

ENGLISH VERSION

transform! italia



Building a European Public Opinion

ENoP
— EUROPEAN NETWORK OF
POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS

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This publication has been published by the European Network of Political Foundations in cooperation with transform! italia. Co-funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union and the European Network of Political Foundations.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

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INTRODUCTION

Europe is a construction in the making and often this construction is endangered by events and crises that challenge it. It is clear that, in addition to political differences and divergences, one of the elements of weakness in this construction is the difficulty of finding a common language that unites the continent.

This is why the work that political foundations do to succeed in supporting the integration process and to arrive at the definition of a unified public opinion must involve a Europe that addresses the issues and themes that run through people's lives, not just as detached national affairs, but directly as European citizens. This is also why transform! Europe has promoted the "Media Alliance" project (<https://european-media-alliance.eu>) to strengthen and network a number of newspapers and media outlets with the intention of empowering each of these to share that plurality of views and opinions necessary to build a true European public opinion.

This was the intent behind our promotion of this publication, in which we have collected stories and points of view on some of the issues that we consider central to the policy discussion.

Climate change, the living conditions of women, war, immigration these are some of the issues addressed and told from different points of view and at different latitudes.

The hope is that this work will succeed in raising awareness of "being in the same boat" and moving forward in an inclusive Europe that can come to terms with the need to improve both the lives and well-being of its citizens, as well as the relationship of European economies with the reduction of negative environmental impacts they have.

As far as we are concerned, just being able to connect and collaborate with different people of various demographics represents a source of great satisfaction, and for that we thank ENoP for creating the conditions for this publication which, we hope, will stimulate a debate with others who, like us, look at Europe as the “common home” of its citizens.

Roberto Morea | Building a European Public Opinion

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COVID-19: The Irresponsibility of Individual Responsibility

by María Iglesias Caballero, Mario Fontán Vela, Pedro Gullón Tosio
Mundo Obrero
translated by Daniele Ruzza

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact worldwide, affecting both the physical and mental health of people. However, it has been especially hard on disadvantaged communities and has furthered existing social inequalities. While scientific and technical issues and advances in the fight against COVID-19 have been central to public debate, issues related to alleviating existing inequalities that were exacerbated by the pandemic have been silenced.

As a scientist, I recognize that the efforts of everyone involved in researching and monitoring the virus has been very important. Along with the economic support received, we have made notable scientific advances that will collectively serve us in facing future challenges. Although there is still room for improvement in the conditions of surveillance centers and their professionals, there have been significant technical advances (in high-income countries) in the past three years. But today, I would like to take off my lab coat and look out the window, as I recognize that many of these advances have also been important catalysts for inequality and stigmatization.

As a scientist, I recognize that the efforts of everyone involved in researching and monitoring the virus has been very important.

Working in virus surveillance, my first thought is towards improving virus sequencing methods to monitor its circulation and evolution. In fact, the general population has become familiar with how different variations of SARS-CoV-2 circulate. This technological evolution has required a significant investment by states, which has highlighted resource disparities between countries. The WHO and ECDC recommended percentages of sequenced samples that were difficult to meet due to the high cost of the technique, with each sample costing between \$300 and \$500, a prohibitive cost for many countries. This difference in resources has prevented global surveillance without biases, which has not been addressed. All of this is also compounded by racism, whereby lower-income countries that complied with sequencing were stigmatized or discriminated against for acting correctly and declaring new variants detected, although retrospectively it was shown that they originated from other European countries that did not declare them at the time.

The development of vaccines in record time is another scientific milestone of which we should be proud. Further it should be a public pride, as it was knowledge generated largely by public universities and research centers whose patents were passed into the hands of private companies that closed multi-million-dollar, secret, and non-transparent commercial agreements with the institutions that tend to our health and that we also finance.

These vaccines have been one of the best barriers against severe cases and deaths from COVID-19, giving a break to our already beleaguered National Health System. However, once again, the enormous inequalities in the distribution of these vaccines are proof that there has not been a vaccination plan based on equity at the international level. It is the umpteenth example that your health directly depends on your postal address. The neoliberal management of public health does not waver even in an international emergency due to a pandemic.

Internationally, one of the main causes of this inequality in the distribution of vaccines is the lack of purchasing power of low- and middle-income countries. Once again, it's all about money. Moreover, in addition to money, there is another crucial aspect: many of the vaccines currently available are only available through exclusive commercial agreements, making it even more difficult for low-income countries to access them. While some countries hoarded vaccines, others struggled to obtain doses. Throughout the vaccination campaign, we have seen paradoxical situations: while some countries began to administer a third dose to their population, others had not even been able to administer two doses to a large part of their population. It's the market, baby!

COVAX is an international initiative coordinated by the WHO devised to prevent these inequalities and ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines worldwide, but it has faced multiple difficulties in obtaining enough vaccines to meet demand, and it has been criticised for the slow distribution of vaccines.

But the neoliberal management of vaccines does not only stop at how the market has led to an unequal distribution of vaccines; the application of vaccination plans themselves can also generate inequality. I would like to present the vaccination plan in the Madrid community as a case in point. It is the perfect paradigm of decades of disastrous and privatizing management of healthcare and a world leader in fatalities. In the city of Madrid, two large vaccination centers were set up with flexible hours: a hospital lacking equipment where citizens had to queue in the sun to get vaccinated during the summer, and a converted sports hall. One of these places is located in the north of the city, and the other in the center. And in the south? In the south of the city are most of the working-class neighborhoods whose inhabitants had to travel to other areas to receive the vaccine (a great incentivization vaccine plan, I know), and if they had difficulties in traveling due to care, illness, etc., they could request an appointment for vaccination at their primary care centers. It seems easy and logical, right? Well, no. Madrid had been dismantling primary care centers since the beginning of the pandemic. Not all centers had vaccines, so people still had to travel, and request an appointment that was

not set for the same day, and at no time was any plan devised that aimed at involving the different communities living in the city. Information was not provided in different languages, and questions from people who were afraid to come for their vaccine due to their immigration status in the country were not resolved, once again turning their backs on people most in need. In a country like Spain, with its spectacular vaccination rate despite everything.

These two great scientific achievements, which are beneficial for all and publicly funded, with their pros and cons, have been used as the perfect excuse to look the other way. And all of these decisions are made on a day-to-day basis. The opportunity cost of sequencing could be comparable to that of expanding social measures to address the pandemic; just as the distribution of the vaccine was never handled by the market in Spain, the same could have been done internationally; and just as Madrid decided to manage the vaccines without taking into account the population, other places did.

Someone might think that citizens were given all possible means from the institutions with these measures and that the rest was their responsibility, i.e., the wonderful individual responsibility that whitewashes the consciences of those in charge.

The non-pharmacological measures were our citizens' responsibility. Masks, social distancing, perimeter lockdowns, hand washing: all these measures have been important at certain moments of the pandemic and have been useful for familiarizing ourselves with hygienic concepts and control of respiratory infections. Despite the great debate around them, especially masks, they have never been the true reason for the decrease in severe cases and deaths.

Spain has been one of the European countries that has bet the most on the use of masks, in more places and for longer periods of time. Although its effectiveness is a controversial issue, it has served to offer us a precious example of the impact of capitalism on essential healthcare products.

Masks were mandatory, you could even be fined if you didn't wear them, and they were funded by citizens. The price of these for a time kept going up, the quality of many of them was questionable, and if you didn't wear them correctly, you were a lousy person. Fortunately, in our country, their price was limited without the global market for masks collapsing as economists had predicted and without pharmacies closing as some pharmacist-merchants had said. But even with the limitation, what protection was available to the people without resources if they couldn't afford them? Could we judge them as war criminals? Are the poor truly irresponsible? Some arguments pointed in that direction: the blame is always on the less privileged.

Lockdowns were a very good tool to try to stop transmission at the beginning of the pandemic when we had neither knowledge of the virus nor tools to fight it. Let's remember that a high number of those 'essential' workers who risked going to work during those days in many cases did not have decent housing solutions even to be able to confine themselves so as to avoid the infection of their cohabitants. I never saw a housing plan to solve these problems.

Again, focusing on Madrid, the city enacted lockdowns by neighborhoods, taking into account the accumulated incidence of the disease in these areas. The working-class neighborhoods of our city are more densely populated areas and their residents usually are essential care workers who are unable to work from, or stay at, home. With this in mind, it is logical to think that if you have to go out to work and meet people, travel on public transport, and live in a block of 60 homes, it is easier to just get infected than the person who lives in a villa who only goes out to walk to the store. Instead of making community plans that took into account the social characteristics of the neighborhood, lockdowns were implemented in a way that discriminated against and stigmatized those same neighborhoods. It seemed more like they were protecting themselves from us than from the virus, but they did not impede our capacity to go to work in any way. The virus only spreads in your free time.

The significant economic impact of the pandemic has hit disadvantaged communities very hard. Many low-income people have lost their jobs or seen their incomes reduced due to business closures and decreased demand. This has led to an increase in poverty and food insecurity, especially among families with children who were fed pizzas and pre-cooked meals in Madrid.

Science did its part: it offered us new methods and vaccines. Now we have to fight for measures that address these inequalities and ensure that all people have access to the healthcare and economic resources necessary to overcome this crisis. These circumstances, which concern us all, will not be solved individually. Hopefully, this situation will serve to develop a more collective approach to healthcare, to our environment, and toward our neighbors.

**The Abortion Ban
in Poland is the Result
of a Deal between
the Church
and the Right Wing,
not the Will
of the Majority of Society**

by Malgorzata Kulbaczewska

Cross-border Talks

translated by Benedikt O'Connor

“Polish law on abortion has only become more restrictive over the last 30 years. But in parallel, there is a growing social awareness, an understanding that abortion is not only a worldview and moral issue, but also an economic one”, says Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk, Member of Polish Parliament from Lewica (The Left) and co-organiser of the women’s protests in (“Black Protest”).

It has been more than a year since women protested against the near-total ban on abortion. These were the largest protests in Poland’s recent history – and yet the initiators of the ban, the Law and Justice Party, pushed through this ultra-radical law anyway. A failure?

Looking from the perspective of the current law, it can indeed be said that we are living in a time of defeat of women’s rights.

Looking from the perspective of the current law, it can indeed be said that we are living in a time of defeat of women’s rights, in fact, because we have a total ban on abortion in Poland. Why has this happened? Mainly because these protests came too late: Law and Justice

(PiS)¹ found a way by imposing the restrictive laws through the politicized Constitutional Court. It is formally impossible for the Court to withdraw from a legal decision once it has been taken.

That is, the government could safely stand its ground, claiming that it could not withdraw either. After all, the abortion ban was not introduced by a voted law. But should we talk about the failure of the whole movement? I have no such feeling. With each mass protest public awareness grows. It was with the previous wave in 2016, when PiS tried to push through a total ban on abortion, an arguably more restrictive law, because it included the possibility of prison time for women seeking abortions.

However, there is also growing support for liberalising the law on abortion. There are more and more supporters of a more liberal abortion law even in conservative circles, such as the Law and Justice electorate. Such are the effects of the ruling of the Julia Przyłębska’s Court². Up to now support for the right to abortion has increased by 10 percentage points in the Law and Justice electorate.

1 Polish: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość.

2 This is how Polish opposition supporters refer to the politicized Constitutional Court, from the name of its president (trans. note).

The demand for a total ban on abortion has never really had majority support in Poland. It has always been a slogan floating around somewhere in marginal, ultra-Catholic circles. Why, then, has Poland become the country in Europe with the most restrictive legislation on abortion?

Polish politics, especially right-wing politics, is entangled in relations with the Church on very many levels. These include issues such as transfer of land to the Church or negotiations concerning the Church's acceptance of Poland's entry into the European Union. The pressure of the Church and its fundamentalist factions is very evident. It is true that Polish society is not at all as conservative as it might seem from a mere reading of the laws. Unfortunately, for many years we have not had a real democracy, i.e., the representation of the actual views and beliefs of society. Instead, we have to deal with enormous influence of wealthy and powerful institutions, such as the Church.

How have we women changed over these last few years?

Women in Poland have been organizing and helping themselves for years. It has been a relay of self-help and self-organisation since at least 1993, since the first restriction of the right to abortion.

Abortion Without Borders assists women in securing the possibility of having a home abortion, i.e., a pharmacological abortion. For years, the Federation for Women and Family Planning has been active. Following the Przyłębska Court judgment, it has also specialised in intervening with doctors in hospitals, making sure that this last post of freedom and admissibility of legal abortion, which is the right to terminate pregnancy to save a woman's health and life, is respected, so that doctors are not afraid to intervene and save women. This is one big civil society for saving women's health and lives. But even the greatest self-organization may not be enough. We will not replace the system. And functioning in a system that is oppressive towards women will end in tragedy at some point.

We live in a constant atmosphere of siege, oppression, and fear. The system pushes women into feeling that they are doing something wrong. They are made to feel ashamed when they simply dare to make a decision for themselves about their bodies.

In European Union countries, women's rights, and access to abortion, are the standard. Why do you think the European Union did not stand up for Polish women then?

The European Union is a great asset. However, there is still too little integration. We are able to integrate on economic matters, on the free movement of people and, to a certain extent, on labor market matters, and nothing should

stand in the way of more uniform action on common respect for human rights, including women's rights. Of course, symbolic gestures such as European Parliament resolutions on the defense of women's rights are valuable and important. Documents on expected standards in terms of *work-life balance* and other such issues are very important. However, there is still a lingering conviction that health systems and related legislation are the exclusive competence of the Member States.

Let's assume that Law and Justice loses the next election and the opposition comes to power. Let's also assume, based on current polls, that the Left will be part of this government, as the liberal Civic Platform will not form it itself and will need at least one junior coalition partner. Do you see a chance for the abortion issue to be dealt with in such an alliance? The Civic Platform was in power for a long time and women's rights were not a priority for them either.

