

# **The Conflict in Ukraine: Social and Ecological Aspects**

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## **Abstract**

The conflict in Ukraine and ensuing energetic crisis has hindered environmental policies in Europe and elsewhere. The war itself has severe environmental implications. The conflict between two major agricultural countries has negative impact on the global food supply. As food prices rise, some nations are likely to cope by converting forests and grasslands to fields. International tensions and conflicts are among reasons to boost childbearing in Russia and some other countries. There are inter-ethnic differences in the birthrate within Russia and worldwide. The necessity of birth control has been obfuscated by conflicting national and global interests, the population growth being regarded as a tool helping to the national sovereignty and defense. The pro-natalist policy is counterproductive in view of the global overpopulation. The ecological damage is generally proportional to the population density. The demographic growth contributes to the scarcity of energy and food in many regions. The energy could be supplied by nuclear power plants (NPPs). Well-managed NPPs pose less of a risk than those running on fossil fuels. The nuclear facilities practically do not emit greenhouse gases. Obviously, a lasting peace is needed, since NPPs are potential targets. By analogy with the Chernobyl accident, the war damage and shutdown of the Zaporozhie NPP (the largest NPP in Europe) will enhance demands for fossil fuels. In the past, the overpopulation was counteracted by wars, pestilence and famine. Today, scientifically based humane methods can be used to regulate the population size taking account of ecological and economical conditions in different regions. Large projects could be accomplished to improve the quality of life all over the world: irrigation systems, nuclear and other energy sources instead of fossil fuels. Hydroelectric power plants can be built on large rivers to produce hydrogen as eco-friendly energy carrier. Such projects would create many jobs, being a reasonable alternative to hostilities and excessive military expenditures. Not only durable peace but also mutual trust is required for that. Ukraine should become a testing ground for the international trust and cooperation.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, armed conflict, peace initiative, environment

## **Introduction**

The separation of Russia from the rest of Europe has started after 1917 and continued thereafter [1]. The following distinctions should be stressed: comparatively low life expectancy in the former Soviet Union (SU), insufficient public assistance, science not always repelling falsification. Inefficient medications are advertised and prescribed, some invasive procedures

applied without evidence-based indications [2-4]. The following proposals have been made in this connection: "Russia must be brought into the world and European community. And in order to reduce distance and fear, NATO should move to Moscow" [5]. "What is needed is a reform of both NATO and the European Union (EU) in the creation of confederation from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Much as was originally proposed by James Baker, François Mitterrand and Mikhail Gorbachev toward the end of the Cold War" [5]. Russian power holders, the former party nomenklatura [6] allied with the military, have generally been against the coexistence in a legal field with the West. This is not entirely groundless considering formally legal but unfair practices, hidden sabotage and schadenfreude.

On the other hand, some people would welcome a Russian advancement to the English Channel, demographic transformations being one of the reasons [7]. According to the author's impressions, some European capitals look today like Johannesburg in 1991. The westward expansion is supported by the ideology of Neo-Eurasianism and personally by Aleksandr Dugin, professor of Sociology at Moscow University, the well-known "political philosopher, analyst, and strategist": [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksandr\\_Dugin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksandr_Dugin) The Eurasianists have incessantly underscored Russia's non-European alterity [8]. Dugin's geopolitical doctrine has been introduced into school curricula [9]. Using numerous neologisms, Dugin has written the following (verbatim from Russian): Shutting down (zakryt') America is our religious duty. Americans cause rejection, repulsion, a desire to hide from their influence, sometimes even to unmask and to expropriate them [10]. The prohibition of war propaganda is pharisaism. You can't get away from the war and you shouldn't try. America is our historical enemy, it is an absolute fact. Western civilization is deadly for our historical way [11]. About science: "Death is the only truly scientific fact. Everything else is hypothesis. Therefore, true science can be built only upon direct experience of death. Without it, we are dealing with charlatans. It is the battle, the rage of war that must become a true Russian university" [12].

Russian leaders are often accused of aggression these days. In fact, they may be pioneers of a new historic period. If the world is indeed becoming multicentric [13], armed conflicts of various magnitudes may become permanent. In a sense, it would be a return to the 19<sup>th</sup> or even 18<sup>th</sup> century. A constructive alternative might be the global leadership centered in the most developed parts of the world based on humanism and modern science. The role of Russia would be that of a regional superpower. Great projects could be accomplished by the unified humankind instead of the warfare and military expenditures. Civil liberties and human rights will be gradually abandoned worldwide if our future is a series of conflicts. This perspective seems to be inevitable unless new ethical principles are accepted: no population group on a national or

international scale, neither ethnic nor confessional minorities, may obtain any advantages because of the present or recent numerical expansion. In view of the global overpopulation, those who have had many children should logically live in more constrained conditions. Social consequences of the gender imbalance must be borne mainly by those countries and population groups, where sex-selective abortions have been practiced [14]. Acceptance of these principles could build a basis for international understanding and trust. Without procreative competition, different peoples would be more likely to live in peace.

### **The conflict in Ukraine: mechanisms and peace initiatives**

The reason for the “special military operation” (SMO) started in February 2022 was the anti-separatist activity by the Ukrainian army in Donbas since 2014. In principle, the fight against separatism within national borders is justifiable. The Ukraine in her 1991 borders was recognized by all nations including Russia. However, another argumentation is also possible. The Ukraine in today’s borders was created by Bolsheviks disregarding ethnic and linguistic realities. A majority of residents in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine are Russian-speaking. Many people in the Donbas were disappointed that their region had not become a part of the Russian Federation [15]. Statistics about ethnic composition may be misleading. During the Soviet time, the ethnicity (‘nationality’) was written in passports; many citizens registered themselves as Ukrainians for reasons of convenience but continued to share the Russian identity. Reportedly, 25.5% of Ukrainian citizens defined their ethnicity as both Ukrainian and Russian in 1997. Around one-third of the population believed that the two countries should be unified [16]. It is known that the public opinion on this topic in the western and eastern/southern parts of the Ukraine is different.

