



The voice of Maria Dolens

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THE COE REPORT

Consistency

Adrian Hancu

The Council of Europe (CoE), the pan-European organisation whose raison d'être is to protect/uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law, recently published its new Report, with the title "Moving forward", which may also be interpreted as an implicit expectation of less problematic times than the current ones.

It is a substantial document of just under 70 pages, outlining the strategy of the multilateral body for a four-year period. It can be found on the CoE website (although not in Italian at the moment) and, as usual, is produced under the direct responsibility of the Secretary General, Croatian Marija Pejčinović Burić, who has been in office since 2019.

On the contents level, it identifies a series of macro-areas (twelve, to be precise) on which to focus the work of the Strasbourg organisation for the future. In many contexts (the sole exceptions being those regarding problems that have appeared recently, such as ar-

tificial intelligence or cybercrime) we may surely rely on the very solid experience gained since 1950 up to the present day, condensed in the dozens of Conventions between countries (mainly members, but not excluding the involvement also of "third party" nations) that have come into existence since then.

While we are not able to list them all, these sectors include freedom of expression, including in print; non-discrimination as well as, on the other hand, the targeted protection of vulnerable groups; guaranteeing independent, efficient legal systems, capable of combating phenomena such as corruption and money laundering; safeguarding the environment by joining in with initiatives for fighting climate change promoted on a wider scale (by the United Nations, first and foremost); reinforcing so-called "civil societies" through, among other things, creating human rights defender institutions in all member states.

To be continued on page 8...

IN THIS EDITION

02

Happening at the UN
The Lisbon Conference on the oceans

04

Happening at the Council of Europe
Report on the welcome given to Ukrainian refugees

05

The war and the poets

06

Membership of the Republic of Cyprus
Speech by the Ambassador

HAPPENING AT THE UN

Ocean emergency

LA CONFERENZA DI LISBONA SULLO STATO DELLE ACQUE NEL PIANETA



Inside Creative House

There are less than thirty years left. The space occupied in the oceans by plastic will then exceed that used by fish. There are a lot of fish, some of them very large, while we are relatively smaller but more numerous and much less provident. The fish take what they need from their environment and leave the rest intact, while we take more than we need and destroy any obstacles that lie between us and our objectives. We also do this on dry land, but there is less room there, because 70 per cent of the planet is covered with water. Anyway, we think it is legitimate to destroy the forests that give us oxygen, and we also think it is only fair to pollute the oceans, which are responsible for 50 per cent of what we breathe on the planet, are home to an enormous quantity of species, and contain over 80 per cent of the living creatures that inhabit the Earth.

And that's not all. We are endangering ocean currents, which have a decisive role in regulating the climate. If they did not exist, for example, north European countries would be much colder on average. In the meantime global temperatures are rising and, if the effectiveness of the action performed by the oceans

were limited further in this critical situation, the consequences would be devastating. Many marine species would risk extinction, entire areas of the planet would cool down and pollution levels would undergo a rapid increase.

This was discussed during the second United Nations Ocean Conference held in Lisbon from 27th June to 1st July. The aim was to extract a commitment from the international community to find sustainable solutions for the conservation, protection and responsible use of marine resources, according to Sustainable Development Goal 14 of the 2030 Agenda. This would entail each of us changing our habits, and States - meaning us again, anyway - revising their economic development model. The planet's biological clock is ticking away noisily and sending clear signals, but these have fallen on deaf ears with us up to now.

United Nations Secretary General António Guterres has supplied a disturbing set of data, defining the current situation as an "ocean emergency". What has to be done is well known, but not very advantageous in the short term and this seems to be the problem: we must start to think in the long term, which we have not been

doing in past decades. In his remarks on this subject to the Youth and Innovation Forum, which concluded in Carcavelos the day before the start of the Lisbon Conference, Guterres apologised publicly for the state in which the seas have been left to the young. "My generation and those who were politically responsible, as in my case, were slow or sometimes unwilling to recognise that things were getting worse and worse in these three dimensions: oceans, climate and biodiversity. And even today, we are moving too slowly in relation to the need to reverse the threat, rehabilitate the oceans, rescue biodiversity and stop climate change. We are still moving in the wrong direction".

