



# The voice of Maria Dolens

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Monthly newsletter from the Peace Bell Foundation



## Time for diplomacy

Since February 24, our days have been characterized - except for those who have deliberately decided to look elsewhere - by news (and images) that were believed to be relegated to history books. Cities reduced to rubble, bodies, riddled with shots or battered by bombs, scattered in urban areas as well as in remote suburbs, thousands of people fleeing desperately, on foot or by any kind of makeshift means, looking for a salvation not to be taken for granted. We can in fact also ascribe to this category the tragic events of bloodshed related to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia having now passed 30 years since those events which are now dramatically re-proposed in a European context on an even greater scale.

Faced with a "declaration of war" by the Russian president, in violation not only of international law but also of

the most basic rules of civilization (it is no coincidence that the judges of the International Criminal Court in The Hague are examining the existence of crimes against civilians by the Moscow leadership for the purpose of future trials), Europe's response was surprisingly (taking into account previous divisions) broad, decisive and cohesive.

In the economic field, a series of sanctions have been adopted which, a few days after coming into force, have already caused serious setbacks to the Russian system, such as the very strong depreciation of the Ruble and the blocking of currency deposits in foreign banking institutions. The strong European (but not American) dependence on gas and oil from Moscow prevents them, at least in the short term, from exerting an even greater influence.

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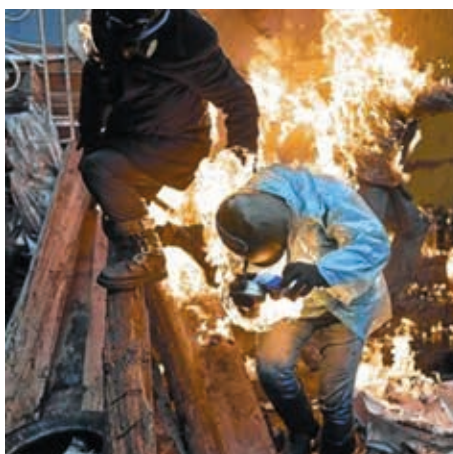
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In the social field, no member country has shied away from welcoming thousands of refugees in hasty evacuations and from anticipating, with appropriate measures, a more lasting integration in their respective territories beyond the current phase of the emergency. Moreover - and this is an unprecedented fact - in consideration of the exceptional nature of the situation, Europe has not even ignored the requests of Kiev (limited, it is true, to those attainable without the risk of triggering a new world conflict) to receive weapons, in particular anti-tank and anti-aircraft, in order to more effectively counter the advance of the preponderant invading Russian forces.

Predictably, it is to this sensitive "openness" that criticism has been concentrated by those who identify two undesired aspects: on the one hand, prolonging the agony of the Ukrainian population, extending the duration of a struggle from what, at least in appearance, seems a predictable outcome. On the other hand, the creation of an increasingly high and impenetrable wall of mutual accusations, mistrust and resentment for the post-conflict phase between Brussels and Moscow. It is a shared belief however that one must sit at the negotiating table, at any given moment, since it cannot really be assumed that the phase of acute conflict that we are witnessing with horror might continue indefinitely.



The resolution passed by the UN General Assembly condemning Russia's invasion could preclude the general secretary from mediating activity

In this regard, the sustained "passivity" of the organization responsible for resolving this type of dispute, the United Nations, cannot fail to arouse some surprise. The impression of many is that the initial, decisive Resolution condemning the work of Moscow adopted in New York by the General Assembly is precluding the general secretary António Guterres from the mediation activity that would be inherent in his office, opening the field to (self) investiture of decidedly less qualified personalities who are, at least in

some cases, not exactly equidistant. In order to overcome the impasse before it becomes endemic, the direct involvement of the two super-powers in the role of "advisors-facilitators" appears indispensable, both with regard to Russia (the role of China) and to Ukraine (a task assigned to the United States). The recent, protracted tele-conference between President Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden, although apparently devoid of concrete results, should be conceived as the start of a path, certainly arduous and demanding, but the only one capable of achieving a shared goal.

As for the possible future scenarios, at the moment each forecast appears premature, as it is susceptible to being disproved by the facts. What seems evident is that President Vladimir Putin "must" gain some advantage from his, albeit infamous, initiative.

This is a morally damning conclusion, but one that corresponds to the unquestionable criteria of *realpolitik*, according to which a great power (and Russia obviously is) cannot emerge empty-handed from a conflict that it has caused. In this regard, will the recognition of the independence of the republics of Lugansk and Donetsk prove sufficient in addition to the definitive incorporation into the territory of the Russian Federation of Crimea and, perhaps, also the rest of Donbass?



