



# The voice of Maria Dolens

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## The US and China intervene

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As was to be predicted, the first anniversary of the Russian aggression against Ukraine was marked, on both fronts, by a number of events. Since they have been widely disseminated by Italian and foreign information bodies, for our specific purposes, they require only a brief mention.

The «historic» trip to Kiev of US President Biden; the «torrential» speech by Vladimir Putin before the “nomenklatura” of his country; the “very delicate” visit to Moscow by the head of Chinese foreign affairs, Wang Yi; the “anticipated” meeting, in the Ukrainian capital, between Zelensky and Prime Minister Meloni; the new Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations in order to achieve «comprehensive, just and lasting» peace. Thus, we have the most significant episodes that took place one after the other. Each of them is bound to leave after-ef-

fects of a various and complex nature so that it would be premature to attempt to analyse them at this moment in time.

If we restrict ourselves to the known elements, we see that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which has now entered its second year of dramatic existence, continues to represent a very serious open wound in the heart of Europe. It is so for many reasons: for the high number of human losses on the side of both the attacked and the attackers; for the immense devastation of various infrastructures and the associated costs necessary for massive reconstruction; for the brutal violence committed by the occupying troops against the resident populations; for the void that won't be filled for generations to come and that constitutes a great divide between the inhabitants of two nations, indeed marked by strong political contrasts but also by a closely intertwined, ethnic, religious and cultural history and identity.

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# Not just a veil

SEMINAR AT THE BELL  
ON THE REVOLT IN IRAN

«Women and young people who are fighting alone, peacefully, to ask "only" for freedom». These few words were enough for Pejman

Abdolmohammadi, associate professor at the University of Trento who is concerned with the history of the Middle East, to define the situation in Iran. The actual meaning behind the question seems to rest mainly on the word "only". There are countries where one cannot say or do what one wants, even when it causes no harm to others. To bring change «a great Renaissance movement» is needed, and this is what, according to the scholar, is underway in the Islamic Republic. The opportunity to develop the topic further came on February 3 on Colle di Miravalle where the Rovereto Peace Foundation organized a

forum on the theme «"Woman, life and freedom". Analysis and testimonies of the protest for the affirmation of rights in Iran». Following an official introduction, Abdolmohammadi and the journalist Sara Hejazi, researcher at the Bruno Kessler Foundation, focused on a complex reality, which does not see a clash between two parties united among themselves, but rather proposes a series of facets difficult to understand from our geographical and cultural perspective.

On one point, however, they all agree: the protesters are mainly the millennials, young people born after 2000 who «are beaten, often arrested, sometimes tortured, in some cases killed during the demonstrations». These are things we will read in history books. Maybe we will call them heroes, they certainly remind us that freedom doesn't come for free. But what exactly do these young people want? To answer the question Abdolmohammadi starts from a demographic analysis. «We must keep in mind that 61 percent of the Iranian population, that is approximately 84 million people, is under the age of 25. And the leadership of the movement seeking change is largely located in this group. More generally, 75 percent of the country's inhabitants are under the age of 44, people who were born either in 1979, the year of the revolution, or after».

They basically know nothing else, and they have two main requests: respect for fundamental human rights, universal values that apply everywhere, and the separation between religion and politics, the secular state.

Abdolmohammadi goes on to highlight how the Islamic Republic has imposed codes of values on the entire population for 44 years. The obligation of the veil is one of these and it is what caused the spark that ignited the revolt. It all began with the killing of Mahsa Amini, the 22-year-old arrested by the morality police on September 13, 2022, in Tehran because her head wasn't covered enough. Three days later she died from the beatings she received. Her peers did not accept the incident and rallied against a law that forces all females over the age of 9 to wear the veil in public. Then the revolt spread, and the young people began to ask for more, in particular, the cultural pluralism guaranteed by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah of Persia who reigned over Iran from 16 September 1941 until the Islamic revolution of 11 February 1979. In fact, in the pre-revolutionary era, «women could choose whether to wear a miniskirt or a veil, whether to go to the disco or anywhere else», in short, they were free. This is why Abdolmohammadi defines this movement as an «Iranian renaissance», as «it is a question of reviving what already existed, not of inventing something new».