However, at least we now know what to do and we have acknowledged that there is a problem, which is the first step to trying to solve it. The path is marked out clearly, but it is neither easy nor painless. First of all, it is important that investments in the oceans and the exploitation of their resources are carried out in a sustainable manner. "This would help the ocean to produce up to six times more food and generate 40 times more renewable energy than it currently does", said Guterres. As well as this, it will be important to replicate the strategies that have worked in the past to safeguard coastal zones and scale them up. The Secretary General also asked for greater protection of the waters, especially for improving the lives of the people who depend directly on the seas and oceans. 40 per cent of the world's population live in coastal areas and it is therefore essential to tackle climate change by investing in infrastructure capable of resisting the



current emergency and a possible worsening of the situation. But we need new tools to do all this, and for this, Guterres highlighted the need to intensify scientific research in the sector and to focus on innovation to lead mankind towards what he defined as "a new chapter of global ocean action".

"Save our ocean, protect our future" was the slogan chosen for the Conference. Understanding the meaning of the word "our" would be a good start.





Marian Vejčík

HAPPENING AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

When your neighbour is far away

THE CZECH AND SLOVAKIAN WELCOME TO UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

Your neighbour is whoever is nearest to you, as the definition has it. Helping your neighbour should be the most natural thing, and also the easiest. But it is more complicated to help someone who is far away, as the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic have done. They found themselves facing an enormous flow of migrants from Ukraine, despite the fact they are not the closest countries to the battle zones. They are not neighbours. This did not pass unnoticed, and the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) on migration and refugees, Leyla Kayacik, underlined in her report the efficient response of the Prague and Bratislava authorities to an unprecedented situation.

In the Czech Republic, as we read in the text, well-managed registration centres were very quickly set up, where national, local and non-government officers work in close collaboration to offer temporary protection to people fleeing

from the war. The data show that this country has been affected by the conflict as much as the ones directly bordering with Ukraine. At the time of the Special Representative's visit, over 320,000 Ukrainian refugees had been officially registered and were benefiting from temporary protection. Of these, around 130,000 were minors. The figures are significant, and the Czech Republic must doubtlessly be considered as one of the main destinations for people fleeing from Ukraine.

Kayacik also emphasised the exemplary effort made by the Slovak authorities in coordination with civil society organisations, volunteer associations, the private sector and the local authorities to supply refugees with basic necessities and other forms of support. Bratislava declared a state of emergency immediately after the Russian invasion and rapidly amended its existing legislation regarding asylum, in order to be able to grant temporary protection status to those fle-

eing from the war at the very start of the conflict, even before any resolution had been adopted by the Council of the European Union. At the time of the Special Representative's visit, around 360,000 people fleeing from Ukraine were in the country, and almost 90 per cent of these were women and children. Daily arrivals were relatively fewer compared with the initial flows and the organisational machine had managed to register over 72,000 people who were able to take advantage of temporary asylum.

Both countries succeeding in tackling unprecedented challenges with impressive flows of refugees, especially if we consider these in proportion to the local populations. Just over 10 million people live in the Czech Republic, and half as many in the Slovak Republic. Despite this, the two countries pulled out all the stops and welcomed the refugees, officially registered them and gave them asylum. There are those in other countries who complain about much less.

POETS AND THE WAR

A blade of grass in the mouth

«I see a sorrowful and more and more sordid world in front of me ... The word 'hope' is cancelled entirely from my vocabulary". Pier Paolo Pasolini did not compromise. Poets cannot compromise. One hundred years after his birth, the words of the great intellectual and visionary are only not still relevant, but disturbing, because nothing seems to have changed. It is no use wondering what he would have written, because he has already written it: "Did you know, to sin does not mean to do harm. Not doing good, that's what sinning means".

Beyond the responsibilities, and the economic, political and geopolitical causes of the horror we are witnessing after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, what seems to be lacking are the intellectuals - the poets, writers, painters, and composers. Somebody who might use their abilities to say what they think, to look towards the future, into the human soul, or at least deep into their

own. For example, as Quasimodo did: "You are still the one with the stone and the sling, man of my time. (...) I have seen you: it was you, with your exact science set on extermination, without love, without Christ. You have killed again, as always, as your fathers killed, as the animals that saw you for the first time killed". But there is no need to go so far back in time; we can go to our own times with the Syrian poet Maram al-Masri, who took refuge in Paris when fleeing from the horrors of the war that has tormented her country for years: "Have you seen him? Carrying his infant in his arms, advancing with magisterial step, head up, back straight ... as if the infant should be happy and proud to be carried like this in his father's arms ... if only he was alive."

