Atlas Network's review of the worldwide freedom movement

FREEDOM'S CHAMPION

WINTER 2025

DEFYING DICTATORS

Heroes in Georgia Risk It All for Freedom in Europe

ATLAS NETWORK

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Cover image: Georgia's Future Academy, winner of the 2025 Templeton Freedom Award, and their allies are organizing, educating, and training their communities to defend individual rights and economic freedom. They face an increasingly authoritarian and Russia-friendly government that has already implemented a Kremlin-style "Foreign Agents Law" that severely restricts civil society. Georgia's future, whether it moves toward liberty and democracy or toward Putin's orbit, hangs in the balance. Cover art by Steven Green.

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FREEDOM'S CHAMPION

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ATLAS NETWORK

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

The ideas of freedom work!

As a regular reader of Atlas Network's magazine, *Freedom's Champion*, you know a central truth: **the ideas of freedom work.**

But we need to take to heart an addendum to the above sentence. Yes, freedom works, **but only when we work for it.**

All over the world, we see confused economic policy because most people are locked in a zero-sum mindset. We see the civility of countries deteriorate when they neglect the importance of individual rights and when they elevate a simpleminded view of good government as "the majority rules."

It's our job in the freedom movement to shine a light on what's often taken for granted—the spontaneous orders that form via open markets, and the blessings that flow from protecting every person's freedom and dignity via a neutral rule of law.

This is hard work. Sometimes, it's work that requires large measures of courage. For example, our cover story is devoted to the brave efforts of Georgia's Future Academy to stand up for the freedom of association and free speech in the increasingly authoritarian Republic of Georgia. Dissidents risk heavy fines, property seizure, police brutality, and even imprisonment for voicing opposition to Ivanishvili's authoritarian regime, which maintains deep political and financial ties with the Kremlin. Our partners don't shrink in front of these threats. They proudly stand for the principles of a free society.

This is why it was such an honor to shine our biggest spotlight on the great work of Georgia's Future Academy. In November, this resilient team was cheered at our annual gala, Freedom Dinner, as they accepted the 2025 Templeton Freedom Award among a set of five other worthy finalists and in front of an incredible crowd of freedom advocates like you.

The rest of this issue of *Freedom's Champion* calls attention to other important lessons we saw at our big event in New York City. First and foremost, the ranks of the freedom movement are growing stronger, as you'll see in our Alumni in Focus feature and our profile of organizations that we presented to our donor community as Smart Bets for 2026. Our article about our partners in South Africa, who are challenging race-based laws that divide rather than unite, is an eloquent reminder that human dignity depends on individual rights—not identity politics. Our profile of Dan Grossman, longtime board member of Atlas Network and recipient of our 2025 Sir Antony Fisher Achievement Award, showcases the way an individual can make a tremendous difference for our cause by embracing the non-glamorous but essential work of nonprofit governance.

Yes, freedom works, but only when we work for it. I'm grateful that so many of our readers dig deep—as activists, board members, and philanthropists—to make the cause of freedom part of their life's legacy. I hope you always recognize that Atlas Network is the natural home—and a great source of continued inspiration—for all who love liberty.

Brad

Brad Lips
Chief Executive Officer,
Atlas Network

The Templeton Freedom Award 2025

Awarded annually since 2004, Atlas Network's Templeton Freedom Award is named for the late investor and philanthropist Sir John Templeton. This prestigious award honors Sir John's legacy by recognizing Atlas Network's partner organizations for exceptional and innovative contributions to the understanding of free enterprise and the advancement of public policies that encourage prosperity, innovation, and human fulfillment.

The award is generously supported by Templeton Religion Trust and was presented live during Atlas Network's 2025 Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner in New York City. The Templeton Freedom Award includes a total of US$300,000 in prizes for winners and finalists. It is the signature prize in a program that in 2025 awarded US$370,000 to high-achieving organizations across Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, and the Middle East & North Africa. Learn more about our finalists—and winner—below.

Instituto de Estudos Empresariais · Human Rights Foundation · LIVRES

↗ **The 2025 Templeton Freedom Award finalists** (left to right): Tiago Carpenedo of Instituto de Estudos Empresariais, Alex Gladstein of Human Rights Foundation, Magno Karl of Livres, Mari Kapanadze of Georgia's Future Foundation, Keli'i Akina of Grassroot Institute of Hawaii, and Carlos Augusto Chacón of Instituto de Ciencia Política.

UNITED STATES

GRASSROOT INSTITUTE OF HAWAII

The August 2023, wildfires that devastated Lahaina, Maui, killed over 100 people, displaced thousands, and triggered long-term recovery challenges due to Hawaii's highly restrictive land-use and zoning rules. These layered regulations, particularly in Lahaina's shoreline and historic districts, have slowed rebuilding and worsened the state's severe housing crisis. Median home prices in most counties already exceed $1 million, which has driven many residents off the islands. The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii has worked to accelerate Lahaina's recovery by identifying and challenging regulatory and tax barriers. Their approach—listening and learning, raising awareness, and advocating—has included meeting with affected residents, researching disaster recovery models, testifying over 60 times before Maui officials, collaborating with the governor's office, and publishing widely in the media. Their efforts helped inspire the creation of a private permitting office to speed approvals, offering a model for post-disaster rebuilding in other communities.

UNITED STATES

HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION

The Human Rights Foundation's (HRF) Financial Freedom program, launched in 2017, combats financial repression in authoritarian regimes by promoting Bitcoin and other open-source tools as lifelines for activists. Through education, training, grants, and community-building, HRF empowers dissidents to protect savings, receive donations, and continue operating even under censorship and financial restrictions. Founded in 2020, the Bitcoin Development Fund has supported projects enhancing privacy, security, decentralization, and adoption, alongside translation and community initiatives in Africa, Asia, and beyond. The fund awarded $2.5 million to over 80 projects in 2024 alone. Other key efforts include the Finney Freedom Prize, Bitcoin education for nonprofits in over 50 countries, the *Financial Freedom Report* newsletter, and high-profile public education engagements. Research projects like the Bitcoin & Stablecoin Adoption Index and the Central Bank Digital Currency Tracker advance global understanding of digital currency impacts on human rights. HRF also drives innovation via Bitcoin bounties for open-source developers tackling challenges faced by activists and through their support for decentralized tech like Nostr and eCash, fostering resilient activism against authoritarian control.

COLOMBIA

INSTITUTO DE CIENCIA POLÍTICA HERNÁN ECHAVARRÍA OLÓZAGA

Instituto de Ciencia Política Hernán Echavarría Olózaga (ICP) successfully defended private property rights, economic freedom, and the rule of law in Colombia by stopping legislative and executive actions that threatened constitutional safeguards for land ownership. The challenge centered on Article 61 of the National Development Plan and a related draft decree, which sought to expand the National Land Agency's powers to seize "underutilized" rural land—without automatic judicial oversight—through agrarian forfeiture, a process more severe than expropriation as it offers no compensation. These measures posed serious risks to legal certainty, especially for small-scale landowners—and discouraged investment. ICP's multi-pronged strategy included expert roundtables, academic publications, media outreach, formal objections to the Ministry of Agriculture, and a public unconstitutionality lawsuit. This coordinated legal, academic, and advocacy effort preserved constitutional property protections, reinforced due process, and underscored the role of secure land tenure in fostering innovation, investment, and long-term economic growth in Colombia.

BRAZIL

INSTITUTO DE ESTUDOS EMPRESARIAIS

Instituto de Estudos Empresariais (IEE), founded in 1984 during Brazil's military rule, develops business leaders through a program rooted in freedom, ethics, and free-market economic principles. Over four decades, it has trained business leaders whose companies generate more than $10 billion annually and employ 85,000 people. A cornerstone of IEE's strategy is the Fórum da Liberdade (Freedom Forum), launched in 1988 and recognized by Forbes as Latin America's largest forum for the debate of ideas. Held annually, the two-day event is headlined by global leaders including Nobel laureates, heads of state, and renowned intellectuals, to discuss topics such as economics, sustainability, freedom of expression, and geopolitics. Roberto Campos, Eduardo Marty, and Mario Vargas Llosa are just a few of the many high-profile names that have gathered at the event. The 2024 edition drew 5,000 in-person participants, from business leaders to students to the general public, interested in vigorous conversations guided by classical liberal principles. With the 38th edition of Fórum da Liberdade taking place in April 2025, the event remains a premier platform for advancing liberal ideas in Brazil and beyond.

BRAZIL

LIVRES

The *Livres Handbook on Public Policy* was designed to influence municipal policymaking in Brazil by promoting evidence-based, classical liberal policy solutions ahead of the 2024 municipal elections involving 150 million voters. Developed through extensive research on national and international best practices, it contains 81 proposals covering economic development, education, urban planning, and government transparency. Thirteen leading experts from academia, the private sector, and public administration contributed, ensuring credibility and alignment with classical liberal governance principles. Over 2,000 copies were distributed to policymakers, candidates, and community leaders, with 53 municipal executive candidates pledging to adopt at least one proposal. The handbook inspired tangible reforms, including advancing the Economic Freedom Law to reduce bureaucratic red tape and new transparency measures in multiple cities. Livres amplified its impact through 12 regional policy events, 22 strategic candidate meetings, and 28 major media mentions, fostering political buy-in and measurable improvements in local governance across Brazil.