Sara Hejazi for her part initially focused on the title of the seminar which takes up the slogan used by the protesters: «Woman, life, freedom». Concepts, she said, which should be understood as a whole: «Woman generates the life that is then lived fighting for freedom». This is not a slogan invented in recent months but has a long history dating back to the feminist movement promoted by Abdullah Öcalan, a central figure in the Kurdish liberation movement who is serving a life sentence in a Turkish prison. The Iranian revolt is therefore part of a broader attempt to make gender relations more just.

Iran's pluralist history spans thousands of years. Cyrus the Great comes to mind together with other kings who shared a very tolerant view. The last three hundred years however have been problematic in the relationship with the modern world and the veil has played a fundamental role as a symbol, also because it has been perceived by some as having no bearing on Persian authenticity. In fact, Iran is a "recent" country and not at all homogeneous, as it is full of ethnic and religious minorities. The relationship with the modern world has been problematic since the eighteenth century and then throughout the nineteenth century, when Europeans saw it as an irrational and backward place that was behind the times. «But the Iranians - highlighted Hejazi - did not think they were backwards just because women wore the veil».

However, the story is still more complex. There were times, such as in the 1930s, when the authorities actually warned women not to cover their heads. «At that time Iran was allied with Nazi Germany and therefore it was necessary to resemble the Germans as much as possible, also aesthetically, so they wore European clothes. For a part of the population, however, this represented a trauma and women began to look for ways to go out without feeling ashamed. They wore big hats or hid their shapes in their husbands' loose coats. In short, history has been full of peculiar attitudes, up to the pre-revolutionary moment, where in fact there was a certain cultural freedom».

The main theme of the 1979 revolution, continued the expert, was essentially political: «We did not want to be with the West, nor did we want to be with the communist East. The intent was to create a new ideological paradigm centred on an Islam that guarantees social justice». It is at this point that the veil underwent a transformation «becoming a totally new, purely political symbol». According to Hejazi, therefore, «it is a question of framing the phenomenon within an attempt to shift the boundaries of morality that has been going on for decades, probably since the war with Iraq ended. At a certain point, the new generations began to have a need for public visibility. Also, because there is a whole series of people and identities that do not coincide with the narrative that wants the public space to be "clean", "pure" and "moral" according to Islamic laws». The imposition of "moral" rules through repression leaves 84 million people living in a powder keg, but that does not mean that everyone thinks the same way. «One day last summer, before the current revolt - recalls the journalist - there was a demonstration against the veil and the next day another in favour. The real question is: what is the real identity of Iran? The answer is difficult, because if on the one hand there are young people fighting for freedom, on the other there are those who don't understand this movement».





## HAPPENING AT THE UN

# Winning the lottery is not necessary

## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF HAPPINESS

«**T**hat all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed». If it wasn't a passage from the United States Declaration of Independence, adopted on July 4, 1776, it would be like reading a science fiction book. But the US is not the only country to contemplate the pursuit of happiness. It was established in the 2008 Constitution of Bhutan as a fundamental

objective of the state, in addition to the promotion of peace, prosperity and national unity. The same goes for the Fundamental Charter of the Samoa Islands, of 1960, while the United Arab Emirates goes even further since there the State must «guarantee the happiness» and «the well-being of citizens».

At this point we need to agree on what it means to "be happy". And it is slippery ground, since the concept is difficult to define objectively and may be interpreted in different ways depending on the cultural and political context in which we find ourselves. For this reason, celebrating «International Day of Happiness», on March 20 every year sin-

ce 2013, is more complicated than it seems. The date was established by the United Nations General Assembly through an initiative presented by Bhutan, which put the constitutional principle into practice by recognizing the value of national happiness as higher than that of per capita income. When the news of the small Himalayan kingdom of Asia provides economic data to just under 800,000 citizens, it not only speaks of Gross Domestic Product, the GDP that makes Western economists lose sleep, but also of Gross National Happiness (GNH), a parameter unknown to the market.