This may all be completely useless; it will always be the same people who pay the price and we must resign ourselves to Bertolt Brecht's logic: "The war which is coming is not the first one. There were other wars before it. When the last one came to an end there were conquerors and conquered. Among the conquered the common people starved. Among the conquerors the common people starved too". Or we should stand and watch because, as Wisława Szymborska reminds us: "After every war someone has to clean up. Things won't straighten themselves up, after all. Someone has to push the rubble to the sides of the road, so the corpse-filled wagons can pass. Someone has to get mired in scum and ashes, sofa-springs, splintered glass, and bloody rags. (...) In the grass which has overgrown causes and effects, someone must be stretched out, blade of grass in his mouth, gazing at the clouds". Perhaps dear Wisława is right, but at least we can try and avoid the "blade of grass in the mouth". It is too painful.



SPEECH BY THE AMBASSADOR OF CYPRUS FOR ADHERENCE TO THE PEACE PROTOCOL

Peace is never taken for granted

On 8th July last, the Republic of Cyprus subscribed to the Maria Dolens Peace Protocol. We publish the speech given for the occasion by Ambassador Yiorgos Christofides.

Allow me to thank first of all the Reggente della Fondazione, my dear colleague and I dare to say friend Ambassador Marsilli for reaching out to me and proposing that Cyprus becomes the 103rd member of the Foundation. I, of course, immediately received instructions from my Government to accept his proposal since Cyprus, as a small island state with a rich history that unfortunately was often accompanied with quite a great deal of suffering, deeply comprehends and attributes the utmost value to the ideals of peace and fraternity.

I stand before you today at a site of historical significance for Italy and Europe. I stand before you to pay my respects on behalf of the Government and the people of Cyprus to all those that have fallen during the Great War but also to all wars.

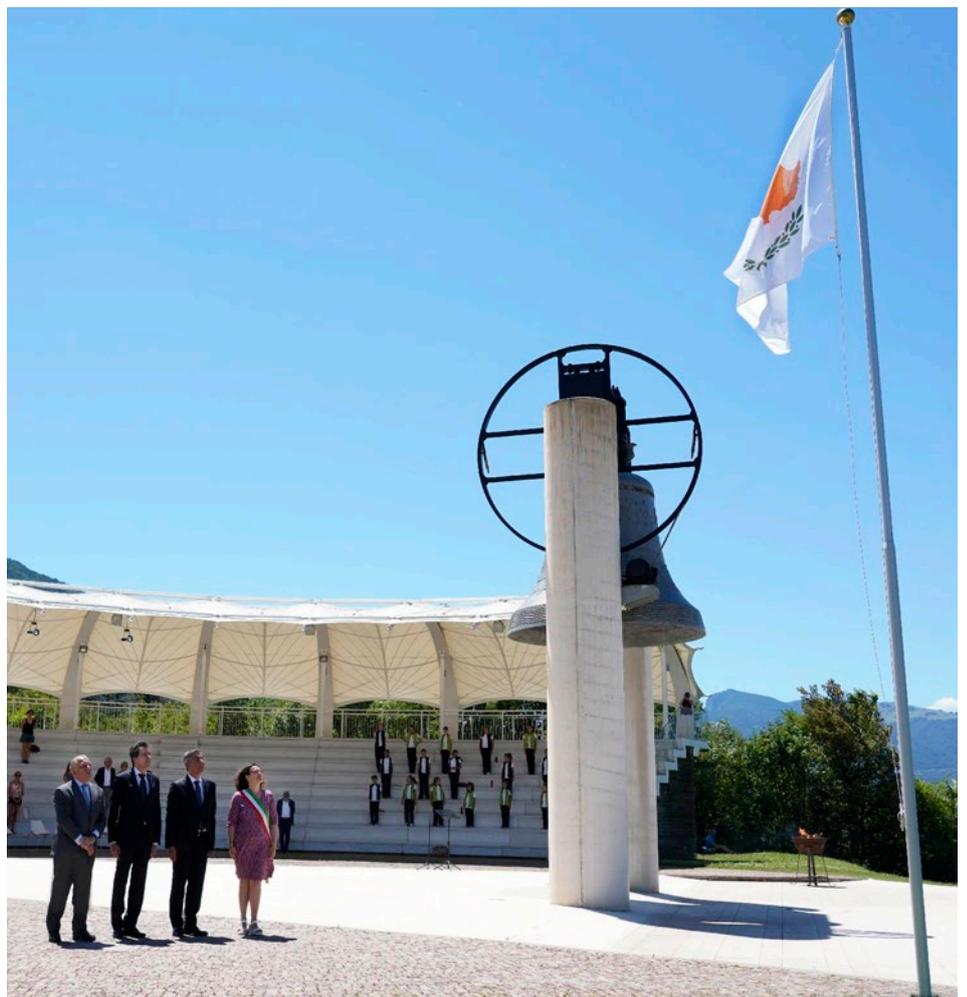
To any war, for no war is a just war. No war can bring benefits to humanity and the use of arms cannot and should not be considered as a means of resolving differences between nations.