The Templeton Freedom Award 2025

Winner

GEORGIA

GEORGIA'S FUTURE ACADEMY

Georgia's Future Academy

↑ **Georgia's Future Academy Executive Director Mari Kapanadze** (second from left) accepts the 2025 Templeton Freedom Award at Atlas Network's Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner, joined by (left to right) Atlas Network CEO Brad Lips, Templeton Religion Trust Vice President of Strategy & Programs Kimon Sargeant, and Monty Brown, Chair of Atlas Network's Board of Directors.

Georgia's Future Academy

A YOUNG GENERATION HOLDS THE LINE

The Fight Against Growing Autocracy

Georgia faces a dangerous authoritarian turn, as the ruling party escalates crackdowns on civil society and democratic freedoms. Yet Georgia's Future Academy and a new generation of young activists have emerged as the country's strongest force for defending liberty.

In the Republic of Georgia, the struggle for liberal democracy has entered a perilous chapter. For more than a decade, the ruling Georgian Dream party—controlled by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, an oligarch with deep ties to Russia—has tightened its grip on the country's institutions. As Ivanishvili's influence has grown, so too has the government's willingness to deploy force, coercion, and propaganda to entrench its rule.

This shift has placed extraordinary pressure on Georgia's civil society. What began as political maneuvering by the regime has hardened into a systematic campaign of repression: violent crackdowns on mass demonstrations, legal harassment of civil society organizations, and disinformation campaigns portraying pro-freedom nonprofits and the free press as enemies of the state. Independent organizations that once served as vital watchdogs now find themselves navigating a landscape where dissent is punished, truth is manipulated, and young people fear for the country's democratic future.

Yet amid this darkening trajectory, a bright force stands out: Georgia's Future Academy (GFA)—an Atlas Network partner organization and the winner of the 2025 Templeton Freedom Award—and the thousands of young people it has equipped to peacefully defend Georgia's fragile freedom.

An Authoritarian Turn—Met With Courage

The gravity of Georgia's democratic crisis became unmistakable in 2023 and 2024 as unprecedented crowds—many of them students—flooded the streets of Tbilisi to resist the government's authoritarian drift. These were not isolated protests but massive civic uprisings fueled by patriotic determination and led in part by networks built through GFA.

The state responded with escalating brutality. Peaceful demonstrators were met with tear gas, water cannons, physical assaults, and organized violence carried out by mobs linked to the police. Even elected opposition figures and student leaders faced targeted beatings. The intent was unmistakable: break public resistance through fear.

↑ **Two pro-democracy demonstrators** who were arrested for peacefully displaying the Georgian and European Union flags side-by-side.

At the same time, Georgian Dream intensified its multi-pronged offensive against civil society. Authorities weaponized courts to demand sensitive personal data—including that of minors—from pro-freedom organizations under threat of severe penalties, including prison sentences and asset seizures. GFA was directly targeted with such demands in 2025, a chilling escalation designed to intimidate both staff and participants.

Parallel to legal harassment, the government launched a sweeping disinformation campaign. State-aligned media portrayed independent civic groups as traitors, foreign puppets, or destabilizing extremists. GFA's leaders were singled out for propaganda attacks, reputational smears, and even threats of physical harm.

Despite this hostile climate, Georgia's Future Academy did not retreat. Instead, it expanded its mission.

Training a Generation That Refuses to Be Intimidated

Georgia's Future Academy has become the country's most effective engine of democratic resilience by investing in the one resource authoritarian actors cannot easily control: informed and empowered young citizens.

Through its flagship programs—including the #IDEBATE initiative, the Franklin Academy, and other civic education platforms—GFA has built Georgia's largest pro-liberty youth network. More than 5,000 alumni have passed through its programs, many of whom now lead civil society efforts, organize demonstrations, document abuses, and engage their communities.

These programs do more than teach theory. They develop practical democratic skills: evaluating evidence, understanding rights, countering propaganda, analyzing budgets, fact-checking information, and conducting local civic projects. In a country where disinformation and state pressure are pervasive, such skills are not academic—they are essential safeguards of democratic culture.

GFA also uses digital engagement to cut through misinformation. Its #MartisIdebi video series, which turns complex civic concepts into accessible content, has reached over 10 million viewers, helping counter state narratives with clear, principled messages about freedom and accountability.

Scan the QR code to watch the video created by each of our finalists—including Georgia's Future Academy—to explain their impact

↑ **Young Georgians** take part in a Georgia's Future Academy training program.

Defending Elections When Institutions Fail

Perhaps the clearest measure of GFA's impact emerged during the fraught 2024 parliamentary elections. With trust in institutions collapsing, GFA mobilized more than 2,000 trained election observers in its "My Vote" mission—creating one of the country's most credible forces for electoral oversight.

As GFA founder Alexander Zibzibadze notes, the struggle underway is not simply political but existential. "For us, it's a fight for our identity," he said. "And our identity is based on ideas of liberty … that is what we're protecting."

The government's campaign of intimidation has made this work dangerous. But instead of bending, GFA has grown more adaptive—developing secure communication systems, operational resilience strategies, and decentralized leadership structures that allow it to continue functioning even under severe pressure.

"The situation in Georgia is very challenging right now," said Executive Director Mari Kapanadze upon accepting the 2025 Templeton Freedom Award. "But despite this, we have a strength and motivation which is empowered by two forces. First, the courageous Georgian people, and especially the young generation. And second, our Ukrainian friends who are at the front line of defending liberty, not only for their homeland, but for all of us."

A Generation That Will Not Give Up

Georgia stands at a crossroads. The regime's repression threatens to extinguish decades of democratic progress, yet the determination of its young people—educated, mobilized, and connected through organizations such as Georgia's Future Academy—shows that the country's democratic spirit is far from defeated.

By training thousands of students, documenting government-perpetrated abuses, and building a civic culture grounded in classical liberal principles, GFA is doing more than resisting authoritarianism. It is preparing a generation capable of reclaiming Georgia's democratic future when the moment comes.

CHAMPIONS FOR GROWTH

Ending Race-Based Legislation and Supercharging South Africa's Economy

South Africa is a nation rich with potential but burdened by economic stagnation. With an unemployment rate of 43% by some measures, millions of South Africans—especially young people—are locked out of opportunity. Growth has remained below 1% for a decade, a level that Makone Maja, strategic engagement manager at the South African Institute of Race Relations (IRR), describes as "a ticking time bomb … especially because the youth in particular are most affected."

In this challenging landscape, the IRR, an Atlas Network partner organization, has emerged as a leading force for reform. Their groundbreaking Champions for Growth project—winner of Atlas Network's 2025 Africa Liberty Award—is changing how South Africans think about prosperity, freedom, and the policy choices that shape both.

Diagnosing South Africa's Crisis

The IRR's work begins with clear-eyed analysis. South Africa's growth and investment performance, they argue, has been "dismal," coming in far below its middle-income peers. In their award-winning Blueprint for Growth papers, the IRR explains that the country's malaise stems from "a profoundly statist inflection in official thinking" and a deep regulatory burden that suffocates enterprise instead of empowering it.

As Makone notes, even South Africa's relative wealth masks a crisis: "South Africa is often referred to as being fairly wealthy, but it's failing its people … Our GDP per capita has stagnated since 2008." The result, she warns, is widespread disillusionment: "People are looking around and saying democracy hasn't actually delivered because it was sold in connection to economic freedom."

Challenging Race-Based Barriers to Growth

A central theme of the IRR's reform agenda is its opposition to race-based bureaucracy, including Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) legislation and the Employment Equity Act. While originally framed as measures to redress the legacy of Apartheid, Makone argues these policies have devolved into tools of patronage: "BEE has become a patronage trough for the African National Congress party … It benefits the politically connected while keeping the economy from growing."

She explains that foreign and local investors face an increasingly hostile regulatory maze: "Are you going to come to South Africa, which wants to tell you who you must hire, how much you must pay them, what color they must look like—or are you going to go elsewhere?"

The IRR's consistent stance against race-based legislation, dating back to its 1929 founding, positions it uniquely to challenge these policies. Their proposed alternative to BEE—Economic Empowerment for the Disadvantaged (EED)—bases assistance on socioeconomic need rather than race. It includes vouchers for schools, healthcare, and housing, giving families real purchasing power and choice.

As Makone emphasizes: "EED is for the ordinary South African … It puts real power and autonomy in people's hands."

Scan the QR code to watch the full interview with Makone Maja on our podcast *Atlas Network with Michael Carnuccio*

Scan the QR code to watch Makone's inspiring award acceptance speech and learn why winning the Africa Liberty Award is important to her team and their work

Inspiring a Movement for Change

Through relentless media engagement, high-quality research, and grassroots activism, the IRR has successfully elevated growth to the center of national debate. Their No More Race Laws petition has gathered more than 12,000 signatures, indicating rising public opposition to racialized policy approaches.

Makone sees growing momentum, especially among young people hungry for opportunity: "South Africans are bold, outspoken, decisive people … and they are desperate to see the country realize its potential."

The IRR's flagship proposal—a 7% annual growth target—is deliberately ambitious. Achieving it, they argue, would double the size of South Africa's economy in ten years. With such growth, Makone says, "South Africa would look nothing like it does today… We could finally attract investors, deal with crime and poverty, and bring millions into the economy."

The Institute reinforces this vision by pointing to global examples. In a key insight of their Champions for Growth initiative, IRR CEO Dr. John Endres notes that in 1950, countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone were wealthier per capita than Taiwan or South Korea, but 60 years later the latter had multiplied their incomes 30-fold, driven by economic freedom and sustained growth.

