



# The voice of Maria Dolens

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Monthly newsletter from the Peace Bell Foundation

## Sultan Erdogan

**T**urkish opposition circles have no doubts that the heavy prison sentence (2 years and 7 months) handed down last December to the mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, represented the premature and unexpected 'kick-off' of the campaign for the presidential elections that, after a period of indecision, would now seem to be definitively set for 14 May.

This belief is based on two closely related factors. First of all, the huge popularity of the character now threatened with political disqualification, the first exponent of a non-governmental party to propel himself, in 2019, to the leadership of the country's most important city at the end of a tormented path characterised by a double vote. Secondly, the observation of the excessive severity of the punishment, in the face of behaviour that, in a democratic system, would have been almost immune from censure, because it falls within the sacrosanct principle of freedom of expression.

In fact, İmamoğlu had expressed himself - in terms that were not entirely elegant, objectively speaking - towards the members of the Electoral Tribunal, who had imposed the repetition of the municipal ballot six months after the first one. (He won again).

The leaders of the opposition, who recently coalesced into the so-called Table of Six, agree that what happened is a crude manoeuvre designed to prevent İmamoğlu from standing for the vital May election, thus ridding the incumbent president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, of one of his most formidable rivals on the road to re-election.

This 'bump in the road' (if it can be called such) on which we have focused given its significance, occurs at a historical juncture in which Turkey finds itself, for various reasons, repeatedly confronted with the spotlight of international attention.

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Mon	closed
Tue	closed
Wed	09:00 - 16:00
Thu	09:00 - 16:00
Fri	09:00 - 16:00
Sat	09:00 - 16:00
Sun	09:00 - 16:00

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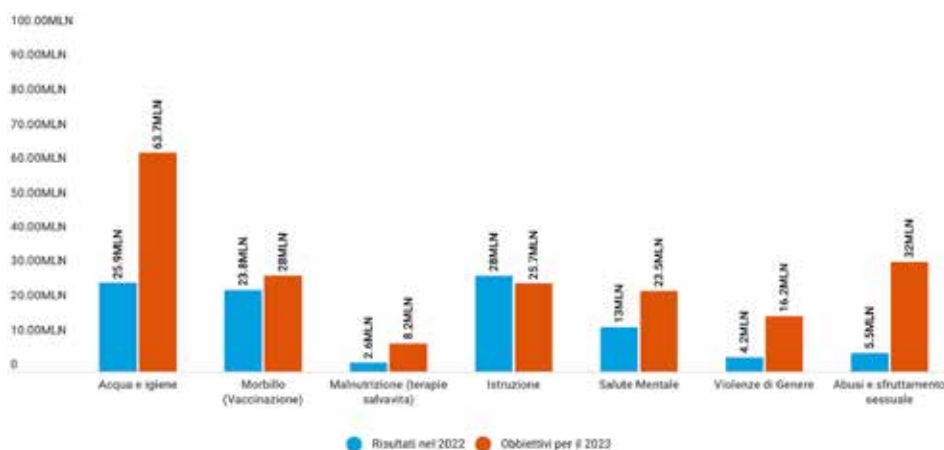
## HAPPENING AT THE UN

# Never before have so many children been at risk in the world

## UNICEF LAUNCHES ITS BIGGEST APPEAL EVER

Today there are more children in need of humanitarian assistance than at any other time in recent history. The total is new, the causes are not, and they are always the same: wars, conflicts, displacement, mass population movements, epidemics and increasing rates of malnutrition. To make matters worse, there is climate change, which worsens crises and triggers new ones. This was the situation reported by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), pointing out that in 2022, humanitarian needs increased drastically, largely due to the war in Ukraine, widespread increases in food insecurity and threats of famine due to climate-related factors. And then there are the epidemics, not just Covid, but those of diseases that have long since been eradicated in the West. Some people are still dying of measles because there are not enough vaccines.

The emergencies in Afghanistan and Ukraine, those of the Syrian refugees, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia are the first to be addressed



UN - Unicef humanitarian action targets and achievements

The emergencies in Afghanistan and Ukraine, those of the refugees from Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia are the first five to be tackled. For these, Unicef is launching an appeal for 10.3 billion dollars to be used to assist more than 173 million people, 110 million of whom are under the age of 18.