At these challenging times for Europe, the ideals of the Foundation gain obviously greater significance anew. As Europeans and as peace loving nations we all follow with extreme sense of concern what is happening for months now in Ukraine. War and

instability is knocking once more on Europe's door. And this reality has forced us all to remember, and indeed has violently made us comprehend that peace and stability cannot and should not be taken for granted. Europe suffered greatly in the past. Equally, Europe was lucky enough to be led by visionaries that understood all too well that peace and stability can only be ensured

through cooperation and the cultivation of a common sense of belonging. It was exactly on that basis the European Union was born of which Cyprus has been a proud members for 18 years now.

However, the European Union ought to continue to view itself as a guarantor of peace, stability and prosperity for the European continent.



From left: the Foundation's Regent, Marco Marsilli, Government Commissioner Gianfranco Bernabei, the Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus, Yiorgos Christofides, and the Vice-mayor of Rovereto, Giulia Robol

Now more than ever, our sense of unity and solidarity cannot but be our guiding principle. In order to make sure that war and suffering ceases on the European continent and that the might of the law prevails over the might of force. International law, for the development of which great steps were made in the aftermath of the First World War, is there and needs to be respected in its entirety. Respect for international legality cannot be on an “a la carte” basis, irrespective of a country’s size or strength. And peace can be guaranteed only when disputes are settled by peaceful means. We Europeans know that all too well.

Those that have fallen and lay here remind us of this. This monumental bell, cast from the metal of guns used during the War strikes to remind us all of our responsibility. Our joint responsibility to remember. Remember those that have suffered and fell and cherish what their sacrifice has given us. The privilege to live in peace and be able to dream of a bright future for our children.

Europe is indeed facing challenging times. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of a European country is under threat. Atrocities are being perpetrated and human rights are being violated to a scale that no civilized person could ever tolerate. As Cyprus we stand in full solidarity with Ukraine and its people. Besides, we know all too well what it means to be attacked by a powerful neighbour who tries to conceal its imperialist and revisionist aims under the cloak of conducting a so – called peace operation.

I would be remiss if, in such a context, I didn’t recall and dedicate a few words of what my country has gone through. Cyprus was militarily invaded 48 years ago and part of its territory is still illegally occupied by Turkey. For Cypriots, the indiscriminate killings, the mass violation of human rights, the hundreds of thousands of refugees and the thousands of persons still missing are not issues of the distant past. They are the memories of our childhood and the reality we still have to live with. Our utmost priority remains reaching a just and viable settlement to the Cyprus problem that will ensure the respect of the human rights and fundamental freedom of all Cypriots.

That is why I stand here before you, honoured and humbled in being given the opportunity to mark with you Cyprus’ accession to the ideals of the Fondazione Campana Dei Caduti. As the Ambassador of a country whose only weapon and sole comfort has always been international legality and the solidarity of all other law abiding nations, I am honoured to declare my country’s adherence to the ideals of the Magna Carta of Maria Dolens. Cyprus is proud to be officially joining today the global family of nations that are members of this noble Foundation.

Today, at this site of historical and symbolic significance, while the flag of Cyprus is being raised to mark our adherence to the universal values of promotion of peace and fraternity, I express once again the hope of my Government for peace and stability to prevail, in Europe, in our Eastern Mediterranean region and beyond. And primarily for a solution to be found to the Cyprus problem so that justice, peace, security and the respect of human rights be our legacy to future generations.