To the IRR, winning the 2025 Africa Liberty Award is a recognition that their ideas—grounded in evidence, non-racial principles, and a commitment to economic freedom—offer one of the most credible paths toward South Africa's renewal. As Makone puts it: "We're not just crazy liberals wagging our tongues. These are genuine solutions, and winning this award shows the world agrees."

Atlas Network's 2026 Smart Bets

Atlas Network's Smart Bets program highlights and invests in emerging pro-freedom organizations who present promising strategies to multiply their impact. One finalist from each region, chosen through pitch competitions at our Regional Liberty Forums, advances to compete under the bright lights at Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner in New York City. Winning a regional competition earns the winner a $50,000 investment—plus a $15,000 matching grant—while victory at the final pitch competition earns an additional $50,000 prize to support their work. Read more about all five 2026 finalists below.

AFRICA
ARAB CENTER FOR RESEARCH
Kathya Berrada

ASIA
PRENEUR LAB
Arif Nezami

EUROPE
BENDUKIDZE FREE MARKET CENTER
Nataliya Melnyk

LATIN AMERICA
LIBERA BOLIVIA
Juan Pablo Chamon

US & CANADA
THE FUTURE OF FREE SPEECH
Jacob Mchangama

ARAB CENTER FOR RESEARCH

AFRICA

The Arab Center for Research envisions a network of youth leaders who will champion market-oriented reforms across North and East Africa. Their long-term strategy has focused on shaping policy and institutional reform, cultivating a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation, and strengthening civil society.

To advance this vision, the organization plans to launch a Free Market Policy Bootcamp in five universities, with the goal of eventually expanding to fifteen institutions across North and East Africa. The bootcamp will teach students free-market principles and public policy design, expose them to global ideas adapted to local realities, and foster a regional network of reformers. The initiative also responds to a unique demographic window: more than 60% of the Arab world's population is under 30, and many young people are frustrated with state-centric economic models. By partnering with universities and connecting the region's tech-savvy youth, The Arab Center hopes to bridge the gap between ideas and action.

BENDUKIDZE FREE MARKET CENTER

EUROPE

Ukraine's Bendukidze Free Market Center (BFMC) is already a leader in economic education, having reached over 100,000 schoolchildren and trained hundreds of teachers. Its digital transformation plan seeks to extend this impact across Ukraine and beyond. Bendukidze's north stars include providing radical access to quality economic and civic education, creating empowered and equipped educators, fostering a culture of economic and civic thinking, and ensuring scalable, sustainable innovation. Over the next two years, the center plans to fundraise for expansion, digitize its Economics Olympiad dataset, and develop an online teacher-training and co-creation platform. The platform will allow educators to share and peer-review content, while additional investments will help scale the Economics Olympiad and third-party educational initiatives. Smart Bets funding will accelerate BFMC's digital rollout and facilitate cross-border collaboration.

↓ **Nataliya Melnyk** (center), CEO of Bendukidze Free Market Center, accepts the grand prize at the Smart Bets Pitch Competition in New York.

PRENEUR LAB YOUTH & INNOVATION TRUST

ASIA

Preneur Lab has built its reputation through StartKoro, a program that blends business incubation, policy reform advocacy, a multilingual knowledge hub, and a "Business for Good" campaign. Over the past five years, StartKoro has trained more than 900 young people across Bangladesh, including women and rural youth, many of whom have launched startups and influenced public policy ideas. Alumni have gained international recognition, from award-winning tech startups to a B2B marketplace.

Looking ahead, Preneur Lab aims to equip 10,000 youth with leadership skills by 2030 and to influence at least 10 legislative or administrative reforms by 2028. In the next two years, they plan to expand Business Boost Bangladesh, launch StartKoro Hub, host national policy hackathons and Smart Policy Reform Labs, and roll out StartUp @ School to bring entrepreneurship training to teenagers in rural and low-income communities.

LIBERA BOLIVIA

LATIN AMERICA

After two decades of socialism, many young Bolivians feel disconnected from economic opportunity. LIBERA Bolivia aims to change that by serving as a training ground for leaders who will transform the country into a free and prosperous society. The group's Leadership Incubator Program, Center for Legal Studies, and Austrian Economics Program cultivate a pipeline of freedom champions. Over the next two years, LIBERA plans to train at least 200 more youth across Bolivia, publish the country's first independent Consumer Price Index, continue research on the economic burden of bureaucracy, and launch a documentary series "Sabemos Vender Bien," showcasing indigenous merchants as examples of freedom and social mobility. The organization will also expand its legal support for legislators and partner with Radio Panamericana to amplify pro-freedom narratives.

THE FUTURE OF FREE SPEECH

US & CANADA

The Future of Free Speech envisions a world where everyone's right to freedom of expression is protected by law and embraced by culture. The organization's multi-year plan revolves around four strategic priorities: advancing a free-speech culture through communications and partnerships, shaping law and policy via legal analysis and model legislation, building institutional sustainability, and investing in operational excellence. To implement these goals, it is launching the First Freedoms Initiative, which includes legal advocacy (amicus briefs and expert commentary), model legislation, public education campaigns, and coalition-building. In 2025, the initiative will focus on early legal engagement; by 2026 it will expand public outreach and host national convenings; and by 2027 it aims to institutionalize its work through impact evaluation, a free-speech policy playbook, and an annual legal-tracking tool.

Travel the World with Atlas Network

Each year, Atlas Network's Regional Liberty Forums bring together courageous, creative, and principled leaders working to advance freedom around the world.

In 2025, these gatherings spanned four continents—Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Brussels, Belgium; Nairobi, Kenya; and Jakarta, Indonesia—culminating with Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner in New York City.

These gatherings offer something rare: the opportunity to connect with the thinkers and doers pushing back against tyranny, advancing free-market principles, and defending individual rights all around the world. Participants encounter powerful ideas and insights while experiencing unforgettable destinations, vibrant cultures, and meaningful relationships with individuals who support the cause of liberty as donors and philanthropists.

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

LATIN AMERICA LIBERTY FORUM

The 2025 Latin America Liberty Forum showcased freedom champions reshaping public life across the region. Speakers presented bold strategies for strengthening liberty-focused organizations and navigating difficult political dynamics, while panel discussions explored advocating in polarized environments, elevating emerging leaders, and pursuing practical policy reforms. A major highlight came when Instituto de Ciencia Política received the 2025 Latin America Liberty Award for defending private property rights in Colombia—an achievement that offered both inspiration and actionable lessons for attendees across the region.

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

EUROPE LIBERTY FORUM

In Brussels, the 2025 Europe Liberty Forum convened advocates confronting regulatory overreach, policy stagnation, and challenges to free expression. Our main stage Cornerstone Talks session featured impassioned speeches encouraging European freedom advocates to stay rooted in foundational principles even as political currents shift. Panel discussions examined how to revitalize entrepreneurship amidst overbearing bureaucracy, protect freedom of speech, and challenge disinformation without falling into the trap of censorship. The Europe Liberty Awards Dinner celebrated exceptional organizations—including Bendukidze Free Market Center in Ukraine and Georgia's Future Academy—who are standing firm against Russian aggression and encroaching tyranny while preparing the next generation of pro-liberty leaders.

BELGIUM

THE ATLAS NETWORK EXPERIENCE

An exclusive group of devoted Atlas Network donors also joined a curated retreat through Ghent, Antwerp, Bruges, and Brussels. This immersive journey paired cultural exploration with high-level conversations led by Brad Lips, Lord Daniel Hannan (Conservative Party leader in the U.K.'s House of Lords and a former member of the European Parliament), Dr. Tom Palmer, and the Prime Minister of Belgium. From canal tours in Bruges to a Michelin-starred dinner in Brussels, participants deepened their connection to Atlas Network's mission and to one another.

↙ A Cornerstone Talk at Latin America Liberty Forum 2025

↓ Renewing connections and making new ones at Europe Liberty Forum 2025

NAIROBI, KENYA

AFRICA LIBERTY FORUM

At Africa Liberty Forum 2025, leaders from across the continent gathered in Nairobi to confront rising authoritarianism, discuss strategies for advancing classical liberal principles, and highlight Africa's potential as a policy innovator. Cornerstone Talks from thought leaders emphasized institutional credibility, community-rooted engagement, and modernized strategies for advancing reform. Sessions on Africa's rapidly growing youth population offered compelling ideas for empowering the next generation of liberty-minded leaders. Attendees left inspired by the creativity and courage fueling Africa's freedom movement.

JAKARTA, INDONESIA

ASIA LIBERTY FORUM

Asia Liberty Forum 2025 brought together partners working across some of the world's most complex political and technological landscapes. Hosted with the Center for Indonesian Policy Studies, the event opened with Cornerstone Talks on what liberty-advancing organizations must start, stop, and continue doing amid rising populism and digital repression. A keynote on liberty in Taiwan underscored the growing stakes for democratic governance in the region. Case studies from IDEAS (Malaysia), the Centre for Civil Society (India), and Bikalpa (Nepal) highlighted effective models for achieving policy reform in the world's most populous region.

NEW YORK CITY

LIBERTY FORUM & FREEDOM DINNER

Each year, the worldwide freedom movement converges in the heart of New York City for its most inspiring gathering: Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner. Against the backdrop of Times Square, this flagship event unites free-market reformers, policy and business visionaries, and supporters of liberty from around the world to exchange ideas, strengthen partnerships, and celebrate impactful achievements. Through discussions, networking, and a stirring awards dinner, attendees leave with renewed motivation and a deeper sense of belonging to a worldwide movement dedicated to human dignity and opportunity.

