

What War Teaches Us?

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14 June, 2022

War is back in Europe. We did not know, until a few months ago, that we would have to say this terrible sentence. But today the war is here, in Ukraine, very close to here.

We in the European Union are not at war with Russia, but we are facing war because of Russia. This is not a world war yet its consequences are global. What does that mean? That we must help Ukraine, that we must help it even more, provide it with even more military, financial, humanitarian, political, and moral support. Yes, moral support. We, as European Union, must measure each of our words, each of our actions by asking ourselves what is morally acceptable, when this war is one of barbarism against humanity, of tyranny against democracy. Moral, because when Ukraine asks to join the European Union, we must say a strong and solemn thank you. Ukraine is already an honorary member of the Union, through the blood shed in defense of its territory and in defense of our freedoms. It is an honour for us to see Ukraine as a candidate. Its place is in our European family and we must quickly give it the necessary assurances.

However, there is one thing we are not in a position to do, and that is to tell Ukraine what it must or must not accept. Because we are not at war ourselves, because we have not sent troops alongside the Ukrainian army, we simply do not have the ability to tell Ukraine what to do. We have not acquired the right to do so and we must not forget that.

We do have a duty, however, and it is a pressing one. We have a duty to draw the consequences of the return of war to our continent in order to know how to better protect the peoples of Europe. And first of all, we must learn from our failures. For yes, the invasion of Ukraine is a sign that we have failed. If we had admitted Ukraine into NATO when it really turned towards the West, during the Euromaidan revolution, it would not have been attacked. Those who opposed it, those who thought that the "open door policy" was enough to ease their conscience when it was mainly a question of leaving Ukraine at the door of the Atlantic Alliance, those - and there were French among them - lacked vision and were wrong. If we had reacted more firmly to the Russian aggression against Georgia, to the annexation of Crimea and to the war in Donbas, if we had not looked away when 21,000 civilians died in Aleppo under Russian bombardment, Vladimir Putin would not have imagined that we would let his army attack Ukraine without reacting. We have been sleepwalking and looking the other way, encouraging Russia and all those who dream of returning to the dirty days of spheres of influence and imperialism to be emboldened to act. Our past responsibility is immense.

We woke up, late, but we woke up anyway. It is about time. We are now delivering weapons to Ukraine. For the first time in its history, the European Union is financing and facilitating these deliveries. This is our duty and our interest, because Russia's victory in Ukraine would have disastrous consequences for our security and influence in the world. But why didn't we do it earlier! The European Peace Facility is proving its worth every day. Why didn't we activate it before the beginning of the hostilities, when Kyiv was already threatened but we were still nitpicking over a few million euros of non-lethal equipment! The United States understood before anyone else what Vladimir Putin was preparing, a war of aggression, a total invasion of Ukraine. Why did they not deliver fighter planes to Kyiv before the outbreak of hostilities? We all knew the strategic importance of the Black Sea. Why did we not send warships to Odessa when there was still time to do so? Why did Turkey

take so long to block the Dardanelles passage to the Russian fleet, closing the strait only when ships and submarines of the aggressor were already in front of Ukraine? Today it is the Russian blockade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports that is putting the world under pressure by preventing Ukraine from exporting its wheat. Moscow bears full responsibility for using world hunger as an infamous blackmail. But let's face it, we have seriously lacked foresight.

Even now, are European states doing all the right things and doing them fast enough to deliver weapons to Kyiv? To put it mildly, I'm afraid the answer is variable. Some are doing everything they can, because they have first-hand experience of what the Russian threat is like. France is holding its own while it is also engaged in external operations that require its equipment. But some countries are still missing in action and others are failing to keep their word.

For several European countries, the question is how to replenish their stocks of weapons and ammunition. Let's deal with it together. Let's work on buying together the armaments that we or our partners need. What we have done for vaccines, ordering them together and producing them in Europe, let us do it for the equipment that will protect Europeans. The Commission has made initial proposals and they are a step in the right direction, even if it is only a start. Joint procurement will prevent the richest countries from buying first and leaving the others without anything. It will also promote the purchase of European equipment rather than the frequent use of American equipment. I even propose going further and moving towards a Buy European Act for military equipment. Because our sovereignty - and our credibility - also depends on this.

Speaking of credibility, what can we say three months after the start of the war in Ukraine? The European Union has adopted six packages of sanctions against Russia, an unprecedented firmness in the face of unprecedented aggression. We must continue, go for the long run and remain united. Of course, but confusing unity and unanimity is costing us. We are moving at the pace of the most reluctant of the 27 Member States, in a crisis where we must act quickly. How long has the oil embargo been called for by an overwhelming majority of us? How long did it take for the Council to adopt it unanimously? Only one country, Hungary, wasted precious time by demanding an exception to the Russian embargo for its benefit, which it finally obtained. Budapest did not stop there in its complacency towards the Kremlin by having the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church removed from the list of Russian officials sanctioned for their support for this illegitimate and illegal war.