The whole situation in which Polish women find themselves today is, of course, to a great extent the responsibility of the present authorities, but it is also the fault of this persistence over the years in what was called the abortion compromise. This was in fact no compromise at all, but a deal made over the heads of women by right-wing politicians and the bishops. Will this deal eventually be thrown in the bin when the broad opposition comes to power? I think so. But the chances of that happening are greater, the stronger the Left's representation in the new deal.

At the moment, we are the only group in parliament which has consistently been in favor of a woman's right to decide whether she wants to be pregnant, without any additional restrictions or conditions. We are the only ones who say that the whole debate about whether a woman should be sent to a priest or a psychologist before an abortion, how many certificates she should have and who else should interfere in her decisions is absolutely unnecessary and blurs the issue. Today everyone has the right to decide about a woman's health and life in Poland, just not the woman herself.

I would like, should be there a joint list, or a joint government or some other form of cooperation after the parliamentary elections won by the opposition, that the issue of the right to terminate pregnancies be one of several priorities.

We have recently learned, from the American experience, that the right to terminate a pregnancy is not so obvious and can be challenged. Aren't you concerned that this wave of neo-conservatism, a renewed assault on women's rights, is growing nonetheless?

Of course I have such concerns. I see that opponents of women's rights are organizing themselves efficiently. There are very broad networks, with various, obscure and extensive sources of funding. We have to keep an eye on

them because you have to know your opponent and there is no reason to minimize their importance.

I have no concerns about the firmness of my own milieu: the left, feminists, those involved in the fight for women's rights. The problem is the so-called lukewarm allies, the centre, the liberal circles, who on the one hand would like to be seen on the side of women, but, when it comes down to it and when these circles have tools in their hands, they do not use those tools. The United States is a good example. Nothing stood in the way of strengthening the right to abortion so that it could not be challenged through the Supreme Court, yet this has not been done.

It is a bit like that in the case of Poland and the eight years of rule by Civic Platform and the PSL³. They maintained the illusion that we struck some kind of compromise on abortion. This only made it easier for that side, the right-wing extremists, to organize and push the law in a radically rightward direction whenever the opportunity arose. That is why we say clearly: there is no return to 'compromise'. Our demand is: guarantee Polish women the right to safe, legal and free abortion on demand until the twelfth week of pregnancy. This is the absolute minimum standard for women's rights.

I hope that the Polish or American experience will also be a lesson for the more centrist, liberal circles that on the issue of human rights the position must be clear and firm.

Irish women have fought for their rights for decades. How many years do you think Polish women will have to fight?

Polish women have also been fighting for 30 years. That's how many years it will have been next year since the 'compromise' law that took away our rights was adopted. I hope we will prevail in the next term of the Sejm.

3 Polish: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish People's Party).

The Political Economy of Abortion. The Case of Romania

written and translated by Maria Cernat
Barricade

Romania, which **rank number one** in the European Union in terms of pregnant underaged girls, is a country where abortion is legal. It is difficult to determine in absolute terms the precise cause of this complex social phenomenon, but, indeed, one of the most critical factors leading to such a damaging effect is related to the material conditions these girls live in.

Almost half of the girls aged 10 to 15 who become mothers in the EU live in Romania

According to Eurostat, in 2020, of the 1,645 girls aged 10 to 15 who became mothers, 731 are from Romania, approximately 45 percent. Almost 30 percent of girls who become mothers before 18 in the European Union live in Romania. Of 29,505 underaged mothers in the EU, 8,276 come from Romania.

Almost 30 percent of girls who become mothers before 18 in the European Union live in Romania.

The living **conditions** of these girls, as they were investigated and presented in a research program conducted by Save the Children Romania in 2021, indicate very low standards of living, with 74 percent of underaged mothers relying on child support as their main source of income. Only a third of the respondents have a toilet in their homes, and 90 percent use stoves for heat. Seventy-five percent of the participants in the study live in a house with no more than two rooms, and 60% live in households with 5 or more people. The contraception prevalence rate is only 13 percent, and 73 percent of pregnant women have to travel to a neighboring city for a pre-natal care. Seventy percent of the respondents have internet in their homes. More than 90 percent of respondents drop out of school due to their pregnancy. (Save the Children Report 2021.)

This synthetic presentation of the living conditions of underaged girls who become mothers in Romania shows that the absence of a ban on abortions in a country does not necessarily mean access to reproductive rights. How can women hope to have dignity and access to reproductive rights when they don't have access to a toilet in their house? How is it possible to have access to abortions when you have to travel to a nearby city to see a gynecologist or obstetrician? These are rhetorical questions aimed at underscoring what should be clear right from the start: the fight for reproductive rights must never ignore poverty as the main source of oppression preventing women from enjoying such rights.

Education

It is also important to note that the techno-determinist utopia, the vision that sees the source of progress, i.e., in the progress of technology, demonstrates its stark limitations in this case. Seventy percent of respondents have access to the internet, yet only 13 percent use contraception. Access to information is a completely different thing from education.

A closer look at Romania's educational system will help us expand our understanding of the situation of reproductive rights in this country

Recently, Romania adopted a law stipulating that children in the 8th grade be taught “education for health” – a euphemism for sexual education – but only with the written consent of the parents. It was yet another case where most discussions focused on the legal aspects. The progressive activists and the Orthodox Church, and other right-wing organizations clashed over aspects that have little impact on the life of the extremely poor communities in Romania. As controversial as it may seem, a government initiative to provide online free courses on sexual education for everyone to access might have been an easier way to reach the girls who have, in 70 percent of the cases, access to the internet. A free hotline and access to doctors via the internet would have been very helpful for isolated communities whose only connection to the larger society is through the internet.

But that would have meant that activists and progressive promoters of the sexual education law would have spent time investigating the actual living conditions of the girls most affected by the lack of education in Romania.

It is important to note that for 30 years, Romania witnessed some of the most brutal reforms in the so-called “transition period.” By 2013 Romania closed down 1,800 schools and merged 1,500. The journalists suspect the number could actually be double this estimate, but, unfortunately, the Romanian Education Ministry did not even keep track of these evolutions. The civilizational downgrade becomes even more evident if we think that after World War II, almost 35 percent of Romanians were illiterate, with 80 percent living in rural areas and only 2 percent of the rural population graduating from the gymnasium. The communist regime, despite all the criticism, managed to reduce illiteracy drastically, and it managed to increase the number of schools spectacularly. What followed after the fall of communism was the constant cutting of funds devoted to education and the closing down of thousands of schools.

A loophole in the Romanian legislation regarding abortions

In Romania, doctors can legally refuse to perform terminations on demand based on the provisions of the Code of Medical Deontology of the Romanian **College of Physicians** which, in article 34, states:

“(1) Refusal of medical assistance may take place strictly under the law or if the person in question asks the doctor for acts of a impair his professional independence, or damage his image or moral values, or the request is not in accordance with the fundamental principles of the practice of the profession for the purpose and social role of the medical profession.

(2) In all cases, the doctor shall explain to the person concerned the reasons for the refusal, ensure that the person’s life or health is not endangered by the refusal, and, to the extent that the refusal is based on a violation of his or her moral convictions, refer the person concerned to another colleague or another medical facility” (Code of Medical Ethics of the Romanian College of Physicians from 04.11.2016).

This document has the power of law in regulating the medical profession. The right-wing militant groups successfully targeted the doctors to deter them from performing terminations on demand. It is worth noting that in a country like Romania, which experienced a total ban on abortion between 1966 and 1989, it is still very difficult to advocate for restrictive reproductive legislation and this is part of the reason why right-wingers regrouped and targeted gynecologists directly.

Reproductive rights in Romania were not accessible in general. The only time abortion was allowed on demand was between 1957 and 1966.

In 1966 with the clear intention of increasing the birth rate Nicolae Ceaușescu (in office: 1964-1989) signed the infamous “770 decree” banning abortion in Romania. On the 25th of December 1989, Ceaușescu and his wife were both shot and killed. The very next day, on December 26th, 1989, Decree number 1 canceled Ceaușescu’s 770/1966 decree.

Ceaușescu’s totalitarian anti-abortion stance was cruel but pragmatic – he wanted to achieve population growth. At the same time, the Polish Catholic Church’s approach is purely metaphysical, advocating for the defense of the ‘soul’ of the unborn child.

Activist Mihai Matei started to collect testimony from Romanian women who suffered due to the infamous 770 Decree passed in 1966 that banned abortions. His own mother was the first to offer her testimony relating to the hor-

rendous experiences she had to endure due to the lack of contraception and access to abortion in communist Romania. He has initiated a project called “[The Decree Journal](#),” an online site where he gathered testimony from women who suffered as a result of restrictive reproductive legislation before 1989.

The fate of unwanted children born in Romania due to the 1966 decree was hair-raising. [Caretakers](#) who used to work in one of those institutions offered their testimony describing the horrific living conditions the abandoned children endured.

Today’s Romania is not a dictatorship but it is poverty that prevents women from gaining access to abortions. The overwhelming majority of the underaged mothers in Romania are poor and rely on child support for their livelihoods. It is vital to focus on the economic well-being of the citizens as well as on legal aspects.

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**Poland:
A Quarter-Century
of Abortion Ban –
from Bad to Worse**

written and translated by Bojan Stanislavski
Barricade

The Polish Parliament passed one of Europe’s most stringent laws twenty-five years ago.

Poland inherited a very liberal abortion law from the times of the People’s Republic. Abortion was legal in three situations: when it posed a threat to the health of the fetus or the pregnant woman, when the pregnancy resulted from a crime, and when the pregnant woman faced difficult living conditions. The Polish Parliament voted to tighten the law on January 7, 1993.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Poland’s legislature passing one of Europe’s most draconian anti-abortion laws.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Poland’s legislature passing one of Europe’s most draconian anti-abortion laws. On January 7, 1993, the Polish Sejm (the most important chamber of the Polish parliament, though it is referred to as the ‘lower chamber’) of the first term after 1989 adopted it.

And what did the Catholic church have to say about it?

“On the issue of abortion, time and history will show that we were correct, as was the case with the 1965 letter to the German bishops” said Primate Archbishop Cardinal Jozef Glemp during a mass in Poznan Cathedral two weeks before the parliamentary vote, just before Christmas 1992. Glemp also stated that alcoholics and drug addicts see restricting their habits as a restriction of freedom, as does “the habit of killing the unborn”.

The bill was approved by the Senate in late January. Surprisingly, as many as 25 senators requested that the bill’s roll call vote be kept secret. Some of them also requested that the debate not be televised. On February 15, 1993, President Lech Walesa, now a supporter of the ‘professional democrats’ in Poland, signed the anti-abortion law.

The new law, enacted in 1993, made no provision for punishing a woman who chose to abort her pregnancy. The procedure was subsequently criminalized under the future law. Soliciting an abortion was criminalized in a 1997 amendment to the Criminal Code.

On December 23, 1997, liberalization came to an end. Since 2007, the far-right has attempted to tighten the law in response. In 2007, a group of MPs led by Sejm Speaker Marek Jurek, a notorious right-winger, and hater of women’s rights, attempted to write protection of life from the moment of conception into the Constitution, but the project also failed due to votes from some Law

and Justice deputies, implying that even some Catholic fundamentalists found it too harsh. After that, Jurek left Jaroslaw Kaczynski's party.

The rest of the story is well known: in 2016, the Sejm discovered a draft legislative initiative titled Stop Abortion, which eliminated all three exceptions left in the 1993 law. When the Sejm sent it to the first reading, women across Poland took to the streets in what became known as the Black Protest.

Here's a brief summary of how it went. On September 23, 2016, the ruling majority rejected in the Sejm the Save the Women Committee's (a broad coalition of feminist organizations) civic bill liberalizing abortion laws. It was signed by 215,000 people. At the same time, the MPs referred to another civic project but of a contrary nature, for further parliamentary proceedings. This was submitted to the Sejm by a highly influential organization of Catholic fundamentalist lawyers called Ordo Iuris and another organization with a similar agenda called Stop Abortion Committee. They collected about 450,000 signatures. The project envisaged a total ban on abortion, even pregnancy resulting from rape, when it threatens the health and life of the woman, or in cases of fetal damage. Abortion would be punishable by up to five years in prison.

In response, on September 25, the then relatively newly established social-democratic RAZEM party started mobilizing against the looming abortion ban and organized nine demonstrations in major cities under the brand of "black protest".

During the "black protest" in Wrocław, a major urban center in south-west Poland, the then representative of the local Democracy Defense Committee (KOD, a discredited organization that was supposed to unite the opposition to Law and Justice attempts to establish 'dictatorship' in Poland) Marta Lempart established herself as one of the frontliners in the ongoing battle. During her speech, she recalled the 1975 women's strike in Iceland and roused Polish women to a similar demonstration.

The form of the protest was specified: abstaining from work, participating in demonstrations, and wearing black clothing. In no time, the logo of the action was created: a white female profile on a black background. The graphic is said to have been created by designer and feminist Aleksandra Jasionowska.

Participation in the protest was confirmed on Facebook by tens of thousands of people. The demonstration was supported by many employers, who gave female employees time off that day to take part in the strike. Men organized themselves on Facebook, declaring to take over the duties of their female partners or colleagues at work for that day.

The women's strike has activated a great social force. On Monday, October 3, demonstrations were held in nearly 200 cities, towns, and villages all over Poland and in many places abroad, including Brussels and Berlin. The protests were attended by between 100 and 300 thousand (depending on the source) women dressed in black and men in solidarity with them.

In Warsaw, several thousand people blocked the PiS headquarters in the center of Warsaw. Approximately fifty thousand people protested in Castle Square in Warsaw's Old Town. The scale of the demonstrations forced the Law and Justice party to take a step back and refrain from further developments on the bill to ban abortions altogether. The party's leader and the petty dictator of the Polish internal political process to this day, one Jaroslaw Kaczynski, barely managed to keep things under control.

