designed to motivate migrants to leave or stay away. Prominently, decision-makers might exclude EU citizens from welfare benefits, thus also addressing the idea of welfare magnetism.

The likely effects of these decisions are context-dependent. It is plausible that limiting access to social support goes along with limited bargaining power of workers as well as the loss of basic social security. Hence, exclusions from social support are likely to cement – or even enhance – inequalities. Even if affected migrants move back to their states of citizenship and the initially observed inequalities become invisible to the richer state’s public, inequalities technically persist. In fact, they might become even greater in the long run, as migrants are being inhibited in seeking social mobility through work in other member states.



Despite basic rules on non-discrimination of EU citizens, there are many examples for the presented mechanism. Germany alone made at least four major policy decisions that excluded EU citizens from social support in a single decade (Deutscher Bundestag 2006, 2012, 2014, 2016) with similar initiatives occurring in other EU states such as Denmark (Martinsen and Werner 2019) and Austria (European Commission 2020). All four German cases showed elements of the presented logic of self-sustaining inequalities, with associated discourses being particularly prevalent from 2013 to 2016. German municipalities (Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund 2013) and politicians (CSU-Landesgruppe 2016) labelled EU citizens from Romania and Bulgaria as “poverty migrants”. The responsibility for improving their social situation was relegated to countries of origin (Deutscher Städtetag 2014) and welfare exclusions were implemented.

3.2 BETWEEN EU MEMBER STATES

At a second level, social inequalities in the EU can become visible between member states, particularly in terms of welfare state generosity. In this constellation, national decision-makers first observe inequalities between welfare states: some welfare states are more “generous” than others in terms of outputs. Similarly, outcomes differ between EU states as specific social problems may be more prominent in some states than in others. For instance, national decision-makers might observe differences in poverty levels between two states, the richer of which might

furthermore have stronger poverty relief policies in place along with a stronger economy and more consolidated public finances.

Just like in the previous constellation, this leads to a problem definition linked to inequalities. However, again, decision-makers in the richer state do not assume responsibility for alleviating inequalities themselves. Rather, they define the observed differences as a problem for EU-wide social policy and harmonisation. An intuitive solution for inequalities across the EU might be a provision of minimum social protection by the EU itself – every EU citizen receives minimum protection directly “from Brussels”. However, decision-makers can argue against this in reference to the existence of inequalities. The claim here is that *because* welfare states are so different, a harmonisation would either spark a downward spiral in which generous social systems would be retrenched, or would overburden weaker economies, labour markets, and welfare states. Thus, even if all institutional hurdles towards an EU welfare state are left aside, the very existence of unequal welfare systems becomes an argument against its own abolishment.

Different from the inter-individual constellation, this problem definition does not result in new policies. Rather, decision-makers prevent potential reforms, meaning that their individual decisions translate to collective inaction at EU level. A harmonisation of welfare systems is blocked and social policy remains a national competence.

