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EDITOR'S LETTER

GERMANY, BELGIUM AND LUXEMBOURG



There are many small countries in the European Union, that are rarely written about and even remembered. Despite belonging to a common European civilisation, they differ from each other, speak different languages, each of them – even a very small country – has its own culture. But they all huddle around the large and powerful Germany. Germany, which used to conquer them from time to time, but which is now trying to assure everyone that it is “just like anyone else”.

Luxembourg was established as a constitutional monarchy. But the country is ruled by a grand duke, not by a king. And the official name of the state is the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Such a pompous name for a tiny country does not confuse Luxembourgers. There are only 600 thousand of them, but they are reckoned with, because Luxembourg had been one of the major financial centres of the European continent for a long time, almost on a par with Switzerland.

One of the smallest countries in Europe, the Kingdom of Belgium is very interesting.

Firstly, Brussels is not only the capital of Belgium, but also the capital of the European Union and the seat of NATO's Headquarters. This alone attaches Belgium an importance that no other small country in the world has.

Culturally, Belgium is also great. Bosch, Bruegel, Van Eyck, Memling – they are geniuses making the history of painting simply unthinkable without them.

Maeterlinck and Kromlink are the pillars of 20th century literature.

Belgium is a small giant.

Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg represent the paradoxical difference between European nations.

Victor Loupan



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HIGHLIGHTS

MUTTER UND DEUTSCHLAND

What will happen to Germany after the retirement of “Mutter Angela”?

VICTOR LOUPAN,
Head of the Editorial Board

So, after sixteen years of reign, Angela Merkel, the permanent Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, is retiring.

Preceding her, full 16 years from 1982 to 1998, Germany was ruled by her mentor, Helmut Kohl. It was he – that tall, overweight and uncharismatic man – who noticed a young native of the German Democratic Republic and a former Komsomol activist Angela Merkel.

Wise old Kohl, as we see, was not mistaken. Angela Merkel, who is as uncharismatic and serious as he is, became the first female chancellor in history and a person who was not only talented, but became one of the wisest leaders in the post-war history of West Germany.

Angela Merkel (née Kasner) was born in 1954 in Hamburg, which is located not in East Germany, but in West Germany! This fact surprised me a lot. Angela’s father Horst Kasner, who served as a pastor at the Lutheran Church, emigrated with his whole family to the GDR following the birth of his daughter, where he was appointed as a pastor of a Lutheran parish near Berlin-Brandenburg. This fact itself is very interesting. Because even then, although



before construction of the Berlin Wall, the Iron Curtain was lowered, and many people in East Germany dreamed of living in the West, rushed to the FRG, developed stratagems to cross the border. And here suddenly everything is the other way around.

Horst Kasner’s act was – I am just sure of it – extremely atypical. Renouncing German citizenship was also an extremely extravagant behav-

our. This can be explained quite simply: Pastor Kasner was one of those few church representatives who supported the policy of the GDR government, as well as the church policy of the Socialist Unity Party of Ger-

many (SED) – in other words, the ruling communist party of the GDR.

Like any pupil, Angela was a member of the Pioneer and Komsomol organisations. During a student exchange trip to Moscow and Leningrad she met her first husband, also a student, Ulrich Merkel.

Having entered the Academy of Sciences where she had worked until 1989, Angela did not join the party,

but actively participated in the Komsomol political life, being a member of the regional branch of the Free German Youth (FDJ) movement, similar to the Komsomol, in the position of the secretary for “Agitation and Propaganda”. According to modern standards, she was engaged in brainwashing and was nothing more than a servant to the ideology. Angela Merkel did not deny this even in an interview given to the German media, but downplayed the essence of her activities, calling it “cultural and educational”, which, and you must agree, looks much more harmless than “agitprop” or “proletkult” style propaganda.

Be that as it may, Angela Merkel’s political career began in 1989, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. And

already in 1990 she was already appointed as a deputy press secretary of the first – and last – willingly elected Prime Minister of the GDR, Lothar de Maizière.

In August 1990 the small Democratic Awakening Party, of which Merkel was a member, decided to merge with the East-German Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and Angela was one of the three delegates to the CDU convention held on October 1 and 2 in her hometown of Hamburg.

Then Merkel met Helmut Kohl, the chairman of the CDU and German Chancellor, in person for the first time. The experienced

Chancellor liked her so much, that a year later she became the federal Minister for Women and Youth. Angela Merkel held this post for three years (1991–1994). After that she had served as a federal Minister for Environment (1994–1998) until the elections to the Bundestag.

But in 1999 a scandal erupted over the illegal financing of the CDU. Following Helmut Kohl’s interview with the ZDF channel, it became obvious that the Federal Chancellor and the current honorary chairman of the CDU received millions of funds for the party evading the FRG’s law “On Political Parties”. Kohl refused to name his sponsors referring to his word of honor.

On December 22, 1999, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung published an article by Angela Merkel, where she severely criticised Helmut Kohl’s behaviour and called on the party to decisively break with the “old guard”, although she owed a lot to old Kohl. Here is what she wrote: “The party must take its first independent steps, must believe in itself, believe that even without the “old war horse”, as Helmut Kohl often called himself, it

will be able to continue the struggle against its political opponents. As a teenager in puberty, it must break away from its parental home and go its own way”.

On January 18, 2000, the presidency and the federal board of the CDU



Photo: kremlin.ru

demanding that Helmut Kohl resign as the honorary chairman of the party until the names of the sponsors are announced.

In response, Kohl resigned. At the same time, he entered into a partially public controversy with the current chairman of the party, Wolfgang Schäuble. The scandal also hit Schäuble himself: in an interview with the ARD channel, he admitted that he had accepted funding from the military-industrial lobby in the person of Karlheinz Schreiber, although a month ago he disputed this fact at a Bundestag meeting. After that and following the appearance of scandalous information about the details of the transfer of money, Wolfgang Schäuble could no longer keep the post of the party leader.

Merkel’s fierce struggle for supremacy in the party and the country lasted for the other five years, until 2005. On September 20, she was elected as a chairman of the CDU / CSU parliamentary fraction, receiving 219 out of 222 votes in a secret ballot. And on November 22, 2005, Angela Merkel was elected to the post of Federal Chancellor of the Federal Republic

of Germany, having received 397 out of 611 votes of the 16th convocation Bundestag deputies and thus becoming the first woman and at the same time the youngest chancellor in the entire history of the FRG. As well as the first representative of the new federal states in the highest leadership position in the country.

Since then she has been taking this post continuously, albeit with varying degrees of success.

Unlike her direct predecessor, Gerhard Schröder, who had ambitions for independence, Angela Merkel distinguished herself by an unconditional tendency for rapprochement with the

United States as a strategic partner and guarantor of peace and stability in Europe.

When Angela Merkel took over the government of the FRG, there was a hope that relations between Germany and Russia would continue to improve. The German media profoundly emphasized the fact that she was fluent in Russian and Vladimir Putin was fluent in German. Meaning that they would have a lot in common. But Putin suddenly began to present her flowers during every meeting, thereby emphasizing that she was a woman. Angela Merkel clearly did not like this. She rather perceived Putin’s gallant gesture as a manifestation of his male superiority than a sign of friendliness. It is still unclear whether Vladimir Putin intentionally got on her nerves or sincerely believed that German Chancellor should be given a bouquet of flowers, like a lady to whom a man pays a visit.

There was also an episode with Putin’s dog, which suddenly entered the hall where they were sitting with Angela Merkel, as if he did not know that she was panicky afraid of dogs, and not rationally, but at the phobic level.



Photo: Maheshkumar Painam

At the beginning of Merkel's rule, relations between Russia and Germany did not undergo any particularly noticeable changes. Although the closeness that was maintained between Putin and Schröder, was clearly gone. Merkel was somewhat skeptical about Russia. She restored German foreign policy orientation towards the United States and began to treat Russia more frostily.