Everyone in Poland assumed that the women had won. However, the Catholic fundamentalists were only regrouping and consolidating their power. The Catholic Church has never abandoned the Law, and Justice owes them for their support of Kaczynski's party. Four years later, the right time came to try paying it back again. Unfortunately, that battle was lost.

It all happened somewhere between another media report on alleged Polexit, already galloping inflation oscillating officially around 6.8 percent, horrifying reports from the Polish-Belarusian border, and the daily circus of the Polish parliament on October 19 2021, when the All-Poland Women's Strike called a demonstration for October 22. On this day, Polish women began their fight against the Constitutional Tribunal, which ruled on that day that a provision of a 1993 law allowing abortion when a fetus is predicted to have a "handicap or incurable disease" is unconstitutional.

People took to the streets of Warsaw in large numbers on the evening of October 22. These events triggered a series of daily protests across the country, which were attended by anyone who was dissatisfied with the rule of law and justice, as well as the Tribunal's decision. According to Police Chief Jaroslaw Szymczyk, approximately 430,000 people participated in 410 protests across the country on October 29. On October 30, over 100,000 of them participated in the largest mobilization, known as the "March on Warsaw."

Tens of thousands of demonstrators were fined under COVID-19 pandemic-related legislation in Poland, were arrested, and some were beaten by fascist thugs who Jaroslaw Kaczynski called on television to "defend the Christian pillars of European culture." The significant politicization of smaller towns and villages across Poland, as well as the protests' clear anti-clerical nature, was a completely new phenomenon.

This was novel and shocking, even to the elites of the Polish Church, who live in their own isolated bubbles.

It all ended on January 27, 2021, when the Constitutional Tribunal’s decision was formally published in the official parliamentary journal. Several thousand people gathered in Warsaw’s streets, which meant nothing to anyone.

Where did things go wrong? OSK¹ appears unprepared for social mobilization or a protracted conflict with the authorities. There were only loud slogans and radical rhetoric. There was no plan, no strategy, no tactics. Most importantly, there was no ideology that would encapsulate the struggle for women’s rights and use mobilization to create a movement demanding structural, systemic changes to secure free and safe abortion access, as well as many other needs of women and other oppressed groups.

1 Polish: Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (All-Poland Women’s Strike or Polish Women’s Strike).

No Wall can Stop Refugees

Małgorzata Kulbaczewska
Cross-border Talks
translated by **Benedikt O'Connor**

The migration crisis on the Belarusian-Polish border is set to escalate because, in addition to migration caused by wars and crises, there is already migration caused by climate change. Meanwhile, Poland has no long-term migration or integration policy. It only makes gestures, relies on civic activity in surrounding areas, and this will never cover the whole problem – says Kamila Fiałkowska, member of the inter-university research group Researchers on the Border, documenting the migration and humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border.

The humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border has been going on for more than a year. Are we at least able to roughly estimate its scale, i.e., the number of people who have tried to cross this border?

One can try, although due to the way the whole situation is managed by the authorities, any estimate will have a large margin of error. The Granica Group, a coalition of organisations, independent activists and Podlasie residents, was in contact with five thousand migrants. In contrast, more than 11,000 people reached Germany via Poland in 2021 alone – meaning they must have crossed the Belarusian-Polish or Lithuanian-Polish border beforehand. One can use the information published by the Border Guard in the calculations, but even here there is a problem. When the Guard writes about “cases of unlawful border crossing attempt”, does it treat, for example, a group of ten people as one case? This is not entirely clear.

This is not the scale of migration that we saw during the so-called refugee crisis in the Balkans, where there were hundreds of thousands of people migrating. It is also certainly not on a scale comparable to what is happening in the Mediterranean or on the Bulgarian-Greek-Turkish border. Nevertheless, there is a migration route across the Polish-Belarusian border and it has been in operation for much longer than just the last year. In 2021, events simply escalated, due to the actions of the Belarusian government and the Polish response.

There is a migration route across the Polish-Belarusian border and it has been in operation for much longer than just the last year.

The number of deaths along this route is incomparable to the magnitude of the tragedy in the Mediterranean, but people have died on that border too...

Again: we don't really know how many people have died in Belarus. The latest official statistics speak of 17 people on the Polish side of the border; on 29 July this year, the body of 17th victim was found in the Svisloch River. But the Polish-Belarusian border area is difficult to access. We do not know if there are bodies in the forest that no one has found, especially as access to the border area was banned for a long time. There are families who, together with

local activists and journalists, are still looking for their relatives. The official figure does not reflect reality.

How long have people been trying to enter the European Union through this border?

This route operates with varying degrees of intensity. For example, in 2016-2017, foundations that worked to defend the rights of migrants, including the Association for Legal Intervention, intervened at the Terespol-Brest crossing. Many people, often from Chechnya, arrived at this crossing by train and intended to apply for asylum, while the Border Guard did not accept these applications. Activists tried to help the migrants so that these applications would nevertheless be submitted. Activist Elmar Abdi, who is from Somalia and works on behalf of migrants, said it straightaway in an interview: I walked this route. So it works, it is the shortest route, for example, for people who want to flee Chechnya, and on top of that it is relatively safe.

The Polish government claims that by erecting a wall on the border it will stop migrants. It is already apparent that this assumption is unlikely to work.

Walls have stood on many borders and never solved the problem. This is a lesson from history, and I don't know why the Polish government has not learned it. Yes, a physical barrier has been created. Yes, it is difficult to cross, but it is not impassable. People try to dig under the wall, with the help of Belarusian services. Others try to climb this five-metre-high wall, risking serious injuries, fractures. I have also heard, although I am not in a position to confirm this 100 percent, of places where bars in the fence, because technically it is not a wall, but rather a fence, have been deliberately cut on the Belarusian side to allow passage.

The wall plays a purely symbolic role. It shows how determined we are to defend the border. But migrants will not be stopped, migration researchers are sure of this. At most, it will make the attempt to cross the border much more expensive: more will have to be paid to the smuggler, probably more will be demanded by the Belarusian services. However, desperate people will not give up.

What do we know about these people, where they are coming from, what they are fleeing from? Last year we heard mostly about Iraqi Kurds – who is trying to cross the border now?

Last year it was also said to be Afghans, because the escalation of the crisis occurred shortly after the departure of US troops from Afghanistan, and many Afghans were trying to leave their homeland with the Americans. However, Afghans did not dominate on the Polish-Belarusian border. The most visible

were indeed the Kurds, but there were also very many Syrians, and this is still the case today. Yemenis are also frequently encountered. As the political scene in Iraq is very unstable, this will also translate into the number of people from there arriving here. A very large number of refugees have come from various African countries, particularly the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the autumn and winter of last year there were people from Cuba, which may come as a bit of a surprise.

The conclusion is quite clear – this migration map overlaps the map of countries that are in a state of long-standing conflict or have been unstable for years. People who are going to Europe do not actually have the prospect of an improved economic situation, a secure life or education for their children at home.

So migrants know they could lose their lives walking through the woods at the border, but are willing to take the risk anyway because the situation in their country is so bad?

Migrants' awareness of what awaits them at the Belarusian-Polish border varies greatly. They get information through different channels. Some people do not even know what conditions are like here before they leave. Some do not believe reports about dire conditions, thinking it is propaganda to discourage them from coming.

A banal example: the contents of backpacks that have been abandoned in the forest. Heeled shoes or hair curlers, for example, were found in them. I am convinced that had the person who took these shoes known that she was going to face a struggle for survival in the forest, she would not have packed them. Rather, she expected that she had a short journey ahead of her and that she would find help quickly afterwards.

On the other hand, this is a fundamental point: people who are well aware of the risks decide to take the journey to Europe. And the risks at the Belarus-Poland border are undoubtedly smaller than those taken by people passing the Mediterranean in boats. On the route via Belarus, or via Russia and Belarus, migrants heading for the EU do not have to hide and run from the police, as the servicemen actually transport them to the EU border. Of course, the brutality of the Belarusian secret services is a fact, but on the Balkan route it is even worse. There refugees, whether arriving via Macedonia, Serbia or Croatia, are exposed to violence, rape, and theft of property at every stage of their journey. From the perspective of a migrant or refugee, going from Belarus through Poland to Germany, where they believe human rights are defended, is easier than marching through the Balkans.

The Border Guard in recent communications has greatly emphasised that migrants arrive at the Polish-Belarusian border with Russian visas. What role is Russia currently playing in fuelling the humanitarian crisis?

First of all, let us remember that, as Anna Maria Dyner of the Polish Institute of International Affairs, for example, pointed out, Belarus did not take the decision to escalate the crisis on its own, i.e., without Russia. Now this role of Moscow is even more apparent, because with the efforts of the EU institutions, flights directly to Minsk, which used to fly from many places in the Middle East, have been suspended. This traffic has been redirected to Russia. I have come across cases of people who bought air tickets to Moscow, then travelled to Minsk and from there to the Belarus-Poland border. There were many such situations.

We also had direct contact with people who came from various African countries, but had lived in Russia for several years and had even learned the language quite well. However, they were probably there illegally. They were caught by the police and given an offer they could not refuse: to go to Europe via the Belarusian route.

In migrants' accounts, this violence on the part of the Belarusian services comes up quite often – talk of destroying phones, beatings, pushing back to the border people who have just experienced push-back from the Polish services...

And all this is still happening. There were people who experienced several push-backs from the Polish side and at some point wanted to return to their countries of origin or come to Minsk, gather their thoughts and plan what to do next. However, they often prevented from having a choice. The strategy of the Belarusian services was to take the migrants to another point on the border in such a situation, or from the Belarusian-Polish border to the Belarusian-Lithuanian border. Individuals could not decide for themselves.

In winter, when temporary shelters were still operating on the Belarusian side, e.g. in Bruzgi, there were also reports of theft and rape. The destruction of telephones, on the other hand, is repeated in migrants' accounts not only in the context of Belarus. This was also allegedly done by Polish officers.

How can we summarise the activities of the Polish services over this year?

The Polish services are very consistent in what they do, despite the fact that there are court judgments showing that they do not quite act within the limits of the law. Now, I am not even talking about push-backs or mistreatment of people who have crossed the border, but, for example, about the approach to people who bring humanitarian aid. With regard to them, there have been repeated detentions, intimidation, coercion to hand over information that the services have no right to demand. We remember the famous 'raid' on the base of the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia. On another occasion, police entered a farmhouse on suspicion of the presence of migrants.

The response of the Polish authorities to the crisis was a powerful intervention into the privacy of Podlasie residents. The brand that Białowieża had built – that of an enclave of peace – was destroyed. Now a walk into the forest in these parts is no longer a “walk into the forest.” There you go with the idea that you might meet a desperate person; many people walk with soup and a thermos to be able to help if something happens. Or random identity checks, even outside the border zone: I spoke to a person who was in a car that a policeman looked into, shone a torch in their faces and let them go, “because they all look good.” The person I spoke to said that at first she was relieved. Then she reflected that it was actually very dangerous to feel that “because I’m white, it’s okay, because I won’t get in trouble.” This is a confirmation of the hierarchy: whoever is not white is somehow suspect. This is racial profiling! The people in Podlasie with whom I spoke are not afraid of migrants. They know that these people have not come to attack anyone, that they arrive in Poland exhausted, often sick. Rather, they are afraid of the services, because how could you not be afraid when you are stopped by an unmarked car on a local road and at first you don’t know who you are dealing with?

What will happen next? Will this humanitarian crisis escalate?

It will, because in addition to the migration that has been caused by wars and crises, there is already migration caused by climate change, for example, during the so-called refugee crisis of 2015. Poland was not on the main migration route. As a result, we were able to make excuses, throwing around slogans that we didn’t want any relocation. This was very short-sighted. On top of that, the government was scaring refugees and migrants in order to mobilise its electorate.

And now we have no meaningful long-term plans. At most, we are used to having services, an army and a wall at the border. We do not have a migration policy or a policy to integrate foreigners who are already in Poland. We have symbolic gestures that do not solve anything in the long term, but cost huge amounts of money. We have several thousand people in detention centres, in terrible conditions, without psychological support – NGOs are fighting for these people. Then there is the separate issue of refugees from Ukraine, whom we have admitted in Poland, but this has also happened through the actions of so-called ordinary people. The state is withdrawing from more areas, hoping to rely on civic activity. And such activities, inevitably, will always be fragmentary. This is not how it should be.

**Interview
with Adrian Dohotaru,
the Head
of the Green Party
in Romania**

written and translated by Maria Cernat
Barricade

We talk to Adrian Dohotaru, a well-known environmental activist, active in environmentalist circles in Romania. He was part of the Save Romania Union, and everywhere the red thread that led his activity we could observe from his numerous appearances, from the published books and articles and the position papers on the fight for the environment. Yet in Romania it seems that the environmental issue is and is not important. Why it is important for Romania to have a green party?

When we see ecology beyond the important things, when we see ecology as economy, we have to rethink the system in which we live.

Ecology is important if we see it in all areas. For me ecology is economy. It is the same word “oikos”, “home”. When we see ecology beyond the important things, when we see ecology as economy, we have to rethink the system in which we live. From an economy still

based on neoclassical terms of economics where we have very high social and environmental costs to a more circular economy on which we rely, and this is after all also the step we took towards the Green Party. We rely on the fact that the main challenge in the 21st century is climate change and the climate emergency. It means that we have to reach a climate neutrality where we store more greenhouse gases than we emit. This is the main challenge of the century and if we do not manage to solve it, we will have major problems, and in the future.

Here I am paraphrasing climate specialists who have said that we will have uninhabitable cities in Romania because many people will move because of droughts or floods. We will have cities, according to the latest report from the National Meteorological Institute, where many and people will die due to temperature surges, as many have already died in recent decades because of the heat. In the worst-case scenario, and this is worth mentioning, we will have summers in August with average, I repeat, average, temperatures seven degrees higher than now. That’s huge because the distribution will be uneven. We’re likely to have in the south or southeast temperatures seven degrees higher in addition to decreased rainfall by one third. Again, with an uneven distribution, we’re going to have areas that are severely affected. That’s the worst-case scenario predicted by the NMI for the second half of the century if we don’t take action at national and international levels to reach a climate neutral zone.