Afghanistan, which has almost disappeared from the news radar, is the country that requires the most intervention, with USD 1.65 billion needed to start humanitarian assistance projects. Coming a close second, the tragic ranking signals that a strong response to the flow of Ukrainian refugees reaching Europe is urgently needed. A response for which more than \$1 billion is needed. For the crisis in Syria, the UN Fund is asking for 867 million, over 862 million are needed to deal with the emergency in the Democratic Republic of Congo and 674 for Ethiopia.

Unicef's 2023 appeal, the largest ever in terms of funds needed, aims to provide strategies to deal with diverse and highly complex situations, in a context where the lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic instability are having a devastating impact on the living conditions of millions of children worldwide.

In 2022, humanitarian needs increased due to wars and famine threats



Climate change is further worsening the scope and intensity of these emergencies. The last 10 years have been the hottest on record, and the number of climate-related disasters has tripled over the last 30 years.

Action must be taken now, which is why the 2023 Humanitarian Action Overview Report sets a number of key targets: to reach 8.2 million children with treatment for severe acute malnutrition and over 28 million with measles vaccinations. The aim is to assist 63.7 million people with safe water and 23.5 with mental health and psychosocial support measures. In the fight against gender-based violence, 16.2 million people, including children and women, are to be targeted and an attempt will be made to reach 32 million of them with safe channels to enable them to report sexual exploitation and abuse.

On the education front, including at pre-school level, the goal is to support more than 25.7 million children.

But in addition to goals, there are also some achievements. And the beginning of every year is the time to take stock. During 2022, the humanitarian intervention, in partnership with UN agencies, non-governmental organisations, civil society and donors, paid off. 25.9 million people were reached with drinking and household water, 23.8 million children with measles vaccination and 2.6 million with life-saving treatment for severe acute malnutrition. Access to education was guaranteed to over 28 million students. This was complemented by interventions on combating gender-based violence and the opening of safe channels for more than 5 million people to report sexual abuse and exploitation.

Examining figures can be boring, especially when they concern lists of things done or to be done, crises to be faced, past emergencies and predictions of future ones. The fact remains that the only way to define the exact magnitude of a phenomenon is to measure it, otherwise one risks falling into the trap of oversimplifying, comparing completely different realities, and perhaps even establishing orders of priority that are not based on the objective consistency of the problems to be addressed.

The last 10 years have been the hottest on record and the number of climate-related disasters has tripled over the last 30 years

There are so many crises that it seems impossible to tackle them all. The doubt is that there is an underlying problem in the global economic development model. If one child's most important need is to receive the latest smartphone model and another's main need is to receive the measles vaccine, there must be something wrong.



## MEMORY AND REMEMBRANCE

Memory and remembrance have different meanings, not least because synonyms do not exist: there would be no need to invent two terms to say the same thing. However, the words memory and remembrance have both been used to commemorate massacres: the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis (27 January, the day Auschwitz was liberated in 1945) and the foibe massacres (10 February, the date on which the Paris Treaties assigning Istria, Kvarner and the city of Zadar to Yugoslavia were signed in 1947).

In the first case the event is remembered as a World Day called by the UN, and in the second case, the massacres are commemorated with an Italian public holiday. Needless to say, the scale of these massacres was very different: on the one hand, a planned genocide that led to the death of 6 million people, on the other, the slaughter of Italian soldiers and civilians by Yugoslav partisans that caused between 3,000 and 5,000 deaths. They are different things, they should not be confused, but they cannot be forgotten, all the victims have the same dignity, regardless of numbers. The Bell tolls for everyone.





## HAPPENING AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

# Resistance and reconstruction

## ACTION PLAN FOR UKRAINE ADOPTED

In metallurgical technology, resilience is the capacity of a metal to resist deformation from external forces. The opposite of fragility. In the psychological field, it is the ability of an individual to cope with and overcome a traumatic event or period of difficulty. In war there are both metals and individuals and resilience concerns both. To resist bombs you need strong shelters and strong minds. In Ukraine, like everywhere else, there are brave people, some who do not make it, as always, and a majority of normal individuals who are under attack and in need of help, both now and when the conflict is over. This is why the Council of Europe has just adopted the Action Plan 'Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction', starting this year and running until 2026.

A project, emphasised General Secretary Marija Pejčinović Burić, 'drawn up in close consultation with the Ukrainian authorities'. It is an initiative, she added, that 'is part of our organisation's contribution to the reconstruction process of the country, which is facing brutal aggression by the Russian Federation and immense destruction'.