On the one hand, Angela Merkel did not denounce the agreements reached with Russia during the

Schröder era. Germany, for example, turned out to be one of the few Western countries that criticised the US plans to create an anti-missile defense system in Eastern Europe.

Relations between Russia and Germany deteriorated sharply by 2014, when Merkel personally supported an illegal and violent change of government in Ukraine. The already deteriorating relations were significantly aggravated by the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation and the military conflict in eastern

Ukraine. Instead of trying to understand the situation and understand its deep essence, the Chancellor of Germany constantly accused Russia of interfering in the affairs of sovereign Ukraine, as well as military support of the self-proclaimed People's Republics in Donbas region.

In June 2016, the German government updated the content of the White Paper, a guide to the country's national security policy. The new edition describes Russia as Germany's "no longer a partner, but a com-

petitor", one of the main threats, since Russia is "ready to use force to advance its interests". Based on the history of the Second World War and the terrible guilt of Germany towards Russia and other peoples of the USSR, such expression is especially shocking.

Realising its historical guilt, earlier Germany has always tried to avoid calling Russia an enemy, even during the Cold War. With Merkel, this "red line" was crossed with particular ease and irresponsibility.

On August 20, 2021, as part of her farewell visit to Russia, Angela Merkel held a meeting with Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin to underline the importance of relations with Russia for her personally. At the end of the meeting she acknowledged the complete failure of the Normandy format, but refrained from reproaching the Ukrainian party, the main culprit in the failure of this multinational initiative. The Chancellor

also refrained from being jubilant over Nord Stream 2, but with some insistence she advocated maintaining the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine beyond 2024.

The Russian president did not show any specific reaction regarding this. He also ignored the fact that the Chancellor described the replacement of Alexei Navalny's suspended sentence with a real one as "unacceptable". She even called for his release. It was evident, that before retiring she checked all the necessary

boxes in all the right places, appealing to German political correctness and, of course, realising that all this is idle talk, to which Putin simply would not answer.

German media repeatedly wrote about Putin's dismissive attitude to the Merkel's statements. Apparently, they remembered it again when, in response, the Russian president said with a smile that Angela Merkel was a "welcome guest" and that she would always be expected in Moscow. Knowing that she was going to visit Kiev after her visit to Moscow, the Russian president asked her "to influence the Ukrainian party in terms of fulfilling the obligations assumed earlier". There was undoubtedly a grain of irony in this. As for the transit of gas through Ukraine after 2024, he said that the Russian party is ready to continue transiting gas beyond 2024, but this is not a political, but a purely commercial problem depending on an agreement to be – or not to be – signed between Gazprom and the Ukrainian party. In the end, Putin briefly noted that Navalny was convicted "not for his political activity, but for a criminal offense".

An important development happened since Angela Merkel's final visit to Moscow. The construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline was fully and successfully completed. This is a great victory not only for Russia, but also for Angela Merkel personally. Without her perseverance, the construction would not have been completed, because both the Americans and many EU member states stubbornly opposed its completion due to purely anti-Russian motives. The Chancellor's pragmatism and willpower have played a decisive role here.

What will happen to Germany after the retirement of "Mutter Angela"? The Germans call her "mutter", "mom", without irony. She is actually perceived by many as the mother of the nation, as its incarnation. What will happen next is not clear. That is, it is clear that Germany is likely

to change, because German media suddenly started talking about the period of Merkel's rule as "stagnation". In the sense that Germany needs serious modernisation, a more modern approach to the technological equipment of the economy. They write that Germany suffers from outdated infrastructure, underdevelopment in digital equipment, insufficient investment in the public sector. In their opinion, climate change and the pandemic crisis have clearly demonstrated the staggering weaknesses of the leading economy of the EU. The budgetary "rigor" of Angela Merkel resulted in the fact that entire industries related to administration, healthcare, schooling, public transport have become obsolete due to insufficient funding.

Joe Kaiser, who ran the industrial giant Siemens until 2013, also believes that the end of Merkel's rule is suddenly revealing unforgivable collapses. In his opinion, she did a lot for the present country, but poorly prepared it for the future which is just around the corner. He believes that the Chancellor's archaic approach to economic realities did not allow her to take into account the fact that many traditional spheres of the German economy are condemned to decline and even extinction. And nothing has been done to prevent it or help them move forward through investment to new technological solutions.

This is roughly how public political life of German Chancellor Angela Merkel proceeded. She is leaving calmly, without drama, without defeat. The rumour has it that she is about to relocate to the United States, because her husband, a great scientist, is planning to teach at a prestigious American university and may be awarded the Nobel Prize soon. And now Merkel wants to support him in this important matter, as he had been supporting her humbly during all these years.

I do not know whether it is true or not. But sounds nice!

HISTORY

LUXEMBOURG: AN INCREDIBLE STORY OF A FORTRESS CITY

The origins and the name of Luxembourg are intimately linked with one person, and with one place.

In the year 963, a Count by the name of Siegfried, a Carolingian by blood – and on his mother's side he was descended from Charlemagne, acquired from the St. Maximin Abbey in Trier a rocky promontory overhanging the valley of the River Alzette. According to the deed recording the transaction, a small stronghold called “Lucilinburhuc” was situated there at that time. It was probably of Roman origin. It was there that the name of Luxembourg first appeared in history. The name would pass to the city which took shape all about, and then be handed on to the country which developed around that city. Nowadays, the city and the country carry the same name.

According to legend, Count Siegfried would be married to Melusina, a mermaid who became a part of European folklore and who was to disappear beneath the waves of the Alzette. Be that legend or not, Siegfried was present at the very birth of the House of Luxembourg, a dynasty which, during the 14th century and the first half of the 15th century, was to provide four Emperors to the Empire and four Kings to Bohemia.

A medieval city

The word “Lucilinburhuc” is synonymous with small fortress. The expression denotes two features which characterised the city for an extremely long time.

First of all, the rocky promontory obtained by Siegfried was of obvious

strategic interest and gave itself admirably to fortification. The city of Luxembourg was to be a fortress city for almost a thousand years until being dismantled in 1867.

Secondly, it would never be a large city: there were 5,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the 14th century, 8,500 by the end of the 18th century, 46,500 immediately after the First World War, and today there are 100,000 at the present day.

Siegfried was to build a veritable fortress on the promontory. Knights and soldiers were billeted there, while artisans and traders settled all around, the first group on top of the rocky outcrop and the others beneath it. Thus was created the distinction between the upper and the lower city. One is not able to talk of a proper city until the second half of the 12th century, when it became surrounded by ramparts of stone.

Luxembourg owes its origins to its precipitous location and to the military interest which it thus provoked.



Luxembourg fortress before its demolition

A fortress city

Since the year 963, when Count Siegfried acquired the rocky promontory overhanging the valley of the River Alzette which since the end of the Middle Ages has been called “The Bock”, it has without doubt set strategic criteria. The location gave itself admirably to fortification. The Count had a fortress built there, around which there took shape little by little a built-up area which only came to merit being called a city some two centuries later. It was towards the middle of the 12th century that it became surrounded by substantial ramparts (to the extent of the Rue du Fossé today).

Demographic pressures led in the 14th century to an extension of the city towards the West, with the construction of new ramparts (to the extent of the Boulevard Royal today). The urban area went from 5 to 23 hectares (12.5 to 57.5 acres). But it would be neces-

sary to wait until the last third of the 19th century to see the city finally pass beyond this “barrier” of ramparts created in the 14th century.