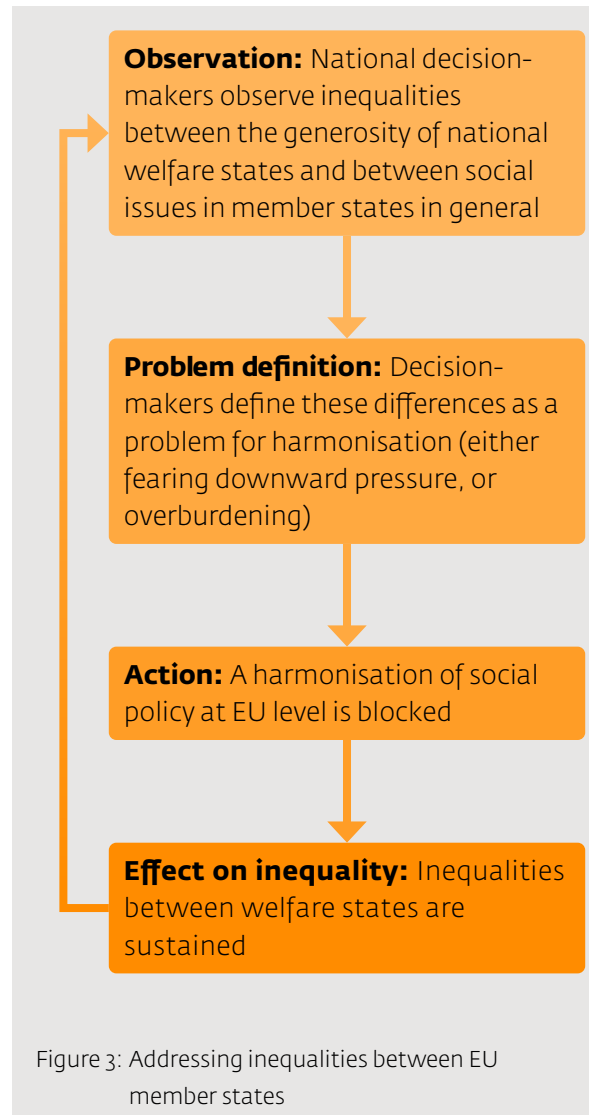




In the few cases in which the EU does become active on social policy matters, it is under severe limitations.

The effects of these actions largely consist in a stabilisation of the status quo, both in terms of institutions and outcomes. As a harmonisation of social policy is blocked, inequalities between welfare states are sustained. Concepts like “upwards convergence” might be popular claims within the EU in the hope of being able to eventually overcome these inequalities without prior harmonisation. However, poorer states face disproportionate difficulties of catching up. After all, the stronger economic performance of richer states goes along with more room to sustain welfare systems, while well-designed social protection can unfold positive effects on countless facets of a society (OECD 2005).

As a harmonisation of social policy is blocked, inequalities between welfare states are sustained.



Self-sustaining inequalities between EU member states’ welfare systems can usually be observed when it comes to debates on EU-level social policies. One recently prominent example of this was the debate on an EU Directive on minimum wages. Nordic member states feared that their wage setting system would be undermined (Bender and Kjellberg 2021), while voices from Poland warned of overburdening growing economies (Kubisiak 2020). Critical voices pointed at inequalities across the EU with vastly different wage levels being used as a reason for why EU action would not be desirable or possible. More generally, Germany’s Olaf Scholz argued in the past that there will “never” be a harmonisation of social policy in the EU, as Germany would “certainly not want to lower” its welfare standards “for the sake of harmonisation” (Deutscher Bundesrat 2014: 376). The underlying argumentative pattern is circular: as welfare is unequal, it must not be harmonised.

3.3 BETWEEN EU AND NON-EU STATES

The third level at which self-sustaining inequalities occur in EU integration concerns EU enlargement and the relationship between EU and non-EU states. The social inequalities between the often wealthier EU states and their often poorer non-EU neighbours are in principle similar to those between different EU member states. However, there is an important difference: in many areas, EU integration could plausibly go along with boosts in socio-economic standards. For instance, market integration, EU structural funds, or political support are part of the aforementioned





attempts of the EU to achieve upwards convergence without social policy harmonisation. While it is debatable to what degree this is successful, it represents a set of opportunities that non-EU states miss out on.

The inequalities between EU and non-EU states do not go unnoticed amongst EU decision-makers. Their observation of these inequalities tends to become particularly salient once EU enlargement is on the table. Similar to the dynamics described before, decision-makers define inequalities between EU and non-EU states as a problem, but again not as one for which they themselves assume responsibility. Rather, they define inequalities as a hindrance to integration. In case of an EU enlargement in which poorer states were to be included, intra-EU inequalities would increase. This, in turn, might result in perceived responsibilities down the line, but certainly in complex issues for policymaking. Fearing such complications for further intra-EU developments, decision-makers deflect responsibility by either not moving forward or by blocking enlargement decisions. As the states in question do not receive EU membership, they also lose out on the aforementioned opportunities to reduce inequalities. This is not to say that the previous arguments on self-sustaining inequalities *within* the EU do not apply. However, up to a specific threshold, non-EU states might plausibly catch up to EU member states after accession. Thus, inequalities between EU and non-EU states are sustained if EU membership is denied.

Decision-makers define inequalities between EU and non-EU states as a problem, but again not as one for which they themselves assume responsibility. Rather, they define inequalities as a hindrance to integration.

A recent example for this consists in the debates over the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans. In this lengthy process, poverty and inequality in the countries hoping to join the EU have been discussed as hurdles ([Stratulat 2021](#)). Some have argued that EU politicians face a major challenge in justifying to their voters the EU accession of poorer countries ([Fraenkel 2016: 2](#)). Similar notions had already characterised political discourses after the EU accession of Romania and Bulgaria ([Deutscher Städtetag 2013](#)). In 2018, the European Commission further argued that „the Western Balkan countries must now urgently redouble their efforts, address vital reforms and complete their political, economic and social transformation“ ([European Commission 2018: 2](#)).