The total budget is estimated at EUR 50 million The highest ever for a specific country

The aims of the intervention, she continued, were defined in detail: "The new Action Plan is aimed at increasing the resilience of public institutions by strengthening democratic governance and the rule of law and protecting the human rights of citizens".

Assistance and support for Kiev will also be one of the main topics on the agenda of the upcoming summit of heads of state and government in Reykjavik in May. The decision to convene a summit, the fourth in the 73-year history of the organisation, was taken in the wake of a report presented in October by a Study Group chaired by former Irish President Mary Robinson and composed of leading political figures from across the continent. The experts issued 30 recommendations to enable the Council of Europe to respond effectively to the challenges presented by the war in Ukraine, taking into account the organisation's core competencies: the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

But Strasbourg has also set itself other goals. In addition to providing continued support to Ukraine, the Action Plan also aims to support Kiev's reform agenda, which has been intensified since the de-

cision made by Brussels to grant the country EU candidate status. The total budget for the four-year cooperation framework is estimated at EUR 50 million, the highest ever budget for an Action Plan targeting a specific country.

The Council of Europe will cooperate with the Ukrainian authorities in addressing urgent needs and priorities, including the implementation of the measures outlined in the opinion of the European Commission in the areas of constitutional justice, the fight against corruption, money laundering, the development of an independent, effective and accountable judi-

The initiative will be closely coordinated with the EU, UN and OSCE



Bank (CEB), which will make a significant contribution by partially financing investment projects with a high social value aimed at improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable groups.

The CEB will also be able to operate directly in the country as soon as the final stage of the ongoing process through which Ukraine will become a full member of the Bank is completed. The Council of Europe's action will be closely coordinated with the European Union, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as with bilateral funders.

One of the objectives is to support Kiev's reform programme necessary for entry into the European Union

ciary, the promotion of freedom of expression and freedom of the media, and the strengthening of the protection of the rights of national minorities.

The Action Plan will be accompanied by important activities by the Council of Europe Development

Support for Kiev will be one of the topics on the agenda of the summit of heads of state and government in Reykjavik in May





IT HAPPENED TODAY

# The *Piccolo Coro dell'Antoniano* at the Bell

A beautiful friendship has always linked Mariele Ventre and the 'Piccolo Coro dell'Antoniano' children's choir from Bologna with Rovereto. A relationship attested to by no less than three visits that the choir and its founding teacher made to the Bell of the Fallen, all in February, during the 'Children's Carnival'. On these occasions, the Piccolo Coro was the star of the very popular and well-attended concerts held at the Teatro Comunale Zandonai.

Mariele accompanied her children from the Piccolo Coro to the Bell for the first time in Rovereto on 10 Fe-

bruary 1985. She returned on 18 February 1990, when she was presented with a miniature reproduction of the Bell as a gift by the then secretary of the Foundation, Sergio Mozzi. She made her third visit, exactly five years later, on 19 February 1995, again in the context of the 'Children's Carnival'.

The year 1995 was an important year for Mariele, who would pass away prematurely just ten months later, on 16 December. The trip to Rovereto and the concert were therefore some of her last commitments with the Piccolo Coro. It is significant that, in her very last year of life, Mariele refused

to give up this appointment, which she considered extremely important, not only on an artistic level (the concert at the Zandonai), but also as a formative moment for her children. Almost as an appendix to these events, the 1st 'Armonicamente Bambino' National Conference for teachers and leaders of children's choirs was held on 20 April 2002 in Palazzo Todeschi, organised by the Municipality of Rovereto and the 'Amici e Minicoro' Cultural Association. During the conference, introduced by Father Berardo Rossi, the figure of Mariele and her work as an educator and musician was an important focal point. The speakers included Mariele's si-



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18 February 1990: The Piccolo Coro "Mariele Ventre" dell'Antoniano under the Bell, on the right, Mariele Ventre and Foundation Secretary Sergio Mozzi



ster, Maria Antonietta Ventre, president of the Mariele Ventre Foundation.

The *Piccolo Coro dell'Antoniano* has always been the staunch, strong promoter of a culture of Peace, which is also one of its dearest and most recurring themes in its vast repertoire. It is no coincidence that in 2003 the choir was appointed *Goodwill Ambassador* of Unicef Italy 'so that through the communicative power and universal language of music and song performed by children, it can convey a message of Peace and hope to all their peers, regardless of nationality, religion, gender, language and race'.

