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# The Voice of Maria Dolens

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Centenary of the Bell



## The legacy of 2024

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Our presentation of the Centenary programme, starting with the first toll of Maria Dolens—the focus of the January editorial (issue 53 of ‘La Voce’)—has so far not allowed us to provide a summary commentary on the “events and misdeeds” of 2024, which would seem appropriate for a year that was undoubtedly extremely busy. So, with apologies to our readers for the delay, we’ll present it here.

In undertaking this analysis, we must inevitably acknowledge that a time period in which fighting (and the related massacres of civilians) continued on both the Russian/Ukrainian and Israeli/Palestinian fronts, in which the horrors of war extended to Lebanon, and

in which the no-holds-barred struggle between rival military factions turned Sudan into a genuine humanitarian emergency, cannot but be labelled as “extremely problematic” by the majority of our public opinions. Add to this the circumstance that American voters chose as their 47th President the most isolationist candidate, the one least interested in international cooperation (the recent “annexationist remarks” regarding the Panama Canal, the Danish island of Greenland, and even the neighbouring G7 member Canada eloquently testify to this), and the picture is further enriched with an additional negative component.

Continues on page 6...

### IN THIS EDITION

02

#### A Story of Trentini in the World

Edi Mattuella Debenetti from Mezzolombardo to Brazil

04

#### The political and financial cost of international conflicts

The greater the fear, the higher the military spending

08

#### For whom the Bell tolls

Father Iori in command

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## A STORY OF TARENTINI IN THE WORLD

# Places of Faith

EDI MATTUELLA DEBENETTI FROM MEZZOLOMBARDO TO BRAZIL

*We asked some descendants of Trentino emigrants to tell their stories in the first person, emphasising how their origin has directed and influenced them in life. This would not have been possible without the active and friendly cooperation of the Trentino nel Mondo Association, founded in 1957 with the aim of social solidarity and as a tool of aggregation and assistance for Trentino migrants and their descendants. The character we present in this issue is Edi Mattuella Debenetti, born in Brazil and originally from the Trentino region.*

A story like so many others, but one that tells of a world that is both distant and close at the same time, the present time and also the past, and how all this put together creates a bond with the homeland of our ancestors.

My name is Edi Mattuella Debenetti, I was born and live in Garibaldi in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. I grew up in the countryside and at the age of ten I went to study 'outside'. I must say that I never left the countryside for good because the whole family was there: the world of the countryside has always been part of my life, and it is still so today.

My father, Dovelio Mattuella, whose family came from Mezzolombardo in Trentino, and my mother Norma Brigolini, whose family were from Veneto (Padua), always wanted us, their seven children, three brothers and four sisters, to study: an indispensable path to a better future.

I graduated in Social Work at the University of Caxias do Sul (Rio Grande do Sul). And then I worked for the state, where I had opportunities to do many things in the world of social work. In 1983, I married Nestor José Debenetti, also of Venetian origin (Padua and Venice): we have three children, Bruno, Marina and Pedro.

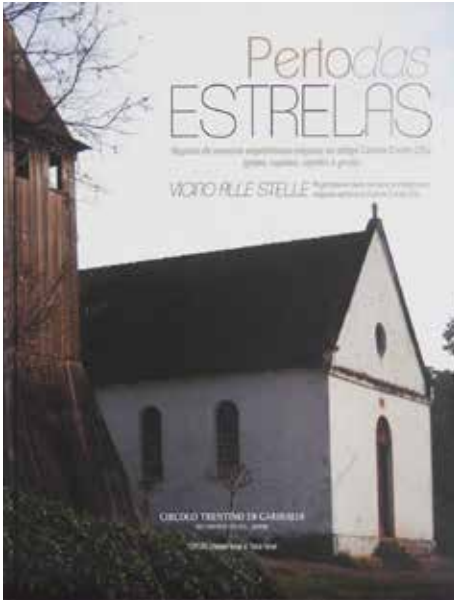
In the 1990s, my brother Edmar Mattuella started researching the origins of our family. He also took a trip to Italy with his father and mother. When they returned, they began encouraging all of us to get to know the Bel Paese our great-grandparents had left behind. So I too joined the Trentino Garibaldi Circle, founded in 1993 and of which my brother Edmar was the first president. At first I got to know it, then I began studying there and helping out.