To overcome the crisis, President Putin will have to gain some advantage from his, albeit infamous, initiative





Or will it be necessary to make provisions for the neutrality and demilitarization of the entire Ukrainian state? The recent admission of President Volodymyr Zelensk'kyj (unfortunately that was not exactly timely ...) regarding Ukraine's obstacles in joining NATO, will serve to bring the parties closer, clearing the field of the alleged main Russian reason for the aggression?

Furthermore, how will the world order evolve in the coming years? A multipolar system, centred on several "control rooms" (where China and other countries have "emerged" into a prominent position) will take the place, as claimed by many, of today's unipolarism, based on the leadership of the United States and the West as such? This latter system, from the combination of the geopolitical evolutions derived from the second post-war period and the fall of the Berlin Wall, appears objectively exposed to ever more intense and widespread criticism. This is unequivocally demonstrated by the fact that a number of "regional leaders" of great strategic importance, such as China, India, Pakistan and South Africa, have not condemned the Russian aggression at the UN, favouring a more neutral abstention from the vote.

Finally, a word on the involvement of the Rovereto Peace Bell Foundation in this dramatic situation in European history. On 6 March the Colle di Miravalle hosted an event of solidarity with the Ukrainian people, crowned by a huge community participation, in recognition of the existence of a national tragedy. To this, innumerable personal tragedies are added, sometimes too mercilessly recorded from media outlets around the world, with too much attention on profit.

### The direct involvement of the United States and China appears indispensable as "advisors-facilitators"

Equally, a similar feeling of solidarity should also be directed to the Russian people, now subjected to a dictatorial-like regime that implacably sanctions any critical manifestation of the established power. In this context, the disconcerting stance taken by the leaders of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow is also significant, while in the rest of Europe the

military aggression of the Kremlin was defined as a true "war of civilizations" against absolutely legitimate behaviour (in relation to the rights of LGBT communities).

While the unmistakable voice of Maria Dolens may resound, loud and clear, even in further events in favour of Peace, the Foundation has decided that the flags of Ukraine and the Russian Federation, displayed alongside 100 others along the "Avenue of Nations" of our monumental area, will not, like the others, be attended to by means of the planned annual change.

The current banners, marked by the wear and tear of time, will continue to be hoisted indefinitely, that is, until a negotiation agreement is reached. The tears and frays that already appear there will, as they become more evident, constitute the visual testimony of the resilience and heroism of the Ukrainian people and of the confidence placed in the ability of the Russians to keep the voice of internal dissent alive. The courage of the journalist Maria Ovsyannikova and the tens of thousands of demonstrators imprisoned for opposing the war shows us that this is possible.

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President



# A Grain War

National flags on product packaging are just a publicity stunt. A supply chain entirely sourced from a single country is a utopia, but not even something we should hope for.

Those who are still not convinced may verify this by going to the gas station, where they can see for themselves that the price of fuel depends on a complex global political balance, or by paying the electricity bills, which are not firmly stable, but are linked to decisions taken at the UN, the Council of Europe, the European Union, NATO, or the Kremlin, all of which turn out to be not so far away. But if we think that filling up the car is our biggest problem, we risk making a mistake. In fact, it seems that what we risk is our daily bread, and not in a figurative sense. Qu Dongyu, Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO, recently reminded us that « Russia is the world's largest exporter of wheat and Ukraine the fifth. Together, they account for 19 percent of global barley production, 14 percent of wheat production and 4 percent of corn, contributing to more than a third of global grain exports. They are also the main suppliers of rapeseed, as well as covering 52% of the world market for sunflower oil exports. The world fertilizer market is also particularly concentrated with Russia being the main supplier».

In February 2022, prices, already on the rise since the second half of 2020, reached record levels

The data provided by the FAO says it all: «In February 2022, food prices, already on the rise since the second half of 2020, reached record levels. Throughout 2021, wheat and barley rose by 31%, while the prices of rapeseed oil and sunflower oil rose by more than 60%. High demand and volatile natural gas prices have also pushed up the cost of fertilizers».



Russia also holds a dominant position in the global energy market, being responsible for 18 percent of global coal exports, 11 percent of oil and 10 percent of gas exports. The agricultural sector requires high energy consumption. The problem is evident and the FAO, through the voice of its director general, is striving to propose various solutions.

## Emotional reactions must be avoided and long-term effects evaluated before any measures are taken

First of all, everything possible must be done « to protect the production and marketing activities necessary to respond to domestic and international demand » and « in order to do this, it will be necessary to protect crops, livestock, food processing infrastructures and any logistics systems that are still intact ». But then it will be necessary to « find a new and diversified group of food suppliers », and this is a plea that has long been coming from anyone involved in this area of activity. It is not an economic question, but rather a political one. In times of emergency

like these, the FAO continues, « governments must expand their social safety nets to protect vulnerable people. In Ukraine, international organizations must intervene to help reach those most in need, bearing in mind that the number of people affected by poverty as a result of the conflict will increase throughout the world: we must therefore provide them with timely and targeted social protection programs ».