← Celebrating the 2025 Africa Liberty Award winner in Nairobi, Kenya

↙ Students For Liberty members from across the continent gather at Asia Liberty Forum 2025

↓ Panelists discuss "Advancing Liberty Under Pressure" at Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner 2025

Join us in 2026

The global movement for liberty is gaining momentum—and there has never been a better time to get involved. Whether you're looking to sharpen your strategies, build new partnerships, or connect with remarkable people who share your values, Atlas Network's 2026 events offer an unparalleled opportunity.

Regional Liberty Forums will take place in:

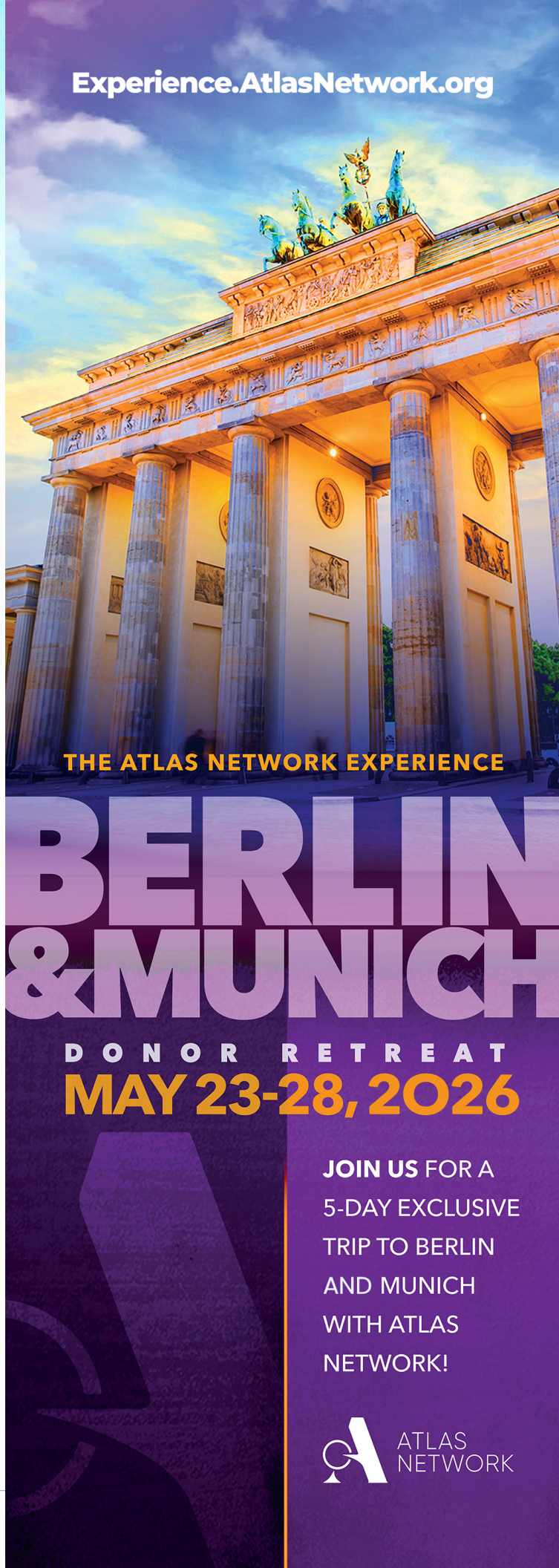
> **Latin America Liberty Forum**
> February 26–27, 2026, in Lima, Peru
>
> **Europe Liberty Forum**
> May 21–22, 2026, in Berlin, Germany
>
> **Africa Liberty Forum**
> July 30–31, 2026, in Accra, Ghana
>
> **Asia Liberty Forum**
> September 10–11, 2026, in Colombo, Sri Lanka
>
> **Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner**
> November 11–12, 2026, in New York City

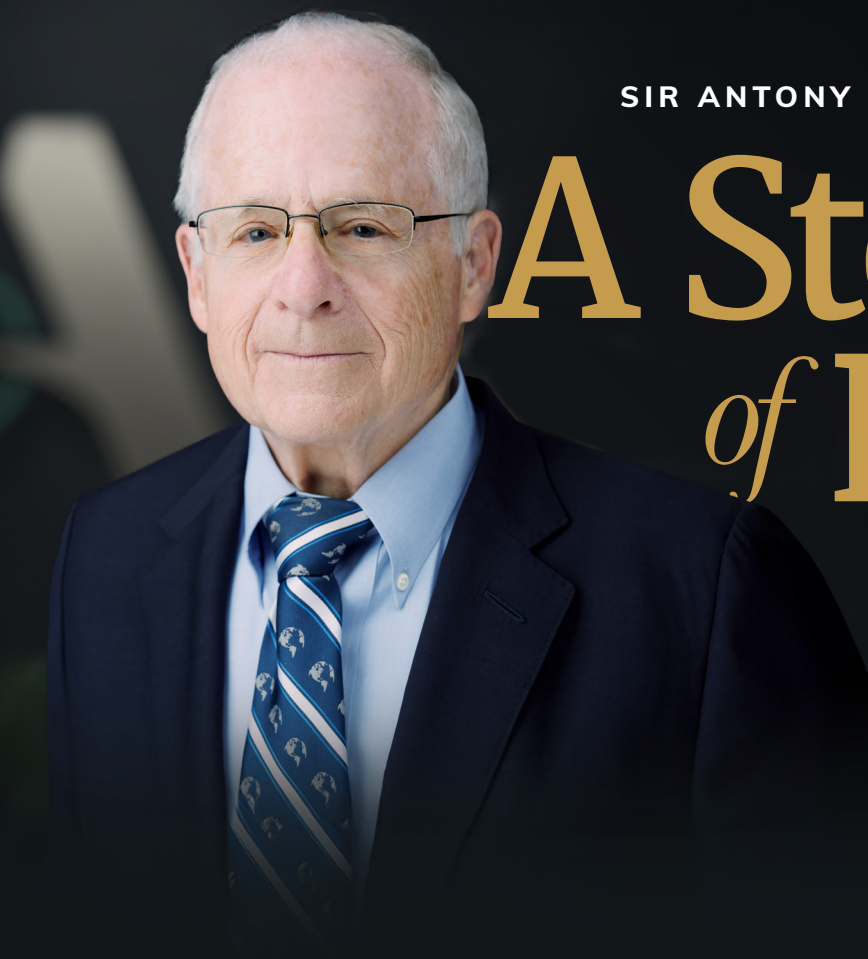
For an even more immersive experience, the 2026 edition of The Atlas Network Experience in Berlin and Munich offers a unique opportunity to experience local history and culture through the lens of exploring the past, present, and future of human freedom. You will take part in idea-driven conversations with thought leaders and fellow philanthropists and build a strong sense of community with individuals who share your love of liberty.

"The Atlas Network Experience highlights the learning journey we have been on," said Laura Ann Spencer, a frequent tour participant. "It's really a great opportunity for anyone who's interested in travel and wants to understand boots-on-the-ground experiences for themselves and see how their investment is being used to advance freedom with local people and local organizations."

The destinations are remarkable—but the insights, relationships, and renewed purpose you'll gain may be even more transformative. Join us in person, and get involved in the worldwide freedom movement like never before.

Visit **AtlasNetwork.org/Events** to learn more about our 2026 events, and **scan the QR code** to learn more about The Atlas Network Experience in Berlin and Munich.





SIR ANTONY FISHER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

A Steward *of* Liberty

At Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner 2025 in New York City, Atlas Network honored Dan Grossman with the Sir Antony Fisher Achievement Award for his decades of dedicated service to the worldwide freedom movement.

Dan Grossman Receives the 2025 Sir Antony Fisher Achievement Award

A retired businessman turned philanthropist, Dan Grossman has spent the past several decades helping liberty-focused nonprofits become more efficient, accountable, and impactful. "I was very fortunate in business and was able to retire when I was 50," he said. "I've spent the last 30-plus years trying to make sure the interests of donors in the nonprofit liberty movement are better served."

Nonprofit boards of directors serve a vital role by keeping organizations financially accountable, strategically sound, and legally compliant. Dan's combined tenure as a board member of groups across the freedom movement totals more than a century of service.

Discovering the Ideas of Liberty

Dan's introduction to the principles of free markets and individual liberty came during his college years when he discovered *The Freeman*, a former publication of the Foundation for Economic Education. The magazine introduced him to the ideas and theories behind classical liberalism, which he found he already agreed with.

"I was basically a libertarian at heart without even knowing the word," he said. "As I was in business, I became aware of how important, from a commercial and economic point of view, free markets are—and that made me even more interested."

"Dan's a true believer," said Wayne Olson, chairman of the board of the Foundation for Economic Education. "He really understands the importance of what we're doing here in the freedom movement."

> I was basically a libertarian at heart without even knowing the word.

From Entrepreneur to Advocate

Before joining the nonprofit world, Dan built a successful career in the office supply industry, which included extensive work in Asia. "I recognized that the rest of the world was in many ways less free than even the United States was," he said.

When he retired, Dan began serving on nonprofit boards, starting with the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE). That experience ignited his decades-long mission: helping liberty-focused non-

profits operate with the discipline and efficiency of successful businesses. "Many organizations I believed in weren't being run as businesses," he explained. "They had great intentions, and I agreed with their missions, but they weren't focusing on making sure donors got the most value for their money.