Seen from this perspective, the International Day is beginning to take shape as it provides not only a state of psychophysical well-being for the individual, but also a political aspiration to pursue. The central question is: what do we need to be happy? We certainly need economic security, but this seems more of a prerequisite rather than the final goal.

One of the first scientific studies on the subject was conducted in 1978 by two psychologists, Brickman and Campbell, who examined the psychological adjustment of people who had won the lottery compared

to those who had suffered a serious injury. The results showed that the two groups, a few months after the event, had very similar levels of satisfaction.

In 2010, however, a Harvard University psychologist, Daniel Gilbert, found that people tend to overestimate how much a positive situation, such as winning something or getting a prestigious job, affects their long-term happiness. It seems that lottery winnings affect our well-being less than small daily activities, such as spending time with friends or seeing family members. A more recent study, conducted in 2020 by a group of scientists at Stanford University, investigated the relationship between happiness and health. Experts have found that those who are hap-

py tend to be in better physical and mental health than those who are not. The data is clear: lower blood pressure, better heart function and more brain activity.

In short, we end up spending our whole lives looking for happiness where there is none to be found and we fail to grab it when it passes right under our noses. If there wasn't scientific data, it would seem like the moral of a bad Christmas movie, where everyone argues for an hour and a half at grandma's and in the end, they discover that it's actually "the little things" that count. That's not exactly the case: "little things" only matter if you already have a home, food, running water, perhaps even hot water, a school not too far away and an acceptable life expectancy.

But once all this has been achieved, one must be very careful when desiring more, as there is the risk that the dream will come true and in doing so expose our absolute inability to be happy.

According to the UN, we need to work in two directions: in the poorest states so that everyone has what they need, in the rich countries so that they avoid pursuing the superfluous as their sole purpose in life. In short, to go to dinner with friends you can also take the bus, you don't really need a helicopter.

Some countries that have incorporated the right to pursue happiness into their constitution are working on it, others are not.



Shopping at Paro weekend market, Bhutan

To be continued from page 1...

A general, profound sense of bewilderment and impotence is further accentuated with the observation of how nothing, or barely anything, solid exists at the moment on which to build any attempt at "reconciliation". The negotiations conducted in the first month of the war through delegations (low-profile, it should be noted) from Moscow and Kiev, with the aim of putting an end to hostilities by agreeing mutual concessions, in fact resulted in nothing.

For months now, in fact, a political head-to-head has been evident, in which neither side is willing to take a step back: for fear of letting further parts of the national territory fall into the hands of Moscow in the case of Zelensky, and in Putin's case for fear of losing credibility on the domestic front (all traces of that on an international level have been irretrievably lost).

The emphasis of the moment seems to be almost exclusively concentrated on the use of ever more sophisticated and high-performance weapons now that the conflict has entered a prolonged phase of attrition and exhaustion, and the Russian offensive has resumed (we will see how long it lasts) on the various fronts (in the Donbass, in Kharkiv, in Zaporizhzhia and in other strategic points). Beyond the ongoing fighting, their use also appears essential in order to prepare those wider-ranging operations to the best of their respective capabilities that both sides, obviously with opposing objectives, have announced they will start over the next few weeks.