After a few years during which we studied some Italian and the history of our family and our people, we under-



Edi Debenetti in the pulpit of the Church of Garibaldi, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

stood that the Trentino Circle, of which I later became president for many years, not only had to organise gatherings for the Trentino-origin community of Garibaldi, but also think about and implement projects that would keep alive the history and culture of our ancestors.



The cover of the book *Perto das estrelas* (Close to the stars), edited by the Trentino Garibaldi Circle

This sparked the idea of recording the architectural-religious memory of the “Colônia Conde D’Eu,” one of the areas where Trentino emigrants settled towards the end of the 1800s, and on which the city of Garibaldi later arose. The goal was to document and preserve the signs of faith left by the immigrants. The project resulted in a book, entitled *Perto das estrelas* (Near the Stars), edited by the Trentino Garibaldi Circle.

Over four hundred pages encompass descriptions and photos of the churches, chapels, capitals and caves found in the municipalities of Garibaldi, Carlos Barbosa, Imigrante, Boa Vista do Sul, Coronel Pilar and Santa Tereza. They were built in the period between 1875, when the first Trentino immigrants arrived together with Father Bartholomeu Tiecher (originally from Caldonazzo), and 1959.

As the Trentino Circle of Garibaldi, with this work, photographing and cataloguing those structures, we wanted to enhance them because, in some way, they show the evolutionary and natural sequence of our history. Prayers and devotions for which those structures were built have almost been lost

over time, but churches, chapels and capitals remain precious testimonies to the spiritual strength of our ancestors, who, in their great poverty, were willing and able to show that they loved beauty.

For us, the value of the book goes far beyond that of the albeit important cataloguing of devotional places, built by emigrants of Italian origin, because along with the wealth of information that is the result of painstaking research on documents and oral sources, the book highlights the profound religiosity that inspired and sustained the emigrants who arrived here. For us, that found in the book is the most beautiful legacy they left us, which we must pass on to future generations. This is also why the *Associazione Trentini nel mondo* has produced a video presenting the book and its creators, through images and interviews filmed in Garibaldi. The video can be viewed at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV1EA7hLuh0>.

In the book, which commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the colonisation of this part of Brazil, we read that on 21 March 1876, improving an altar with crates and trunks, in the middle of the street, Don Bartholomeu Tiecher celebrated the first mass in Colônia Conde D’Eu. Faith was an element that gave strength to our forefathers, and the chapel they built became the central meeting point for families, the place where people gathered and exchanged ideas which led to the development of the city.

We have learnt that by knowing our past, we can build a future that preserves our identity. Unwavering faith and work from dawn to dusk were fundamental elements that sustained and promoted the progress we can experience today.

We must respect the values they left us and keep our history alive.



Edi Debenetti's family of origin

# The greater the fear, the higher the military spending

## THE POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL COST OF INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS

The Archivio Disarmo International Research Institute recently published in its journal 'IRIAD Review. Studi sulla Pace e sui conflitti' (IRIAD Review: Peace and Conflict Studies'), an in-depth look at the cost of international conflicts. We are pleased to republish it here, and thank the experts of Archivio Disarmo for their collaboration.

2024 proved to be a year of growing tensions: from the conflict in Ukraine, which continues to rewrite the strategic priorities of Europe and beyond, to the escalating conflicts in the Middle East and the competition between the US and China. In the course of the year, the consequences of strategic and military choices made in the 2022-2023 biennium emerged strongly. The geopolitical priorities were reflected in the record increase in global military spending and in the re-emergence of the nuclear threat, which in turn fuelled international dynamics.

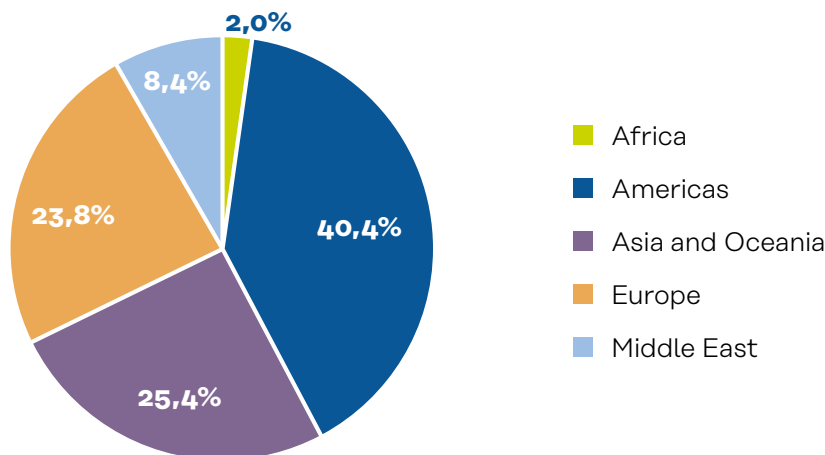
In a world that appears increasingly divided, nuclear doctrines are undergoing significant transformations. The recent revisions of nuclear policy by Russia and the United States

reflect an increasingly polarised world, where the role of atomic weapons returns to the centre of security strategies and the risk of global escalation increases.