Just like so many cities in the Middle Ages, Luxembourg also became fortified. In this case on three sides – to the South, to the East, and to the North-east – it was surrounded by the deep valleys of the River Petrusse and the River Alzette. Augmented by

the appropriate works, these heights were utterly invincible. On the side opening out to the plain, to the West and North-west, mighty ramparts were a barrier to access.

The city did not succumb as a rule to siege prior to 1443, the date when Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, seized it by surprise. A new era was beginning for Luxembourg, which had been elevated to the status of Duchy in 1354. It was integrated into the territory of the Netherlands and drawn with them into the duel which the Valois-Bourbons and the Habsburgs indulged in during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.

Gibraltar of the North

The political galaxy, in the same way as the increasing role played by artillery, was of great significance to the future of the city whose fate was a plaything of the major powers during the 1540s. In the strife which took place between Francis I and Charles V, the city changed hands four times before finally resting in those of the Habsburgs. The latter decided to review the entire defensive system. After long and seemingly interminable works, which were drawn out over almost a century and a half, the fortified city had been transformed into a complete fortress.

At the end of a memorable siege, led by Vauban, the forces of the French King Louis XIV conquered Luxembourg in 1684. Vauban entirely redesigned the defences of the city and made it into a formidable entity – formidable in the first meaning of the word, inspiring



“Huelen Zant” (Hollow tooth), the remains a tower of one of the fortress gates, on the Bock rock

great fear and apprehension. Luxembourg returned to the Habsburgs in 1697, the city took on the nickname of “Gibraltar of the North” during the 18th century.

After a long blockade, the city of Luxembourg was conquered, in 1795, by the French Revolutionary troops. In 1815, after the creation of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, which became a member of the German Confederation, the city was made a federal fortress with a Prussian garrison.

During the 19th century the conflict between the Bourbons and the

Habsburgs had Luxembourg at the very front line between France and Germany. In fact, a war over it almost broke out between Napoleon III and Bismarck in 1867. It was only possible to avoid it at the last moment. Thanks to the Treaty of London: The Grand Duchy was declared a neutral state, and the fortifications of the Capital were ordered to be dismantled. Nine centuries after Siegfried, Luxembourg had ceased to be a fortress. There are remains of the impressive ramparts, but they face another problem today – modern traffic.

WHO: RICH COUNTRIES SHOULD DONATE 1 BILLION VACCINE DOSES

Rich countries must share their supplies of COVID-19 vaccines quickly, in line with recommendations made earlier this year by an independent panel appointed by the World Health Organization (WHO), the former co-chairs said in a statement.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of Liberia, and Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, expressed deep concern over the slow pace of vaccine redistribution from high-income to low-income countries.

The two former leaders served as co-chairs of the Independent Panel on Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPPR), launched by WHO in July 2020. Its final report was published in May.

A critical step

“The Independent Panel report recommended that high-income countries ensure that at least one billion doses of vaccines available to them were redistributed to 92 low and middle-income countries by 1 September, and a further one billion doses by mid-2022”, they declared.

“Ensuring that all those around the world most vulnerable to the

impact of the virus, including health-care workers, older people and those with significant comorbidities, can be vaccinated quickly is a critical step towards curbing the pandemic.”

Show solidarity

To date, the global solidarity initiative COVAX has shipped 99 million donated doses, they said. While 92 countries have received some 89 million vaccines, this is far short of the one billion called for in the report.



Photo: Daniel Schludi

“High-income countries have ordered over twice as many doses as are needed for their populations. Now is the time to show solidarity with those who have not yet been able to vaccinate their frontline health workers and most vulnerable populations,” the former leaders stated.

“Reaching the goal of redistributing one billion doses by 1 September would be a vital step in protecting the five billion people aged 15 and over who live in low- and middle-income countries. The 600 million doses which have already been pledged now need to be delivered with urgency”, they added.

Boost production

Additionally, rapid action is needed to step up vaccine production in low- and middle-income countries.

“Manufacturing capacity has to be increased and knowledge and technology shared in order to scale up production quickly,” the two experts recommended. “This pandemic has shown the global risks of locating the know-how and manufacturing facilities in just a handful of countries.”

The co-chairs have also welcomed the establishment of a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine technology hub in South Africa, adding that more such announcements are needed.

“Low and middle-income countries must be able to produce more of their own vaccines and thereby help increase in general the amount of vaccine available to the world,” they said.

NEW DATA-DRIVEN HUB IN GERMANY TO PREVENT THE NEXT PANDEMIC

A new centre in Berlin, Germany, launched by the World Health Organization (WHO), aims to help countries better assess and respond to global disease threats in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

The WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence, will bring together diverse partnerships from several disciplines, and the latest technology, so that data and intelligence are shared for the common good.

Critically, it will support experts and policy-makers worldwide to be able to forecast, detect and assess epidemic and pandemic risks so that they can respond rapidly to future public health emergencies.



Photo: CDC

Sharing expertise and knowledge

Speaking at the launch, outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel highlighted her country's contribution to medical science, including developing tests and vaccines against the new coronavirus.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated how much we can actually achieve if we combine our strengths,” she said through an interpreter. “Experts from all over the world at enormous speed, have been able to enhance and share their expertise and their knowledge in order to decode the coronavirus.”

Ready, fast and agile

The Hub is part of WHO's Health Emergencies Programme, headed by Dr. Michael Ryan. He has been at the forefront of managing acute

risks to global health for more than two decades, including the COVID-19 pandemic but also Ebola and measles outbreaks.

“In my experience, there are three things that are critical to an effective response to an epidemic or pandemic: be ready, be fast and be agile,” Dr. Ryan said at the launch.

“The better we prepare, the more ready we will be to respond. The faster we identify new infectious disease risks, the faster we can respond. The more adaptable and agile we are, the more effective our response will be. None of this is possible without better data, intelligence, analytics and insights to improve the speed and adaptability of our response.”

The WHO Hub is currently operating from a centre provided by Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, one of the largest university hospitals in Europe.

It will soon move to a permanent location in the city's Kreuzberg district.

NINE THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT FLANDERS

Even though the Flemish Region of Belgium, or Flanders, is fairly modest in size, it boasts an enormous wealth of art, heritage, culture, food, drink and more. But what about those incredible, amazing, sometimes amusing things you might not yet know about Flanders? Visit Flanders shares some of our secrets with you below, if you promise not to tell. Did you, for example, know that...

1 Belgium brews more than 1,600 original beers?

Belgium is one of the best places in the world to enjoy beer, if not the best. There are more than 220 active breweries in our country, and together they brew more than 1,600 original beers, in more than 700 different taste profiles. Whether this is lager, Flanders red ale, gueuze, wheat beer, trappist or lambic: Belgium shines. And that's not just us saying that: UNESCO says that as well. It has designated Belgian beer culture as immaterial cultural heritage. Cheers!



Photo: Yutakar

2 All art on the moon comes from Flanders?

Flanders is the state of the arts. For centuries, the Flemish Masters



have delighted the whole world. And they don't let themselves be restricted by the stratosphere. There is, in fact, a work of art on the moon. And it's from Flanders. In 1971, the space mission Apollo 15 left Fallen Astronaut by modern Flemish master Paul Van Hoeydonck behind. That 8.5 centimetre statue is in honour of all who gave their lives for space travel.

3 Flanders cheese is also eaten in space?

Not only Flemish art but also our culinary culture is considered a galactic delicacy. That is demonstrated by the small cheese maker 't Groendal in West Flanders. It supplies cheese to the American space agency NASA. Astronaut Shannon Walker is a big fan of these cheeses. And even during her mission in the International

Space Station (ISS), she enjoyed those delicious cheeses from 't Groendal.