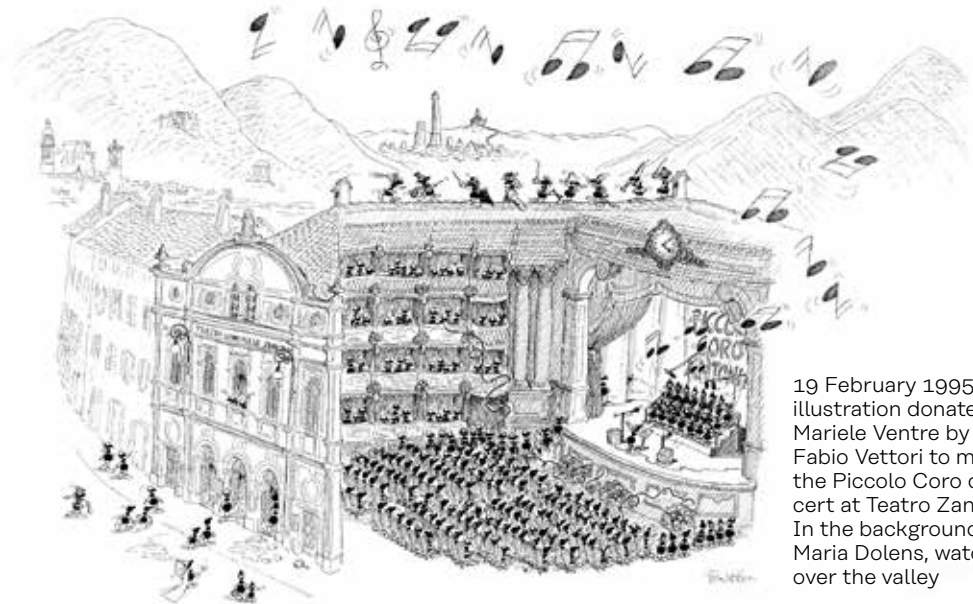
In fact, long before this important acknowledgement, on 1 September 1971, on the eve of its tour to the Holy Land, Pope Paul VI asked the choir to take his greetings and good wishes for peace to the land where Jesus was born. And, not surprisingly, upon arrival at Tel Aviv airport, the first song sung by the choir on Israeli soil was *Hevenu shalom aleichem*: we have come to bring you Peace.

In its now sixty years of existence, the Piccolo Coro has created many songs with Peace as their main theme. Many of these made it onto the recent compilation (December 2022) entitled *Peace, with songs such as Il cielo di Beirut, Il sole verrà, Prova a sorridere, Le impronte del cuore, Il mio cuore è un gran pallone, Una stella a Betlemme, Se la gente usasse il cuore and Hevenu shalom aleichem.*

Francesco Marruncheddu



19 February 1995: The Piccolo Coro "Mariele Ventre" dell'Antoniano under the Bell



19 February 1995: The illustration donated to Mariele Ventre by artist Fabio Vettori to mark the Piccolo Coro concert at Teatro Zandonai. In the background, Maria Dolens, watching over the valley



19 February 1995: Mariele Ventre on the stage of Teatro Zandonai at the end of the concert applauds Maestro Gianpaolo Daicampi, director of the 'Minicoro di Rovereto' children's choir

*To be continued from page 1...*

On the part of Western countries, the European Union and the United States, there is a growing sense of frustration with its leadership, which cites the position taken by Ankara in the Russian/Ukrainian conflict as its main reason for existing. It is a position that appears mainly dictated by reasons of opportunism, and this inevitably makes it lack unambiguoussness and coherence.

While it is undoubtedly true that Ankara is supplying armaments to Ukraine - in particular the effective Bayraktar TB2 drones - having previously closed off access to the Black Sea to Russian military vessels, it is equally true that as early as in the aftermath of 24 February, its leadership had already clearly refused to associate itself with the sanctions decreed by Brussels and Washington, which it deemed 'useless and counterproductive'. Similarly, it had not opposed the plans, publicly announced by several Russian companies (including Gazprom), to relocate their 'headquarters' hitherto located in other European countries to Anatolian soil.