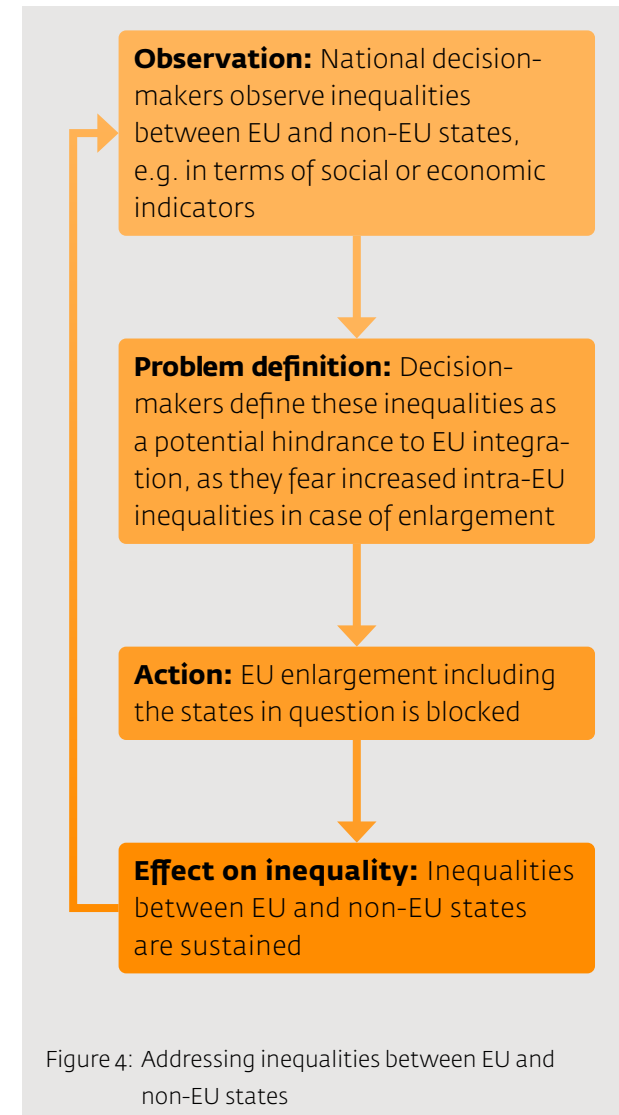


Figure 4: Addressing inequalities between EU and non-EU states





3.4 INTERDEPENDENCIES

In practice, the three presented constellations are not independent, but can feed into one another. For instance, inequalities between EU member states might inhibit EU-level solutions to the most severe poverty issues. This implies that social policy remains a largely national matter with all the inequalities between welfare states that go along with this. As a consequence, national actors convinced of the idea of welfare magnetism pursue welfare exclusions of migrants which causes social precariousness “on the ground”. In consequence, national decision-makers might oppose further enlargement out of fear of existing struggles becoming more severe. This then sustains inequalities between the EU and non-EU states.

4 DISCUSSION

The three presented constellations illustrate the basic concept I explored in this piece, namely how social inequalities in the context of European integration can sustain themselves through discourse. In key debates in the context of European integration, inequalities are used as an argumentative instrument to justify decisions that enforce these very inequalities. In all three constellations I discussed, the step of defining a problem and a goal is key. In this step, the responsibility of reducing inequalities is largely “crowded out” of the process of European integration.

The validity of my argument can, of course, be plausibly contested. My approach is largely based on theoretical considerations and examples derived

from some broader empirical research, meaning that the cases I describe are not necessarily representative for a wider pattern. Furthermore, the models I present are strongly simplified and there are many other factors involved in actors’ motivations, actions, and impacts. For instance, not all policies that match my descriptions are necessarily motivated by inequalities themselves. Factors such as xenophobia and welfare chauvinism might just be hidden behind publicly more palatable arguments. Furthermore, even if inequalities can sustain themselves, these systems are no closed loops. Myriad external factors that my approach does not account for such as economic catch-up effects can contribute to a reduction of inequalities and thus to a disruption of the cycles I describe. While this does not undermine my argument on discourses and patterns of political argumentations, it needs to be acknowledged.