4 Antwerp owes its name to a giant with a severed hand?

According to Flemish mythology, Antwerp was, in times long past, terrorised by the giant Antigoon. He demanded a toll from all skippers who wanted to sail in the Scheldt. If they refused, he would chop off their hand. But the brave soldier Brabo was not about to let that happen. He challenged



Photo: Jonne Mäkikyrö



Photo: tgroendalbe

the giant, won the dispute and took revenge. He chopped the hand off the giant Antigoon and threw it into the Scheldt. And from the combination of the two Dutch words – ‘hand’ and ‘werpen’ [throw] – came the name of Antwerp. The magnificent fountain on the Grand Market of Antwerp is a lasting reminder of that spectacle.

5 The world’s most frequently stolen art work is from Flanders?



The Lamb of God – also known as the Ghent Altar Piece – by Jan and Hubert van Eyck is not only a key work in art history, it is also the most stolen work of art ever. In its six century history, this multi-panelled work has been the subject of no less than thirteen crimes. During the Napoleonic wars and the Second World War, for example, the work was hauled away by the occupiers. And even today, at least one crime remains unsolved. In 1934, two side panels of this painting were stolen, and only one has been



Photo: Jennifer Pallian

recovered. The panel featuring The Righteous Judges remains missing.

6 Praline was invented in Brussels?

The Belgians are not only masters of beer, but also of another delicacy: chocolate. This treat has been around for nearly 500 years in our region. And in 1912, the chocolatier Jean Neuhaus took it a step further. In that year, in Brussels, he made the very

first filled chocolate bonbon. He dubbed the succulent concoction ‘praline’. From then on, the culinary world would never be the same again – thanks to Mr Neuhaus.

7 The world’s longest tramway is in Flanders?

Flanders may be small in size, but that has a lot of upsides. It makes public transport the perfect way to discover the region. The trams that wind their way through the major cities of Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent are a good example. And added to this is the longest tramline in the world: the coastal tram. Its route runs parallel with the entire Flemish North Sea Coast. That adds up to no less than 67 kilometres of tramlines. It is the ideal way of going from one pearl along the North Sea to another, from a museum, via one of the many mussel restaurants, to the next sunny place.

8 A person from Flanders worked on the development of the very first version of the world-wide web?

It’s strange how quickly things can go. Can you imagine modern life without internet? Robert Cailliau



Photo: Jay Winnington



from Flanders can take a lot of credit in the development of the World Wide Web. In 1989 he was working in the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), working in collaboration with Tim Berners-Lee, leading to the very first version of the

world-wide web. This unsung hero from Flanders played a crucial part in recent world history, sending society in a totally new direction.

9 Nowhere else in the world can you eat so well as here?

Our tiny little Flanders has no less than 94 restaurants with one or more Michelin stars. That is the highest density of first-class eating establishments in the world. Anyone who enjoys great food will find more than enough to their taste here. And that’s not the end of the story. There is a fantastic range of food for every conceivable budget.

BRUEGEL PAINTINGS

The most Famous Masterpieces of the Artist

By OKSANA KOPENKINA,
art analyst, founder of the Arts Diary & Pad website



Peter Bruegel the Elder. *The Fall of Icarus*. 1558

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525/30–1569) is often called the successor to Jerome Bosch. Yes, at first glance, some of their artworks are similar. Bruegel, like Bosch, created crowded canvases. But they are as different as Malevich and Chagall. Both are avant-garde artists. But one is about squares, the other is about love. Bosch is a medieval surrealist. He has a lot of monsters from terrible dreams. Bruegel is a realist. He portrayed ordinary people, townspeople, beggars. Strange creatures in

his paintings are a rarity. Bosch has refined, delicate figures. Bruegel has big-shouldered peasants. In this, Bruegel was more likely influenced by Michelangelo than Bosch. Bosch “talks” about the fear of the fall. Bruegel is about human stupidity and the futility of life.

There are too many differences to put Bosch and Bruegel in the same row.

Here are just a few of Bruegel's masterpieces. They will help you understand such a unique painter as Peter Bruegel the Elder.

The Fall of Icarus

The painting is called “The Fall of Icarus.” But where is Icarus actually?

In the foreground is a plowman. A little further away is a shepherd with sheep. In the background are the sea and mountains.

Oh yes, in the lower right corner between the fisherman and the ship – Icarus fell into the sea. He was almost immersed in water. Only his legs are still visible. And a few feathers are

spinning around... Why do we see such a neglect of the main character?

It is believed that Bruegel thus illustrated the popular wisdom “No plow will stop while someone dies.”

Bruegel portrayed that no one noticed the death of the young man. Neither a fisherman, nor a plowman, nor a shepherd. None of them quit their occupation. The ship also sailed past. Such indifference of the world to the tragedy of one person is discouraging.

Such was the world of Bruegel.

The Tower of Babel

The Tower of Babel incredibly combines panoramic and miniature painting. Details of the picture are simply amazing.

You can see that there are a lot of temporary buildings along the walls. But judging by the female figures and the hanging clothes, the workers' families have already moved to them. It already looks more like an anthill than a majestic tower.

Don't you find it strange that construction is going on at almost every level? It would seem that the lower levels should have already been completed, and work should only be done at the top. But no, work goes



Peter Bruegel the Elder. *The Tower of Babel*. 1563

everywhere. Obviously, people understand each other a little. Therefore, they can't agree on how to build a tower.

But at the very least, they manage to maintain the integrity of the building. And even live in it with their families.

Despite the misunderstanding of each other, ultimately, we manage to save our fragile human world. All in patches, all in scaffolding. But it continues to stand.



Bruegel the Elder. *Hunters in the snow*. 1565

Hunters in the snow

“Hunters in the Snow” is one of the main masterpieces of the Renaissance. What is so special about it?

The space of the picture is slightly concave inward. As if painted on the inside of a giant bowl. The effect of incredible, sucking depth.

Of course, Bruegel purposely distorts the perspective. Otherwise, everything would not fit in such a limited space.

The picture blows quiet joy. Small cares and games of people combined with grandiose mountains and snowy valleys. The world is not at all hostile to man. On the contrary, if you respect his greatness and adapt, he will give you everything you need.

An unexpected philosophy for the time in which Bruegel lived. America was already discovered. People increasingly became convinced of their superiority. And less and less they thought about unity with nature.

That was Bruegel. His personal worldview was different from the generally accepted.

PROTECTION OF THE THEOTOKOS

AUGUSTIN SOKOLOVSKI,
Priest, Doctor of Theology

The adornment of the month of October, the culmination of the whole autumn, a symbol of the changing times and an echo of ancient Church and Russian history is the Feast of the Intercession of the Theotokos. This day is celebrated annually by the Church on the 14th of October, marking the end of the first half of Autumn.

According to the Church Statutes, the Feast of Feasts, the main celebration of the liturgical year is Easter. It is the most important holiday. It is above all. Then the twelve feasts follow, as if by a step below. Hence, they are called Twelve Great Feasts. Each of them is directly linked to the History of Salvation or sacred history. The content of the liturgical texts is taken from both Scripture and the Apocrypha. The latter refers to the earthly life of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross, celebrated on 27th of September, stands out in this series of celebrations. It stands out clearly from all other celebrations, both in the circumstances of its appearance and in its content.

The Exaltation is at the same time a historical holiday, or holiday in history or – better – a holiday of history. For it is dedicated to the finding of the Cross under Emperor Constantine (+337), and then under Heraclius (+641). The Exaltation is also an ideological or theological feast. For it brings with it the idea of the union and the synergy of Christianity and the Empire. And finally, the Exaltation is a celebration in honor of the Cross of Christ as a holy, re-

vered and worshipped object.