Although the overall number of nuclear warheads has decreased, the volume of ready-to-use warheads has increased, reaching 9,585 warheads out of a total of 12,121 in January 2024. The number of deployed forces has risen to 3,904 (60 more than the previous year), with 53.79% in a state of maximum operational alert for ballistic missiles. Russia and the United States hold almost 90% of the world's nuclear weapons, although they each have over 1,200 warheads currently being decommissioned.

The nuclear arms race is not limited to the traditional powers. India, Pakistan and North Korea are also increasing their potential. Pakistan continues to invest in deterrence against India, while the latter is expanding its long-range weapons capabilities, especially towards China. North Korea, which has about 50 warheads already assembled and fissile material for another 40, is focusing on the use of tactical nuclear weapons, with new short-range ballistic missiles and cruise missiles for land attacks. Finally, Israel, which, moreover,

Percentage distribution of world military expenditure in 2023, divided by macro-regions.



### Military expenditure in the years 2014, 2022 and 2023, with GDP share for 2023.

Ranking	Country	Year			Share of GDP (2023)
		2014	2022	2023	
1	United States	647.789,0	860.692,2	916.014,7	3,4%
2	China	182.109,2	291.958,4	296.438,6	1,7%
3	Russia	84.696,5	102.366,6	109.454,4	5,9%
4	India	5.914,1	79.976,8	83.574,6	2,4%
5	Saudi Arabia	8.762,4	70.920,0	75.813,3	7,1%
6	United Kingdom	6.995,5	64.081,6	74.942,8	2,3%
7	Germany	4.662,8	56.153,1	66.826,6	1,5%
8	Ukraine	3.961,6	41.183,9	64.753,2	36,7%
9	France	53.134,8	53.638,7	61.301,3	2,1%
10	Japan	46.903,5	46.880,2	50.161,1	1,2%

Source: SIPRI (2024a) in mln US dollars at current prices

does not officially acknowledge that it possesses nuclear weapons, is allegedly modernising its capabilities and increasing its plutonium production, hampering efforts to create a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. In the region, attacks by Iranian-backed groups against US forces in Iraq and Syria are further complicating the tensions between Tehran and Washington, disrupting recent attempts at détente.

It should be emphasised that the modernisation of nuclear arsenals is not taking place in isolation: it is part of a broader context of increasing global military expenditure. The data show that the defence budgets of many powers are increasingly geared towards funding both nuclear capability and the expansion of conventional armaments.

Not surprisingly, the increase in global defence investment is not limited to the nuclear sector. The crises that mark the current international scene are directly reflected in an unprecedented increase in global military expenditure. Let us then analyse the main trends that have emerged from Sipri (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) data, highlighting how global powers are also devoting increasing resources to conventional armaments. Such

investments reflect the perception, whether justified or not, of increasing threats and contribute to fuelling a spiral of global insecurity.

According to the Sipri 2024 report, 2023 was a record year for global military spending, which reached USD 2,443 billion or 2.3% of the world's Gross Domestic Product. This leap was the fastest growth since 2009. For the first time in over a decade, military spending increased simultaneously in all five geographical regions of the world. The 5 countries with the highest expenditure are the United States, China, Russia, India and Saudi Arabia, which together accounted for 61% of world military expenditure.

In Europe, military spending reached USD 588 billion in 2023, an increase of 16% compared to 2022 and of 62% compared to 2014, following the war between Russia and Ukraine. In Central and Western Europe, total military expenditure reached USD 407 billion, an increase of 10% compared to 2022 and of 43% compared to 2014. The UK remained the largest military financier in the region, increasing military spending by 7.9% compared to 2022 and by 14% compared to 2014, accounting for 2.3% of GDP in 2023. Germany saw a growth of 9% in military spending in 2023 and

48% compared to 2014. Currently, the military burden makes up 1.5% of the GDP, but the German government has pledged to reach 2% cent of the GDP as of 2024. The largest annual increase among European countries is in Poland, with 75% growth since 2022 and 181% compared to 2014. This is 3.8% of the GDP, with the government hoping to bring this figure to 4%. In April 2023, Finland joined NATO.