The moment we see ecology as an economy we will take measures both in terms of urban and regional mobility and we will take measures in terms of thermal insulation. If we talk about pollution that comes from housing, we will take measures in terms of source-separated waste collection and product

recovery measures until we get to recycling. If we come up with such a broad package of measures ecology is no longer a niche issue. And that is what the Greens constantly explain. Although they started out as a small, niche movement, these are cross-cutting objectives for achieving climate neutrality, objectives that are also linked to social justice, because what we are seeing at the moment, both in Romania and internationally, is that those who pollute the most are also the richest. A state of equality and equity would lead to higher costs for those who pollute, on the one hand, and on the other hand, a vision in which we live in a more egalitarian world would automatically lead to less pollution. These status issues matter too, when you see a wealthy person holidaying in the Maldives using a few flights, you may wish you, who are in the aspirational zone, could go there. That will lead to even more pollution than if in a more equitable society you holidayed travelling by train and had a regional patriotism that inspired you to go near you, to give you one example.

I don't want to put you in a bad light , but I honestly tell you I don't think there is any hope within this system to change things as you say. The change you propose is so radical, deep and assumed that I don't see how it can be done within the current capitalist system. I see a clear contradiction between a green party and the capitalist system. What do you think?

There are also questions of tactics here. If we look at the majority of the Romanian public in terms of statistics, they are in a centre zone. But according to our statute that was voted at the congress at the beginning of September, we go from the centre to the left, that doesn't take out some more radical tendencies. You can have several positions and I thought it was important to have an ideological position like the Greens have internationally. But you have to be careful in an organisation that has a few thousand members how you make changes. If that organisation had people who didn't have a clear ideological identity, you don't make very sudden changes because you have to take care of the organisation you are part of. Things will get more settled over time as members become more active and doctrinally active not just on local components or niche environmental causes. And that seemed relevant to me. A second point about anti-capitalism, and such members can come to the Green Party as they are in Romania, is a kind of modesty. What can you do from a semi-periphery of Europe? Yes we are a big enough country, but you have to make sure that there is not too big a gap between rhetoric and declarations and actual possibilities. Because we are fighting now for 2024 to get into parliament to have more than five percent, to have a percentage ok enough to get into the EP to get into local and county councils. There are already 120 elected Greens in local councils, surely we will have higher numbers.

We need to calibrate our speeches to our abilities. Hannah Arendt said that to say is already to do, but we don't do strictly theoretical work and then we have to see how we calibrate these speeches, but without excluding radical tendencies. Certainly people with strong left-wing tendencies will come to the Green Party, but we know how doctrinally educated the Romanian public is and there are many centrists and we must accept such options as long as we show that we have a tendency that does not exist in the Romanian Greens from centre to left. This is to compete with the Social Democratic Party because it is not a social democratic party. I have been saying this for years, it is a social conservative party with no environmental policies, let's say we can understand that they are environmental policies to a small extent. But the PSD doesn't even have those social democratic positions that we see in public policies from progressive taxation as we have been asking for to more adequate social policies than the PSD has offered so far seen by many as a social kleptocrat party, not social democrat really.

I ask this as we clearly know that the recycling solution was also a broad public relations strategy to cover the real problem – we no longer need to produce disposable plastic. Because even if you collect it perfectly practically recycling costs are high and you can recycle little. Disposable bags are very difficult to recycle at all. The problem is at the source – how do you block the production of single-use plastic when only now in the context of the war Exxon Mobile, which is one of those directly interested in producing single-use plastic, has made four times as much money. How can you fight that? There seems to be nothing left to do because the system is so badly designed and the enemies are so powerful that... what else is there to do?

Everything is to be done. And in that sense, if more people probably thought in the 90s that recycling was a gamble, and it is a gamble in the current context, but already more and more people are talking about the need to produce differently. It is clear that this recycling stake has been pulled out of the hat as a solution by multinationals producing more and more waste and trying to throw some responsibility onto the consumer and the state to manage this massive pollution. But what I can say quite clearly is that although recycling is still a stake, it is an even bigger stake in the near future and already people are becoming more and more aware that you have to produce differently. What does it mean to produce differently? Not producing so much waste and packaging. Why are so many single-use plastics being produced? Why don't we have a return and reuse system? Because the profit is higher there. It's easier to manage such a system where plastic is thrown away. I was talking about this neoclassical linear economy where the social and environmental costs somehow disappear are externalized are socialized losses. Profits are privatized. We need

to convince policy makers. How? By being more in the decision-making zone. Whether it's a position or even partnership in government.


The Greens are starting to be coalition partners in some countries. You have to convince the legislature that a different kind of production is needed. There were countries in Africa because they had such big management problems with plastic bags they banned them. And indeed those countries have become cleaner. There are similar issues that we can do in parallel with a higher price for companies to take back their products put on the market on the EU polluter pays principle. For example, we are late at the moment and Romania could be cleaner if a return guarantee system were introduced whereby we would go to the shops with the cans we have, but unfortunately, due to the lobby of the producers and the inefficiency of the government, we see that this system which should have been introduced ten years ago in Romania and which exists in other countries is not being introduced. But in parallel with such gestures which are important, but in a reformist area it is important to have system changes. And this system change should lead us to more sustainable products without this programmed obsolescence, as to a large extent such products are designed through cartelization. Here there are data showing that products are designed to deteriorate, it is necessary for polluters to pay even more with regard to environmental degradation and this is done through an awareness that happens. Ten years ago in the Romanian media there was no “climate change”, now we see mainstream channels talking about climate change and environmental injustice, coupling environmental injustice with social injustice. It's still a niche discourse, but it's growing, and we see this even in international street movements that have been in Romania. In several large cities, young people have demonstrated with a tone that is highly critical of capitalism.

A “New Pact” for Immigration in the European Union

by Stefano Galieni

Left

translated by Daniele Ruzza

 On the 23rd of September 2020, the European Commission unveiled its *New Pact on Migration and Asylum*, which has not been discussed yet by the European Council. In recent months, its legislative process resumed: the first evaluations should have been carried out by the end of 2022, and it should become law in February 2024, before the next European Parliament election.

Over the last two years, in critical member states like Italy and Sweden, the latest general elections were won by openly xenophobic parties, whose opposition to immigration is a common trait. In countries where those movements have been defeated at the polls, like Spain, France, and Germany, parties with similar positions are constantly growing, garnering support in parts of the population that have been mostly affected by a never-ending cycle of crises that started in 2008 and is still ongoing. This “New Pact”, the result of a series of compromises, is considered by conservatives as a good starting point. The pact focuses on a principle of solidarity among member States with no obligations, as well as on speeding up, and increasing the cooperation and the number of people to be returned to their country of origin, willingly or not. Furthermore, though without detailing much as to how to realise this, it calls for more cooperation with countries of transit to stop ‘illegal’ departures.

Over the last two years, in critical member states like Italy and Sweden, the latest general elections were won by openly xenophobic parties.

Member states with strong conservative governments are now free to force the European Union’s hand. An example of this is Giorgia Meloni’s, the new Prime Minister of Italy, inauguration speech at the Chamber of Deputies. In her speech, Meloni stated: “Our goal is to revive the original proposal for the Sophia naval operation by the European Union, whose third phase, which was never actually implemented, entailed stopping migrants’ boats departing from North Africa. We will submit the proposal to the European Union and enforce it in accordance with North African authorities. The mission will be coupled with the creation of a series of hotspots in African territories, to be managed by international organisations, where asylum requests will be reviewed, so as to identify those who have the right to apply for asylum in Europe, and those who do not”.

The “Sophia operation” was launched in June 2015, and, at the time, was known as *European Union Naval Force in the South Central Mediterranean* (EU NAVFOR Med). In the August of the same year, the operation was renamed Sophia, when a pregnant Somali woman gave birth to a child aboard a German ship that had just saved her from a refugee boat, along with other asy-

lum seekers. The operation ended in 2020, and a similar one was launched immediately thereafter: Operation Irini, whose activities were focused mostly in the Aegean Sea. Irini and Sophia were military operations, among whose objectives, was also the rescue of people at sea.

But their legacy is also tied to the institutionalization of widespread policies of collective pushbacks, an illegal activity, as established by Article 33 of the Geneva Convention. When these operations were deployed, their existence was motivated with the necessity of fighting human trafficking. Destroying the vessels used to carry the refugees towards European shores was one such practice. In reality, these operations made crossing the Mediterranean Sea more expensive and dangerous, increasing the number of people dying at sea. Irini and Sophia were conceived as spiritual successors to the ruinous Khartoum process (whose groundwork was laid in 2014, during the half year Italian presidency of the European Council), whose purpose was to transfer to third party countries, whether of transit or origin, the task of “defending” European borders, in the face of a growing flow of migrants. The governments of several African countries initially adhered, on the condition that they would be provided resources and the wherewithal needed to increase their borders supervision. This would have been achieved by cooperating with the Frontex European agency, so as to carry out pushbacks or collective repatriation to countries of origin or transit.

Today Frontex is in crisis as well. The last 18th of October, the European Parliament rejected Frontex’s 2020 financial report (345 MPs rejected and 284 were in favour), at a time when the agency’s leadership was asking for increased funding. The rejection was also tied to the Director’s, Fabrice Leggeri, resignation on the 28th of April, after the publication of a harsh report by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) highlighted a lack of supervision in the Aegean Sea in 2020, as well as a worrying connivance between Frontex members and the Greek authorities, and widespread irregularities in its functionaries’ activities. The same document also criticised the illegitimacy of pushbacks in the central Mediterranean, and the careless use of EU funds. Frontex will temporarily be managed by two dignitaries from many Baltic states, Aija Kalnaja (Lithuanian) and Uku Särekanno (Estonian), alongside a former German policeman, Lars Gerdes. The new leadership of Frontex has to now convince EU member states of its usefulness, even if arrivals are increasing. But it can also now rely on, as we said, a shift towards the right of many EU’s governments. The European Council will therefore become the new instrument for other governments, like Italy, on top of the so-called “Visegrad group” to promote their policies.

In view of policy changes tightening the chances of entrance in Europe for men and women coming from other continents, we would do better to ask

ourselves why in recent years, feelings of fear, hate, and indifference are so widespread in many EU member states. And not just in conservative political parties, but in progressive milieus, in working-class communities, amid those who have fallen into poverty. The drifting of public opinion in this direction bears many issues. There is the exaggerated perception of a ‘foreign presence’ which has grown through the years for many reasons. Misinformation, a swelling fear of dealing with the unknown, the idea that Europe can return to being a fenced continent populated by white skinned Europeans or, at the very least, by workers willing to take up jobs that, given the continuous rise of the mean age, European people are not able to carry out anymore.

It is a process started at different times in different countries, for historical and demographical reasons, but now has many shared traits. And yet, from 2008 to 2012, when the first effects of the economic crisis were being felt, the arrival of people from other countries diminished. Both because of an increase in policies limiting entrance in Europe, especially in southern states, and because of the economic downturn lessening working opportunities available. Economic migrants declined, while those on the run from wars, dictatorships, famine, environmental disasters, and economic crises, have increased, but the overall number of those seeking asylum has decreased. The only exception to this was the 2011 humanitarian emergency in Syria.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, around seven million and a half people, were able to flee their country, thanks to the deployment of a European directive (55/2001), which had never been activated before. The right means of entrance which saved millions of people, is not taken into consideration when it comes to just a few tens of thousands of people coming from Asia or the African continent, and so they must be “stopped at all costs.” Billions of euros are handed out to dictatorships like Turkey to stop refugees; walls are constantly under construction with the general public’s approval. Walls, barbed wire, and high-tech devices, are all utilised to stop, by any means necessary, those who seek to enter.

There are countless cases of international laws being ignored in the name of the defence of European or national borders, in which abhorrent practices take place. One must only look at what happening at the border between Belarus and Poland, Greece and Turkey, or the effects of the 2017 *Memorandum of Understanding* stipulated between Italy and Libya by a ‘centre left’ government, which is now being surreptitiously renewed for three more years. Under this agreement, which was not approved by the Parliament, 85 thousand people have been pushed back in the span of five years. It also allowed for the funding of the so-called Libyan coast guard, detention centres, supervision of the southern border, and repatriation from Libya back

to countries of origin. The only opposition to this measure was made up of anti-racist activist associations, part of the Church, small political parties, and groups of intellectuals.

Islamophobia, already present in Europe and further aggravated during the years by Islamist-inspired attacks, contributed to stoking widespread fears and mistrust. But what truly legitimised racially motivated aggression, often justified, if not by governments, by prominent political figures, are also economic and ideological factors. These factors include a mixture of the vilification of foreigners, and of those who sympathize with them, a fear of having to share resources considered scarce, due to a greater number of people on state welfare, followed by discrimination towards the poor, especially if they are not ‘white’ and European.

Immigration towards Europe, particularly in some countries, has been and is still considered an emergency to get rid of as soon as possible, and has also been considered a burden, and not an asset or a source of social and cultural renewal or economic development. If we as a society, especially the media, do not free ourselves from this toxic narrative based on a non-existent “invasion”, driven by the purported desire for an ‘ethnic replacement,’ and if we do not become capable of telling the truth by giving a voice to those who arrive or reside in our countries by considering them subjects and not objects, the actual democratic stability of the Union will continue to be at risk.

The European Approach to Immigration

by **Cristiana Pipitone**
transform! italia
translated by **Daniele Ruzza**

For decades, Europe has followed two inconsistent approaches to immigration. On one hand, the EU has been conceived as a ‘fortress’ since the inception of the Schengen area in 1985, which allows free movement for citizens once considered foreigners. On the other hand, there is a demand for an increased workforce to support the economy, which is closely linked to the general demographic decline.

Southern and Eastern European countries, which have joined the Schengen area, have been primarily concerned with erecting barriers to control entrances.

