

# A b s t r a c t s

## **Green Paper “Zeitenwende” War and Peace in (Eastern) Europe**

**Aleksandr Morozov**

**Europe will have to fight – and it is vital to prepare for this**

Russia has caused the ceasefire negotiations to fail. This shows that Putin will not be persuaded to end the war by flattery or pressure. His chief concern is a reorganisation of the continent. Sooner or later, Europe will have to fight – and it is vital to prepare for this.

**Nikolay Mitrokhin**

**Russia’s War Against Ukraine**

**Weekly Reports August-October 2025**

Russia’s summer offensive has largely failed. However, the occupying forces have weakened the Ukrainian defences at key points in the Donbass, incurring heavy losses in the process. On the ground, both sides are exhausted and are facing major difficulties recruitment, without Russia abandoning its war aims. Thus, US efforts to secure a ceasefire remain fruitless, and the war of attrition continues. In this war, both sides are deploying more and more drones with ever greater range and destructive power. Signs are growing that the Baltic Sea region could become a new theatre of aerial warfare.

**Mattia Nelles**

**Death by a Thousand Pinpricks**

**Attack on the Fight against Corruption in Ukraine**

In July 2025, the Ukrainian government attempted to strip the authorities created to curb corruption of their powers. Only protests and massive international pressure persuaded the president to reverse course. However, the domestic intelligence service and the Attorney General's Office continue to put pressure on the two authorities. The leadership of the Ukrainian state must dispel the mistrust it has itself fostered by clearly committing to the independent institutions that combat corruption, bribery, and similar offences. Otherwise, it will not only jeopardize the state’s goal of EU accession, but also put at risk the Western support that is essential for Ukraine’s survival.

## **Anniversaries**

**Martin M. Simecka**

**How the Helsinki Final Act Changed My Life**

For many years, the Helsinki Final Act, signed in 1975, appeared to be a victory for the communist regimes. They viewed the document as recognition of the division of Europe. Only at the end of the 1980s did it become clear that the Final Act's recognition of human rights had served as a small hammer, chipping away at the concrete of the Soviet empire bit by bit. Yet the Final Act's soft power was unable to prevent either the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan or the murderous actions of Serbian troops in Bosnia and Kosovo. The Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe averted neither Russia's first attack on Ukraine nor the large-scale invasion in February 2022. When autocrats no longer even pretend to respect the law, the old formulas no longer work.

**Przemysław Czapliński**

**From Arch-Europe to Anti-Europe**

**Milan Kundera's Essay on Central Europe**

Milan Kundera's essay "The Kidnapped West" is a classic. In it, he sharply distinguished Central Europe from Russia. Unlike Russia, Central Europe, he wrote, is characterised by the greatest degree of diversity in the most confined amount of space. Cultural richness shapes the identity of Poles, Hungarians, and Czechoslovakians and inspires them to act together. In 1990, Central Europeans began their "return to Europe." They wanted democracy, pluralism, and prosperity. Today, three of the four states are threatened with a relapse into pre-democratic conditions. Kundera is not responsible for the authoritarian turn. But his essay suggested that Central Europe was exceptional, obscured serious modernization deficits, and encouraged the suppression of fundamental truths. However, it remains key to understanding the mixture of inferiority complex and overconfidence that characterizes today's Central European elites.

**Robert Żurek**

**In the Beginning Was the Word**

**The 1965 Letter from the Polish Bishops**

"We grant forgiveness and ask for forgiveness." This sentence from the Polish bishops to their German counterparts on 18 November 1965 came as a thunderbolt. After the monstrous crimes committed by the Germans against Poland during the Second World War and the injustice of the expulsion of Germans from Poland, the bishops' letter laid the foundation for reconciliation. It inspired

many believers to rethink their views, challenged communist propaganda, and called into question the bloc confrontation in Europe. The German bishops reacted with reserve. Shrewder contemporaries saw the letter as “the most courageous and most far-sighted act in Polish post-war history.” Today, Poland’s church is struggling to define its position on the legacy of reconciliation. Right-wing parties, with which most bishops and lay people sympathise, defame reconciliation as German deception. A return to the spirit of the letter exchange could give new impetus to German-Polish relations.