The incidence of military expenditure (expressed as a percentage of the GDP) provides a key to assessing the weight that national economies attach to defence compared to other priorities. Sipri estimates that this burden increased globally from 2.2% of the GDP in 2022 to 2.3% in 2023. The Middle East recorded the highest military burden (4.2% of the GDP), followed by Europe (2.8%), Africa (1.9%), Asia and Oceania (1.7%) and the Americas (1.2%). The military burden grew significantly in Europe (+0.5%), the Middle East (+0.5%) and Africa (+0.2%), while it remained unchanged in the Americas, Asia and Oceania. The global increase highlights a worrying trend towards an ever greater economic commitment to the military, reflecting a spiral of insecurity in which countries, perceiving others' military spending as threatening, respond by increasing their own.



Continues from page 1...

In short, the overall context would *prima facie* suggest that, also due to the evident operational stalemate in which the United Nations have been for too long, the framework of agreements and multilateral conventions conceived after the Second World War and which remained in relatively good health until the end of the last century, has now entered an irreversible crisis. It is being replaced, almost everywhere, as the general norm of conduct between states, by the law of the strongest (the so-called 'might makes right').

However, a less biased and more balanced reflection of today's world situation seems destined to lead to conclusions that are, fortunately, less pessimistic. In issue 47 of 'La Voce' we have already mentioned how the year just ended was marked by a record number of elections on five continents, involving no less than 76 countries and two billion voters. In many of these - including some components of the Global South, i.e. the geographical area most prone, according to political scientists, to prefer authoritarian and illiberal regimes - the appointments at the ballot box were comforting for the opposition forces.

Two examples relating to two major players on the international scene, as founders of the BRICS and influential members of the G20, are worth mentioning. These are India and South Africa, where the parties that have been in

power for several years (in the case of Pretoria, without interruption since the end of apartheid) have been forced, in order to stay in power, to reach coalition agreements with reformist forces and accept compromises in their programmes.

On closer inspection, the observation of the present Russian context also contributes to a review of the leap year, 'in a substantial draw', to use a football metaphor. While Putin's control over his country remains full and uncontested to this day, it is 'state authoritarianism' that may, in the future, be exposed—upon objective analysis—to cracks of considerable significance. The modest military successes reported by the 'tsar's' army in the Donbass and the Kursk region are indeed exacting a heavy price, and not only because of losses on the ground on a scale far greater than the Kremlin admits. On a general level, the perverse effects of the prolonged diversion of substantial percentages of Gross Domestic Product, in favor of the war effort, are being felt. This diversion is essential for a more balanced economic development of the country. Significant declines in industrial and agricultural production, high inflation rates, and increasing dependence on the Chinese market for the allocation of its raw materials, particularly hydrocarbons, are just some of the inevitable consequences linked to a strategic choice that, in the long run, will prove detrimental to the interests of the Russian Federation.

In addition to these structural deficits, there is the considerable squandering of resources associated with the futile goal of preserving the leadership of its “protégé,” Bashar al-Assad, in Damascus. The latter’s ruinous fall last December was a heavy defeat for Putin, both politically and in terms of image, shared with the other unconditional supporter of the fierce Alawite dictator, Iran, in turn reduced in size by the Israeli army’s heavy blows to the Hamas and Hezbollah movements, both notoriously close to Tehran.

In a rapidly evolving overall scenario, the uncertainty surrounding China’s future role and influence on the global stage is undoubtedly still an issue. On the international relations front, Beijing does not shy away from behaviours that could be described as “provocative” (such as airspace incursions and naval exercises) towards neighbouring countries in the region, (especially the Philippines). Not to mention the repeated statements from its political leadership in support of the expected return of the “rebellious island,” Taiwan, to the fold of One China. Without underestimating the relevance of the dense network of relations woven, also thanks to the *Belt and Road Initiative*, with various Asian and African countries, the Chinese economy, the country’s real strength over the past decades, is going through an obvious phase of slowdown. According to experts in the field, rather than being linked to periodic cycles, which cannot be directly attributed to specific policy lines, the decline in performance should primarily be traced back to Xi Jinping’s desire to place the economic system of the People’s Republic under the control of the Communist Party, thereby preventing the free market from expressing its full dynamism.