"Unlike for-profits," Dan said, "nonprofits don't get price signals. If Walmart doesn't sell you what you want, you stop buying. But an organization like Atlas Network could be doing the best job possible—and people wouldn't know."

> Unlike for-profits, nonprofits don't get price signals. If Walmart doesn't sell you what you want, you stop buying. But an organization like Atlas Network could be doing the best job possible—and people wouldn't know.

Strengthening the Freedom Movement

Dan Grossman joined Atlas Network's board of directors when it was still a small organization focused largely on Latin America. "When I joined, Atlas Network was essentially a grant-giving organization," he said. "They were continually going to the same people, and the effectiveness of the grants wasn't being evaluated."

Under his tenure, Atlas Network transformed into a global hub of training, peer-to-peer collaboration, and innovation. "It evolved into the *Coach, Compete, Celebrate* approach, where grants represent about 30 to 40% of what is invested in the freedom movement," he said. "The rest is providing services, a network, giving people the opportunity to meet each other, and getting ideas exchanged."

"When I think of Dan, I think of him as an institution builder," said Peter Goettler, president and CEO of the Cato Institute.

Today, the network includes over 500 organizations in more than 100 countries, compared to the few dozen when he began. Atlas Network, Dan said, has become "a true global network—a multiplier of impact rather than just a funder."

A Global Perspective

Dan's travels across continents have given him a unique window into how societies flourish—or fail—depending on their commitment to liberty. "Traveling to former totalitarian countries has shown me how transformative liberty and markets can be," he said. "You could see it in Eastern Europe, in places like Georgia and Armenia after the Soviet Union fell—the vibrancy, the economic growth, the opening up of society."

He has also seen setbacks: "Sometimes you go to a country and ten years later, the amount of human liberty is dramatically reduced. It's a reminder that our work's never done."

Still, he remains deeply optimistic. "Anybody who was around in the 1960s will realize that things today are much calmer and more harmonious," he said. "The world is a far, far better place than it was then."

The Modest Reformer

For all his impact, Dan doesn't boast about his own achievements. "I've always preferred to work in the background," he said. "The benefit is from what has hopefully been accomplished. Fame is not worth the effort because there's nothing there to it."

> Anybody who was around in the 1960s will realize that things today are much calmer and more harmonious. The world is a far, far better place than it was then.

Asked what principle he hopes others will carry forward, he answered without hesitation: "Humility and optimism. We are not able to control the world. We are hardly able to control our own lives, much less the lives of eight billion people. But if we bring humility and optimism to our work, the movement will continue to flourish."

As he receives the Sir Antony Fisher Achievement Award, Dan Grossman remains focused on the same mission that began when he first picked up a copy of *The Freeman*: helping liberty's advocates do their work better and keeping faith in the power of free people to build a freer world.

ALUMNI IN FOCUS

Atlas Network partners in their own words

Nicos Rompapas

President, KEFiM (Center for Liberal Studies – Markos Dragoumis), Greece

Growing up, I always believed that ideas mattered, but I also thought that the smartest path to drive change was to be a responsible and devoted professional. I saw no reason to expect much from politics. So, I built a career as a senior executive in the private sector.

A classical liberal even then, I acknowledged the merit in markets, individual responsibility, and open institutions, while assuming that real change would come irrespective of ideological contests.

However, life proved me wrong when the 2009 financial crisis struck Greece. The political pressure permeated every corner of Greek life. Free markets were blamed, even though the Greek economy was one of the least free in the European Union. Suddenly, debates once considered academic or resolved became existential. The distance between "ideas" and "reality" collapsed. Many Greeks grew bitter and many surrendered to populism. The future of liberal democracy was at risk. It was then that I realized the ever-present resistance from vested interests, insulated bureaucracies, lobby groups, and inertia undermined any prospect of getting out of the crisis. It was time to act to shift the perspective.

This is why I decided to devote myself full-time to KEFiM, the Center for Liberal Studies of Greece. Although I had run corporations, managing a think tank demanded a different kind of leadership: cultivating ideas, building networks, mapping and shaping public discourse, and walking the thin line between evidence and persuasion.

In those early years, when the pressure from the crisis and the new responsibilities hit, the support from Atlas Network was crucial. Through the training, peer-learning platforms, and grant programs Atlas Network provided, we acquired critical tools to professionalize our operations, strengthen communications, and promote best practices from the global liberty movement. With

↑ **Nicos** attending Atlas Network Academy's 2024 Executive Accelerator program.

↗ **Nicos** kicks off the Greek Economic Freedom Audit 2023.

→ **Nicos** in conversation with Daniel Bunn at the First Economic Freedom Forum, discussing why tax competitiveness matters and the steps Greece can take to improve its ranking in the International Tax Competitiveness Index

Atlas Network's help, KEFiM has grown into one of the most influential think tanks in Greece.

Our strategy has always been to combine international benchmarks and local innovation. We began by introducing recognized indices in Greece, such as the Tax Foundation's International Tax Competitiveness Index and the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of the World Index, to spark a much-needed data-driven debate. Over time, we transplanted innovative local models from abroad: for example, the Municipal Effectiveness Index (inspired by the Lithuanian Free Market Institute) and the Greek Panel of Economists (modeled on the IGM Economic Experts Panel at the University of Chicago).

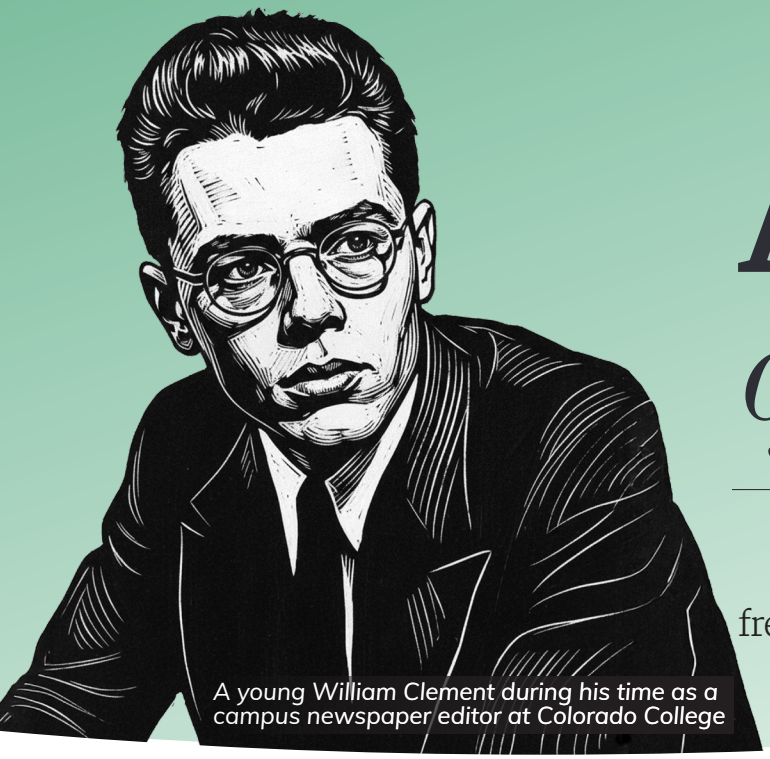
As our capacity matured, we branched into wholly homegrown projects, including Agenda 2021, a comprehensive reform platform we published before the 2019 general elections and again before 2023. Many of its proposals were eventually adopted in governmental platforms or legislative initiatives. Through it all, we remained guided by a single conviction: ideas sure matter, but credible ideas, well-argued, well-communicated, and well-anchored in evidence, are the ones that can move minds and systems, create change, and generate impact.

When we started, few Greeks would openly identify as classical liberals. Classical liberalism was often blamed for anything and everything wrong in the world. Today, multiple surveys show classical liberalism among the top one or two ideological self-designations in Greece. This change in narrative, this reclamation of the language of freedom, is a mark of progress and pride for KEFiM, and me personally.

Still, the challenges ahead are real. As KEFiM enters its second decade, we face an increasingly polarized media environment, an entrenched echo chamber in public discourse, and a citizenry fatigued by unfulfilled promises. However, we stand stronger than ever since we possess a rare combination: a track record, a network of partners domestically and abroad (through EPICENTER, the European Liberal Forum, and Atlas Network), and a deep conviction that institutional and cultural change happens slowly by seeding ideas, equipping leaders, and steadfastly defending principles.

Looking forward, my ambition for the upcoming decade is to scale our reach and impact: to bring economic and civic literacy into Greek high schools and universities, to strengthen our policy observatory so that citizens and journalists can monitor reform progress in real time, and to cultivate the next generation of liberal public intellectuals and policymakers.

In all this, Atlas Network has been a trusted companion: a mentor, a source of insight, and a bridge to global networks of innovation.



A young William Clement during his time as a campus newspaper editor at Colorado College

A Legacy *of* Liberty

William Clement's extraordinary gift is helping Atlas Network strengthen the freedom movement for generations to come.

William Clement devoted his life to learning, inquiry, and the power of ideas. As a student studying on a scholarship at Colorado College, he served as editor in chief of the campus newspaper, sharpening his interest in journalism and free speech. That curiosity guided him throughout his life. During World War II, he worked as a physicist on the Manhattan Project at the University of California, Berkeley. After the war, he studied physics and philosophy before beginning a career in the electronics industry. He remained an avid investor and pursued what he called a "non-professional quest for knowledge."

