



The voice of Maria Dolens

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Global boiling

Against the backdrop of the hottest summer ever recorded in southern Europe and the Mediterranean basin since the establishment of statistical records (accompanied in the north of our country by weather phenomena, such as cloudbursts and tornadoes, which are opposite but equally extreme), this month's editorial will consist of deliberately concise references to some of the main topics of international current affairs.

The one at the top of the agenda is the climate dossier, as it is impossible to ignore the statements by UN Secretary General, António Guterres, who said that "The era of glo-

bal warming has ended. The era of global boiling has arrived". Coming from the multilateral body "par excellence", repository of the historic Paris Convention of 2015, this is a cry of alarm of extraordinary intensity, moreover accompanied by national appeals of similar concern. In the case of Italy, both President Mattarella (signing with 5 other Heads of State a joint declaration on the subject) and a large group of scientists, led by Nobel Prize winner for Physics Giorgio Parisi, have made themselves the authoritative interpreters of this through an 'open letter' to the media.

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A BOOK ON THE HISTORICAL REASONS FOR THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

Borderland

If language is the instrument of thought, it becomes necessary to understand the meaning of words in order to understand what is going on around us. All the more so when things become complex and tragic, as in the case of the conflict in Ukraine. *Carico 200*, a book written by Sergio Giangregorio and Mario Neri, can help us unravel this intricate tangle. It points out how the Russian invasion has catapulted us into a “magmatic battlefield where disinformation and counter-information mix with the truth of war crimes, on the fringes of the unbelievable and the impossible”.

The danger, the authors add, “is becoming accustomed to the tragedy that is being experienced in Ukraine today and could be even closer tomorrow, a scenario that takes our breath away, but which opens a window on a scenario that could be our future or perhaps our present”. Below are some excerpts from the book that frame the current conflict from original perspectives, with insights that use history to shed light on fragments of current events.

THE MEANING OF WORDS

The word Ukraine means borderland, for the etymology of the name is a borderland between Russia and Europe, characterised by strong geopolitical pressure.

In order to try to see why we are fighting today, we must look back and understand the facts in their historical depth, in the main political, economic, cultural and social characteristics of this nation’s mix of different peoples and cultures.

For centuries, the territories of modern Ukraine were subject to the expansionist aims of the neighbouring countries, which often changed the customs and life of the indigenous populations, imposing repressive policies.

These continuous ethnic contaminations have made it difficult to understand what is authentically Ukrainian and what distinctly differentiates Ukrainians from their Polish, Romanian and

Russian neighbours; Kiev itself is considered the mother of all cities in Russia and the birthplace of civilisation.

Ukrainian nationalist thought originated prior to the nation-state. But the literature claiming Ukrainian autonomy has always lacked the connection to a force capable of making cultural autonomy a reality and, in a word, shaping an independent and autonomous nation.

Over time, Ukrainian culture took on a mythological connotation that later became a reference for ideological currents in contrast to the pervasive and encompassing power of first the Tsarist empire and later the Soviet Union, up to the current Russian Federation.

The Ukrainian myth, after the Cossack interlude, which claimed independence from both the Polish Republic and Muscovy and gave birth to an intellectual



elite destined to become the backbone of Ukrainian nationalism, failed, however, to unite the different realities in a process of forming a national identity capable of fighting for its own state.

In the history of the Ukrainian population and the Ukrainian independence movement, the ideal of identity was never directed towards the claim to a territory, to a border established on the basis of a previous state experience; the struggle was sparked from a cultural claim aimed at the pursuit of one's own identity, separate and distinct from the Moscow one, but still within the framework of the Slavic world.

Ukraine thus lacks a collective and unifying memory and, as a consequence, this has led the population in the western areas to feel as if they were children of European tradition and culture, while in the eastern regions a strong sense of attachment to Russia and all that it represents remains.

At the end of the Second World War, Stalin made numerous interventions in Ukraine aimed at the reorganisation of the economy, the issue of minorities and the management of the western territories with the objective of implementing the industrial sector, as opposed to the agricultural sector.

The Soviet system tried to amalgamate the Ukrainian population under communist governance by implementing a strong repression against the Greek-Catholic Church, which was widespread in the west.

This condition contributed to the inhabitants of the Ukrainian territories living in two separate worlds, developing different political, historical, cultural and socio-economic characteristics.

Thereafter, further massive Russian investments financed the industrial development in Ukraine, and industrialisation led to major social changes but failed to bring the population of western Ukraine towards mass adherence to the Soviet party and ideology.

CARICO 200

Cargo 200 is a Soviet and post-Soviet military code which was and is used to indicate the transport of dead soldiers' bodies.

The number 200 in military transport codes indicates, in fact, the bodies of the fallen soldiers recovered from the battlefield to be repatriated.

Over time, lexically, "cargo 200" has become the synonym for the loss of soldiers during a conflict.

The code was first used by the Soviets during the war in Afghanistan and it was printed on the livery of the Antonov AN-12 aircraft used to repatriate the bodies of the fallen. From then on, it would be used for all vehicles used for that purpose.

Even today in Ukraine, the vehicles sent to the front to recover the bodies of dead soldiers are called "cargo 200".