In conclusion, despite the continued presence of large areas of uncertainty over the two major ongoing conflicts (in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, we note with great satis-

faction the achievement of a shared ceasefire, and hope that it will be observed by the parties involved) and situations of high unpredictability (primarily in Syria), 2024 appears to have nonetheless confirmed the resilience of democratic systems and their ability to adapt to rapidly changing scenarios.

Applying the electoral discourse mentioned earlier to the European continent, it must be acknowledged that Great Britain successfully navigated the transition from the Conservatives (who had been in power for 14 years) to the Labour Party without excessive trauma. While France was more shaken by its closely spaced elections (which could see a new aftermath in 2025, a year that is also important for Germany, which is called to early elections in February), its population nonetheless clearly expressed dissatisfaction with the actions of the sitting president and government. This positive assessment should be extended to Spain, which has been

able to rack up a series of economic results in recent years, starting from a less than privileged position. These have propelled it to first place in the special ranking of industrialised countries in terms of aggregate growth indices.

Indeed, the ability to distance oneself from unpopular leaders, shelve outdated projects, and quickly pivot towards addressing the priorities of the moment seems to be the key factor that enables democracies in general (and the European ones in particular) to keep pace with the rise of new international actors and potential competitors in various geographical contexts. It has been historically proven that conflicts mainly arise in situations of power vacuums, which need to be filled. All the more reason for democracies to believe firmly in their principles and values and to demonstrate a heightened commitment to growth, cohesion, and stability.

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Foundation President



FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS - P 15

# Father Iori in command

After the death of Don Rossaro and a year of vacancy, on May 15, 1953, the Opera Campana dei Caduti appointed Capuchin Father Eusebio Iori as regent, at the request of the Municipality of Rovereto and the Military Ordinariate for Italy. The main reason for this was the help he had given to prisoners freed from concentration camps, providing not only essential goods but also job opportunities to facilitate their social reintegration. More pragmatic than his predecessor, Father Iori, born in 1918, was a man of action, with a clearly socially oriented approach. He had joined the Capuchins at a very young age and became a priest in 1942. The following year, he was already military chaplain of the 4th Legion of the Guardia di Finanza in Trento. One of his first initiatives, the symbolic value of which cannot be overlooked, was to celebrate Christmas Mass in the little church at the Brenner Pass in 1953, involving soldiers from armies that had fought against each other. The intention was to foster dialogue and overcome national barriers, and somehow it worked. Repeated over the years, the celebration ended up spreading a message of peace that also brought international accolades, such as honorary citizenship of Innsbruck and the Austrian Republic Cross of Merit.

The religious vocation of the Capuchin from Revò was constantly exercised through concrete, specific projects: few grand statements, many actions. In this sense, the restoration of the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Trento—a Romanesque gem that had lain abandoned for nearly two centuries—can almost be considered a real achievement.

Some wanted to tear it down to build new housing. But things went differently. Father Iori managed to involve the municipality and various organisations in the project. And the funding needed was secured. In 1955 the work was completed. The basilica became a civic temple dedicated to the fallen soldiers of all wars.

Following the same model, which involved a physical place in which to reflect on abstract principles, in 1958 Father Iori founded the Alcide De Gasperi Centre on Mount Bondone. It began as an international summer camp for meetings between young people from various European countries, later becoming a care centre for children in the Trentino area suffering from tuberculosis and other illnesses, and eventually serving as a school for the children of Italian emigrants abroad.



It was known as the 'house in the clouds', a symbolic name for a way of working that saw great ideals pursued with concrete actions. A place where both bodies and minds were cared for, with a constant focus on marginalised children—the first building block in the construction of a common home, taking shape in the ideal of a united Europe.

Father Iori approached the management of the Campana dei Caduti with the same method: concreteness, high ideals, innovative ideas. He focused on practical aspects, such as the casting of a new clapper and a more appropriate location for Maria Dolens, but also on a universal vision of the Bell as a symbol of global peace. Among other things, he proposed setting up a press office and organising group visits, anticipating the age of mass tourism. The important thing was to use all possible means, the most modern ones, to reflect on the value of dialogue, living together in harmony, understanding diversity: in a word Peace.