Many decades later, Clement's belief in the enduring power of ideas took on lasting significance when he left a $12 million legacy gift to Atlas Network, returning to future champions of freedom the generosity he'd received as a student. The news represented far more than a single act of generosity. It was a defining moment—proof that the ideas of liberty can inspire commitment that outlives us all. For Atlas Network, it was also a powerful affirmation of trust: that years from now, this organization will remain strong, principled, and effective in advancing freedom worldwide.

A legacy gift is a planned contribution through a will, retirement account, or other long-term financial commitment that helps secure Atlas Network's future and the future of the worldwide freedom movement.

CEO Brad Lips reflects on what Clement's remarkable gift means for Atlas Network, how legacy giving sustains the worldwide freedom movement, and why permanence and purpose go hand in hand.

Freedom's Champion: Why does long-term sustainability matter so much to Atlas Network's mission?

Brad Lips: Atlas Network was founded for the long game, built on the understanding that advancing freedom takes time and depends on strong institutions that endure change. Legacy giving helps ensure that strength over the long run. These gifts are an extraordinary vote of confidence in our staying power. They show that donors believe our mission will deliver results long after their lifetime. That trust means a lot to us and is something we work hard to earn every day.

FC: What was it like to learn of William Clement's $12 million legacy gift to Atlas Network, and how is his gift making a difference in the organization's ability to advance global freedom?

Brad: Wow. You react to a gift like that with simple awe. Bill was not someone to draw attention to himself, so learning about the scale of his generosity just affirmed his full commitment to the ideas of liberty. His gift wasn't about recognition but about impact, and his decision will strengthen the freedom movement for generations to come.

Bill's legacy gift—our first one in excess of $10 million—will go down as special in Atlas Network history because it allowed us to demonstrate how scalable our business model is. We made a deliberate decision with our board of directors to use Bill's gift over a period of five years to ramp up the funding we provide to Atlas Network partners who successfully compete in our grant competitions.

Our belief is that funds from our donors should not be hoarded for an endowment, but should be put to

use in the near term to address today's challenges to freedom. I hope this example gives other donors confidence to make similar commitments to Atlas Network, knowing we're very adept at making good use of funds in the short term. Of course, exercising these muscles also strengthens the freedom movement for the long term.

FC: You have been at Atlas Network for 27 years. When did you first meet Bill Clement and what do you remember most about him?

Brad: I met Bill when Atlas Network held a 20th anniversary event in San Francisco in 2006, and I remember someone deeply curious about how innovation fuels prosperity. He loved free-market thinking, not as an abstraction, but as a practical way to better the world.

He was also a careful investor, and that discernment carried over into his philanthropy. I remember seeing a stack of private placement memoranda on his desk, a sign of how thoroughly he approached everything. His generosity was quiet but profound, and though he wasn't interested in recognition, his gift ensured he'll be remembered as a hero to the cause of liberty.

FC: How does Atlas Network ensure that legacy gifts like Clement's are used in ways that honor donors' intent?

Brad: Stewardship is at the heart of what we do. Our board of directors sets a high standard of excellence and takes its governance responsibilities seriously to ensure our work stays faithful to Atlas Network's mission and delivers real value for donors. Any time we consider a significant new project or program direction, we bring it to the board for discussion and approval.

As former board member George Pearson once observed, many pro-liberty organizations look to Atlas Network as a model. We feel a real responsibility to lead by example and model excellence within the freedom movement. This explains why donors feel confident naming Atlas Network in their estate plans. They know their legacies will be managed with care and in ways that reflect the principles they believed in.

FC: For people who are deeply committed to the future of liberty, why might this kind of giving be one of the most meaningful steps they can take?

Brad: Legacy giving is about permanence. It ensures that the work continues long after any single leader or moment. We're training the next generation of think tank leaders and empowering innovators around the world so freedom continues to advance for decades to come. Sir Antony Fisher, our founder, believed that meaningful reform requires patient investment in people and ideas over decades. Legacy gifts make that kind of long-term vision possible.

FC: What does it mean to you personally when someone makes this kind of commitment—and why have you and Stephanie chosen to do the same?

Brad: It's humbling. When someone includes Atlas Network in their will, they're saying they believe our mission will matter far into the future. That's the kind of faith that fuels our work.

Stephanie's battle with cancer in 2017 forced us to think about topics you don't want to face in your forties. We have such a love for this organization and are so proud of what it has accomplished with great partners around the world. Including Atlas Network in our will felt like the natural way to ensure the work we care about continues long after we're gone.

FC: If you had the chance to sit down with Mr. Clement for another five minutes, what would you want him to know?

Brad: I think he understood this, but I'd sure want to reiterate how determined we are to honor his intent by staying true to the classical liberal values he cherished. I think he'd be proud to see how his gift is helping Atlas Network grow, and how it results in new efforts to advance freedom—much like the innovative startups he once invested in. All of this is resulting in a stronger movement for liberty around the world. I can't think of a more important legacy that one could leave!

FISHER LEGACY SOCIETY

Make Global Freedom Part of Your Legacy

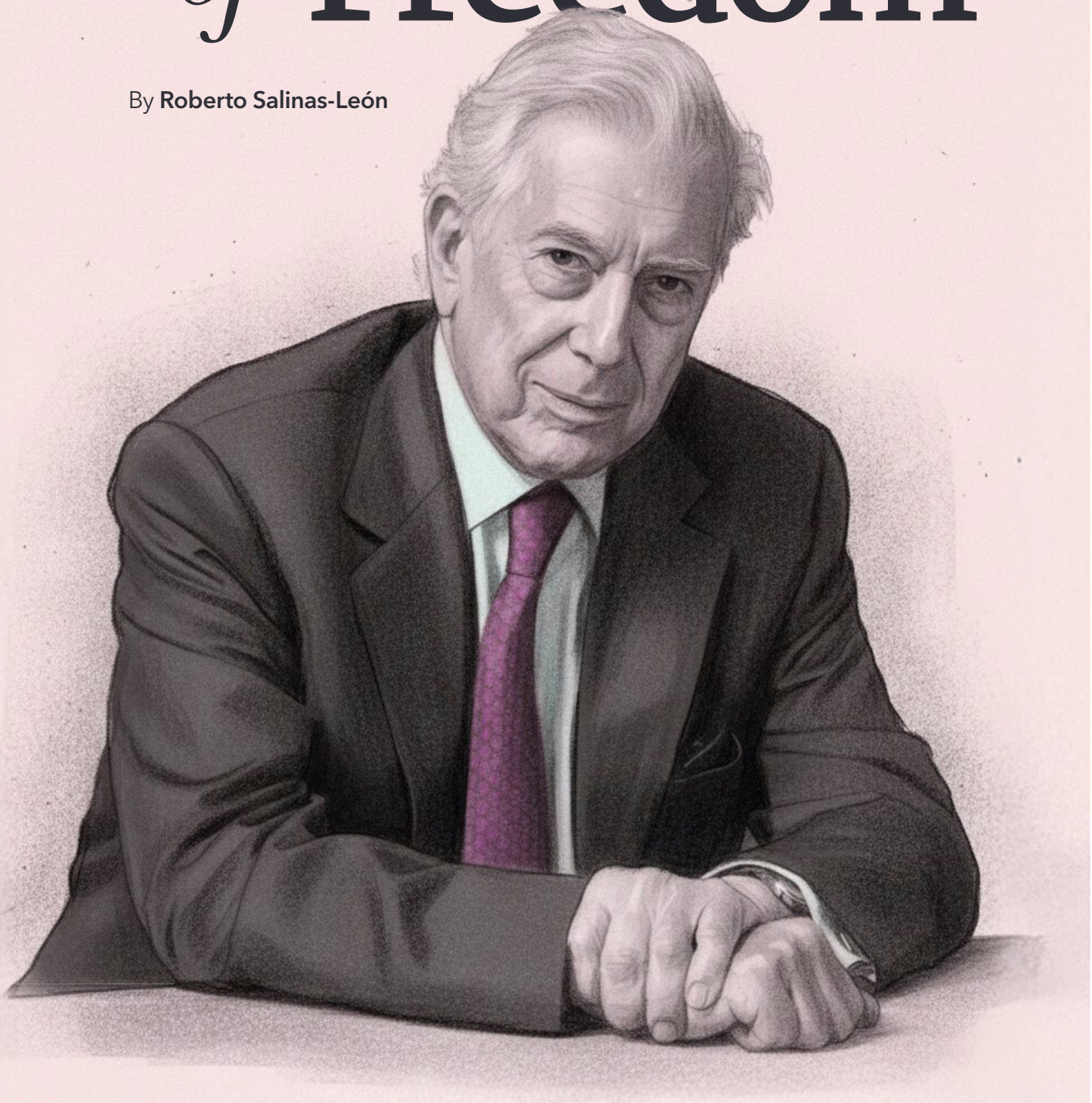
Since 1981, Atlas Network has helped organizations around the world advance individual liberty, free enterprise, and voluntary cooperation. Members of the Fisher Legacy Society ensure that this work continues for generations to come.

To learn more about including Atlas Network in your charitable plans, contact **legacy@atlasnetwork.org** or **scan the QR code.**

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA (1936-2025)

A Champion *of* Freedom

By **Roberto Salinas-León**



The famous Peruvian novelist, Mario Vargas Llosa, passed away on April 10, 2025, eleven months shy of his 90th birthday. He was one of our era's greatest literary talents—and greatest advocates for human liberty.

