



# The voice of Maria Dolens

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## Between Taiwan and Ukraine

Following the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine, the more informed political analysts highlighted the existence, almost immediately, of a particularly attentive "observer" within the international community, interested in the progress of the conflict caused by the Russian invasion, as well as its consequences on a global scale. This is the People's Republic of China (PRC), currently the second largest economy in the world but waiting to overtake the United States, expected in the not-too-distant future. Over the last twenty years it has been characterized by unmatched levels of economic development even in an area, such as Asia, which is known to be very dynamic but moreover maintained through an iron political control, intolerant to any form of dissidence by the resident population.

The reason for Beijing's timely monitoring of military events in and around the Donbas is unambiguously identifiable with the situation in Taiwan, the island state of which the PRC has almost always claimed the "reconquest",

although on close inspection it has never been a part of its national territory. As is well known, Formosa (name of Portuguese domination) was occupied in 1949 by the nationalist forces of General Chang Kai-shek, fleeing the continent because they were defeated by the Communist army in the civil war following the Second World War.

Aside from the obviously very different historical / geographical context, Beijing's claims do not differ much, on an "ideological" level from those put forward by President Putin on February 24. In other words, there is the plan to extend national sovereignty towards geographical areas considered one's own domain and on the basis of considerations that have little or nothing to do with international legality. Independence (for Ukraine and the other former Soviet republics, in relation to the Russian Federation) or a limited condition of autonomy for that matter will not be accepted.

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## HAPPENING AT THE UN

# The war on drugs and human rights

**A**lmost everyone is against the drug trade but opinions differ on the methods used to combat this problem. « The “war on drugs” undermines health and social well-being and wastes public resources without managing to eradicate the illegal market ». So say the experts of the United Nations, according to whom « this “war” has in many cases generated narco-economies at the local, national and regional level, to the detriment of national development ». In a document recently released in the event of « International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking », the specialists go so far as to say that « such policies have far-reaching negative implications for the widest range of human rights, including the right to personal liberty, freedom from forced labour, ill-treatment and torture,

the right to a fair trial, the right to health including palliative treatment and care, the right to adequate housing, freedom from discrimination, the right to a healthy and clean environment, the right to culture and freedom of expression, religion, assembly and association and the right to equal treatment before the law ». To put it simply, it would seem that sometimes crimes are committed in order to combat crime.

The experts who raised the alarm are part of the so-called Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, a UN Security Council investigation and monitoring body that addresses specific situations in a given country or thematic issues in all areas of the world. In particular, in a study published in 2021, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that the “war on drugs”

has led to « mass incarceration through racial profiling, search and seizure laws and procedures, excessive preventive detention, disproportionate sentences and the criminalization of people who use drugs, including pregnant women in some countries ». The study also found « widespread violations of rights, including unlawful incarceration, the trial of children and adolescents as ‘adults’, torture and ill-treatment, lack of guarantees for a fair trial, extrajudicial executions and abusive use of the death penalty ».

According to the report, there is a further series of issues related to the disproportionate use of the death penalty or the forced eradication of crops, which can lead to the loss of life due to the excessive use of force as well as causing severe damage to subsistence crops through aerial spraying of dangerous substances used to destroy illegal crops.

We must be careful, however: the experts in no way claim to give up the fight against drug trafficking, but ask « member states and all United Nations agencies to base their responses on law and international standards of human rights ». It would appear that such a policy would not only be more just, but also more effective.

## HAPPENING AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

# The environment and universal rights

A clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a universal human right. The United Nations makes this claim and the Council of Europe reiterates as such. It would seem obvious yet is not, but above all has not been so evident in recent decades, which have left an oppressive legacy in terms of global pollution. « Our goal is a "reading with the focus on ecology" of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, namely an interpretation of its guidelines in relation to environmental protection as well as reinforcement of the position of local and regional authorities in the decision-making process on environmental matters », as stated by Congress spokesperson on Human Rights, Harald Bergmann (Netherlands), referring to the report adopted by the Monitoring Commission at its recent meeting in Istanbul. The text will be discussed next 25 to 27 October during the 43rd session of the Congress.