From this point of view, the involvement of the European Union and NATO (minus Turkey, which up to now has remained substantially equidistant between Russia and Ukraine) is becoming ever more all-encompassing, approaching a situation of "co-belligerency". In concrete terms, it translates into a new series of military deliveries which - as in the case of the Leopard 2 tanks - has raised some doubts concerning the exclusive "defensive" nature of the armaments delivered to the Ukrainian forces. If for armoured vehicles the dividing line is not entirely clear, what of the new wishes clearly expressed by President Zelensky at the European Council on 9 February and in the *en petit comité* meetings which immediately preceded and took place in London and Paris? There, the discussion clearly fell on the aeronautical sector (the so-called "wings for freedom", represented by F-16 fighter jets) and long-range missiles, whose offensive capability is indubitable. According to Kiev's assessments, it is a matter of compensating the very wide numerical gap existing with the Russian Federation both from the point of view of manpower (it should be noted that the Ukrainian population is 4 times lower) and of armaments (in terms of stockpiles existing in warehouses). According to reliable estimates the cost of US military supplies to Ukraine alone in 2022 exceeded the total amount from 2020 to three traditional allies of the United States, that is Afghanistan (before, of course, its reconquest by the Mujahideen) Egypt and Israel. This fact provides a clear idea of the extent of Euro-US involvement.

Up to now the West (in the geographical configuration mentioned above) has shown a commendable cohesion, managing to amalgamate the approaches of radical and irrevocable closure



with regard to Moscow, supported above all by the members of the so-called «Bucharest Nine» (made up of the 9 countries of NATO's "Eastern Flank") together with those members most aware of the need to reopen, sooner or later, some form of dialogue with the capital. The recent polls relating to local public opinion and the attitude towards the war, also widely reported by the media, are eloquent confirmation of this heterogeneity.

The 10 packages of sanctions adopted by the EU in the 12 months following the aggression form unequivocal evidence of a substantial resoluteness. They are supplemented by increasingly targeted and invasive measures and have been compared by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs Borrell - with an appropriate match to the moods of the moment - «to arsenic, which acts slowly, but irreversibly».

At the same time, the process of Ukraine's accession to the Union, with all the complex procedures this entails, is proceeding at a steady pace, following the visits to Kiev by the presidents of the Commission and the European Council as well as the aforementioned visit to Brussels by Zelensky. Against this background, it does not seem out of place to question whether the convinced military support so far granted to the Ukrainian government both by Washington (most recently, and clearly and almost «brazenly», by President Biden himself in his lightning visit to Kiev) and by Brussels, might (or rather must) coincide, with some urgency, with other initiatives. The Holy Father is an authoritative supporter of those initiatives aimed at putting an end to the bloodshed where the end is not in sight. To confirm this, it is enough to recall the very recent statements by Putin's generals who estimate a further 24 months of fighting as the period necessary to impose "Russian peace" on Ukraine. Such a period might definitively derail a convoy already engaged along an impervious route and almost devoid of safety nets.



Moreover, if the origins of the conflict are evident beyond any possible doubt and if those responsible for it stand trial, when it will be possible to do so, before the competent international justice bodies (Tribunal of the Hague), the consequences in the medium and long term will remain unpredictable. From his observatory in the United Nations Headquarters, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, in an implicit recognition of the impotence of the organization he presides over, noted how the prospects for peace are increasingly giving way to a further upsurge of armed clashes and how «never in our lives have we seen the risks of a nuclear threat grow».

Turning to a possible facilitator capable of initiating an intermediary process between the parties, which is difficult to set in motion and is uncertain in outcome, appears at this point to be difficult to postpone.

My consideration is that this role cannot be assumed by Europe (too aligned) nor by the United Nations (paralyzed by the veto system) nor by intermediate powers such as Turkey or Israel (lacking authority and as regards Turkey is also grappling with the very serious problems caused by the recent, devastating earthquake). Due to the vital relevance of the interests at stake - under political/military, geo-strategic, economic/financial aspects as well as others - the United States and the People's Republic of China would appear fully justified if they were to take coordinated action under the circumstances. Faced with the "recommendations" to reach a ceasefire which would be the first step towards a future agreement, neither Zelensky (if pressured by Biden) nor Putin (if urged to do so by Xi Jinping) could avoid this task, since in the current international situation there is no "third power" capable of opposing a measure decided by mutual agreement by the two world super-powers.