Crucially, the argument that inequality is used to hinder EU integration does not imply that inequality is never *actually* a substantial problem for successful integration. Many arguments that call for caution in EU integration can be valid, for instance when it comes to the need for basic requirements for EU enlargement. However, it is a political decision whether the EU collectively takes over the responsibility of overcoming obstacles to integration, or whether such hurdles are solely used politically to prevent integration. In reality, political actions likely fall in-between these extremes. For instance, politicians largely reject an EU-wide welfare state but supported instruments like SURE, an EU-wide reinsurance for short-time work

schemes ([Council of the European Union 2020](#)). However, consciously reflecting on the ways in which inequalities are being argumentatively instrumentalised is crucial for such concrete policy decisions to be made on a sound basis. After all, some calls for caution concerning EU integration might be constructively used to improve the effectiveness of policies, whereas others might only serve nationalistic ambitions.

Thus, I argue that there is some merit to the presented approach of identifying self-sustaining inequalities in the context of the EU. It offers a conceptual way of thinking about European integration that puts inequality itself at the centre of debates, rather than treating it as an external factor that is naturally given. This can contribute to challenging lines of division that arise in the process of European integration and are often taken for granted. As the presented reflections illustrate, inequalities associated with European integration, for instance between rich and poor EU welfare states, are often seen as a limitation to more integration. However, the very same inequalities can plausibly also be defined as a social policy problem – and thus as a potential motivator for *more* integration, particularly in the realm of social policy. Past political decisions to rather treat inequalities as hurdles to integration inhibit a potentially strong unifier of European societies: a common system of minimum social protection. What is more, such decisions run the risk of implicitly turning social policy into a divider of Europe in the long run if, for instance, populist politicians argue that “we” must defend “our” welfare system against migrants, “Brussels”, or EU enlargement.





As these considerations indicate, the presented concepts can quickly link to strong normative claims. While the mere observation of self-sustaining inequalities in and of itself is not a judgement of values, it could bear important normative implications. As these implications are of fundamental political relevance for a self-proclaimed “ever closer union”, they need to be openly discussed in democratic processes. After all, while inequalities themselves are currently a fact of life, it matters how decision-makers react to them. And while it might be true that not all actions intended to reduce inequalities are successful, it still matters if actors decide that something should be done. This is particularly relevant in the EU context, where economic integration still lacks an equally strong social policy counterpart beyond the member state level ([Sabato and Vanhercke 2017: 73](#)).

Importantly, I do not mean to suggest that European integration is necessarily a driver of inequalities. Many of the inequalities discussed would also exist without the EU, and perhaps be even more severe. However, an integrational project with ambitions of linking “European citizenship” to a “European social model” needs to reflect on the responsibilities involved. The argumentative patterns I described indicate that inequalities are occasionally used as a “veil of objectivity”: by overemphasising the “objective” nature of constraints, this veil disguises the fact that inequalities in Europe are not solely a given reality, but also, to a certain degree, a political choice. If the reduction of Europe-wide inequalities is a political decision to be debated in democratic systems, change requires political actors that push for it.

Overemphasising the “objective” nature of constraints disguises the fact that inequalities in Europe are not solely a given reality, but also, to a certain degree, a political choice.

This issue is particularly thorny for political movements that claim labels such as “progressivism” for themselves. A prime example for this is Social Democracy. Operating in an electoral system that still strongly incentivises parties to focus on their national electorates first, parties in richer EU states might fear being punished at the ballot boxes for attempts of pan-European redistribution. However, not addressing inequalities across Europe is hardly a viable strategy for progressives either, as they claim to be champions of European integration and of inequality reduction at the same time. Thus, if Social Democrats simply ignore European inequalities, they run the risk of undermining their own “political brand”. By implication, salience is key: as long as EU debates on inequalities largely happen in national logics, Europe-wide inequalities can further sustain themselves, as it is the politically easiest option for national decision-makers to simply deflect responsibilities to other states. However, this could change if the eradication of inequalities at a European level

became salient amongst national electorates. In such a case, progressive parties might be incentivised to scale up their traditional goals of tackling inequalities to the European stage.

