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## FOREWORD

Ronald Bos

The brutal invasion of the Russian army on February 24th 2022 was a slap in the face of freedom and democracy in Ukraine. It seemed unexpected but had already been predicted fourteen years before by Vladimir Putin during the NATO meeting in Bucharest. He told George W. Bush, 'You know, George, Ukraine is not a state at all. What is Ukraine? A part of the territory is Eastern Europe. Another part, a considerable one, we gave away.' (Kommersant, April 7th 2008). He added that if Ukraine eventually became a member of NATO, Russia could tear away Crimea and the eastern part of Ukraine.

Before this invasion, the 'little wretched evil bearer' (as Lina Kostenko called him in a poem) had already invaded and destroyed thousands of people's lives and many villages and cities in Chechenia and Syria, where Russian bombings are still going on to prop up Putin's counter-part-dictator Bashar al-Assad.

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*Cartooning Ukraine* is a sad sequel to *Cartooning Syria* which featured Syrian cartoons. Syrian cartoonist Mwafaq Katt characterizes the qualities of a cartoonist: 'by drawing a few simple lines, you can summarize a certain case, mock a situation or expose lies.' The cartoons of these Ukrainian artists are not just simple lines, they are the professional artistic expression of their anger and grief about the catastrophe of this cruel and unnecessary war. And they see their cartoons as a way of supporting their fellow citizens and soldiers defending a free Ukraine.

Almost all of them are still living in Ukraine, in the capital Kyiv, in Kharkov and smaller cities. Some had to hide from the invaders or flee the country, like Vladimir Kazanevsky. In the cartoons you will find many images of Putin, since he is the incarnation of evil. He belongs to the former generation of the Soviet Union's KGB, now the FSB, elderly men afraid of forfeiting power and money. They are not willing to give up, and are supported by the so-called oligarchs, the small group of people in Russia who got super rich by cooperating with the leading powers.

The cartoonists make jokes about the president and his followers, and they tell them in strong drawings and language to 'fuck off'. See how Ukrainian marines responded to the Russian vessel attacking them with missiles in April 2022: 'Russian warship, go fuck yourself', or Max Moshkovsky in his cartoon 'Ukraine is kicking ass'. The cartoonists use humor as their weapon, but one subject is certainly not to be mocked: 'You don't make jokes about the death of Ukrainians.' (Antonio Fischetti in *Charlie Hebdo*, May 22nd 2022).

The Koffi Annan Courage in Cartooning Award-winning cartoonist Vladimir Kazanevsky says: 'Autocrats and dictators are afraid of our

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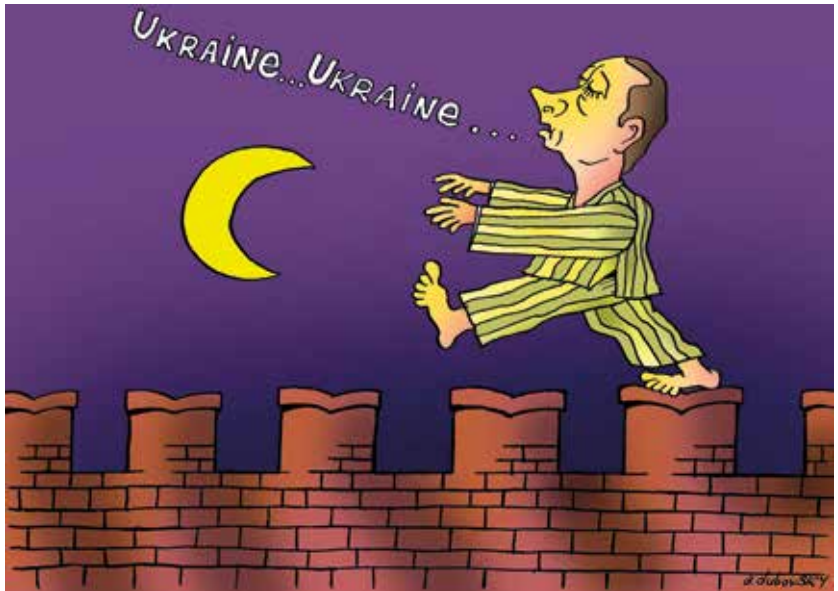
cartoons, and they are right, because our drawings are powerful weapons.' He sees his work as an act of resistance, as an act of defence of the freedom to speak out against war propaganda.

After February 24th, Andrej Kurkov was warned to flee the country because of his writings about Putin and his politics, especially the satirical novel *The President's Last Love* (2004) which was banned in Russia. He says about the resistance, 'Ukrainians consider freedom more important than stability. To lose this freedom that Ukrainians have now means to go back into the Soviet time, to become frightened slaves of the system and become like Russians. They understand that if there is no Ukraine, there will be no freedom for them.' Kurkov stopped writing fiction and is writing essays and diaries, like the short story in this book. He sees it as a task for writers to let the world know about the tragedy in Ukraine.

In this book you will find cartoons by fourteen Ukrainian artists, together with short biographies. They all supported the exhibition and the book with their cartoons. One of them wrote, 'I and all the Ukrainian people want criminals from Russia to suffer the deserved punishment for their crimes and atrocities that they commit in Ukraine. I am glad to help you bring all the pain and sorrow that the Russian soldiers and their leader Putin brought to our land. And most importantly, if we do not stop Putin in Ukraine, he will continue to seize Europe and kill Europeans from the European Union.'

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## OLEG GUTSOL

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