Bergmann calls this recognition « a crucial turning point that demonstrates the urgency of collective action, at every level of government, to protect our environment and fight climate change ».

The central issue consists in recognizing that a healthy and safe environment is an indispensable prerequisite for guaranteeing human rights and keeping in remembering that the goal may only be achieved through shared responsibilities.

For this reason, the Congress proposes to draw up an additional Protocol to the Charter, intended to guarantee local governance in environmental matters and to raise awareness among local authorities. Furthermore, to help local authorities and their administrations, the Congress is preparing a third volume of the series of *Human Rights Manuals* intended for those elected who are more in contact with the needs of the territory. The text, dedicated specifically to the environment and sustainable development, will be published in October 2022.

It is indeed an important recognition, a necessary but insufficient condition, as in the study of mathematics when there is the absence of something, an element that could transform an intent into a reality. And so too in this case the theorem is well underway

but still incomplete. There are no rules, it is true, but above all there is a lack of political will to apply them, at least in certain geographical areas.

A reading of the European Charter of Local Self-Government with the focus on ecology

The Council of Europe provides an excellent guide, which will be further perfected in the coming months, then it will be necessary to ensure that it does not remain a dead letter.



## THE TWINNING BETWEEN MARIA MATER ORPHANORUM AND MARIA DOLENS

# Death in the workplace

Every day within the European Union 12 people leave their homes, say goodbye to their families, go to work and never come back. They are not abducted by aliens but rather they die while earning their salary. A silent, constant massacre, to which we are almost accustomed. The reason, in the vast majority of cases, is failure to comply with safety regulations. The same that led to the Marcinelle tragedy in 1956, when on the morning of August 8 in the Bois du Cazier coal mine in Belgium, a fire killed 262 workers. One hundred and thirty-six of them were Italian emigrants, 95 Belgians, 31 miners of other nationalities. Even today, the lust for profit leads to neglect of procedures that would save lives that are perhaps considered acceptable "collateral damage" and are certainly not sufficiently protected.

Maria Dolens has always encouraged the philosophy that people be put at the top of the list of priorities, especially those who are more at risk than others of not returning home from a construction site or a factory when the end-of-shift siren sounds. For this reason, since 2009, it has been twinned with Maria Mater Orphanorum, the bell which rings out in Bois du Cazier two hundred and sixty-two times every 8 August, at 8.05 am, the hour of the tragedy, alternating the name of one of the victims with each toll. Twinning means "the two Marys" remember together, and so on the same day, the Bell of the Fallen rings out at 12 on the Colle di Miravalle hill with its hundred strokes of peace in memory of the tragedies that occur at any latitude or any era, even in ours.

But there is no resignation, only a desire to remember in order to do something. Because we need to keep

our guard up so that men and women of any country do not have to risk their lives every day to earn a salary. And it must be done consistently because often the workers who have the lowest wages and fewer opportunities to have their say are the ones who die.

The latest Eurostat data available from a complete analysis by the European statistics office for 2018 is pitiless. The EU average of deaths from accidents is 1.77 for every hundred thousand workers while the Italian average is 2.25. We could go on to see who does better and who does worse, but it is not a race, it's a tragedy. So, let's not forget to count the victims, but let us also begin to pursue those who are guilty with greater determination, those who are called by different names but may all be attributed to an uncontrolled desire that does not seem to subside even when satisfied. Distinguishing features: greed.



1st August 2009: Reggente Alberto Robol, Foundation President in Marcinelle with Jean-Louis Delaet, Director of the Le Bois du Cazier Museum, for the twinning of Maria Dolens with Maria Mater Orphanoru

## IN MEMORY OF FATHER EUSEBIO IORI

# Sowing Peace

Those who have known war often find themselves working for peace. Father Eusebio Iori, Director of the Foundation from 1953 to 1979, the year of his death, knew two wars all too well. It was a recurring theme in his stories, one he had just fought in and the other he had lived through. He was born on 24 August 1918 in Revò, Val di Non, and died on the 12th of the same month in 1979, the day on which the Rovereto Peace Bell Foundation remembered him again this year. A concert was organized together with the *Associazione Italia-Austria* of Trento and Rovereto and entrusted to the «*Bianche Zime*» Choir, which proposed a program dedicated to the work of the Capuchin monk entitled “*Campana squilla*” (The Bell Rings). With them the harpist Chiara Brun, and the actors Elisa Magnabosco and Romano Panizza, of the group «*Prove de Teatro*» from Calliano, who counterpointed the event with pieces and readings.