I thank you once again for the honour and for being here today to mark with us this auspicious occasion.



The Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus, Yiorgos Christofides, and the Foundation’s Regent, Marco Marsilli

A clear warning to avoid any “non-standard” behaviours in the future

To be continued from page 1...

Incidentally, this last recommendation touches a raw nerve for Italy, one of the very few European countries that has not yet established a national authority with wide-ranging responsibilities on this sensitive matter. Until now, it has preferred to divide up duties and responsibilities between the various “sector-based” figures (guarantors for the rights of prisoners, of children, of privacy, etc.), which are certainly worthy of recognition for the activities they perform, but are without a necessary overall view of things.

The criminal act of aggression carried out just a few months before the publication of the Report by what was, at that time, a member of the Strasbourg Court against a neighbouring country and also a member of the organisation may, at first sight, lead to reductive considerations about the value of the Report. In other words, there may be a temptation on the part of some people to regard it as a collection of principles that are certainly noble and virtuous, but not able to sustain the impact with the much harder and more concrete needs of realpolitik. There is very little doubt about the fact that, after 24th February, the Russian Federation placed itself in open and radical conflict with almost all the values stated in the Secretary General’s Report. An obvious example, on the subject of freedom of expression, is the fact that any criticism of the conduct of the military operations, aimed at the Kremlin by a Russian citizen, is now punishable by several years of imprisonment. In addition, there is practically no trace of the independence of the judiciary in the Federation today,

in a system that was already strongly dependent on political realities. And the list could go on and on. In spite of this, some major international forums (including the G-20) continue to keep the doors open to Putin, Lavrov and other Russian leaders.

Applying an open different, and more positive, interpretation, the value of the document lies in highlighting how commitment to the 12 macro-areas represents a sort of “essential passport” for belonging to the Strasbourg organisation. It is, of course, fully acknowledged that certain margins of flexibility could be applied to them. For example, both the previous history and current political situation of Cyprus differ widely from those of Armenia (the two states are not quoted by chance here, but because they have subscribed to our Foundation’s “Memorandum of Peace” in 2022). It would therefore not be right that the application of CoE principles in Nicosia should be absolutely identical to their application in Yerevan. At the same time, these principles would not be so “diluted” as to be without identity or meaning, to the point where the very credibility of the Council that approved them is put into question.

Consequently, in the Report’s evaluations (which I personally would share) we are not faced with a failure of multilateralism - in this year, 2022, that is so tormented and has its certainties eroding - but with an unjustified act of violence by a member State, already the subject of sanctions by Strasbourg in the past. In 2014, following the annexation of the Crimea, the exclusion concerned only parliamentary delegates and did not result, as it has in the current year, in the

suspension/expulsion of the Russian Federation from the European organisation, when it happened, as we will remember, on a procedural level during Italy’s well-managed six-month presidency.

From this point of view, the respect for core values has clearly prevailed over the principle of inclusivity that the CoE has been very careful to observe ever since its origin, in particular with regard to two of its members (the Russian Federation and Turkey), considered as real “added values” for Europe up to the very recent past. Now that the European Union and NATO have, almost in unison, set in motion internal procedures for enlarging their respective memberships, a signal arrives from Strasbourg that goes against the trend, on the basis of a shared need for “consistency”, including a clear warning to avoid any “non-standard” behaviours in the future.

I would like to conclude these reflections of mine by reporting the final words of the Secretary General’s Report. “The lesson to be drawn, yet again, is that our success as an Organisation – and as a continent – relies on our member states’ determination to do the right thing: to invest in human rights, democracy and the rule of law as the basis of a just future”.

These words may seem predictable but, if we think about it, they comprise the basis for allowing us to carry on our lives in free, democratic societies in the future, as has fortunately been the case over the last decades. The Council of Europe has made a decisive contribution to implementing this model of society for the past 73 years, with its proposals and creations. These could all gain new energy from a forthcoming summit of heads of state and governments (this would be the fourth since its foundation) and a large part of the Strasbourg membership would seem to look favourably on this prospect.

Reggente Marco Marsilli,
Foundation President

«Our success relies
on our member
states’ determination
to do the right thing»