It should also be emphasised that, after the invasion of Ukraine, 'Sultan Erdogan' has certainly not broken off his relations with 'Tsar Putin', with whom he is united by an undeniable human and political affinity, and whom he has met on several occasions and in various formats. In trilateral talks with Iranian President Raisi in July in Tehran, in bilateral talks in Sochi the following month, with Central Asian countries in Samarkand and Astana. Against this backdrop, it has to be acknowledged that national interest (Russia is Turkey's third largest trading partner in absolute terms and, more specifically, the leading supplier of gas and the main country of origin of tourist flows) has clearly prevailed over other possible considerations, giving further substance to that 'privileged partnership' that has actually seen Turkish exports to the Russian Federation double over the last ten months.

In an objective judgement, having to also assess the positive sides of a 'less than exemplary' relationship, it seems fair to point out that the so-called Grain Initiative agreed on last summer under UN auspices to allow the continuation of supplies vital for the survival of numerous African countries, was made possible mainly thanks to the existing channel of dialogue between Moscow and Ankara.

Also adding to the 'package' of Western recriminations is the fact that Turkey considered withdrawing its veto on the extension of NATO to

Sweden and Finland, which were applying for membership, only after having obtained assurances from the two capitals that the support hitherto granted on their respective territories to the Kurdish exiles of the PKK would not be extended.

Although the stance described above certainly does not call into question Ankara's membership of the multilateral security body, it does validate the reasoning of those who consider Turkey 'a headache that we have to live with anyway'. It is also counterproductive in the European context. Turkey's aspiration to one day be welcomed into the EU family by successfully concluding the journey that began way back in 1999 in Helsinki (the ebbs and flows of history...) by obtaining candidate status, had so far found the most support in Sweden of all the 27 members. After what everyone considered blackmail, it is a foregone conclusion that Stockholm will henceforth take a very different view.

In this context, in the analyses performed by authoritative commentators at home and abroad, there is a growing suspicion that if a few international crises exists (in addition to Ukraine, the Syrian dossier is still very topical, with Turkey engaged in the creation of a 'buffer zone' to avert the feared Kurdish attacks, not to mention the recurring 'pinpricks' with Greece over the delimitation of air and sea space and the exploitation of seabed resources) these can only help Erdogan to divert the attention of many of his compatriots from his very serious domestic problems. First and foremost, the galloping inflation rate (up by 80 per cent in one year), which significantly reduces the real value of wages and savings and is also behind the Turkish lira's heavy depreciation and worsening social imbalance.

At the level of the electoral programme, the opposition is fighting for a return to the parliamentary system in force until 2018, i.e. until the reform introduced by President Erdogan as a reaction to the failed 'putsch' two years earlier, which cost - as is well known - thousands of Turkish citizens long prison sentences as well as a massive purge policy from public offices and jobs. What is stigmatised by the 'Table of Six' is above all the excess of power in the hands of Erdogan and his partisans and the lack of any internal system of checks and balances. One designated victim of this shortcoming is certainly the People's Democratic Party (Hdp), the main Kurdish party, which is constantly under threat of closure because it is arbitrarily likened to a terrorist formation. Even with the margin of error that characterises vote forecasts made months in advance, experts agree that Erdogan's more than 30 years of political militancy - founder of the Justice and Development Party (Akp), mayor of Istanbul from 1994 to 1998, prime minister from 2003 to 2014, and uninterrupted head of state since then - are insufficient for him to impose himself as Turkey's twelfth president in the first round - assuming that the polls are fair and free. And, in the event of a runoff, with all the opposition parties expected to unite against his candidature, the prospects of his defeat would, according to such analyses, become realistic.

As a final consideration, it is not out of place to recall how in 1997 Recep Tayyip Erdogan, then the first citizen of Istanbul, was convicted - in a domestic political context quite different from the present one - of an opinion crime not dissimilar to the one Imanoglu is charged with today. By general assessment, the ruling marked the beginning of the hitherto unstoppable political rise of the 'sultan'. Another topic to reflect on, a quarter of a century later, in a Turkey that is about to make a fundamental choice about its near future.

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President

## VIOLENT EARTHQUAKE IN SYRIA AND TURKEY

Shortly before going to press, we received the tragic news of the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that has left thousands dead in northern Syria and south-eastern Turkey, the country to which our opening editorial is dedicated this month. As European citizens, we add our voices to that of Ursula Von Der Leyen, President to the EU Commission who, standing in solidarity with the victims' families, assured them that «Europe's support is already on the way».