It was an opportunity to retrace the life of a man who founded his pursuits on values that today are considered central throughout Europe, but which were not so obvious in the first half of the last century. Breaking down walls, building bridges and sowing peace were not shared policies. Walls were built, peace was in the making and was believed to be guaranteed from closure towards the other. There was little talk of cultural bridges. Father Eusebio continued to go against the tide for a long time, also making use of the religious habit, donned in 1935, seven years before becoming a priest. A mission carried out from 1943 to 1977 as chaplain of the *Guardia di Finanza* (Financial Crime Investigation Unit) in Trento and then as Head of the Spiritual Assistance Service at its General Headquarters in Rome. A way to live the religious mission intensely, dedicating himself to the needy, without neglecting his role as a soldier.

As Director of the Bell of the Fallen, he was given credit for undertaking initiatives in various areas and promoting relations, also international, which even today constitute a valuable investment for the Foundation and for the entire regional community. The work he carried out between Italy and Austria in the dramatic post-World War II period, promoting fruitful and con-



tinuous peaceful and collaborative relations, is now extremely actual and is carried out and implemented with initiatives on both sides of the Brenner Pass. In particular, his commitment was exceptional, not only for the recasting of Maria Dolens, but also for obtaining recognition of the Rovereto Peace Bell Foundation as a legal entity.

Rediscovering European roots 65 years after the Treaty of Rome of 25 March 1957 and identifying Europe's fundamental values together with the memory of important figures who helped to shape the cultural fabric of this important political and institutional path is not a simple historical celebration but a social and cultural commitment to give new impetus to those ideals. Father Eusebio Iori is certainly among the individuals to remember for a life characterized by a great industriousness in favour of dialogue between peoples and for peace, that in these times would be particularly relevant and useful.

IT HAPPENED TODAY

# In memory of the Fallen

September 14, 1975: International Day in Memory of all the Fallen. The intervention of Father Eusebio Iori and (below) the sound of the Bell



IT HAPPENED TODAY

# Maria Dolens in El-Alamein



September 21, 1962: Father Eusebio Iori on pilgrimage in El-Alamein for the inauguration of a reproduction of Maria Dolens



September 29, 1990: Reggente Pietro Monti, Foundation President welcomes the wife of President of the Republic of Czechoslovakia Olga Havel and the National President of the Italian Red Cross Maria Pia Fanfani

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The latter is essentially the case of Taiwan, with which only very few states in the world have normal diplomatic relations (in this restricted group the most significant among them is certainly the Holy See). The idea of a "One China", identified in the People's Republic, is generally recognized in the international field.

It was since the 1970s, after President Ronald Reagan's historic visit to Beijing, that the vast majority of countries, including the United States and Europe, in fact began to consider the PRC (at that time admitted to the UN while Taipei was expelled) as the "institutional" Chinese interlocutor for all issues, from political to economic, from environmental to security, which represent the priorities of the multilateral agenda.

In consideration of their multiple and consolidated interests in the area of the so-called "Indo Pacific", the preservation of Taiwan's territorial integrity from possible threats from the continent constitutes an absolute must for the United States, which would otherwise result in an unfavourable and likely irreversible scaling down in its sphere of influence around the globe.

The 19 hours spent in Taiwan, between 2 and 3 August, by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi were part of an Asian trip that also took her to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Seoul and Tokyo. Her consequent meetings with President Tsai Ing-wen and other authorities on the island have been able to highlight the numerous and profound contradictions with great clarity, which had already emerged or were hitherto latent, in a Sino-American relationship destined to condition the destinies of humanity for decades to come whether we like it or not.