Mario Vargas Llosa was serving Atlas Network in an honorary role—giving speeches as its Templeton Leadership Fellow—at the time that he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2010. It was thrilling to see Vargas Llosa recognized on a global stage for what his Latin American fans always knew: no modern author has written as lucidly and persuasively as Vargas Llosa to denounce authoritarianism and to give voice to otherwise silent victims of oppression. *La Fiesta del Chivo*, for example, is a brilliant exposé on the horrors of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic.

Classical liberalism's central focus on the dignity of each individual person shines through Vargas Llosa's best-selling novels, essays, short stories, and plays, as well as the political commentary he published in a syndicated weekly column in Spain's *El País*. Indeed, Mario Vargas Llosa was an active voice in the freedom movement, undertaking a run for president in his native Perú in 1990, losing in a runoff election to Alberto Fujimori, who eventually held a coup and tried to install a dictatorship. He chronicled this story in *El Pez en el Agua*.

In 2018, he penned *La Llamada de la Tribu (The Call of the Tribe)*, an intellectual autobiography that details his journey in the world of ideas, from his early advocacy of socialism to his later "conversion" with classical liberalism, including his conversations with prominent figures such as Jean-François Revel, Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper, and F.A. Hayek.

Mario Vargas Llosa became closer to the worldwide freedom movement in 2002, when he founded the Fundación Internacional para la Libertad (FIL), a global think tank that brought together leading classical liberal intellectuals from across Ibero-America. FIL remains a powerful voice in the struggle against dictatorship and the defense of open markets, tolerance, and liberal democracy.

FIL's annual Foro Atlántico, held every summer in Madrid, features the most distinguished proponents of the ideas of liberty in literature, academia, policy activism, and politics, and Atlas Network has been proud to be a co-organizer. Other events held in Mexico, Perú, Colombia, Miami, Argentina, Chile, and even Venezuela, have leveraged Mario Vargas Llosa's public reputation to gain a better hearing for classical liberal perspectives to challenges across the Americas

Two recent initiatives highlight the importance of the relationship between Marío Vargas Llosa and Atlas Network—the support of FIL Futuro and the Young Journalism Prize. The former is a very encouraging initiative of mentorship and participation among new young voices of liberty, all who have been inspired and influenced by Mario Vargas Llosa's literary legacy and pro-liberty

→ **Mario Vargas Llosa** announcing the winner of the first Young Journalism Prize at Atlas Network's Freedom Dinner 2021.

↑ In 2011, **Mario Vargas Llosa** delivered the keynote address at Atlas Network's Freedom Dinner, which also marked the organization's thirtieth anniversary. He remarked "Liberty is not divisible. There is no economic liberty without political freedom, and the material progress obtained through freedom in the economic sphere [but] excluded from the political and social arenas is imperiled progress, progress with lead feet."

↓ The author with **Mario Vargas Llosa** at an event hosted by Fundación Internacional para la Libertad and Atlas Network in 2021.

activism. It includes new rising stars across the freedom movement in the Ibero-American region, now boasting over forty active voices, with the guidance of a council of mentors that includes his son Álvaro Vargas Llosa (a prominent public intellectual in his own right), Javier Férnandez-Lasquetty, and Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo, among others.

In 2020, amid health challenges of the pandemic and worldwide lockdowns, Atlas Network and FIL launched a Young Journalism Prize to recognize young leaders in the field whose work contributed to a richer understanding of the ideas of liberty. The first prize was awarded in 2021, by none other than Mario Vargas Llosa himself, at Atlas Network's Freedom Dinner in the Marlins Stadium in Miami. The winner was Cuban refugee Carla Gloria Colomé, who was recognized for her brilliant lengthy chronicle of the rise of popular dissent in the summer of 2021, in Cuba, "11 de julio en San Antonio de los Baños: lo que se ve/lo que no se ve."

The late, great Linda Whetstone, daughter of Atlas Network founder Sir Antony Fisher and longtime chair of the board, jovially remarked to me, towards the end of this memorable evening, "You know, this is really cool!"

This prize later was renamed the Carlos Alberto Montaner Young Journalism Prize, in honor of the great journalist and distinguished Cuban public intellectual, also a close ally of Atlas Network, who chaired the jury of this initiative until his untimely death in 2023. The prize celebrated its fifth anniversary this year.

Mario Vargas Llosa shared the spirit of humility and open discourse championed in the tradition of classical liberalism. He was an ardent opponent of the "fatal conceit" of social engineering and also of ideologies that promote nationalism, which are often smokescreens for resentment and the politics of hate. But he never lost hope in the view that ideas have consequences.

Atlas Network's community worldwide mourns the loss of one of its most committed and courageous spokespersons for the ideas of liberty. Yet, it also recognizes and celebrates the huge impact that Mario Vargas Llosa's narratives had in the freedom movement, and now form part of a lasting legacy.

Roberto Salinas-León is Senior Fellow for Latin America at Atlas Network

ATLAS NETWORK PARTNERS WORK AGAINST STATIST MYTHS AND POLICIES

Why Zero-Sum Thinking *creates a* Negative-Sum World

By **Dr. Tom G. Palmer**

As governments around the world revive tariffs in the name of "protection," the hard-won lessons of decades of open trade are quietly being forgotten. The consequences reach far beyond economics, affecting consumer welfare, innovation, and global cooperation.

Governments around the world have recently begun imposing massive sales taxes on their citizens and claiming that in doing so they are "protecting" them. The additional taxes their citizens must pay are called "tariffs." At the end of the Second World War, there began a long trend toward removing extra taxes on trade, which helped to create waves of unprecedented prosperity. Lifespans and living standards rose across the globe. How easily we now take for granted what only a few generations ago seemed miraculous; how easily we fail to remember what made those seeming miracles possible: free enterprise, freedom to innovate, and freedom to trade. All of those are under serious attack around the world today.

Enterprise is now smothered with paperwork, restrictions, and controls; "precautionary principle" restrictions and costly regulatory burdens restrict innovation; and trade is burdened by huge taxes on consumers—including the many producers who import raw supplies—and by a vast array of sometimes very ingenious "non-tariff" barriers concocted by special interests. The U.S. administration has imposed on American consumers, without congressional debate or authorization, the highest taxes since the disastrous Smoot-Hawley tariffs of 1930–34 that played such a terrible role in crashing the American and global economies in the Great Depression.

Policies Rest on Theories;
Theories Rest on Fundamental Assumptions

A common fundamental assumption that is inimical to freedom is called "zero-sum" thinking, or sometimes the "win-lose" mindset. It says that in interactions the sum of the gains equals zero. If Melissa gains by 10 units when interacting with Tony, then Tony must lose 10 units. Profits are seen as "taken" from others; exchange is seen as a field of combat; harmony is possible only among the predators, who will soon, in any case, turn on each other. If that's all you can imagine, as many political leaders today reveal, then universal mutual gain and peace are unimaginable, for every gain must be someone else's loss.

Truly zero-sum interactions almost never happen in the real world; mainly, they're found on blackboards. Advocates of free enterprise rest their advocacy on a wider view of interactions. Interactions can be "positive-sum." That's what characterizes voluntary exchange. We see them all around us in free societies. Parties agree to exchange because each of them values what he or she gets in exchange more than what he or she gives up. The journalist John Stossel identified the "double thank you" as a clue to mutual benefit; when people exchange in a store, the customer and the merchant both say, "Thank you" to each other. It's rather striking when you think about it, because usually when someone says, "Thank you" to another, the response is, "You're welcome." In voluntary exchange, each side benefits, and each side is grateful for the exchange.

Truly zero-sum interactions almost never happen in the real world; mainly, they're found on blackboards.

There is another kind of interaction that zero-sum thinkers don't understand but which positive-sum champions of free enterprise and free trade understand well: negative-sum interactions, and those are easily observable. In a negative-sum interaction, the sum of the gains is less than zero; either one loses far more than the other gains (as when a robber shoots a victim to steal $50; the robber gets $50, but the victim suffers a far greater loss) or both of them end up losers, which is a common outcome in involuntary interactions, notably wars, including "trade wars."

Mutual Gain Knows No Borders

Gains from trade are what make society possible. Love and friendship, rather than being the foundation of society, are the wonderful potential fruit of mutual benefit. If every interaction had a winner and a loser, those people could never be friends,

could not truly love each other, for the gain of one would have to bring harm to the other. It is when we can benefit one another that the most beautiful consequences of mutual benefit—love and friendship—become possible.

We trade with our neighbors. We trade with people on the other side of town. We trade with people we will never meet from hundreds of miles away in our own countries. We trade with people we will never meet in countries on the other side of the planet. We trade with people whose languages we do not understand. We trade with people of different religions, customs, and sports passions. The fundamental economic and moral principles of trade are not affected by distance, language, religion, customs, or sports. They rest on mutual advantage. When a Vermonter exports maple syrup to a Floridian and imports oranges from the Floridian, there is no essential difference between that exchange and one between a Canadian and a Floridian.

Trade creates intertwined interests. Complex and prosperous societies are those in which people depend on each other in myriad ways—for food, clothing, entertainment, transportation, medical care, teaching, and more. That mutual dependence is a source of harmony, not a loss of autonomy. As Frédéric Bastiat, one of the greatest champions of freedom who ever lived, noted, "The one thing that people overlook is that the sort of dependence that results from exchange, i.e., from commercial transactions, is a reciprocal dependence. We cannot be dependent upon a foreigner without his being dependent upon us."