While the Ukrainians have set up a proper service for the recovery of the fallen with a subsequent religious funeral in the soldier's country of origin, the Russian General Staff has decided not to repatriate the bodies of the dead soldiers, not to authorise any funeral, but to proceed with the cremation of the bodies in mobile or field crematoriums, justifying the decision with the need not to create internal dissent over the ongoing invasion war.

The aim of *Carico 200* is therefore, to draw attention to the chilling scenario of this war where, while Ukrainians mourn the dead soldiers and civilians, every day, the Kremlin tries to hide the losses suffered in combat, fearing criticism at home.



HAPPENING AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

“Now to work”

It was 1949, on 10 August to be exact, when Frenchman Edouard Herriot officially opened the proceedings of the first session of the Consultative Assembly, later to become the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), in the Great Hall of the University of Strasbourg. After an opening statement, Henri Spaak, the Belgian foreign minister who two years later would be among the “founding fathers” of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), was elected president of the Assembly. Concluding his inauguration speech, he said one simple thing: “My watchword is: ‘now to work’ so that, thanks to your efforts, our old Europe may be reborn, may be organised and may live!”.

Today, PACE has members from 46 states. The ten founders (Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom) can be pleased with the continent’s growth, which is impressive considering how low the starting point was. World War II had recently ended and the Council of Europe had set itself the mission of creating a “common democratic and political space” across the continent. The aim was to guarantee human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Did we succeed? Yes, but only partially. And this is a problem for everyone because the principles invoked not only form the basis of a tolerant society, but are essential for European stability, conflict avoidance, economic growth and social cohesion. The latest events, with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine causing Mo-

scow’s exclusion from the Council of Europe, show how “now to work” is still a current buzzword, even though it is a phrase.

The objectives are clear and relate first and foremost to the need to foster the enhancement of cultural identity and diversity in Europe. The aim must be to find common solutions to the problems of complex societies that can no longer be conceived as separate and closed. This should ‘naturally’ lead to the consolidation of economic stability in Europe by favouring political, legislative and constitutional reforms and avoiding conflicts.

But what instruments does the Council of Europe have at its disposal? In Strasbourg, initiatives take the form of agreements designed to fit the legal system of all the member states. To date, more than 200 treaties have been issued, 128 of which have also been signed and ratified by Switzerland. The list is long, but first in order of importance is surely the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which allows private citizens to lodge a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights. These agreements are accompanied by various resolutions and recommendations addressed to the member states, which play a primary role in finding solutions to common problems.

But what happens if a government does not implement the dictates of a convention it has signed? Too little. “Now to work”, Henri Spaak would say, it is time to address the issue. Hopefully before the centenary celebrations of the first session of the Consultative Assembly, which are scheduled for 26 years from now.

HAPPENING AT UN

Changing attitudes

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

The header of the United Nations website reads “Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet”. A clear message that associates armed conflicts with environmental policies and human rights. The full version means that fighting for everyone to have the same opportunities and guarantees means fighting against wars. This is why on the International Day of Peace celebrated every year on 21 September, it is worth remembering that the more democratic countries are, the less they fight with weapons. According to the democracy index calculated by the weekly “The Economist”, there are various degrees to which this form of government is developed in 167 countries. The index takes into account five general categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and democratic political culture. Accordingly, nations are divided into four categories: “full democracies”, where freedoms are not only respected, but also reinforced by an attitude that contributes to the prosperity of fundamental principles; “flawed democracies”, where elections are free and basic civil liberties are respected, but there are problems such as the violation of freedom of information; “hybrid regimes” where significant irregularities in elections occur on a regular basis; and “authoritarian regimes” where political pluralism is absent or extremely limited.

According to data dating back to 2021, in sub-Saharan Africa out of 44 states analysed only one was found to be a full democracy. It is therefore not surprising that Africa is the continent that hosts the largest number of conflicts, where human rights are most often ignored, free information is absent and cultural activities are controlled, and so in practice rendered harmless. This is why it is right, as well as useful, to organise artistic events on the International Day of Peace, because the very fact that authoritarian regimes restrict culture certifies the social and political importance of art. And precisely for this reason, on 21 September, the Foundation will host the show *Vellus*, produced by the Clochart collective, which “offers us a sensory experience to retrace the steps of a humanity that keeps repea-

ting the same mistakes over and over again”, as underlined by the organisers. A dance and theatre show will be staged and directed under the Bell by Michele Comite, with choreography by Hillary Anghileri, costumes by Elisa Calaon and videos by Simone Lorengo. Starring performers Federica Fantuzi, Arianna Bianchini and Giulia Baldassari, it will feature 4 ten-minute frames, each reflecting precisely on the need to change attitude in order to modify the status quo. Albert Einstein defined insanity as “repeating the same action *ad nauseam* and expecting different results”. If things do not change, it therefore means that we are insane, or perhaps just lazy. Meanwhile, the world goes on, the same old way. For more information, ask the people who live in war zones.



To be continued from page 1...