In practice, there has never been a common policy in this regard. Southern and Eastern European countries, which have joined the Schengen area, have been primarily concerned with erecting barriers to control entrances, while others have continued to manage the entry and

regularization of immigrants for economic reasons until at least 2017, based on calculations related to national interests.

Each of the 26 states has approached the last thirty years with different methods and rationales, which are often unclear. For example, the countries of the so-called Visegrad Group, which have not had to accommodate a significant number of migrants, have become the most adamant, along with the rich Scandinavian countries, in preventing any entry and in refusing to apply European migration policies.

However, over the last 15 years, some events have changed not only migratory routes, but also their *raison d’être*. The 2008 economic crisis, whose effects we are still experiencing, the explosion of the “Arab Springs” and the civil war in Syria, as well as the resurgence of numerous conflicts, have produced two global effects.

People who have tried to enter Europe for economic reasons have primarily sought to reach countries with better prospects, while, in the meantime, the number of those fleeing to seek asylum or humanitarian protection has increased. The EU has effectively closed the doors to legal entrances and, in different ways, has increasingly restricted the accommodation of asylum seekers. For example, in 2015, Germany allowed almost one million Syrian refugees to enter its territory, but closed its doors the following year.

The people arriving, both for protection and economic reasons, have effectively had no other channels than “illegal” entry, with all the problems this entails. However, for years, there has been an unquantifiable number of people in Europe who do not meet the requirements to stay in individual countries. According to the Pew Research Centre, in 2017, an estimated 4.7 million peo-

ple were present in EU countries without the necessary documents. This number has certainly increased in the last six years, even though the old continent no longer exerts the attraction it did in past decades.

Some governments believe that repatriation is the only possible solution, but, at the same time, they must deal with a massive demand for added workforce that the declining demographic cannot satisfy. Thus, everyone is taking their own measures.

On July 26th, the Spanish government's Council of Ministers approved a reform that concerns "the incorporation of foreigners into the labour market." The changes introduced aim to facilitate the access of foreigners into sectors with labour shortages. According to the Minister of Inclusion and Migration, José Luis Escrivá, the reform streamlines the administrative procedures through which immigrants obtain the necessary authorizations to work and expands the migrants' statuses, which make it possible to access employment.

One of the novelties is the introduction of granting work permits to migrants without a residence permit in Spain, but who have been in the country for at least two years, provided they receive training in fields with labour shortages.

The law also facilitates the hiring of foreign workers in their countries of origin, or of foreigners who come to Spain to study and intend to work at the same time. The criteria for opening a business have also been made less rigid. "We want to promote a legal, safe, and orderly migration model," said Escrivá.

The French approach exhibits both similarities and differences, compared to the Spanish one. In France – news broke last November – permits are to be granted to those who have arrived illegally in the country but are willing to work in sectors considered 'under pressure.' In the construction sector alone, there are at least 400,000 vacancies. The Interior Minister, Gérald Darmanin, proposed a 12-month permit that can only be renewed if a work contract is extended.

The plan, which has not yet been implemented, stipulates that beneficiaries cannot apply for family reunification until after one year of work. This measure should be part of a new asylum and immigration law, which should be implemented by June of this year, and which would also include, according to various sources, measures to make repatriation easier. The minister's words are emblematic: "I want a bad law [sic] with bad people and a kind law with kind people. [...] We will propose the automatic renewal of multi-year permits for those who do not cause problems, who have no criminal record and we will file foreigners who are obliged to leave French territory as 'wanted per-

sons’.” The draft law also provides for a single judge to operate in the National Asylum Court. A board hearing will be difficult to obtain, and only for complex cases, and, at the first rejection, an obligation to leave France will follow, with 15 days for an appeal.

Germany, instead, has already planned a regularization process starting from January 2022 for 100,000 undocumented immigrants who meet certain requirements. These individuals must have been present in the country for at least five years, not have committed any crimes or concealed their identity to avoid deportation and must have remained in the country for administrative or humanitarian reasons. They are commonly referred to as *geduldete* (tolerated). According to the SPD minister Nancy Faeser, “This is a change in perspective, we want people who are well integrated in Germany to have real opportunities.” The plan is to provide them with an annual temporary permit, which can be extended to long-term permits if they can demonstrate financial stability and speak German.

In 2021, the Council of Ministers also approved easing family reunification for skilled workers and simplifying access to language courses for asylum seekers. Special care is afforded to young people, as those under 27 years of age may be able to apply for permanent residence under certain circumstances after three years of stay in the country. However, the emphasis is on ‘qualified’ migrants, which means that visas will be facilitated for relatives of professionals who can reside in the country without having to demonstrate language proficiency. This applies to sectors such as software and logistics, where a single auto component company, Continental, has stated that they need at least 2,500 more people every year. Overall, being the country with the highest aging rate in Europe, Germany now requires around half a million workers. The current government is aware that citizenship must be made easier to obtain and that a ‘points-based’ legal entry system needs to be introduced, in order to overhaul the currently obsolete legislation. This proposal focuses on the economic aspect of migration, but it contemplates the securitarian facet as well. Detention for immigrants who have committed crimes in expulsion centres can be extended up to six months, giving authorities time to carry out the deportation.

In comparison, Italy is significantly behind in these approaches. After Germany, it is the country with the greatest need for additional workforce, but the underground economy and low wage policies have prevented any political force that has come to power in the last 15 years from attempting to address similar issues and find solutions. The “Decreto rilancio” (revamping decree, ndr) law on the regularization of undeclared work (June 2020) only addressed workers in agriculture and care work. As of today, only half of the 207,000

applications submitted have been examined. The possibility of regularization in other economic sectors has not been considered, while at the same time, the previous government Minister of Tourism asked for the regularization of hundreds of thousands of workers in the tourism and restaurant sector. However, the mistake, in the author's opinion, is to think that immigration, which is now circular, there are more Italians that emigrate, than people who come to settle in Italy, can be governed with the logic of "let's take whoever we need."

It is necessary to rethink the ways and reasons by which those who have been residing in a country for years can permanently regularize their presence. It is not just about work or income, but also about emotional or social ties established and their roots, which cannot be assigned following pre-set, rigid, frameworks. If there were a common ideal across the continent, instead of relying on repressive and costly ineffective tools, we should consider forms of regularization that allow people to move around Europe and choose where to stay and how to live. After all, even the Schengen area should be considered outdated; in 2025, it will be 40 years since its inception. Shouldn't we also reconsider this approach, which is at the heart of the failed concept of the Fortress Europe?

Certain Ideas Need to Mature

by Wojciech Lobodzinski
Cross-border Talks
translated by Adam Figat

In the zero game, the stake is the title throne. Their tools are force, power, deceit, sometimes even ideology or religion. In fact, all available tools are there.

Marek Budzisz, columnist, analyst for the Strategy & Future team, expert on Russia and the post-Soviet East, historian by profession (University of Warsaw), talks about Ukrainian emigration to Poland, the horizons of cooperation with Poland's eastern neighbor and Euro-Atlantic integration. In his youth, he participated in an opposition Young Poland Movement. In the past, he worked as a journalist for Puls Dnia TV, Radio Plus and the Życie daily. He served as advisor to the Minister-Head of the Prime Minister's Chancellery and Minister of Finance in Jerzy Buzek's government.

A few months ago, in an article published by Oko.press, three visions for the migration of Ukrainians to Poland, related to possible scenarios for the course of the Russian invasion, were outlined. One spoke of a quick end to the war, another of a war of attrition, and the third of Russia conquering all Ukrainian territory. In connection with these scenarios, reports on the quantitative scale of possible migration were produced. At the moment we are in the exhaustive war scenario, the number of Ukrainians in Poland arriving after the outbreak of a full-scale conflict is 3 to 3.5 million women and children. How does this, in your opinion, change the perception of Polish-Ukrainian relations?

It seems to me that we are dealing today with the prospect of a prolonged conflict, and with the prospect of this state being preserved, in terms of the level of migration. It is also important who comes to Poland. As you mentioned, we speak of women and children. And therefore, if 90 percent of the people are women and children, then this prolonged conflict means that they will stay in Poland longer. This is also clear from the surveys conducted among these people. Simply put, most of them have nothing to return to, so they are thinking of staying here for longer, and in this sense we will be observing natural processes of accommodation to the new conditions.

It seems to me that we are dealing today with the prospect of a prolonged conflict, and with the prospect of this state being preserved, in terms of the level of migration.

Do you mean polonisation?

It's not even about the polonisation of children, as many children study online in Ukrainian, or get their education from Ukrainian-speaking teachers. Rather, it is about work, residence and life stability. The issue of polonisation

is much more distant, although it, too, will come into play over time. Many people will become bilingual, and I wonder if this could also happen on the Polish side. Will Poles start to find it worth investing energy and money in learning Ukrainian? But from the perspective of a protracted war, there are potentially three things that could happen. Firstly, the scale of Ukrainian losses is, in my view, comparable to Russian losses, although not in absolute numbers, rather in relation to the size of these nations. The Russians, of course, have greater losses, but the population of the Russian Federation is three times that of Ukraine. Consequently, Ukrainian losses are also high, and we must not forget this.

These estimates also forget that a significant part of the Ukrainian population already lives in occupied areas. Eastern Ukraine is a highly urbanised and industrialised region.

This is the second element. The women who are now in Poland, who have partners who are now on the frontline, will have no one to go back to and nowhere to go back to because of the prolonged conflict. This is because the Russians occupy a large industrial part of Ukraine. These occupied areas, according to estimates from before the last strike on Izium, comprised around 90 percent of Ukraine's industrial potential. This means that there will be a huge problem with the pace of reconstruction of the country after the conflict. Where are these people supposed to return to? That will be the question. The opposite may also happen, as some of the demobilized soldiers will go to their families in Poland. The Ukrainian army today stands at more than a million people. Three hundred thousand serve in the forces, while 700,000 have joined the territorial defense established after the outbreak of war. So the demobilization process will take place, and some of these people will simply have nowhere to go back to and nowhere to work, so they will come to Poland. Therefore, the number of Ukrainians may increase significantly. Some women with children will have nowhere to go back to, so they will stay here. At the end of the day, we also do not know what territorial changes this war will end with. Therefore, there will also be natural processes of mixed marriages, unions, forming of new families. In this sense, we would rather see an increase in the number of Ukrainians in Poland. They will not be guests who stay here for a short time.

This migration will be a permanent feature of Polish-Ukrainian relations, as well as of the Polish demographic landscape.

And even more so if we are talking about the prospects of Ukraine joining the European Union, opening the borders, entering the community of nations that Zelenski and some representatives of the current ruling team have been

talking about. This will lead to a bi-national state, or perhaps something else. We don't know about that for now.

Also Putin's decision, to carry out a full-scale mobilization of the army, indicates that it is possible that the most dramatic moments of this war are still ahead. Russian independent newspapers are writing that the target for mobilization may not be 300,000, but a million soldiers. An increase in the intensity of this kinetic conflict could lead us to even greater immigration to Poland.

The impact of an increase in Russia's military potential invested in this conflict is a completely different issue, which we could discuss at great length. However, it will certainly trigger further waves of migration to the West. Poland will of course remain the main recipient of refugees. I would not overestimate the importance of this Putin mobilization. Of course, I have read those articles that discuss the supposedly hidden "Point 7" of the mobilization plan, where the number of one million people to be mobilized would be indicated. Today, information came out that some gubernias were assigned a percentage, or the scale of recruits required of them. If we sum them up across the country, this gives a figure close to one million, which indicates that general Shoygu's declarations are simply not true. This is not surprising, looking at the Russian government's relationship to the truth. Since the beginning of this war, the military administration has been less keen on mobilizing the residents of the big cities, potentially the most likely to protest. It has relied heavily on the population of rural regions, where the respect for the authorities is much higher. Another question is, whether the authorities are able to give all these new recruits a proper training. In contrast, this certainly foreshadows a protracted war. In the pessimistic variant, the blackest one, we are talking about a shift of Russian forces towards the west. The minimum variant, which Russia is playing for the moment, would be a permanent defense of the annexed territories. In each of these variants, there is no prospect of unloading the scale of Ukrainian emigration to Poland. We are faced either with a longer period of immigration influx, or with a more intensive immigration.

Why is Poland so attractive for Ukrainians? This was visible even before the Polish legislation made Ukrainian and Polish citizens de facto equal in rights.

There are several elements here. Firstly, the geographical proximity. Transport costs are very low and the infrastructure network is rather wide. Ukrainian migrants working in Poland regularly visited their families before the war. The transport has been available all the time. Secondly, Polish legislation had already facilitated the model of staying in Poland. Work permits were issued at

six-month intervals, in order to apply for another one the working person had to return to Ukraine for a while. Western European countries followed a different model, firstly much more “delayed” than the Polish one. Germany facilitated emigration, but only for certain professional groups. Poland was much more open here. The “Karta Polaka”, or the Pole’s Card, is another important facilitation. Quite a sizable population of Western Ukraine has gotten the Card so far. Another factor, apart from legislation and geography, is cultural and linguistic proximity. Many studies show that the level of salaries in Germany is higher than in Poland, but cultural and linguistic factors, as well as the network of the Ukrainian community established years before, make Ukrainians prefer to stay and work in Poland, regardless of economic factors. They feel more at home here than in any other country. Those first days after 24 February, the huge wave of emigration and its acceptance were possible precisely because of this huge Ukrainian minority.

There were more than 1.5 million people already before the war.

Exactly – if not more. It was these people who welcomed their compatriots into their homes for the first few days. After a week, the Poles took over the baton. This huge humanitarian mobilization has continued until now. It always works this way, after all, you have to come to someone – to your friends, to your family. And here all these elements came into play.

Do you believe that the legislation from March this year on the part of the Polish government was the game changer here?

No. I think not. This was not the main motive or reason why Ukrainians decided to choose the Polish direction. In my opinion, the game changer was the attitude of Polish society, regardless of political orientation. There was a general national mobilization. The government’s policy was, to some extent, a reaction to the attitude of society.