## **Snapshots**

### **Kurt Haven**

#### **Russia’s Police Force**

#### **Signs of Crisis in Times of War**

Russia exhibits many characteristics of a weak state. This is particularly evident in the police force. Poor pay and a repressive working environment in overly centralised structures lead to staff shortages. Instead of solving crimes, police officers focus on meeting quotas. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated the situation. The army attracts men with high pay, while convicted violent criminals escape punishment by going to the front. Police officers see their work devalued. Excessive violence and a collapse of the monopoly on the use of force are not a contradiction.

### **Aleksandr Kynev**

#### **“Elite” Change**

#### **The New Nomenclature in Russia’s Regions**

Russia’s leadership has further tightened its centralised control over the country’s regions since mid-2024. After the invasion of Ukraine, the revolving door of personnel changes had slowed for two and a half years. Between June 2024 and July 2025, however, new governors were installed in 13 regions, while the rotation of other high-ranking positions in the regions also accelerated. With the new appointments, numerous participants in the so-called “special operation” have obtained high office. Some are members of the army. Others are administrative officials previously deployed in the “new territories”.

**Marija Kugel'**

**Wrong and Right People**

**Latvia: Demographics, Migration, Border Regime**

Latvia's population is shrinking. Over the past 20 years, the number of inhabitants has declined by almost 20 per cent. As in many other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, this is due to low birth rates and emigration abroad. The consequences are a labour shortage and growing financial problems for the pension fund. The country needs immigration, but its migration policy is extremely restrictive. Ever since Belarusian dictator Lukashenko began directing people from war-torn regions of the world to the Latvian border, a dehumanising discourse has taken hold in which refugees are seen only as a security risk and tools of Russia's hybrid warfare.

## Reflections

**Hans Janus**

**The End in Sight**

**A Brief History of Eastern European Legal Studies**

Jurisprudential scholarship on Eastern Europe had deep roots in the Federal Republic of Germany. During the East-West conflict, there existed a well-grounded, differentiated body of expertise. The focus was on public and constitutional law, as well as comparative law. The upheaval of 1989/1991, changing priorities at law faculties, and the shortsightedness of universities and government departments have led to the decline of Eastern European legal studies. It faces extinction. Yet, there is a great need in political circles and the general public for in-depth legal knowledge on Eastern Europe. The Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) should assume responsibility, change its research profile, and become a platform for rebuilding legal expertise on Eastern Europe.

**Caroline Breitfelder**

**The Press and Politics**

**Paul Scheffer and the Shakhty Trial 1928**

The Shakhty trial was the first major show trial in Stalin's Soviet Union. Paul Scheffer, Moscow correspondent for Berliner Tageblatt, recognized the political dimension of the proceedings early on. In his articles, Scheffer criticised the judicial nihilism surrounding the trial, which called German-Soviet cooperation

into question. His assessment earned him the displeasure of the Soviet leadership and the German government. The Foreign Office attempted to rein in Scheffer and other German journalists. Scheffer, however, evaded these efforts. Nonetheless, the episode illustrates the central role played by the press in German-Soviet relations during those years.

**Johannes Bent****Ernst Troeltsch and Eastern Europe****On a Region's Appropriation of a German Historical Thinker**

In the interwar era brought with it a reorganisation of historical knowledge. After the experience of the First World War and the revolutions that followed, the question had arisen as to how a reconstruction of the past could provide guidance for the future. In his late work *Historicism and Its Problems* (1923), Ernst Troeltsch, a German philosopher of history, developed an answer that was widely discussed in Eastern Europe. The different interpretations and appropriations of Troeltsch's work in the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere, show the role that the transnational transfer of knowledge played in various national historical cultures. The exchange extended to the micro level of terminology. Troeltsch's work is thus an intersection of European intellectual history and national intellectual histories in Europe.

**Simon Schulz****The Forgotten "Weather War"****An Historical Episode as Reflected in the Soviet Media**

In the early phase of the Cold War, advances in atmospheric physics provided the basis for military research into influencing precipitation. This aroused fears of a looming "weather war". The Soviet Union initially took a sober view of the United States' capabilities in this area. During the Vietnam War, however, when Washington attempted to employ "cloud seeding" to induce heavy rainfall and so reduce the enemy's combat capability, the Soviet press responded with a campaign against the "meteorological aggressors." The Soviet Union initiated the United Nations' Convention on Environmental Warfare (ENMOD) to prevent environmental warfare. It is one of the few international agreements that aims to protect the environment in war.