At this point, one might rightfully object that progressive parties are already incentivised to act on European inequalities. Accordingly, they have increasingly promised a “social Europe” and continued to echo this idea in recent election cycles (PES 2009, 2014, 2019). However, this promise might render the issue of self-sustaining inequalities even more problematic in the long run. While the key actors involved use the existence of inequalities to justify actions sustaining said inequalities, they simultaneously feel pressured to push for a “social Europe”. They therefore walk a tightrope between guarding the status quo and promising change, leading to an embrace of comparatively toothless instruments. A “European Pillar of Social Rights” that offers no legally claimable *rights*, or a “Youth Guarantee” that technically *guarantees* relatively little form a “social Europe” with deliberately limited social policy competences. Such approaches are, of course, influenced by complex political negotiations, and they might produce some mild social improvements. However, they also make bold claims which overpromise on solutions to European inequalities – a problem which was only exacerbated by deliberate policy choices of the same actors that proclaim their embrace of “social Europe”.

In short, the reduction of inequalities in Europe is not only a materially difficult task with institutional obstacles in its way. It is additionally





a discursive dilemma in which the existence of inequalities is used to justify actions that sustain these very inequalities. All the while, democratic processes around these discourses seem nowhere near of resolving this dilemma. Rather, democratic competition over the matter goes along with further complications, meaning that a fundamental change in the observed phenomena might still be far off.

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Participants' Biographies

Bogomir Doringer

is a Serbian/Dutch artist, researcher and curator. He is doing an Artistic Research PhD at the University of Applied Arts Vienna in an ongoing research project "I Dance Alone," which observes clubbing from a birds-eye-view as a reflection and reaction to social and political changes. He is investigating the collective and individual dynamics of the dance floor and different functions of dance. Bogomir is curator and head of education and research at the Nxt Museum for new media in Amsterdam. He lectures and teaches internationally. Since 2014, he has been co-curator of Envisioning Free Spaces – the public day of the Stadt Nach Acht conference. He contributes to various international music festivals, club programs, and institutions throughout his work and research.

<https://bogomirdoringer.info/>

Artur Kamarouski

Born in in Mir, Belarus, in 1991, Artur Kamarouski is a poet, performer, artist and journalist. He is a member of the Krasnyi Borshchevik group of artists and graduated from the Belarusian Philology department of Hrodna State University (2013 and 2014), the Creative Writing School (2013) and the poetry and translation department of the Young Writers' School W/Rights (2020) of the Union of Belarusian Writers. His poetry has been published in several literary magazines and anthologies in Belarus and Russia. Artur is the author of a poetry collection, "Water Begins to Live" (2020), which was presented with the Maksim Bahdanovič Award as the best poetry debut (2021). Moreover, he was featured in the exhibition Ciahlicy (Minsk, 2018), the international performance festival Performensk (Minsk, 2019) and the international festivals Eve's Ribs (St. Petersburg, 2018 and 2019), Carbonarium (Kyiv, 2019), and Dotyk (Minsk, 2020). He has been in political exile in Tbilisi, Georgia, since 2021 and currently lives in Warsaw, Poland.

Lura Pollozhani

is a Researcher and a PhD candidate on Law and Politics at the University of Graz, researching citizenship practices in divided societies, social movements, radicalisation and violent extremism. She completed her MSc in European Studies: Ideas and Identities at the LSE and her BA in International Relations at Malmö University. Lura has previously worked as an Advisor to the Prime Minister of North Macedonia on cooperation with international organisations and as an external engagement officer for the UNHCR. She has also worked as a Researcher at the University of Prishtina, as a University Assistant at the CSEES in Graz, as well as a Project Manager for ECMI Kosovo.

Paula Erizanu

was born in Chisinau, Moldova, in 1992, and has studied and worked as a journalist in London for 10 years, collaborating with the BBC, The Guardian, London Review of Books and other publications. She was shortlisted for the UK's Culture Journalist of the Year Award by Words by Women in 2019. She is also an award-winning Romanian-language author. Her first book, A diary from the 2009 mass protests in Moldova, This is my first revolution. Steal It (Cartier, 2010, trilingual edition), won UNESCO Germany's Most Beautiful Book of the Year award. She also authored a poetry collection, Take Care (Charmides, 2015), and co-edited the pioneering three-part anthology A Century of Romanian Poetry Written by Women (Cartier, 2019-2021), together with the poet and critic Alina Purcaru. Her debut novel, The Woods Are Burning, a fictionalised historical account of the lives of early Soviet feminists Alexandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand, was published in 2021, winning the Young Writer of the Year Award at Romania's Young Writers' Gala and being shortlisted for the Sofia Nădejde Prize in Bucharest, Romania, and Festival du Premier Roman in Chambéry, France.