The hierarchy of Feasts in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, beginning with Easter, continuing with the twelve feasts, continues with the next step consisting of five celebrations. The Feast of the Circumcision, which coincides with the beginning of the new civil year on 1 (14 January), is a celebration of the appearing of the Lord Jesus as both the son of the biblical people of Israel and the Messiah on whom the promises of God have been fulfilled. The Nativity of John the Baptist commemorates the birth of the one whom Christ Himself in the Gospel calls “the greatest among those born of women” and whom the Church considers the greatest of all prophets. The beheading of John the Baptist is a mournful remembrance of his martyrdom. The commemoration of the Apostles Peter and Paul, whom tradition calls “the first among the apostles”, commemorates those on whose work and word the Church was built. This emphasized “equivalence” or the equality of the two Apostles in the work of building up the Church which is particularly characteristic of Orthodoxy.

It is obvious that the Intercession stands out here, and we will examine the reasons for this in the following paragraphs. It falls out of the structure of the four feasts. First of all, historically it comes much later. The occasion of its appearance, as it is generally accepted, is caused by two events. The first took place under Emperor Heraclius; the second, about three centuries later, and relates to the vita of the

great saint, St. Andrew the Fool for Christ (+936). Both events took place in Constantinople.

It turns out that the Emperor Heraclius, with whose name the Feast of the Exaltation is directly related, is also directly connected with the event of the Intercession of the Cross in bringing it back from captivity. After all, in the period when Heraclius led his armies in the Roman-Persian wars, the Capital Constantinople was saved from the invasion of the Avars and Slavs by the power of the Intercession of the Theotokos. Moreover, if to proceed from the religious essence of events, the Emperor also went to a campaign for the Cross of the Christ. In turn, the Avars and Slavs wanted therefore to take advantage of his absence. Through the prayers of the Virgin the City was saved. It is noteworthy that it was at this very moment, dedicated to deliverance, that the great Akathist to the Most Holy Mother of God was composed. Through prayers before the Blessed Virgin, the City was delivered from danger.

The second historical component of the feast of the Intercession is linked to the name of St. Andrew. St. Andrew is one of the most venerated saints of the Church of Constantinople. According to the hagiography, during the time of the barbarian invasion when the city’s inhabitants prayed to God for deliverance, the saint saw heaven opened and the Theotokos in the temple. The Blessed Virgin prayed for deliverance of the City and stretched her cloak, i.e. cloak, mantle, omophorion, over it.

So, based on two historical episodes, the event of the Intercession is a historical celebration. However, and this is a surprising parallel between the Exaltation and the Intercession, the content of the feast is not limited to history. After all, in addition to biblical and sacred history, the Virgin Mary has a very special role in providence and salvation. The Divine dispensation, that is the Work of God aimed at completing the History of the universe, finds in Her, or through Her, new and – in this very newness – paradoxical ways of its realisation.

As it clearly happens in the events that served as a justification for the celebration of the Intercession, the Virgin “intervenes” in the course not only of sacred, holy, but also profane, secular, in this case “urban”, imperial history. She protects, intercedes, preserves the city with Her cover. As it says in the great penitential canon of St. Andrew of Crete: “Preserve Thy city, O Mother of God. By Thee faithfully reigning, by Thee it is established. By Thee, overcoming all temptation, triumphing over enemies, and passing through obedience”. In this aspect, the celebration of the Intercession takes on an ideological and theological significance.

Finally, the Intercession of the Theotokos finds its semantic localisation in the material, or so to speak, in the material aspect of the celebration. For the Protection of the Virgin is also a shrine: her garment, her robe, her blessing. A concrete material object, which in the light of God’s saving work has acquired a special symbolic meaning, but which remains in its literal, man-made, tangible dimension. In this sense it is important to mention the cloak, or Robe of the Blessed Virgin preserved in the Cathedral of Chartres, or the Girdle of the Virgin preserved on Athos. The shrines associated with the life of the Virgin are of special importance, especially because, according to tradition, the faith of the Church and theology after her death or, as it is called in the



Icon of the Protection of the Theotokos

liturgy, the Dormition, the Virgin did not rest in the tomb, but was bodily taken up by God to Heaven.

It is considered that the Feast of the Intercession was established in Russia by the holy Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky (+1174). He especially venerated Saint Andrew of Constantinople, that is why an episode from the life of this saint served for him as an occasion for the introduction of the liturgical feast of the Protection. Among other things Andrei is linked with the name of transferring or, more precisely, moving of the

capital centre of Rus’ from Kiev to Vladimir. Besides, when killed by the boyars because of jealousy, i.e. “innocently murdered”, Andrei Bogolyubsky became a “passion bearer” for the Church. He was killed, but suffered not for the Christian faith, and therefore he could not be considered a martyr. A similar thing had already happened in the case of Princes Boris and Gleb (+1015). In order to overcome this “obstacle” in the distinction of the holiness of martyrs and passion-bearers, the Russian Church, for the first time in history intro-

duced a separate rank of holiness. Much later, on the threshold of the third millennium, Tsar Nicholas II (+1918) and his family were recognised by the Church as martyrs – the Tsar who was innocently and brutally murdered. Thus the “absence of visible suffering for the faith” as an obstacle to his glorification was removed.

It is accepted that the Intercession is originally a Russian feast. Like the canonisation of the holiness of the “Passion-Bearers”, it was introduced at the dawn of the history of the Russian Church and only later began to be celebrated in other, first of all, Balkan Orthodox Churches. The genius of the Russian tradition, when applied to the feast of the Protecting Veil of Mary, lies above all in the capacity to see through the prism of the historical events of the saving of the City and also the political, or even military, dimension of the veneration of the Mother of God in Constantinople, a profound ideological and theological content. In fact, once, twice – and for the eyewitnesses of those events and for historians – repeatedly saving the City has not obscured for the Russian mind the genuine, semantically important and theologically relevant component of the participation of the Virgin in the destinies of history. Her participation in the housebuilding and economy of God in the World.

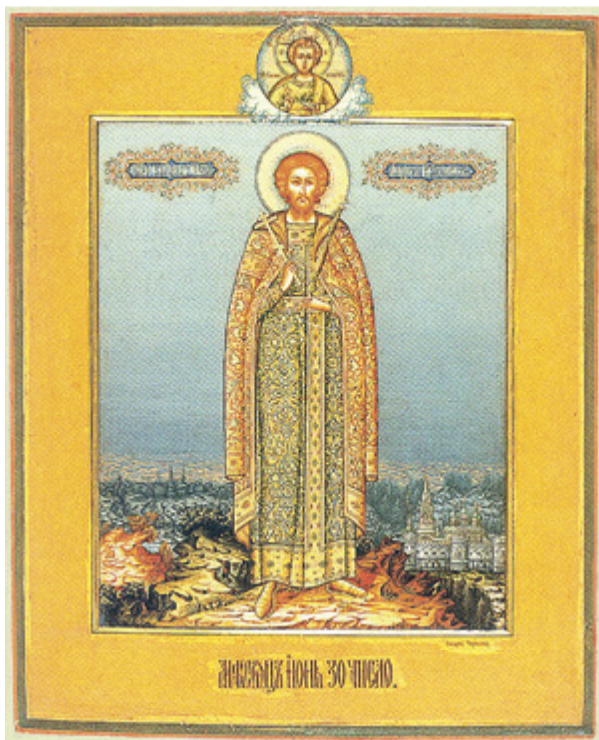
Researchers tell us that in the first centuries of its existence the Russian Church tradition was not able to express itself in the language of theology or philosophy. Up until the very nineteenth century, until the emergence of Russian religious philosophy, our Church was unable to give the world a single truly and universally significant thinker, philosopher or theologian. Nevertheless, an amazing counterbalance to this silence and inability, inability, and inadequacy, was the Russian Orthodox icon. “Speculation in colours” as this phenomenon has been designated by scholars. And here, in the realm of the juxtaposition of the feast, theory and icon,

we encounter a new and surprising contextualisation of... the Intercession.