A Tax on Imports Is a Tax on Exports

A sales tax imposed on Floridians who purchase Canadian maple syrup may please the Vermont producers (unless they are serious about principles), but it is still a tax imposed on Floridians. It will likely raise the price the Vermont maple syrup producers can charge. In the end, the Floridians will pay more. What's more, however, it will restrict the Canadian market for Florida oranges, even if the Canadians are rational and refrain from "retaliating" by imposing such a tax on themselves. Why? Because a tax on imports has in the aggregate the same impact as a tax on exports. Exports are what you have to send to get imports. After all, what you want are the imports, not the exports, which you have to send away in order to get the imports.

It's possible—at great cost—to produce oranges up north and maple syrup in Florida, but it's a lot better for people to exchange Florida oranges for maple syrup from Canada or Vermont. When the Canadians find that Floridians are not buying their now more expensive (price paid to Canadian producers + the tax taken by Uncle Sam) maple syrup, they will not have the U.S. dollars to buy those oranges, meaning that the Floridians are less able to sell to the Canadian market. The market for oranges has just shrunk, which means lower income for Florida orange producers. The country as a whole is not better off. Taxing imports is, in effect, quite like directly taxing exports. (In economics, that's called the "Lerner Symmetry Thesis.")

> A tax on imports has in the aggregate the same impact as a tax on exports. Exports are what you have to send to get imports.

Taxes on Trade Don't Create Jobs, But They Do Lower Wages and Living Standards

Imposing taxes on imports doesn't create or protect jobs in the aggregate. Some industries might hire more people, but exporting industries end up laying off people. Some people might find their incomes rise, but at the expense of their fellow citizens, who must now pay higher prices (meaning that their real incomes fall) and who have fewer options than when they could buy from people in other countries. You export when you find that you can get higher prices from foreigners than from your neighbors. By taxing imports you tax the domestic exporters, meaning the higher prices exporters could charge abroad are lost to them.

Populist politicians focus on material goods because they think that only what you can touch or hold is real. But services generate value, as well. A doctor who saves your life is rendering a service that you cannot touch, hold, or weigh on a scale, but it is nonetheless of greater value than a shoe or a lightbulb or a spark plug that you can touch, hold, or weigh on a scale. Many wealthy countries export a great many services—insurance, medical technology, banking, and more—that populists scoff at as insignificant. Yet all material goods are actually valued not because they have weight but because they render services to us.

Shoes render me the service of keeping my feet safe and warm, as the lightbulb renders the service of enabling me to see when it is dark. The great free-enterprise economist J. B. Say, a friend and advisor of Thomas Jefferson, pointed out, "Material products derive their value from the services they render, and not from the substance of matter itself. It is the service which constitutes the value, and not the material form which serves as its vehicle."

"Trade Deficits" = "Investment Surpluses"

A common error of those who wish to tax their fellow citizens for importing goods is to claim that if a country runs a "trade deficit," it means that the country is "losing money." The word "deficit" is part of the problem, as what sounds like a negative term seems to lead some people to assume that it must be negative in all respects. In fact, it comes from a simple accounting identity. Savings minus investments equals exports minus imports, or S – I = Ex – Im. It's derived from the definition of Gross Domestic Product: GDP = Consumption + Government Expenditure + Investment + (Exports – Imports).

> Protectionism only protects cronies, or (to use the awful term adopted in political economy) 'rent-seekers.' They seek to gain at the expense of others, not by offering gain for gain but by depriving others of the right to seek their own gain.

Those who skipped economics or accounting think it's an equation for economic growth (it's not; it's an accounting identity), and they focus on the "minus imports" part. Reduce imports and you increase GDP, they say. Yet the reason that the identity has "minus imports" is because imports are already counted in Consumption, Government Expenditure, and Investment; we put Canadian maple syrup on our pancakes, bureaucrats use imported paper clips to hold together their paperwork, and carpet-making businesses import German machines to make the carpets they sell. (The formula just avoids counting the imports twice.)

Some algebra turns that accounting identity into S – I = Ex – Im, meaning that if your imports are greater than your exports (a "trade deficit") then investment in your country is greater than your domestic savings. In other words, a "trade deficit" is another way of describing a "capital surplus." The headline "Our Trade Deficit Goes Up" is functionally the same as "Foreigners Invest More in Our Economy," which is not a bad thing.

"Protectionism" Only Protects Cronies

The common term for imposing taxes and other restrictions on consumers of goods of foreign origin is "protectionism," which is unfortunate, because it implies that there is some "protecting" going on, as if buying Canadian maple syrup is an act of violence against which protection is needed. Who is being protected? Not the consumer, who has to pay higher prices for a smaller selection of goods and services. Not the exporter, whose market has just been reduced and who suffers losses. Who is protected? Those who lobby the state to impose taxes on people who buy from their competitors. We know them as special interests, cronies, or (to use the awful term adopted in political economy) "rent-seekers." They seek to gain at the expense of others, not by offering gain for gain but by depriving others of the right to seek their own gain. They profit from the losses, not the gains, of others.

The Possibility of National Security Exceptions

There might be some cases in which, in anticipation of a break in international trade, it would be wise to have the domestic capacity to produce various goods needed for the defense of the nation, for protection from a pandemic, and so on. Those possibilities are exploited mercilessly by special interests to argue that taxes and restrictions on furniture, baby socks, and tomatoes are all needed to protect national defense, but there may be some plausible cases. In those cases, however, imposing taxes on imports to foster local production is perhaps the most inefficient and the most harmful way to realize such capacities.

Consider steel, which has a variety of uses in national defense, although fewer than before as military tech is turning toward lightweight drone weapons delivery systems, for example. Far better to identify what would be needed for national defense and stockpile it or invest in that capacity, rather than to impose costs on every industry and every job that consumes steel, as taxes and restrictions on the importation of steel do.

Atlas Network Partners Work for Liberty, Rationality, Prosperity, and Peace

On every continent, Atlas Network partner organizations are working for free enterprise, freedom to innovate, and freedom to exchange. In Sri Lanka, the Advocata Institute helped lawmakers to formulate and then assisted in the implementation of a three-part reduction of tariffs and a dramatic simplification of the complicated system previously in place. In Pakistan, the Policy Research Institute for Market Economy helped the government with a five-year tariff reform plan that abolishes or reduces thousands of import duties and simplifies the tariff structure, while the Experts Centre for Market and Policy Research has empowered Pakistanis to generate their own electricity by reducing restrictions on solar panel importation, by enabling private investment in power generation, and by allowing people to introduce their own reliable meters.

Partners in Africa—where trade has been heavily restricted for many decades—are implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), educating the public and lawmakers about the benefits of wider and freer markets; in Cameroon, for example, the Cameroon Economic Policy Institute's "Trade for You" project is training cohorts of both businesspeople and bureaucrats on the implementation of liberalized trade; and in Burundi the Center for Development and Enterprises removed the onerous passport requirement for cross-border trading, raising incomes to tens of thousands of mostly female traders, eliminating assaults traders suffered from crossing at night to avoid the passport checks, and lowering prices for consumers.

In Argentina, Atlas Network partners such as Libertad y Progreso worked with the government to reduce currency controls, known locally as "Cepo Cambiario," and to allow Argentines to obtain U.S. dollars without restrictions. Trade barriers have been lowered or eliminated. As President Milei stated when he opened the Argentine Congress on March 1 of this year,

> Opening markets will open the doors of the world to Argentine companies so that they can sell our products to 8 billion people, in an international context where what Argentina has to offer will be in great demand.
>
> I also want to put an end here to another fallacy and that is the issue of the infant industry, an infant that is at least 90 years old. Or, let's say, to protect industry X, because it generates jobs. That is another lie. Because if in the process of opening up the economy, a better quality or better-priced product enters and a company goes bankrupt, it is also true that consumers now have more money in their pockets and can spend it in other sectors of the economy. Therefore, employment will be reallocated and will go to sectors where it is more productive and where there are higher wages and, therefore, there is greater welfare for all. Therefore, enough of the protectionist lie, because, in the end, it is nothing more than a scam between politicians and rent-seeking businessmen.

In the United States, many Atlas Network partners have worked to document the harm caused by imposition of taxes on American consumers, as well as by other trade barriers. For examples, the Cato Institute's Herbert A. Stiefel Center for Trade Policy Studies has produced a tsunami of research, while the Liberty Justice Center has won at the U.S. Court of Appeals a 7–4 ruling against the presidential administration's unilateral imposition of taxes on American consumers without congressional authorization. This imposition was despite the American Constitution explicitly and exclusively delegating the power to tax (Art. I, Sec. 8, Clause 1) and the power to regulate commerce (Art. I, Sec. 8, Clause 3) to Congress and to Congress alone. The case was granted review by the Supreme Court, and arguments were heard in November.

The natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace. Two nations that trade together become mutually dependent: if one has an interest in buying, the other has an interest in selling; and all unions are based on mutual needs.

Trade, prosperity, and peace are intimately linked. As Charles Montesquieu, a French thinker who had a huge impact on the formation of the American republic, noted, "The natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace. Two nations that trade together become mutually dependent: if one has an interest in buying, the other has an interest in selling; and all unions are based on mutual needs."

In other words, when two groups come into contact with one another, they either fight or they trade. Fighting is almost always a negative-sum interaction; both lose. Trading is a positive-sum interaction; both gain.

"Through the training, peer-learning platforms, and grant programs Atlas Network provided, we acquired critical tools to professionalize our operations, strengthen communications, and promote best practices from the global liberty movement. With Atlas Network's help, KEFiM has grown into one of the most influential think tanks in Greece."

—NICOS ROMPAPAS
PRESIDENT, KEFiM

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