The rule according to which European foreign policy decisions must be taken unanimously must be abandoned. It amounts to giving a right of veto over our common action to the most reluctant of the 27, or even to the one who will be the most sensitive to influence from outside our Union. We must therefore learn to decide by qualified majority on these subjects too. This is what the European Parliament thinks, this is what the citizens who expressed themselves during the Conference on the Future of Europe expect, and this is logically what the Strasbourg Parliament has just voted for by a very large majority and on my initiative. I would also like to thank the Members who are not necessarily of my political side and who chose to support a strong text, which calls for Ukraine to be granted candidate status for membership of the European Union, for more arms to be sent to it and for us to strengthen our common defence. Some MEPs have told me that they would not have voted for my text a few months ago. The war in Ukraine has changed their view and they finally see the need for a real European defence. For three years I have been trying to convince them not to wait. I kept telling them: it is true that Europe advances thanks to crises. Let's not wait for a crisis in defence because then the crisis has a name: it's a war. Let us not wait for a war to advance European defence. They looked at me in disbelief.

For their part, Finland and Sweden have understandably expressed their desire to join NATO. We must give our full support to this move, which the Turkish President is unfortunately blocking,

demonstrating once again the ambiguity of his position and how little his interests are aligned with ours. Until Sweden and Finland fully join NATO, Stockholm and Helsinki will fortunately be able to count on the full solidarity of the other members of the European Union under Article 42-7 of our Treaty. This is European defence. If proof were needed that European defence and NATO are not contradictory but complementary, here it is.

Another sign of the times: Denmark has just joined the common European defence policy. This is a historic step forward for a country that had chosen to remain on the sidelines. It is a demonstration that, when it comes to a political Europe, it is sometimes wise to move forward first among those who wish to do so and not to force anyone. Those who are ready and willing to do so can then join in. It is by respecting the sovereignty of each individual that we convince by example. Those who tremble at the prospect of a variable-geometry Europe pretend to be unaware that it already exists and that it allows the most daring to move forward, joined little by little by the others. Today Croatia is deemed fit to join the eurozone, while no one has sought to leave. Tomorrow, when they are ready to do so, Bulgaria and Romania will join Schengen. Again, the area of free movement is expanding, it has never shrunk. But in these different examples, those who were ready to take a step forward were not prevented from doing so by the most reluctant.

This reflection on method must inspire us at a time when the question of the enlargement of the European Union is coming back with the force of Ukrainian expectations. What should we say, and above all what should we do? Are we to tell the Ukrainians that they are not ready to join us and that we are not ready to welcome them? This is describing the present, not preparing for the future. It is a statement of weakness and powerlessness, even though our model is the most attractive in the world. It means not believing in ourselves and in our ability to transform ourselves. Ukraine is not ready? That is true. Well, let's set a course: let's accept its candidacy and show it the way. What other response can we imagine, when Ukrainians are resisting and fighting to be fully European? Are we going to tell them no, "sorry, come back later when you have solved all your problems yourselves"? Are we going to give this gift to Putin? Not humiliating Russia should not lead to humiliating Ukraine. The Ukrainians I speak to keep telling me that if they are capable of fighting the Russian army, do we really believe that they will not be able to fight corruption and succeed in their reforms? Let's be serious and stop underestimating them.

Are we going to tell them: we have not thought about our future, steering an enlarged Europe will become even more complex, come back when we have taken two minutes to think about it? Since the last enlargements, we have known that the way in which the European Union functions must be changed. We have stumbled over the Constitutional Treaty, we have sought a solution with the Lisbon Treaty, we still have to work on it. The Conference on the Future of Europe produced many ideas, and European citizens were neither short of vision nor of audacity. They are talking about putting an end to the unanimity rule, which is already essential and will be even more so if there are more of us. It is time to listen to them and to think of our future as it should be thought of: with confidence in ourselves and in our ability to meet the challenges. We are the continent that has acted best in the face of COVID, by far. We are a Union that preserves peace among its members in an unstable world. We are the first region to restrain the Internet giants and we are the most committed to climate protection. We can do all this because the European Union is an exceptional project. That is why others want to join us and why the only country that left us, the United Kingdom, is now biting its fingers and becoming the sick man of Europe. Let us be serious and stop underestimating ourselves.

Another Europe is possible, one that welcomes the countries that wish to join it without giving up any of its values, without weakening itself but on the contrary strengthening itself. Faced with China, Russia, India, the demographic growth of Africa, the ageing of our population, do we want to become

an anecdote or remain a power? The day the United States gives birth to a new Donald Trump, do we want to burn candles to appease the world or find the foundations of our own power within ourselves? Emmanuel Macron has spoken of a European Political Community, the European Parliament is calling for a convention to review our treaties. Those who dismiss these efforts at reflection are the new sleepwalkers, who believe that we can continue as before while everything around us is changing. It is because we want to remain what we are, free, prosperous and united, that we must rethink everything, with pride in what we have achieved and the desire to do even better. It is not certain that dictatorships will prevail over democracies. But it is not yet certain that we have fully understood that this struggle has begun, that it is within our power to win it, provided we are prepared to fight it fully.

A shorter version of this article has been published in Ukrainian by Evropeiska Pravda:

<https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2022/06/14/7141216/>