The fact is that the Greek tradition does not know its own images of the feast of the Intercession. The Russian tradition, on the contrary, gave birth to various types of appropriate icons. The Intercession found its continuation in the Church architecture: it is enough to remember Saint Basil's Cathedral on Red Square, the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl and other masterpieces of the medieval past dedicated to the Intercession of the Mother of God.

This speculation in colours reflects one very deep intuition which reveals the Orthodox understanding of the dogma of the Mother of God. According to Western Christian tradition, the Virgin Mary is the Mother of the Church. In the icons of Pentecost, that is the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, she is shown seated in the centre, in the middle, and thus at the head of the disciples of Christ. The Apostles are arranged as if around Her, thereby testifying that the Virgin in Western theological thought is both the image, the prototype and the representation of the Church. In Eastern Orthodoxy, the Virgin Mary is something else.

Perhaps the most famous of the texts dedicated to her, the Angel's Greeting at the Annunciation, says to her: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you”. In turn, the frequently repeated words in the divine service call her “Most honorable Cherubim and most glorious Seraphim without comparison”. At the



Icon of Saint Andrei Bogolyubsky

same time, and this intuition is very important to grasp, Our Lady is the image of every believer. An image which, in the case of Mary herself, by the power of grace has become an infinite openness of the human person, spirit, soul and body, towards God.

There is something profoundly anthropological in this celebration, straight and directly related to humanity and to each person individually. In fact, there is an infinite degree of potentiation of human nature revealed in Our Lady. The image of God, as the givenness and likeness of God, as the capacity for infinite perfection, which in Christ Jesus makes man “a partaker of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1,4). The maximally “potentialised” image of the human soul and body in the Lord and God. As it is sung in church hymns, spoken of in biblical texts and proclaimed in the dogma of faith in the Lord Jesus, “incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of Mary the Virgin”. In this sense, the Intercession is a celebration in honor of every person in Christ.

The Exaltation and the Intercession are thus direct analogues, or

better not contradictory antipodes. It is of the utmost importance that the Intercession did not “become” one of the twelve greatest feasts. For in the veneration of the Lord Jesus and the Theotokos there must be an irresistible and necessary, unmistakable hierarchy. The glorification of the Lord Jesus and the adoration of the Holy Cross in the Exaltation, who is absolutely inseparable from Him who was crucified thereon, is based on the unmistakable witness of faith in Him as Redeemer, Savior, Lord and God. God – as an infinite self-addressed, entered history.

The veneration of Our Lady is different. Repeatedly repeating the invocation, “Our Lady, save us” during the service, the Church does not forget its theological conventionality. For, according to Scripture, there is only one God who is able to save and to destroy (cf. James 4,12). Accordingly, the invocation to the Blessed Virgin for salvation means a request for help, and is in fact a trans-semantic translation of the ancient apostolic cry, “Blessed Virgin Mary, help us!”.

It turns out that if the Feast of the Intercession were to become one of the twelve greatest feasts, this would mean a kind of bias towards late Catholic theology which, in its polemic with Protestantism, was characterised by a parallelism between the work of the Lord Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary. In this case, the Mother of God, in the positive sense of the word, becomes a kind of “counterbalance” to Christ. The Cross and the Veil become analogous signs of the same saving power of God. But this is not the case. The Exaltation remains the Exaltation, and the Intercession remains the Intercession. By making the Intercession “only” a “great”, the Russian theological tradition has thus created, on the level of celebration, veneration, “speculation in colours”, a representation of the two households or –better – a hierarchy within one and the same household of the Lord and God. This is also what the text of the Creed says, “I believe in the Lord Jesus, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate”. This immediately follows the confession

of “the Lord, incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary”.

The Intercession is as a celebration of the saving gift of grace. The Intercession is as salvation in spite of it. Contrary to historical circumstances, contrary to circumstances of incapacity.

“A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head” (Rev.12,1). There is a version that the crescent moon, was originally a symbol of Our Lady and Constantinople. Many of us here are reminded of the Old Russian sign of the cross and the crescent on many churches and cathedrals. Thus the Cross and the Intercession find their surprising correspondence in signs, symbols and theology. The reverse logic, the vectorial movement of the words of confession from Our Lady to Pontius Pilate, is extremely important and interesting. This aspect of adoration before the shrine, left as a precious relic of the Blessed Virgin, turns the Feast of the Intercession into a kind of Exaltation in Honor of the Blessed Virgin. The Cross becomes the Christological covering of the whole universe and of every person. “Cover us from all evil with your holy omophorion”, says the Akathist. “We magnify Thee, Most Holy Virgin, for Thou art seen by Saint Andrew on the air, praying for us”, is sung in the Exaltation of the Intercession. The Cross of Christ as an irresistible protection, the Intercession of the Theotokos as a sign of the soon unfolding and completion of the history of salvation from the Lord and God.



Icon of Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross

TRAVEL

GERMANY'S HIDDEN GEMS

By ELLA LARINA

A trip that extends beyond tourist hotspots is always a trip to remember, whether you encounter a huge beach, a nostalgic industrial heritage or a massive crater from prehistoric times. Explore these off-the-beaten-track highlights and you will get to know Germany from an entirely new perspective.

Amrum — the largest beach in Europe

Off we go to the mudflats of northern Germany. The island of Amrum is situated in Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mudflat hikes are exciting enough, but then there's Kniepsand, Europe's largest sandy beach. There is always a secluded spot to place your towel, even in the height of summer.

The island is made up of a sandy core of geestland and features an extended beach all along its west coast, facing the open North Sea. The east coast instead borders to mud flats and tidal creeks of the Wadden Sea. Sand dunes are a characteristic part of Amrum's landscape, resulting in a vegetation that is largely made up of heath and shrubs. The island's only forest was planted in 1948. Amrum is a refuge for many species of birds and a number of marine mammals like grey seal or harbour porpoise.

Settlements on Amrum have been traced back to the Neolithic when the area was still a part of the mainland of the Jutland peninsula. During the Middle Ages, Frisian settlers arrived at Amrum and engaged in salt making and seafaring. A part of the modern population still speaks Öömrang, a dialect of the North Fri-



sian language, and Frisian traditions are kept alive.

With the island hosting many endangered species of plants and animals, its soil being largely unfavourable for agriculture and as a popular seaside resort in general, Amrum's population today almost exclusively lives from the tourism industry.

Back to the Vikings

The town of Schleswig is also located in Schleswig-Holstein. The small town on the Schlei inlet dates back to the 9th century. The Vikings used to

live in the region, and they expanded their settlement into a gigantic stronghold: Hedeby. Many Germans are unaware of this heritage from the Norse people – the region first became German territory in 1864. Merchants from all over the world met here between the 8th and 12th centuries. Often fought over, Hedeby was ultimately destroyed. The Viking Age lives on today in a village of reconstructed huts. Hedeby was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2018.

Our quest for insider tips now takes us to Uckermark in Brandenburg, a district to the north of Ber-

lin, where a mystical wood awaits: Grumsin Forest, one of the world's largest continuous beech forests. In 2011, parts of the forest were included in the Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe UNESCO

ation. The pressure on timber as a resource may increase due to international demand and European companies may start large-scale felling in neighbouring Ukraine.

Currently unprotected areas of virgin forest can be permanently

preserved in the Ukrainian Carpathians by expanding and reinforcing conservation areas. In the Ukrainian Carpathians there are nine national parks and two biosphere reserves. There is a general ban on tree felling in coniferous for-

World Heritage Site. A 20-kilometre circular route takes walkers to hidden lakes and moors via an ancient forest path. This is a lovely and cool place to be in summer.