From this point of view, the proposal for a «peace plan» presented by China in connection with former Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Moscow must, in my opinion, be seen to have a positive value. Many of the provisions contained therein, which are inspired by the primary need to avoid antagonizing either the Russians or the Ukrainians, end up being ambiguous, even contradictory. It is no coincidence that President Zelensky immediately declared himself available for a meeting with his Chinese counterpart with the intention, undeclared but understandable, of dislodging the "dragon" from the consolidated position of pro-Russian "neutrality". This ambiguous equidistance was confirmed a few days ago when the Chinese abstained during the vote in New York on the Resolution of the General Assembly.

On closer inspection, a unilateral initiative - however much criticized in Western capitals - is still preferable to inaction. On the other hand, Sino-American relations are characterized in this period by profound fundamental differences (referred to in the September editorial which was dedicated to the very delicate situation of Taiwan), further exacerbated by the most recent episode of the "spy balloons" (real or presumed). It is unrealistic to hypothesize a path shared by the two super-powers, especially if one considers that the planned mission to Beijing by US Secretary of State Blinken was postponed. The visit was to be an obligatory first step for a meeting between Presidents Biden and Xi Jinping, a meeting that was originally set for this year, but which has now become more uncertain.

As a final consideration, two references to the past. It is popular opinion among historians that the results of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 allowed the defeated nation, in that case France, to gradually, and without excessive trauma, reintegrate into the new international order, to the benefit of all. In the assessments of many historians, a similar response did not occur in Versailles towards Germany approximately 100 years later. Based on the "unfair nature" of the orders imposed, a series of demands - economic, military and territorial - led, with the advent of Nazism, to the well-known and tragic subsequent events.

Returning to the present day, it is certainly desirable that the solidity and steadfastness of the West contribute to bringing about the fall of the regime currently established in the Kremlin, which has placed itself, by choice and without necessity, outside any acceptable framework of legality. However much ingrained the images of the massacres of Bucha, Irpin and other Ukrainian cities remain, I believe that the model to be applied to post-Putin Russia is the "Viennese" example. The goal to strive for is a return to the normal circuit of collaboration and interaction between states of a country of fundamental importance on a global scale which, moreover, is an essential part of the pan-European geography. In summary, it is the classic case in which the end will justify the means.

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President

## HAPPENING AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

# A record of the horrors

## STRASBOURG ASKS FOR A LEADING ROLE IN ACKNOWLEDGING RUSSIAN CRIMES IN UKRAINE

The Council of Europe has asked to play a key role in establishing a record to catalogue and document evidence and claims for damages, losses or injuries resulting from the Russian attack on Ukraine. It would seem like a bureaucratic technicality but could instead be the beginning of a process aimed at obtaining justice once the war is over. Indeed, this official list is an important part of international initiatives which work towards instituting a compensation mechanism for crimes related to the aggression against Kiev. The proposal comes directly from the general secretary Marija Pejčinović Burić, who sent an informative document to the governments of the 46 states which form the organization.

The text highlights how the Council of Europe is in an ideal position to be able to lead the project, especially considering the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and its supervision process. In fact, the organization already provides legal and political assistance, training experts and professionals who investigate and work with victims of violence, particularly with women. These and other activities are included in the Council of Europe Action Plan 2023-2026 dedicated to Ukraine.

The document also examines the different options for setting up a special tribunal and the need for a solid legal basis. The secretary general suggests that Strasbourg could assist in the selection and appointment of judges, in drafting rules of procedure and evidence,

in providing expertise in managing cases and in sending experts. The organization is also ready to offer its support to the already existing "interim prosecutor's office" in Ukraine. Furthermore, any activity connected to the Special Tribunal should be coordinated with the mechanisms of the International Criminal Court.

The laws, the commas and the quibbles might be boring if you are not a fan of the genre. But as long as man wishes to live together there is no other way of regulating things. Everything should be agreed before starting yet sometimes it is precisely on closer inspection of the bureaucratic details that the possibility of truly actuating worthwhile initiatives is hidden. This could be one of those cases.