The Polish government supported the Ukrainians with access to all social benefits, in addition to financial support of 300 zloty (60 euros) for living and food support, free psychological and medical assistance, as well as free public transport. How do you perceive the attitude of the Zelenski government? After all, they have practically given us Poles the same status in Ukraine. Polish citizens are now equal in terms of privileges and rights together with Ukrainians.

Agreed, this reaction is quite understandable. Ukrainian society, even more so the political class, was surprised by the reaction of the Poles. It was easily noticeable. And as a result, it was difficult not to react. There was some

pressure on the Ukrainian side, stemming from the attitude of the media, to reward the Poles for their support in some way. Surveys of Ukrainian public opinion show quite clearly how different countries and nations are assessed. It was important to assess the attitude of the Polish state, its role in sustaining Ukraine's defense capabilities.

How can this attitude be described?

We can do a thought experiment here, and consider whether the Ukrainian side might have been able to continue the war if the government in Warsaw had pursued the same policy as the government in Budapest. The answer seems quite obvious, almost banal. Poland, by virtue of its location and existing transport links and capabilities, is Ukraine's main supply hub, for everything, from arms to fuel. Let us remember that before the war Ukraine imported diesel mainly from Belarus. This has come to an end. Without Poland's deep involvement, this Ukrainian resistance would have been impossible. Ukraine would not have been able to resist the Russian invasion for so long, and so effectively. This is understood and recognized in Ukraine. The current team of the Servant of the People party is building on cooperation with Poland to think about defense.

Is this the moment when we can start talking about a kind of union?

I used the term "union" as a rhetorical figure. Today the strategic and military realities are, in my opinion, as follows: firstly, without Poland's help, without its involvement, Ukraine would not be able to continue resistance. This means that from a Russian perspective, the strategic perspective, if Russia would like to maintain the vision of overpowering Ukraine – which seems less likely today but may return in the horizon of 20-30 years – Russia must look at Poland. Without overpowering Poland, there is no way to defeat Ukraine completely. This can take place on many levels. Such an absolute minimum is to get the Polish government to adopt Orbán's point of view. But there are many more possibilities of making it difficult or impossible to help Ukraine. In a 20-year perspective, we are a certain unity with Ukraine. Poland guarantees supplies, is Ukraine's strategic depth, and is also Ukraine's alternative channel of contact with the world. Even literally. After all, the Black Sea ports are easily blocked, and Ukraine will have to shift its infrastructure to the west after the war. The alternative will be Poland.

In Strategy & Future you often emphasize that this should be the responsibility of the next Polish government as well as the government of Ukraine. We need to build these arteries leading to the west.

Industry needs it, the state and the military need it. The rebuilding of Ukraine even requires it.

Poland would also gain in this equation.

Of course it would. That is the idea of enhanced cooperation, which can lead to something more. It is our mutual interest. I, of course, focus more on the Polish interest for obvious reasons, as I have a greater understanding of this. Therefore, if we have the prospect of a prolonged conflict or a frozen war, Poland cannot be indifferent to the condition in which Ukraine will emerge from this war. It is in Poland's interest to stabilize the Ukrainian situation in all fields. It can be said, of course, that such stabilization is provided by Ukraine's membership of NATO and the European Union, and also by a properly conducted project of Ukraine's post-war reconstruction. The best option would be an accelerated accession of Ukraine to the aforementioned institutions – there is no doubt. But this process might take longer, and therefore it is in Poland's interest to build social and political stabilizers regarding the situation in Ukraine. I am talking about a set of changes and reforms, firstly the de-oligarchizing of Ukraine and the introduction of European and NATO standards. Ukraine's GDP has fallen by more than 30 percent, so has unemployment, despite the huge wave of refugees. Industrial capacity is destroyed and one million people are in the ranks of the armed forces. Now imagine a hypothetical situation where the war ends at some point and the reconstruction process begins. It will take years, a million veterans will return to their destroyed homes. Thus the normal social processes associated with their re-acclimatization to society and civilian life begin. How did it end in Italy and Germany?

These will be incredible social upheavals.

Exactly. Poland should care about stabilizing the situation in Ukraine and giving the political class and the Ukrainian people some prospect of joining the West permanently, even if questions of membership of the EU and NATO were to drag on. I do not even mention other areas of cooperation, such as economic issues.

Do you see this perspective emerging in the Polish public debate now?

Certain ideas need to mature. Today it seems to me that they are not ready neither in Poland, nor in Ukraine. Polls say that more than 30 percent of Ukrainians think that the idea of a Polish-Ukrainian federation is not a bad idea at all. But at the level of the political class, it seems to me that this thinking is absent. The Ukrainian political class claims to be able to achieve rapid membership of the European Union. Deputy Prime Minister Stefaniushina said in an interview that Ukraine would be ready to start membership negotiations on 1 January 2023, that they would end in 3 years and that then Ukraine would be ready to join the Union. The same with NATO. This is how the political class in Ukraine thinks.

It seems that the Ukrainians must be extremely optimistic in their assumptions for both internal and external reasons. On the other hand, we have Germany, the Netherlands and France, which do not support these ideas very much.

And it is exactly on these facts that I base my skepticism. That is why I am skeptical about the idea of Ukraine's rapid accession to NATO and the European Union.

So these ideas must mature dialectically – by clashing with the reality of the ideas that are present in the public space now.

Agreed, I think it will be like this. Ukraine will make a great legislative effort in terms of bringing its legislation and institutions up to EU standards. As a result, it will be confronted with the impossibility of breaking down intra-EU barriers, which in turn will lead to disillusionment among a significant part of the political elite and the public. At the same time, all the aforementioned internal problems will be present. So we have a potentially destabilizing situation. What I meant when talking about the Polish-Ukrainian union is a project prepared by Poland, precisely for this kind of shock that I believe Ukraine will encounter. A clash of hard work and effort with institutional blockages. This will be potentially extremely destabilizing for the internal situation in Ukraine. And we, as a country with an obvious interest in the stability of our neighbor, must have a ready-made alternative political project to offer that stability. If Ukraine's NATO and EU membership are certain, then the whole talk is meaningless. But the project is necessary as insurance in case it is not.

**Are Foreigners Spoiling
the Polish Labour Market?
No, It Has Already Been
Spoiled for a Long Time!**

Małgorzata Kulbaczewska

Cross-border Talks

translated by Benedikt O'Connor

In order to fight for the rights of Ukrainian migrant women, we need to look broadly and fix the general situation on the labour market. We had a huge problem with junk contracts in Poland, with free and semi-free internships and apprenticeships, with non-payment of salaries long before the influx of refugees,” says Nadia Oleszczuk, an activist of the Confederation of Youth Labour, leader of the Unions Help Refugees project.

How did your project to support Ukrainian refugees in the Polish labour market start?

At the beginning of March, the Youth Labour Confederation launched an initiative that set itself the goal of supporting migrants in labour law matters. We were concerned not only with the new wave of Ukrainian refugees, but

We were concerned not only with the new wave of Ukrainian refugees, but also with citizens of that country who had arrived in Poland earlier.

also with citizens of that country who had arrived in Poland earlier, as well as migrants from other countries. However, in the first instance, we simply received requests for help to find employment. Ukrainian refugee women did not imagine that they would sit back. Of course,

there were probably also people who did not want to take up employment and did not, due to various barriers, such as language.

I make no secret of the fact that we were somewhat surprised by this – after all, it is not the role of a trade union to help people find employment. That should be the task of state institutions. Meanwhile, at least in Warsaw, their reaction was late. It was only after two or three weeks that the Mazovian Labour Office worked out the mechanisms by which refugees were helped to find work.

And the original aim of your initiative? To support people who have been cheated by dishonest bosses? How quickly did it become necessary?

Unfortunately, we did not have to wait long. Just three weeks after, the first people who had not been paid showed up. One of them was Ms Olena, who worked at the Intercontinental Hotel, through an employment agency. She was offered 10-12 hour shifts, involving hard physical work, including manual floor polishing. When, after her trial day, she decided she did not want to work under these conditions, she asked to be paid for that one day. She heard that she would not receive the money. We intervened with the employer. And then something happened that surprised us.

It turned out that Ms Olena’s employer was another Ukrainian woman. She had lived in Poland for several years, spoke excellent Polish and had her own business. As you can see, she had no scruples about exploiting a compatriot in an extremely difficult situation. But perhaps I should not be surprised? After

all, we have heard many times from Poles going to work in, for example, the UK, that they were treated worse by bosses who were Polish too. A classic class conflict.

Did Ms Olena's case end well?

Yes, our intervention was successful, the worker got the money. However, that situation was quite exceptional, as the topic of Ukrainian refugees was currently in the headlines. The story of the cheated Ukrainian woman even caught the attention of TVN TV channel, which does not usually take a close look at disadvantaged employees.

This case was also followed by the Centre for Trade Union Organising Foundation, which supports the development of unions across Central and Eastern Europe. The foundation has secured funding from Uni Global, the international trade union federation, to launch a refugee support project – Unions Help Refugees. For at least nine months, people who are involved in supporting refugees and migrants in the Polish labour market will be employed for this project. This is a very different situation than if we were to rely only on activists, working on a voluntary basis. I became the coordinator of this project.

We have launched a poster and billboard campaign. On the posters, in Ukrainian, we write about basic workers' rights: the minimum wage or the prohibition of discrimination based on nationality. There is a contact to reach us, both for people who need help and for those who want to sign up with a trade union. In addition, we run a helpline: from Thursday to Sunday. Over the phone, you can get free consultations on labor law, in Ukrainian and in Russian. Our long-term goal, however, is to help Eastern European workers organize in trade unions.

The state of workers' rights and the situation of trade unions in Ukraine was far from what it should have been even long before the war. Do female workers coming to Poland see the sense in joining unions?

I will give the example of a factory in Tczew, which, since the 24th of February, has employed a whole group of Ukrainian women for hard, physical work. We recruited a potential trade union leader there, a Ukrainian woman, who wanted to set up a union and chair it. As union organizers, we are helping to register the organization and to encourage more people to join. We intend to support crews at other sites in a similar way.

Another heartening story is the example of Mrs Svetlana, who came forward when her and her husband's wages were not paid. She worked for an em-

ployment agency. We met with the employer several times, sent a pre-court demand for payment and managed to recover the money. Ms Svetlana told us that there were other female workers in a similar situation, and she encouraged her colleagues to fight. She rightly believed that hard-earned money should not be let go.

The fact is that the majority of Ukrainian women who have come to Poland after February 24th and have taken up employment here simply want to keep their jobs. They are often frightened, they follow the reports from the war, they fear for their relatives who have stayed in the country. They don't have the strength for another 'battlefield' at work. So our aim to find potential leaders, women with personality and a desire to make a difference is more long-term.

Most of Ms Svetlana's colleagues were too afraid of losing their jobs to take any action. In addition, many Ukrainian women do not know how long they will stay in Poland. They miss their hometown, their family, and assume that they have emigrated for a while. They are also discouraged by stereotypes. Ukrainian or Belorussian trade unions are not associated with militancy. As we know from the refugee women, many of them only organize, for example, for the purposes of a recreational trip for their members once a year.

Do you have any data, or suspicions, about the scale of abuse against refugee and migrant women?

At the beginning of the war, experts estimated that between 250,000 and 600,000 workers from Ukraine could enter the labor market. As a result, one in nine workers in Poland would come from there. Meanwhile, figures from the Ministry of Family and Social Policy show that at the end of July, almost 736,000 Ukrainians (including those who arrived before the war) were employed in Poland. In May, 102,000 refugees from Ukraine found jobs in Poland. The vast majority of those employed, 75 percent, are women. Of course, these are only estimates, as some people work in the underground economy.

Our helpline received 400 calls in the first two months. Some of the enquiries did not relate strictly to employment law, but this still gives an idea. I have reason to suspect that these few hundred calls are a drop in the ocean of problems. Unfortunately, I think that despite all attempts, we have only reached a small proportion of refugee women. And the reports were serious: no payment, no contract of any kind, let alone an employment contract. We even found out about an NGO in Krakow, where employees were given volunteer contracts and then paid unofficially.

Some of the cases, which were only partly linked to labor law, were truly outrageous. A basic sense of justice calls us to intervene, but we have no legal basis to do so. An example: a man took in a Ukrainian woman because the state was paying 1,200 zloty a month for providing shelter to a refugee [as of July this regulation no longer applies – author]. However, he expected this woman to cook for him, clean his house, clean the hotel rooms where he accommodated more refugees, and prepare meals for them. He did not allow her to leave. All for 1,900 zloty, of which only 700 he paid himself, because he got the rest from the state for providing assistance. Of course, there was no work contract of any kind.

If you suspect that the few hundred calls you have had to the helpline are a drop in the ocean, it means that thousands, maybe tens of thousands of people are victims of labor rights violations. What can be done to stop this?

We have to look broadly. We have a huge problem with junk contracts in Poland, with free and semi-free internships, apprenticeships. Our state has screwed up on this subject before. Exploitation never disappeared – during the first wave of hospitality towards refugees some problems were just less visible.

If we had a labor market where workers felt secure, were guaranteed their basic rights regardless of the type of contract and the stability of their employment, there would also be less abuse of migrants. Meanwhile, there are many professions in which Polish women and men are also exposed to fraud and abuse on a daily basis. I am referring in particular to professions that are highly feminized. Women make up the majority of those employed in the lowest-paid professions, related to care work, and cleaning, for example. Migrant women are likely to take up these professions. We also have relatively weak trade unions with a shortage of young people. The average age of a trade unionist is 48. In fact, it is only in recent years that we have seen a slow change for the better. Several strikes have been successful, and the labour movement seems to be recovering.

However, it must be admitted that the Law and Justice government has done a little for workers. The minimum hourly wage on a contract of mandate is a step forward, but after all, there are many more issues to be resolved. And we trade unionists are constantly trying to remind them!