The last intact virgin forest in the temperate latitudes of Europe is to be found in the Carpathians. Trees can live to a hundred years old in these forests, providing an important habitat for organisms such as mushrooms, moss, lichen, insects, rare birds (e.g. capercaillie and black grouse) and mammals (e.g. bats, brown bear, wolf and lynx). Large parts of the forest in the Romanian part of the Carpathians have been lost due to deforest-

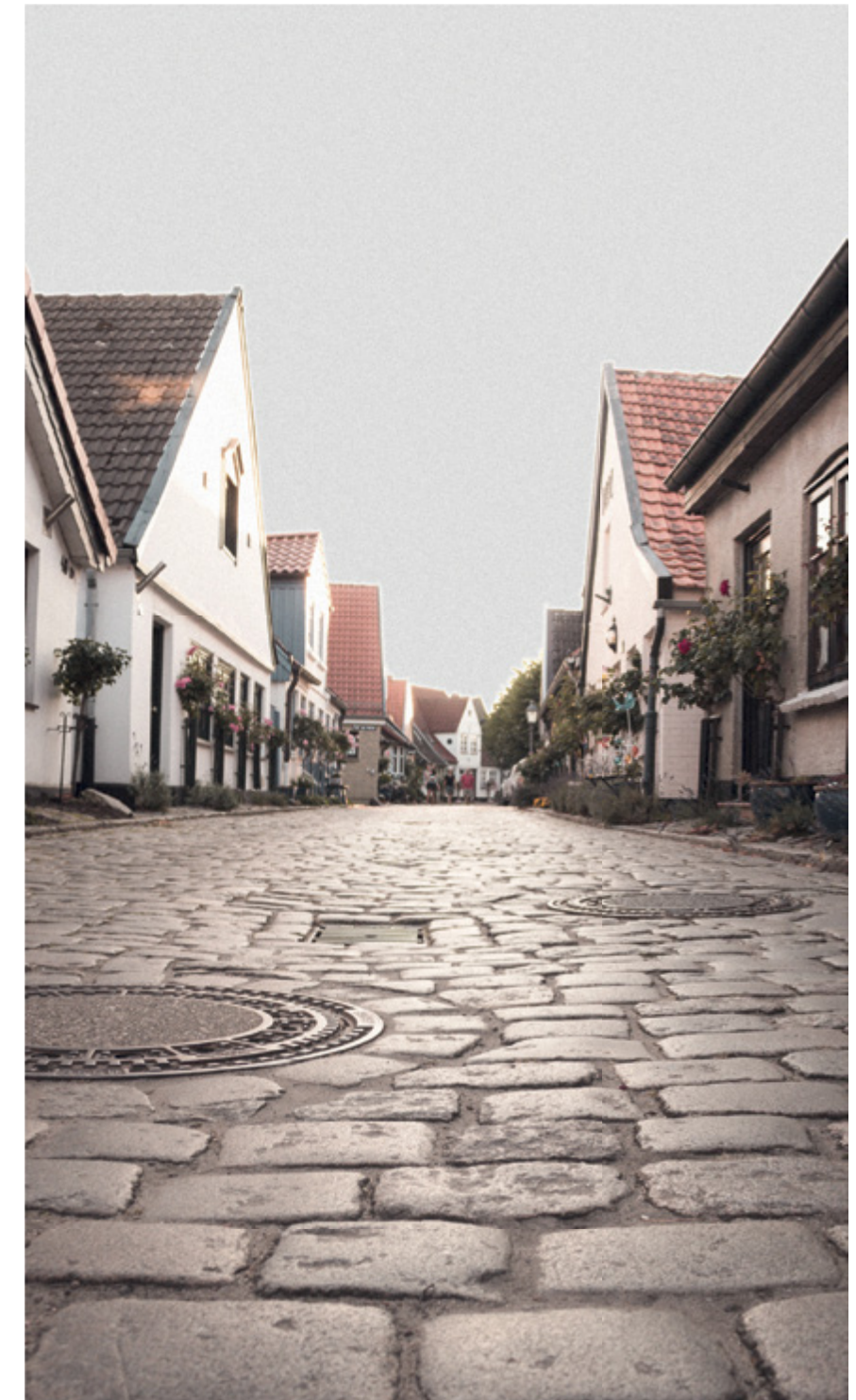


Photo: Ibrahim Rifath

est areas above 1,100 metres. If park administrations are shown to work, management of larger, previously unprotected areas of virgin forest to preserve them on a permanent basis, may occur. There are roughly 100,000 additional hectares of forest which could be integrated into the existing conservation areas.

Rhine's natural beauty

It is difficult to find another region of Germany that evokes more romantic feelings than the Rhine. A trip along the river is like a voyage into a fairy-tale land, with no fewer than 60 picturesque castles and formidable



Photo: Hardie van Zyl

fortresses presiding over the river from the surrounding hilltops.

The most beautiful time of all is early morning, when a dawn mist wafts gently over the river. Castles are shrouded in the haze and ruins rise up from the mist like heavenly towers. Birds twitter cheerfully from the riverbanks. The first rays of sunshine shimmer on the gently flowing wa-

ters of the Rhine and ignite sparkling highlights among the fine droplets of dew covering the vineyards.

The magical and romantic atmosphere of the Rhine is almost impossible to resist. Even around 200 years ago, painters and poets of the Romantic period had discovered the fairy-tale beauty of these river landscapes between Lake Constance and the Dutch border. Philosopher Friedrich von Schlegel was impressed by the “proud castles on wild cliffs”, while poet Heinrich von Kleist spoke of the “most beautiful expanse of land in Germany where our great gardeners have so clearly worked con amore”. Painters such as William Turner picked up their brushes to capture the magic of these landscapes for posterity. Poets including Friedrich Hölderlin and Heinrich Heine were inspired to pen lyrical verses. With artists in the role of pioneers, the Rhine’s reputation as a travel destination grew. By the start of the 19th century, a visit to the Rhine region was the highlight of the “grand tours” by English high society.

The sight of the Middle Rhine between Bingen and Bonn, carving a narrow passage through the Rhenish Slate Mountains, with vine-covered slopes, knight’s castles, magnificent palaces and quaint fishing villages, thrilled the hearts of the early romantics. Today, the Upper Middle Rhine Valley from Bingen to Koblenz is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Westhavelland Nature Park

Until 1990, just under 100 kilometres of the Elbe river marked the border between East and West Ger-

many. The region is still just as sparsely populated today – perfect for stargazing. There is hardly any industry, streetlamps or any other form of artificial light to tarnish the view of the night sky around Gülpe, making it the darkest place in Germany. Whether you want to spot shooting stars or the lunar eclipse, there is no better place to gaze at the sky than the Dark Sky Reserve in Westhavelland. There are now other dark sky parks in the Rhön Mountains, the Eifel low mountain range and the Chiemgau Alps. This abundance of natural beauty before the gates of Berlin earned the nature park the ‘Star Park Westhavelland’ designation – Germany’s first star park!

The lowland of the lower Havel is one of the largest continuous wetlands in western Central Europe and a habitat for many endangered animal and plant species. This is where one can find wading and water birds, beavers and Eur-



Photo: Max Saeling



sian otters, white-tailed eagles and red kites as well as Germany’s last great bustards.

The Alps are impressive. Insider tip: the German Central Uplands even more so. Here too, you can hike without seeing another soul. The Elbe Sandstone Mountains in Saxony with their table mountains, pinacles, gorges, rivers and forests are particularly appealing, and they just so happen to be a climbing paradise that holds its own as the alleged birthplace of free climbing. More than 1,000 free-standing sandstone rocks can be scaled here. You can book lessons in climbing schools

from Bad Schandau right through to Königstein.