Central aspects of the latter are the need to proceed with the rapid elimination of fossil fuels, replacing them with renewables, and the need to increase public funding to combat geological disruptions. In view of the urgency of the matter, the well-known internal polemics agitating the government and the parties at this time over the most appropriate source of funds to be allocated to this sector (whether from the NRP or other sources) appear captious and difficult to understand.

Turning to the Russian/Ukrainian conflict, after more than a year and a half of fighting, the situation on the ground evokes, the geographically corrected title of a famous novel by Erich Maria Remarque. On that front, unfortunately always characterised by a high number of victims and immense destruction that does not spare places of worship and historical monuments, the two opposing sides appear to have long been locked in a costly war of attrition that does not allow us to see winners and losers emerge in the short/medium term. The idea of an almost impenetrable "wall-to-wall" is well conveyed by the US intelligence analysis, according to which the three months of Ukrainian counter-offensive have resulted in the reconquest of a very modest area of national territory, equivalent to our island of Elba.

As mentioned in the previous editorial, in order to emerge from an increasingly dramatic no-holds-barred recourse to arms, the most promising flame of hope (with at the same time, an increased activism on the part of the Arab world) seems at the moment to be the Peace mission entrusted by Pope Bergoglio to the President of the Italian Bishops' Conference (Cei), Cardinal Zuppi.

It does not seem justified in itself to draw negative conclusions from the circumstance that after the stops in Kiev, Moscow and Washington (which were also much emphasised in the media) the initiative seems to have lost some of its intensity (moreover, a forthcoming mission to Beijing has been considered). Indeed, it is well known that Vatican diplomacy is used to making discretion and confidentiality two key components of its *modus operandi*.

The decision to suspend the implementation of the "grain agreement" is closely linked to the previous theme. Announced in mid-July by the Moscow authorities, it was concluded exactly one year ago with the Ukrainian counterparts, thanks to the essential mediation of Turkish President Erdoğan. An agreement, as is widely known, that saw as beneficiaries a number of African countries at risk of bankruptcy, as such unable to acquire at market prices the precious cereal needed to feed their countrymen.

A few weeks after the announcement, a new edition of the Russia/Africa Summit, held in St. Petersburg at the initiative of President Putin, allowed the Kremlin leader to show off, once again, his well-known cynicism with the announcement that for 6 African countries (those, obviously, most closely aligned with Moscow) the supplies would continue, even at zero cost, with the suspension applicable to the other former beneficiaries, clearly not considered sufficiently "loyal".

Moreover, Russian influence on the "Dark Continent" was confirmed at the end of July by the coup d'état in Niger - one of the lowest income countries in the world but, until a few days ago, the only democratic regime





in the entire Sahel area - which led to the ousting of elected President Bazoum in favour of the former head of the presidential guard, General Tchiani. While the Kremlin has denied any direct involvement in supporting the rebels, the presence in the country of substantial units of the infamous "Wagner militia", the mutineers' ostentatious display of Russian flags, and the vocal intention of the new Niger leadership to break free from "Western" models, proves exactly the opposite.

On the subject of the "Wagner militia", the airplane accident, the circumstances of which have not been fully clarified, in which its military leaders (including the founder and undisputed leader Prigozhin) fell victim on 23 August, suggests, as an immediate consequence, the rapid reabsorption of all the "irregular" units, which have had margins of autonomy up to now, within the structures strictly subordinate to the Russian Ministry of Defence and, ultimately, to the Kremlin.

This round-up concludes with the reference to Prime Minister Meloni's first visit to Washington since her inauguration at Palazzo Chigi, and the talks she had with President Biden and other influential members of the US establishment. Following the mission, the "perplexities" openly manifested after the formation of the new Italian government by both the White House and Congress appear to have been definitively withdrawn and replaced by the ascertainment of the existence of very strong convergences between the two capitals, first and foremost the unequivocal Italian commitment to political and even military support, in favour of Kiev.

The talks at the White House certainly did not overlook the role of prestige, but above all of great responsibility, that awaits Italy in 2024 in the exercise of the G-7 Presidency. In fact, the annual summit of the most industrialised countries on the planet is traditionally called upon to manage the priorities of the moment in the political, economic/financial and social spheres, with the duty of the Presidency in office being to both concretely identify these macro-issues and to enable the necessary shared agreements to be reached on each of them.

Another delicate international engagement will take place more or less in the same time frame (end of 2023) - and this is the final consideration -, the Prime Minister's visit to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Inevitably, it will be within this framework that President Xi Jinping will be officially made aware of Italy's decision not to renew its participation in the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (New Silk Road), which our country (the only one among the G-7 members) had joined in 2019 with great media hype (and, it is believed, with insufficient knowledge of the initiative's contents), under strong pressure from Beijing. This is, also in terms of form, an extremely sensitive announcement, in which the proper defence of national interests (underlying the decision to withdraw from the agreement) will have to be carefully balanced against the need to "limit the damage" in future dealings with the Asian giant, a partner that is in any case indispensable.

The Director, Marco Marsilli

IT HAPPENED TODAY

The Twin Towers



11/09/2003: commemorative ceremony to mark the anniversary of the attack on the Twin Towers



22/09/2008: composer Giovanni Allevi visits the Bell