Some experts have expressed fears that the influx of refugees, who will want to work quickly and who do not protest when employers make them work under the table, will lead to lower standards in the labour market. Meanwhile, from your words, the situation in Poland cannot get

any worse, it only increases the number of people who can fall victim to exploitation.

Not so long ago, things were worse in the Polish labour market. Thanks to the aforementioned minimum hourly rate on a contract of mandate, people no longer work for seven, four or even two PLN (Polish zloty) per hour, as was the case under the Civic Platform government. New trade union organizations are also being set up, and this is where I see the opportunity for a better situation for workers.

But anyway, what was going to get worse with the influx of foreigners if, even without them, Polish women and men were extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse? In establishments where there are no unions, people were already vulnerable to their employer and it was not uncommon for existing labour laws to be enforced. As for the stereotypical saying that “Ukrainians are taking jobs away from Poles,” it is worth remembering that the unemployment rate in Poland is currently at a low level. In July, it stood at 4.9 percent.

Do you expect Polish and Ukrainian workers to co-found trade unions in a few years’ time? In the interwar period, when Poland was a multinational country, there were instances of Polish and Ukrainians left working together. And not to go back that far, even during the now historic strike at Solaris, Ukrainian workers joined the protest together with their Polish colleagues.

I hope so and look optimistically to the future. Such a vision also fully meets the objectives of our project (it is about Unions Helping Refugees): to organize workers from Ukraine into trade unions, together with Polish workers. Solaris is a very good example. There is an effective trade union there and both Poles and Ukrainians can see that we are all fighting together for a better situation at the plant.

The advantage of organizations created only for migrants is that such organizations give them some representation on a symbolic level. They can, for example, appear in the media on behalf of Ukrainian workers. However, this is not a suitable tool with which to confront workplace struggles.

There have been attempts to organize Ukrainian workers in Poland in the past, but the results are not satisfactory. The activists who were involved in them told me that many people treated the union as a place that could provide temporary help. Once the problem was solved, they did not stay in the union. We are learning from these experiences, taking them into account and moving on.

Our Prisons

written and translated by Maria Pia Calemme
transform! italia

Politicians of all orientations, experts and commentators seem to essentially agree on the diagnosis of the major issues about the Italian prison system:

- Overcrowding. At the end of last year there were over 56,000 inmates compared to an official capacity of about 51,000 places available¹;
- Inadequacy of existing structures. Twenty percent date back to before 1900; and
- Shortage of personnel.

The problem of overcrowding, which is long-standing in Italy², derives from numerous elements. Firstly, it seems from criminalization policies, particularly the insertion of new crimes in the penal code. The most recent is against

The problem of overcrowding, which is long-standing in Italy, derives from numerous elements. Firstly, it seems from criminalization policies.

free parties, due to the willingness of the current centre-right government. The length of the sentences, also compound the problem, with about 1,800 people currently sentenced to life imprisonment, as well as the massive use of pre-trial detention. About 30 percent of prisoners

have not been irrevocably sentenced). Additionally, the modest recourse to non-custodial measures for short sentences and the prohibitionist laws on the use of drugs further exacerbate overcrowding. Over 7,500 people have to serve a sentence of less than three years and over 25 percent of prisoners are drug addicts and are in prison on charges of drug dealing.

Overcrowding is not just an Italian problem. Indeed, the SPACE report³ shows that 10 of the 49 administrations that participated in the study have a population density of more than 100 prisoners per 100 places. Italy ranks among the

1 The Ministry of Justice, which provides data on density and capacity, specifies that the latter does not take into account any situations of temporary unavailability of some structures. On average, about 7 percent of places are not available.

2 This problem has been the subject of a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (*Torreggiani and Others v. Italy*, no. 43517/09, January 8, 2013), which condemned Italy for violating art. 3 of the Convention, which obligates the authorities to ensure that every prisoner is detained in conditions compatible with respect for human dignity. The sentence is a so-called pilot judgment, i.e. it intervenes not only on the specific case that is the subject of the appeal, but requires the elimination of the violation within one year.

The sentence was followed by some legislative measures aimed to the reduction of the use of pre-trial detention and to a wider use of alternative measures to prison detention which only temporarily affected overcrowding, since in the following years the prison population increased again. The Court has ruled on the subject also against Hungary (*Varga and Others v. Hungary*, nos. 14097/12, 45135/12, 73712/12, 34001/13, 44055/13, and 64586/13, March 10, 2015) and France (*J.M.B. and Others v. France*, no. 9671/15, January 30, 2020).

3 The SPACE I report (*Statistiques Pénales Annuelles du Conseil de l'Europe*) is drawn up once a year on behalf of the CoE by the University of Lausanne and is based on the answers of national prison administrations to a questionnaire about prison facilities, the number and characteristics of the detainees. **The most recent**, published in 2022, reports data updated to 31/1/2021. All data used in this article, if not differently indicated, are taken from this report.

seven worst, with an overcrowding rate of 105.5 percent⁴, together with Turkey (108.3), Belgium (108.4), Cyprus (110.5), Greece (111.4), San Marino (112.5) and Romania (119.3) compared to the average of the Council of Europe (CoE) countries of 85.4. However there are countries that do not have overcrowding problems despite having high incarceration rates (number of detainees per 100,000 inhabitants): compared to an European average of approximately 102 (1,414,172 detainees in total), 17 countries (including Turkey, 325.4, the only country with both problems) have rates above 130, with a maximum of 328.1 for the Russian Federation (which was banned from the Council of Europe following the invasion of Ukraine).

These two issues, as underscored by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT, an organ of the CoE), are “the result of stricter penal policies with increased criminalisation, more frequent and longer use of remand detention, lengthier prison sentences and limited recourse to non-custodial alternatives to deprivation of liberty” and are not a reflection of rising crime levels⁵. And since overcrowding constitutes an obstacle to the implementation of the principle of prohibition of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, the CPT suggests implementing measures that bring a lasting reduction in the number of persons instead of building new prisons and/or adopting policies to expand the capacity of the prison estate⁶.

Further some of the characteristics of the Italian prison population are common to many countries: pre-trial detention (European average 21.7 percent) concerns about a third of the total number of prisoners in 17 other countries; detainees sentenced to less than three years are over 34 percent of the total; over 25 percent of people are convicted of drug-related crimes in 12 countries (100 percent in Liechtenstein!); foreign prisoners are 15% of the total in Europe, with wide differences among countries (from a minimum of 1% in Romania to a maximum of 92.3% in Monaco, with Italy at 31.6% and Denmark at 28.2 percent⁷).

A problem related to overcrowding, which is often underestimated, is the health of prisoners. Health profoundly affects quality of life, even in the future, of those who are in prison, where health risks are concentrated and multiplied compared to life on the outside. This is due both to conditions of greater vul-

4 The figure is lower than that of the previous and following years due to the measures against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a temporary reduction in the number of prisoners in Italy and in other countries.

5 [31st report](#), relating to 2021, p. 26.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

7 The reference to Denmark is due to the agreement (20/12/2021) between this country and Kosovo for the transfer of 300 prisoners from the first to the second one, which is not a member of the CoE. The European Commission has decided not to censure it, on the grounds that the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU applies to Member States only in the implementation of Union law.

nerability of those entering prison, e.g. poverty, lack of social capital, drug addiction, etc., and to living conditions inside the confines of prison itself, which facilitate the spread of infectious diseases, like tuberculosis, HCV and HIV⁸ and, most recently, SARS-CoV-2).

Furthermore, the high average age has a negative impact on health. In Europe around 16 percent of detainees are over 50 years old, and the countries with the highest mean ages are Italy and Liechtenstein, respectively with 26.7 and 50 percent of inmates over-50. Lack of physical activity, a diet that is not always appropriate, the absence of sexual activity, and the difficulty of maintaining relationships with family and friends due to the limitations on the number of meetings and telephone calls also adversely affect the health of inmates. All these factors contribute to a worsening of both physical and mental conditions. In fact, mental health in prison is one of the most relevant problems: mental disorders are half of the pathologies detected in the prison population in Italy. At an international level, it is one of the major concerns for the World Health Organization (WHO), which estimates that 10 to 15 percent of the total prison population in the world suffers from serious mental illnesses, that are often complicated by comorbidities. The WHO identifies the following issues as negatively impacting on prison mental health: lack of privacy, lack of meaningful activity, isolation from social networks, insecurity about future prospects, i.e., work, relationships, etc., and inadequate health services, especially mental health services⁹.

An indication of the suffering induced by prison is the high number of suicides. The data show, in fact, that the suicide rate among detainees is much higher than that in the general population, at a ratio of 10 to 1 approximately, and, in particular, among women and minors. Even if there is no doubt that suicides can never be traced back to a single factor, an effort to prevent the majority of them is necessary. As WHO states, “the fact that people are in prison does not mean that they have any reduced right to appropriate health care. Rather, the opposite is the case. When a state deprives people of their liberty, it takes on a responsibility to look after their health and provide them with the best possible care.”¹⁰

8 Providing condoms and sterile needles in prisons has been valued as a good practice for harm reduction in a 2013 European Union study (*Inventory of harm reduction measures in European prisons. European Union – Drug Prevention and Information Programme*). Despite that, there are only a few countries that do so and Italy is not one of them.

9 See WHO, *Prison and Health*, <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289050593>, pp. 88-89.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

The Eternal Return of Nuclear Power

by **Francesca Stazonelli**

Left

translated by **Daniele Ruzza**

Yes, to nuclear power. No, to nuclear power. Yes, to nuclear power, as long as it's clean and safe. The public debate on atomic energy in Italy, always seems right around the corner. With the 1987 referendum, held right after the Chernobyl disaster, with which Italian people decided to halt the production of nuclear power in the country which led to the decommissioning of the four active nuclear plants. Not even after another referendum in 2011 confirmed the result of the one held in 1987, held this time after the Fukushima disaster in Japan, the idea of using nuclear power to produce electricity on Italian soil was completely shelved.

In Italy, the debate on atomic energy reemerges and splits the political community. Last year was crucial in this regard.

Every so often, in Italy, the debate on atomic energy reemerges and splits the political community. Last year was crucial in this regard. The objectives set for the energy transition, and the energy crisis sparked by international geopolitical turmoil caused by the war in Ukraine, have

given more than one reason to Italian political parties to include the topic in their campaigns leading up the general elections held on the 25th of September. On the one hand, left and center left parties are staunchly against nuclear power. On the other, the center right coalition and the so-called "Terzo polo" ("Third pole", Azione and Italia Viva) have specifically included nuclear power in their platforms. Nuclear energy "of the latest generation", "clean", "safe". But what does it mean?

The latest generation so often mentioned would be the fourth. The issue stems from the fact that this definition is not scientifically agreed upon: "It's a sort of 'everyday' kind of term" explains Angelo Tartaglia, nuclear engineer, and professor emeritus in Physics at the department of applied Sciences and technology of the Polytechnic University of Turin. "It is tied to the time required to build the nuclear plant and to the type of technology used, the type of reactor, what cooling is used, how much waste it produces." Since the first nuclear plants built during the 50s, scientific research and technological development should have improved the safety and efficiency of each new generation.

Among the most cited innovations of the fourth generation, there are the *Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)*. "The SMRs are classical, fission type reactors, but with reduced size and energy output, between 100 and 300 megawatts," states Luisa Ferroni, professor of Energy engineer at the Engineering faculty of the Sapienza University in Rome. "The smaller size allows it to be assembled in production workshops, paving the way for assembly production, and lowering its building time. The interest towards SMRs stems from the fact that, having a lower energy output, they cost less, with the hopes of lowering it to

two to three thousand euros per kilowatt-hour.” Despite being able to build reactors in less time and with fewer expenditures, there are still all the issues of having to set up, in the span of a few years, an entire supply chain for nuclear energy in Italy: from the extraction of natural uranium, to building plants to enrich uranium, to plants as a whole, of which the reactor is just one of many components.

As of today, there are around sixty *Small Modular Reactors* being developed, but even in this foreseeable case there are many uncertainties as to the development timeline. “The truth is that fourth generation reactors still aren’t available. Will they be in ten, twenty, or thirty-years’ time? The deadlines for the energy transition are much tighter,” concludes Tartaglia.

That’s right, the objectives set by the European Union are much closer than one might think. To keep global warming below the threshold of 1.5°C to try and fight the ongoing climate crisis, in June 2021 the European Parliament approved a new climate policy that transforms the European Green New Deal effort into a binding obligation for all member states. The EU’s plan “Fit for 55” aim is to reduce the Union’s CO₂ greenhouse gases emissions by 55 percent, compared to emissions produced in 1990, by the year 2030. And this is just one of the intermediate goals towards the ambitious final target: to completely eliminate net greenhouse gases emissions, which means reaching climate neutrality, by 2050.

If Italy wants to abide by this timeline, it must double down on decarbonization so as to decrease as many as possible CO₂ emissions in the atmosphere. This is another reason for nuclear energy to break through the public debate, because nuclear power plants do not produce CO₂. For this reason, this summer, the European Commission has included nuclear power, as well as natural gas, in the so-called Green Taxonomy, the guideline which defines what human activities are considered sustainable and respectful of the environment. Therefore, such activities will be able to take advantage of tax breaks, as well as make them easier to receive private funding.

In truth, Brussels, has pointed to gas and nuclear energy only as temporary means to facilitate the green transition towards a future that, in theory, will have to be mostly made up of renewable energies. But how long it will take for the transition to be completed is still unclear.

“Nuclear and renewable energies are not mutually exclusive, they can actually be incorporated with one another,” states Umberto Minopoli, President of the Associazione Italiana Nucleare (AIN, Italian Nuclear Association, ndr). “None of these energy sources alone can allow us to meet one of the objective of the energy transition, that is, ridding us of fossil fuels. Wind and solar

power have limitations, in that they can't be consistently relied upon, and it can't be planned when they will be at one's disposal. If we truly aim for decarbonization, we must inevitably take advantage of all possible energy sources, nuclear, renewables, hydroelectric and biomasses.”