Impact craters and smoked beer

It’s no secret that the Germans brew an abundance of beer. But have you heard of smoked beer? This liquid delicacy, which smells a little like smoked meat, comes from Bamberg. Several breweries in the town in Upper Franconia, Bavaria still make their beer today using traditional recipes – a practice not found anywhere else. Back in the day, smoked beer was the only beer, as it only became technically possible to malt without the use of smoke through industrialisation. At any rate, there is an impressively high density of breweries here. There is a total of 60 in the vicinity, and they brew around 400 different beer styles.

You can go on walks from brewery to brewery and learn how to make traditional beer on beer courses.

Nördlingen, a two-hour drive to the south of Bamberg, is the site of a catastrophic event in the Earth’s history. Fortunately, it was a long time ago. And yet the history is omnipresent, for the pure fact that Nördlingen is situated 150 metres deeper in the ground than the surrounding area, as the town was built in a crater.

A meteorite hit the Earth 14.5 million years ago at a speed of 70,000 kilometres per hour. It tore an impact crater 25 kilometres in diameter into the ground: the Nördlinger Ries, the best-preserved crater in Europe. Guided tours are available almost every day at Geopark Ries. You can also learn more about the impacts of this prehistoric cosmic encounter on Earth at the Ries Crater Museum in Nördlingen.

WORLD OF CHANGE

CLIMATE OBJECTIVES COULD FALL SHORT WITHOUT NUCLEAR POWER

By STEVEN SCHMIDT

According to UN, the urgent need to reduce emissions and slow global heating, should involve the roll-out of more nuclear power stations.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has released a document arguing that nuclear power can help deliver on the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“Nuclear power is an important source of low-carbon electricity and heat that can contribute to attaining carbon neutrality and hence help to mitigate climate change,” UNECE Executive Secretary Olga Algayerova said.

In the new technology brief published on Wednesday, the agency warned that “time is running out to rapidly transform the global energy system,” as fossil fuels still account for over half of electricity generation in the UNECE region, which include the countries of Europe, but also countries in North America, Central Asia and Western Asia.



The Gösgen Nuclear Power Plant (in German Kernkraftwerk Gösgen, abbreviated in KKG) is located in the Däniken municipality (canton of Solothurn, Switzerland) on a loop of the Aare river. It is operated by the ad hoc society Kernkraftwerk Gösgen-Däniken AG.

Photo: Patrick Federi

The report highlights how only hydropower has played a greater role in avoiding carbon emissions over the past 50 years.

Nuclear power is a low-carbon energy source that has avoided about 74Gt

of CO₂ emissions over this period, nearly two years' worth of total global energy-related emissions, it noted.

Yet nuclear power currently provides 20 per cent of electricity generated in the UNECE region and 43 per cent of low-carbon generation.

Still time to limit climate change

The publication comes as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its landmark report on Monday, warning that some climate change trends are currently now irreversible, but there is still time to limit it with strong and sustained reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases.

The UNECE document also highlighted a 2018 report by the IPCC which sees demand for nuclear generation increase six times by 2050 with the technology providing 25% of global electricity. Nuclear power, it stated, has the potential to increase its integration with other low-carbon energy sources in a future decarbonised energy mix.

Powering the region

According to the document, in the UNECE region, nuclear power is providing over 30% of electric generation in eleven countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine).

Twenty countries currently operate nuclear power plants, and fifteen

countries have new reactors under construction or under development. Seven UNECE member States are in the process of developing nuclear power programmes for the first time.

A number of countries – such as Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Russia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States – have explicitly stated that nuclear power will play an important role in reducing their national emissions in the future.

Climate mitigation

In contrast, Belgium and Germany have announced phasing out nuclear power, in 2025 and 2023 respectively.

Over 70 reactors have been shut down since 2000, for political, economic or technical reasons.

In most cases, these have been replaced at least partly by fossil-fuel power generation. The report argues that this represents a setback for climate mitigation efforts. Preventing the premature closure of further nuclear power plants is seen by the International Energy Agency and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as an urgent priority for addressing climate change, it states.

Nuclear options

As nuclear power plants produce both low-carbon electricity and heat, they also offer opportunities to decarbonise energy intensive industries, the UNECE report argues, such as scaling up low or zero-carbon steel, hydrogen, and chemical production to decarbonise hard-to-abate sectors.

Nuclear power is cost-competitive in many parts of the world, it states. But the UN agency warns that to prevent radiological accidents and manage radioactive waste, risks must be properly anticipated and handled.

Some countries choose not to pursue nuclear power because they consider the risks to be unacceptable. The technology brief highlights the need for nations that use nuclear power to work together on these issues to help mitigate climate change and accelerate deployment of low-carbon technologies.

Radioactive waste and security concerns must be addressed

However, there are persistent public concerns about the potential dangers to health and the environment caused by radioactive waste from nuclear plants. This was addressed earlier in 2019, at the opening of the first-ever International Conference on Climate Change and the Role of Nuclear Power in Vienna. Advances concerning the disposal of such material may alleviate



Photo: Kelly Sikkema

fears about the long-term sustainability of the energy source.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) stated that the problem of radioactive waste is an “unresolved issue” that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Zhenmin also raised nuclear safety, which he described as “a significant public concern, especially after the Fukushima accidents and terrorism related fears”.

The large up-front costs of nuclear power remain an important issue, continued Mr. Zhenmin, and renewable energies, such as solar and wind, are continuing to drop in price, becoming increasingly competitive with conventional, fossil-fuel based sources. Meeting the capital costs of building nuclear plants will require government commitments, and public acceptance.

Nuclear technology's 'important role in society'

Nuclear technology plays an important and positive role in society, added Mr. Zhenmin. He outlined some of the benefits, such as monitoring pollution, and assisting in the diagnosis and treatment of cancers and other major diseases, and pointed out that radiation technology helps prevent food from spoiling, and to create new crop varieties, which supports climate change adaptation.

Mr. Zhenmin referred to the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the UN body tasked with providing objective, scientific reports on the changing climate, which has shown that far-reaching changes to the way we produce energy must occur if we are to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

In its various models for a sustainable energy future, the IPCC has included significant increases in nuclear power generation by 2050, ranging from a 59 per cent increase, to a 501 per cent rise.



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EVENTS AND INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL FORUM “BRUSSELS DIALOGUE”

On October 22–23 the youth from Russia and Europe is to discuss the topics of saving the planet and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the period up to 2030, on the platform of the Brussels Dialogue international forum, that the Russian House in Brussels hosts for the third time.

The Forum lets explore the Russian and European experience in achieving the SDGs, in particular those related to the topic of accessible education, health care, environmental protection and the fight against climate change.

The organizers of the forum are aimed at sharing the image of Russia among European youth and compatriots. Russian House in Brussels hosts cultural and social events throughout the year to create a unified cultural, scientific, informational and educational space. A Russian think tank The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, the Russian Humanitarian Mission and the Association of Volunteer Centers together with the European experts namely the Brussels Diplomatic Academy, UN SDG Youth Leaders, UN Youth Dele-

gates from Belgium, UN Information Center in Brussels and UN modelers from leading Belgian universities will collaborate on the forum.

The Russian House in Brussels first organized an international youth dialogue platform in 2019. At the first edition of the forum, experts from Russia and Europe agreed on the need to develop academic exchange and the increased role of the new technologies in leading areas of the economy. In 2020, the forum was held online and was joined by participants from different countries all

around the world. In the year of the 75th anniversary of Victory, the end of World War II and the 75th anniversary of the UN, participants discussed preserving

historical memory and the role of youth in ensuring and developing the world order created after the end of World War II.

Over two days, young professionals will share their views and discuss humanitarian initiatives that will help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

International forum Brussels Dialogue formed a group of permanent participants, young professionals who every year take part in the dialogue and share their opinions. Based on the results of the Brussels Dialogue forum, it is expected to develop a roadmap “Intercultural projects to achieve the SDGs” in order to plan and in the future implement joint intercultural volunteer projects aimed at implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