Tomasz Padło

is a freelance photographer based in Krakow, Poland, and a co-founder of Bezgranica Foundation, which focuses on the promotion of knowledge through visual arts. He treats photography as a representation of reality, hence his primary focus on documentary photography. After taking up trials with a view to recognising and understanding the Orient, he turned his photographic interest towards imaging the relationship between humankind and the environment. Furthermore, he is a geographer by profession and is working as an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Arts of the Pedagogical University of Krakow. He has studied the problem of perceiving Europe for many years.

Louise Cognard

is a journalist for French TV (France 3 and Arte) and radio. She worked for the web programme Europe 2019 on Arte, a special and temporary collection of programmes dedicated to Europe during the European elections. She also collaborated with radio producer Caroline Gillet on her weekly radio show Foule Continentale. The show was a platform for dialogue and for expressing new ideas for young people involved in civic movements around Europe and was broadcast on France Inter. In the winter of 2020, she boarded a cargo ship crossing the Atlantic to America. During the crossing, she worked as a deckhand and made short documentary films about life at sea. She then travelled through Central America for a year as an independent journalist, looking for alternative ways of living in hippie, boatbuilder and Mennonite communities.





Elliot Raimbeau

is a French-American journalist and illustrator working as a freelancer for investigative documentaries. He makes animations for French television and illustrations for newspapers and has published a graphic novel entitled *Les Tambours de Srebrenica* about the war in Bosnia. He lives and works in Paris.

Tamar Tolordava

is an Assistant Professor at Ilia State University and a researcher and research coordinator at the university's Center for Advanced Studies. She holds a Bachelor's degree from the School of Arts and Science (2011) and a Master's degree in Soviet Studies from Ilia State University (2015), as well as in Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies from the University of Glasgow (2020). In the autumn of 2021, she was a CEES Fellow at the University of Zurich. Her research interests include post-Soviet politics, civil society and social movements, as well as informality and informal practices in Georgia.

Kostiantyn Fedorenko

is a social scientist with a background in political science. He received his MA in European and European Legal Studies from Europa-Kolleg Hamburg and a Master's degree in Political Science from Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. At Centre for East European and International Studies, he works within the MOBILISE project team, which aims to understand why in times of crisis some people protest while others migrate. He is responsible in the project for work with Ukrainian respondents and data analysis. He is also a doctoral student at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Prior to this, he worked as a political analyst for the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation in Kyiv.

Angelika Mika Korzeniowska

was born in La Garenne-Colombes near Paris. She graduated in painting with honours from the W. Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts in 2017. She is interested in various means of artistic expression – from visual and conceptual arts to music. "I believe that art plays an extremely important role in human life. Through the act of creation, we are able to express ourselves, share emotions, explore areas on the border between consciousness and subconsciousness, creating "new worlds". For me, art is the language of the soul. It speaks with emotions, and these are universal for all people around the world. And this is beautiful." She currently pursues her creative work primarily in Warsaw, painting pictures, writing and singing.

Dominic Afscharian

works as a research officer at the Institute of Political Science of the University of Tübingen. He is also currently completing his PhD on different ideas of 'Social Europe'. Dominic holds degrees in political science and economics from Heidelberg University and has worked with think tanks, consultancies, and academic institutions. Specialising in public policy analysis, he primarily focuses on European social policy and its relations to other policy fields such as migration. Besides this main focus, Dominic has published work on basic income, labour market policy, mental health policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, and democratic resilience around the globe.

Vesna Marjanović

has held the position of Secretary General for Europa Nostra Serbia since July 2021. Before that, she was employed as a culture and media advisor at the Center for Democracy Foundation in Belgrade. She was a member of the Serbian Parliament from 2007 to June 2020. Vesna is very active in the field of cultural policy. She is a member of the Board of Trustees of the European Museum Forum and a Member of the Council of Europa Nostra. She was also a Vice-Chair of the Committee on Culture, Diversity and Heritage, Rapporteur Council of Europe Museum Prize, Rapporteur "Culture and Democracy" in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, an Elected Member of the Belgrade City Council in charge of the Department for Culture and a president of the Board of the Belgrade Film Festival (FEST).





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