The Chinese reactions in their most blatant form consisted of air-naval exercises without precedent in terms of duration, number of vehicles involved and extension of areas of development. They also consisted of very clear characteristics of "provocation" (even towards third countries such as Japan). Furthermore, they resulted in sanctions on the supply of food and raw materials (primarily the components for semiconductors, of which Taiwan is the world's leading producer), on which the island is heavily dependent.

On a political level, the warning addressed by Xi Jinping to his counterpart Biden in a recent telephone conversation « not to play with fire, otherwise you risk getting burned », cannot fail to be more explicit in conveying the very strong irritation of the Chinese leadership in the face of what is equivalent to a real "affront".

In truth, the White House, the Department of State and the Pentagon had done everything in their power to dissuade the resolute speaker from including a visit to Taiwan, sensing in essence the disastrous consequences in terms of bilateral relations and, more generally, of "geographic area". On the other hand, in democracy (a system that is exactly the opposite of the rigid top-down orthodoxy existing in the PRC, dominated by the single party) the legislative power is of course free to adopt its own decisions, especially when they are widely shared. (bipartisan).

Since this is probably her "swan song" (82-year-old Pelosi will hardly be brought back to Congress for the midterm elections next November in which success by the conservatives seems apparent), the U.S. House Speaker made the most of the opportunity, with the authority of her position in office, to confirm the US commitment in favour of the defence of Taiwan. In this way, a similar commitment was renewed,

that of republican predecessor, Newt Gingrich, the last US prominent figure to visit the island 40 years earlier.

On closer inspection, in the Taiwanese dossier the stakes for both Xi Jinping and Biden are very high, in terms of their respective credibility, both internally and internationally. The former is expected to secure a third term at the National Congress of the Communist Party (CCP) in October which, in all likelihood, will confirm his re-election as General Secretary as well as to the Presidency of the country for a further five years. Since none of the previous presidents, including Deng Xiaoping or Hu Jintao, remained in the top position for that long, Xi's willingness to prove himself "worthy" of an undoubtedly prestigious award is evident. To this end and in this light, what better demonstration than to finally bring Taiwan under the effective control of Beijing, putting an end, after the brutal police repression in Hong Kong, to the "democratic anomaly" of another far more important Chinese territory (not surprisingly identified in bureaucratic jargon as the "rebel province")? Especially since, according to assessments by military experts, the Chinese armed forces would operationally be in a position to successfully undertake a possible "annexation operation" by 2027 when Xi's new mandate would end.

For his part, the American president will find himself facing midterm elections a month later which, as mentioned above, forecast problems for his party, not least due to an embarrassing rating in the popularity polls close to historical lows.

The involvement of the United States in the Asian chessboard, derives not from its image connected to the role of global player, but above all from economic interests defined as strategic and consequently indispensable. The proof is that while the resi-

dent of the White House never indicated the possibility of direct US military involvement to defend Donbass, even when openly provoked by Putin, he did so, in reference to a possible Chinese aggression in Taiwan without breaking the traditional line of "strategic ambiguity". The island, a democracy built on institutions and the twenty-second country in the world in terms of GDP, is at the centre of vital maritime routes, which control, among other things, the energy supplies of historical US allies, such as South Korea, Japan and Australia. Consequently, if preserving its integrity is an obligatory objective, the collision course with Beijing appears practically inevitable.

In conclusion, returning to the topic of the Russian / Ukrainian conflict which we have dealt with in recent editorials, the prompt identification of a negotiating solution that, without claiming to be perfect, may be considered "balanced" and, as such, acceptable both in Moscow and in Kiev seems to be the best antidote to the arrival of a fearful front of instability in Asia.

A definitive and essentially un-sanctioned violation of international legality would in theory end up being tolerated with regard to the Russian Federation. Consequently, this would constitute an undoubtedly irresistible temptation for the PRC through the imitation effect, even if not immediately implemented.

The widely shared hope, but obviously to be verified in terms of feasibility, is that the United Nations, with the newfound international credibility at least partially recovered as a result of the recent "wheat agreement", will be able to facilitate the achievement of a ceasefire, followed by a lasting political solution for the disputed areas.

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President