The European Green Taxonomy establishes precise criteria for new investments in nuclear plants. They will be considered 'green' only if a detailed development plan is laid out, indicating how funding will be used and, most importantly, the sites where nuclear waste will be stocked. The reason behind this is that waste is one of the main issues with nuclear power.

Nuclear waste is the byproduct of fission, what remains after the nuclear reaction is completed. Used up nuclear combustible can continue to emit radiation for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. In broad terms, nuclear waste can be divided in two groups: waste of a lower/intermediate yield, with a shorter time of decay, which stops being radioactive after one, two hundred years; and waste with higher yield, whose isotopes remain dangerous for tens, or even hundreds, for thousands of years. Plutonium, for example, takes around 250 thousand years to become completely stable. This waste must then be stocked forever in a way that poses no threat to the environment and human health. But how, and most importantly, where?

“Elements with a shorter lifespan are locked in special metal containers, enclosed in concrete, and can be stocked in storages at ground level, where their radioactivity will be monitored until exhausted,” explains Ferroni. “While waste with high radioactive yield are to be stocked indefinitely in geological depositories which are called 'until lost memory'. They are built deep into the earth, at a depth between 500 and 900 meters, in anti-seismic, and peculiar geological areas that guarantee no water seepage for thousands and thousands of years.”

Nevertheless, Minopoli states that “radioactive nuclear waste with a long decaying time is only around three to five percent of the fission byproduct. The law establishes a rigorous management for this, and it can never be found out in the open, and capable of affecting the environment or people's health, all throughout the production process.”

Today, there is still only a single geological repository for higher yield nuclear waste. It's the Onkalo spent nuclear fuel repository in Finland and is not yet operational. Building is now completed, and it should become operational in the coming years. But, in the meantime, in Finland as in other countries, waste is stocked in temporary repositories.

“The truth is that much of nuclear plants’ waste is still kept around the plants themselves, and they are still waiting there for a solution that does not exist yet, because nuclear waste does not just disappear,” comments Tartaglia. “The solution proposed is to stock them somewhere where we are positive that nothing will change for thousands and thousands of years? I wonder which geologist will take up the responsibility of finding such a place. The nuclear power debate exemplifies the usual, old way of thinking: I will pursue a policy today because it will bring me an advantage, the future generations will deal with the fallout of today’s decision.”

**“When the Wise Man
Points at the Climatic
Crisis, in Italy, Fools Look
at the Washable Paint”**

by Elena Mazzoni
transform! italia
translated by Daniele Ruzza

In Italy, the country at the centre of what is defined as the **Mediterranean’s** climate hotspot, one of the areas on the planet where the effects of anthropogenic climate change are particularly severe, what is causing a fuss are the buckets of washable paint that the climate activists of Last Generation have thrown in recent weeks on institutional buildings and monuments.

In Italy what is causing a fuss are the buckets of washable paint that the climate activists have thrown on institutional buildings and monuments.

The outrage of television commentators, of politicians quick to express indignation and scream terrorism, of ministers like the Minister of the Interior Matteo Piantedosi, who is planning new legislation and a tightening of regulations, both with criminal and security measures, is what’s making noise.

The silence of politics is deafening, which was completely absent from important international events, such as Cop27 in Sharm El-Sheik, which did not turn out to be the transitional conference that was expected, but nonetheless introduced novelties that could have effects for decades.

The Italian government was not present at any negotiation table.

There was no institutional representative discussing the political direction of what will be central issues in the economic, energy, social, and international relations scenario of the coming decades. Furthermore, no representative was present to debate on a topic so ‘hot’ for the Meloni government as climate migrants.

The Ministry of Environment and Energy Security, Gilberto Pichetto Fratin, while the ministers of other countries negotiated until late at night, returned to Italy, not before using the few hours he was present in Egypt to talk about issues of no relevance to the Sharm negotiations, but that were instead related to the domestic national political debate, namely the famous, yet unseen, fourth-generation nuclear.

“But the European Union negotiates in blocs,” claim the government backers, who sit in the European Parliament next to climate change deniers and call environmentalists “Gretinis,” an Italian portmanteau that plays on the similarity between Greta Thunberg’s name and the derogatory adjective ‘cretini’, Italian for ‘idiots’.

Yes, the EU negotiates in blocs, but individual member states sit at the negotiating tables, with the work divided into groups around the most delicate

and crucial issues, and Italy was not entitled to participate because it was not assigned any of the crucial dossiers.

The only real noise heard is that of Italy crumbling, of the mud, cloudbursts, and landslides that have struck the island of Ischia, yet another disaster in this year that has alternated periods of extreme drought with meteorological phenomena that paint a tragic picture of the climate crisis.

The problem is not ‘only’ the unusually violent climate phenomena, which we will have to get used to as they become the norm. Now that climate has changed and the air is warmer, contains more vapor, and stores more energy. Increasing temperatures can change large-scale atmospheric circulation patterns, causing more sudden and intense rainfalls, and actual furious cyclones.

The real problem is the tragic combination of the climate crisis and a permanent centuries-old emergency, created by neglect and inability to manage the territory, and hydrogeological instability. Data from **ISPRA**, the Institute for Environmental Protection and Research, shows that almost 94 percent of Italian municipalities have at least one area at risk of landslides or floods, a condition of high risk that affects 1,28 million people.

In a friable country like Italy, the forest heritage plays a fundamental role in mitigating these risks, which the climate crisis instead tends to amplify.

Furthermore, the consumption of soil looms over Italian mountains: large or smaller former hotels, united by the state of degradation that defiles the territory after covering it with concrete. Buildings tied to the ski industry, hotels, camps, border barracks, all left without a perspective.

The same consumption of soil looms over the coasts, luxury hotels and villas overlooking the sea, concrete behind the dunes and no plan to redevelop existing building heritage sites. Indeed, construction continues on ecologically valuable land, in the name of profit.

According to data from the National System for the Protection of the Environment (SNPA), in Italy, land consumption continues to grow even in areas at **risk** of landslides and floods: protected areas, river banks, valleys where the soil is most fertile, coasts, and dunes.

Italy is particularly vulnerable from a hydrogeological instability perspective, it’s true. It’s right in the middle of the infamous hotspot, but political choices taken in the name of profit, often tied to shady businesses, have made the

situation almost irreversible by building where there should not be, without respecting either the landscape, or European regulations. Condoning and blocking or diverting waterways, especially in the South, where those defined by pardons as ‘torrents’ reveal their nature as rivers, swollen by rain, devastate homes and lives, destroy families and leave powerless, rescuers to move around among pots and children’s toys, framed photos, and shattered furniture.

The outlook for our country does not seem rosy if the government’s plan, through the Minister of Infrastructure and Sustainable Mobility, Matteo Salvini, is to bring back on the decision-making table the dossiers of the Strait of Messina Bridge, high-speed rail on the Salerno-Reggio Calabria line, and the Turin–Lyon high-speed railway in the Susa Valley. The global picture does not look better, despite the commitments made. There has been no acceleration in decarbonization measures in sectors of the economy characterized by high energy consumption, such as transport, electricity production, construction, and industry; sectors dominated by fossil fuels and responsible for 80 percent of national emissions, excluding the forestry and agricultural sector.

Compared to countries like Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Spain, Italy has never set a target for an additional emission reduction beyond the contribution fixed by the European Union’s objectives.

In March 2020, the Plan for Ecological Transition was approved: the goal is to reduce emissions by 51 percent before 2030, as compared to emission levels in 1990, but it is not legally binding.

Man has thought he could dominate nature, behaving as its ruler, but he was wrong.

To be consistent with environmental objectives, we should ecologically convert the industrial and production model, reduce military spending, call for a ban on dangerous weapons, and recognize nature’s rights.

Instead, the war in Ukraine has become a pretext for slowing down international commitments and resuming the arms race.

A Network of the Peace Movement Against the War in Ukraine. A Proposal from Southern Europe

by Marga Sanz, director of *Nuestra Bandera*, José Luis Centella, former member of the Congress of Deputies and President of the PCE
translated by Daniele Ruzza

It's not a novelty to suggest that imperialism, as an inflated phase of capitalism, uses war to resolve its internal contradictions and make the working class and popular sectors bear the costs of its systemic crises.

In this sense, while not forgetting the responsibility of the US and its allies in promoting instability in the region by trying to expand NATO to the Russian borders and supporting the Ukrainian government when it refused to comply with the Minsk agreements, nor forgetting the responsibility of the Putin government when it responds to these provocations by ordering the entry of Russian Federation troops into Ukraine, in a move contrary to international law, we are facing a very concrete reality.

The Imperialists are using the war to try to resolve a situation marked by the exhaustion of its ability to accumulate profits.

The Imperialists are using the war to try to resolve a situation marked by the exhaustion of its ability to accumulate profits with a loss of initiative in the international arena that was leading to a decline that endangered the world he-

gemony they had believed to have conquered after the disintegration of the USSR.

This loss of initiative was clearly highlighted by the crisis caused by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic that accelerated the contradictions that challenged the prevailing international order, and the ideological principles that supported it. No state looked to Washington as a reference point for the measures to take to deal with the emergency, but more than 80 countries turned to China for economic and healthcare assistance. China appeared to the peoples of the first world as an example of how to overcome the medical and health crisis and as an ally to get out of the economic crisis.

At this moment, in analysing the military confrontation, we must assess how a double intersection of interests that feed off each are currently transpiring.

On the one hand, we have the Putin government, which is using military confrontation to try to regain, in a nationalist sense, the popular support it was losing for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation due to poor pandemic management and its inability to solve economic problems.

On the other hand, we have the Imperialist Bloc, made up of the United States and its allies in the EU and NATO, who are using the situation created by the war to advance their strategy of creating the conditions for a New Cold War, which would allow them to regain the initiative in the international arena from a security model with militaristic characteristics, according to their idea that a

more armed society is a safer one, while also obtaining significant economic benefits for large multinational corporations.

In this mixture of interests, we have reached a situation in the military conflict where it seems clear that neither of the two sides, the imperialist bloc or the Russian Federation, can win the war militarily. However, it is also evident that neither side can willingly accept a solution that could be interpreted as a political and/or military defeat. Both issues define this as a moment of severe gravity, insofar as the two blocs, in the event of being cornered on the brink of a military defeat, have at their disposal sufficient military resources to activate the greatest military confrontation in history. Such a contest can only lead the world to the brink of a military confrontation that would endanger the very survival of life on the planet.

To complete this analysis, the reality we face today in Europe is that the war in Ukraine is the best breeding ground for the interests of those who want to bring about a new Cold War, insofar as, up to this point, it has allowed them to advance one of their objectives: to cause a disconnection between Europe and Asia, breaking the possibility of creating a Eurasian zone of economic and commercial cooperation, which was advancing with the growth of economic relations between Europe, China, and Russia, and which had its most significant expressions in the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, or the participation of various EU states in projects related to China's New Silk Road.

Therefore, it is necessary to break this terrible situation in favour of a negotiated solution. Assuming the responsibility of advancing initiatives to stop the war necessarily entails promoting a Great International Mobilization in defence of peace that joins sufficient social, trade union, and political forces to further the need to stop the arms race and enable a just, equitable, and balanced solution to the war in Ukraine in the United Nations and other international organizations agendas. This must start with an immediate ceasefire that can pave the way for negotiation within the UN to achieve an agreement that provides security for all states in the region, within the framework of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, respecting international legality based on the Paris Accords and the Helsinki Treaty.

But those of us who fight for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the war in Ukraine as an essential step in preventing the possibility of bringing the world into a new Cold War must be aware that this war is by no means the only conflict in the world today. In order to open the way to the possibility of building a future of peace and progress for humanity, in harmony with nature, we must be aware of the need to contest the ideological hegemony of the "Culture of War" in favour of a "Culture of Peace."

In this ideological confrontation, we must be able to explain the seriousness of increasing military spending at this moment of crisis, instead of investing that money in social and climate justice, towards those who are directly or indirectly suffering the consequences of war.

We must demonstrate that Peace is only truly guaranteed with a demilitarized Collective Security system, based on the peaceful and diplomatic resolution of conflicts, multilateralism from compliance with the United Nations Charter.

A Collective Security system that contemplates the ecological elimination of weapons of mass destruction, that considers the closure of military bases that the major powers have built in third countries, because we cannot forget that the proposal to strengthen NATO is accompanied by a military deployment of the United States around the world that we reject, including the bases in our country in Rota and Morón.

It is therefore necessary to remember the old maxim that Peace is not built by strengthening military organizations, for which we have to counteract the campaign that tries to ‘whitewash’ the image of NATO, presenting it as a guarantee of Security for Europe against Putin’s military aggressiveness. Rather, we have to lead a campaign that exposes what has always been and continues to be today, NATO: a Military Organization, the armed arm of Imperialism, which acts on the international stage, often infringing on the explicit mandate of the United Nations Charter, making it a threat to peace, as demonstrated by its actions in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, or Afghanistan, bringing destabilization and destruction in all parts of the world in which it has intervened.

We must show how NATO, by not ruling out the use of nuclear weapons, is an obstacle to promoting an International Treaty to prohibit and destroy in a controlled manner all the world’s arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and how the US withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), allows the possibility of an uncontrolled rearmament of tactical nuclear weapons.

Therefore, the challenge that we must assume at this moment, those of us who defend the construction of a Multipolar international order that ensures a future of Peace and Progress for all of Humanity, is to promote a powerful Peace Movement with the capacity to open a debate on a model of Collective Security that encompasses all aspects of life, proposing the dissolution of military structures, stopping the possibility of leading us towards a new Cold War, marked by the division of the planet into blocs of opposing and disconnected

states, so that the construction of a Multipolar Order can be opened, based on an International Community that builds a shared destiny for all of Humanity, in which the resolution of the problems and conflicts that affect all peoples of the planet can be approached in a solidary way.



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