In situations like these, it is necessary to think about both the future and the now. It is not easy to keep the two perspectives together, but we need to make a start. Meanwhile, in the coming years and decades, we should strengthen transparency and dialogue. « More information on world market conditions would help governments and investors make informed decisions in times of volatility. Initiatives such as the G-20 Agricultural Market Information System increase transparency, providing objective and timely assessments », notes Qu Dongyu, adding that for the moment, it is better to avoid emotional reactions and « evaluate the effects on international markets before implementing measures aimed at guaranteeing food supplies ». To give a practical example, it may be noted that « a reduction in import tariffs or the use of export restrictions could help solve food security problems in a single country in the short term, but would cause prices to rise on a global scale ». Indeed, we are all interdependent.





## HAPPENING AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

# Homo homini lupus

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING ON THE BORDERS OF UKRAINE

They seem like caring, reassuring people. They stand on the roadside and lure the mothers fleeing from the bombs with children in their arms, with no more food to feed them. Until two months ago it would have been the introduction to an uninspiring novel, now it has once again become reality. It is happening on the borders of Ukraine, where refugees arrive overwhelmed with fatigue, with the explosion of bombs in their ears, and in their eyes the rubble of their cities, of their home. Easy targets, especially the children, who have sometimes escaped from an orphanage during an attack and when the dust settled, no longer found an assistant, nurse or relative. Nobody. In these situations, there are people, humans like us, who instead of helping them kidnap those little

ones. It is called child trafficking, and it is not a new thing. It has never been obstructed in some areas of the world and now it is upon us, for all to see, on our back doorstep.

The Council of Europe's « Group of Experts on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings » (Greta) has warned of the danger, emphasizing that the current flow of refugees to Europe is the largest since the Second World War. In less than a month, approximately three million people have been forced to flee Ukraine to take refuge, initially in neighbouring countries, and then in the rest of the continent. It is estimated that 90 per cent are women and children. The secretary general of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić, confirmed that women and young girls are extremely exposed to the risk of sexual violence and promised support to member states in assisting refugees.

Front-line journalists and volunteers have reported suspected cases of human trafficking. In some countries, specialized non-governmental organizations distribute leaflets to refugees, warning them of the risks they run by accepting transport or accommodation from strangers, and informing them on how to seek help or report suspected cases to existing national services of assistance for victims of trafficking.



The current flow of refugees to Europe is the largest since the Second World War

According to Helga Gayer, president of Greta: « Urgent measures must be taken to strengthen coordination at borders and in reception facilities as well as to ensure accurate registration of refugees and their access to necessary documentation, residence permits and essential services. ». People fleeing war, she added, « are physically and psychologically weak, they are unfamiliar with the



People on the run are physically and psychologically weak, they are unfamiliar with the environment in which they arrive and run a high risk of falling prey to criminals



Non-governmental organizations distribute leaflets to refugees, warning them of the risks they run in accepting transport or accommodation from strangers

Reception facilities must ensure that refugees are informed of their rights, in a language they understand, and that they receive psychological and material support

environment in which they arrive and run a high risk of falling prey to criminals. Reception facilities must ensure that refugees are informed of their rights, in a language they understand, and that they receive psychological and material support. The authorities must take measures to prevent fraudulent offers of transport, accommodation and work and must strengthen the protocols for the safety of unaccompanied minors in collaboration with the national child protection system».

Once again, the situation is dramatically clear: in a crisis there are those who help and those who think of immediate gain, even by trampling on people's dignity, sometimes their very lives, always

taking advantage of moments of absolute weakness, a specialty of the cowardly. We should remember this when we define such behaviour as "inhumane". Unfortunately, it is not. The exploitation of one's fellow men is « human, all too human », an often-misunderstood philosopher would say. Solidarity, however, is also very human. It's about choosing, and having the tools to do something.

Financial Times analysts, along with other prominent commentators, argue that we need to invest more in arms to protect ourselves

from invasion. If this is true, we will know in a few decades, when the experts will no longer be accountable for the consequences of their recommendations. In any case, since almost everyone agrees, we will see a significant increase in arms spending. But more money for guns almost always means less money for culture, and culture is humanity's view of the world and its fellow men. When our borders are reinforced, who will defend us from ourselves if we are no longer able to distinguish between a prey and a child in distress?





IT HAPPENED TODAY

# The first Gloria

20/04/1957: Father Eusebio Iori and the representatives of the countries adhering to the Peace Protocol take part in the first international Gloria at the Rovereto Peace Bell Foundation