The recent referendum in the eastern and southern provinces of Ukraine has been generally met with skepticism. However, here is a possibility to settle two long-lasting disagreements. Considering the analogy between in Donetsk/Lugansk Peoples’ Republics and Taiwan, the following peace initiative has been proposed recently [17]. Referendums under efficient international control should be held both in Taiwan and some predominantly Russian-speaking provinces of Ukraine with a proposal of 3 options: unification with Ukraine/China, independence, inclusion in the Russian Federation, or for Taiwan - a protectorate by the United States and/or Japan. Analogous solution was proposed for the Crimea in 2015 [18]. An alternative could be a division between the EU and Russian Federation after referendums held under international control in each province separately. It can be reasonably assumed that a large part of the Ukraine’s population, possibly except Bukovina, Galicia and Transcarpathia (Subcarpathia), would vote for the unification with Russia, among others, because of economical

and linguistic reasons. The main thing is to avoid a new East-West conflict. Both sides would be losers in the long run as it was 100 years ago while winners will be those who stay outside. The undermining of globalization is another nail in the coffin of democracy and human rights. This is not automatically unfavorable: more order is needed in our age of overpopulation and mass migrations. However, these problems should be openly addressed instead of using international conflicts for the tightening of screws. Grandiose projects could be accomplished by the globalized mankind, being a reasonable alternative to excessive military expenditures. Not only durable peace but also mutual trust is required for that. Unfortunately, trust can be abused while certain individuals and organizations are unreliable. Trust is good, but checking that trust is not abused is also necessary. Ukraine should become a testing ground for the international trust and cooperation.

The conflict in Ukraine is not objectively elucidated by Russian media. Based on available information, literature and own observations [18], the author believes that the warfare, harm and victims were exaggerated prior to the SMO at least. In particular, destructions in the Donetsk area tend to be exaggerated. Neither damaged buildings nor roads nor other communications could be seen in Donetsk, Makeyevka, Khartsyzsk and other places (March 2022). Available foodstuffs were good and relatively cheap. Admittedly, there were electricity and water outages. A thunder of cannons could sometimes be heard from afar. There was some mutual understanding, mobile phone contact and coordination between adversaries [19]. Apparently, the SMO was aimed among others at the personnel training, absorption of foreign aid and military technology. The conflict is distracting people from internal problems, facilitating screw-tightening, postponing solutions in the field of public health and assistance. There are hopes that the war would contribute to the national unity and solidarity of some peoples of the former SU. All those participating (factually or on paper) in the current conflict will obtain the veteran status thus acquiring considerable privileges over fellow-citizens. This is a motive both to participate in the warfare and to exaggerate its dimensions.

There was a tendency to exaggerate military activities and harm also regarding other conflicts in the post-Soviet space. The real or claimed dangers together with bribery at frontier crossings often with participation of military personnel [20] have been damaging for tourism, trade, human rights and, consequently, for the international understanding and trust. This, in turn, contributes to further conflicts. As mentioned above, commanders of the Ukrainian army and Donbas militias established communication by mobile phones to arrange local ceasefires and avoid casualties [19]. Abandoned dilapidated buildings were often shelled, as it was in Chechnya in the 1990s, whereas residents had been warned about forthcoming bombardments. In the meantime,

the towns and villages have been newly rebuilt; some Soviet-time facilities were replaced by modern constructions. Apparently, the service in overmanned militias both in the Donbas and in Chechnya was a remedy against unemployment due to the overpopulation in the latter and coal mines closures in the former. The unemployment in the Donbas was partly caused by a decline in the coal production thanks to ill-considered and corrupt policies during privatization of state enterprises in the 1990s [21].

### **Ecological aspects**

The war in Ukraine and ensuing energetic crisis has thwarted many environmental policies in Europe and elsewhere. The conflict between two major agricultural countries has negative impact on the global food supply [22]. As food prices rise, some nations are likely to cope by converting forests and grasslands to fields [23]. The war itself has severe environmental implications and waste of non-renewable resources [24-26]. International tensions and conflicts are among reasons to boost childbearing in Russia and other countries. There are considerable inter-ethnic differences in the birthrate. The pro-natalist policies are counterproductive in view of the global overpopulation. The ecological damage is generally proportional to the population density. The demographic growth contributes to the scarcity of energy, drinking water and food in many regions [27,28]. The energy could be supplied by nuclear power plants (NPPs). Well-managed NPPs pose less of a risk than those running on fossil fuels. The nuclear facilities practically do not emit greenhouse gases [29,30]. Obviously, a lasting peace is needed, since NPPs are potential targets.

The humankind is in a demographic deadlock [31]. Possible solutions would require a revision of certain ethical clichés and propagation of new principles, in particular, that no population group on a national or international scale, neither ethnic nor confessional minorities, may obtain advantages because of a faster growth, even if it would disagree with numerical democracy. The necessity of birth control has been obfuscated by conflicting national and global interests, the population growth being regarded as a tool helping to the national sovereignty and defense. In the past, the overpopulation was counteracted by wars, pestilence and famine. Today, scientifically based humane methods can be used to regulate the population size taking account of ecological and economical conditions in different regions. Large projects could be accomplished to improve the quality of life all over the world: irrigation systems, nuclear and other energy sources as an alternative to fossil fuels. Hydroelectric power plants can be built on large rivers to produce hydrogen as eco-friendly energy carrier. Such projects would create many jobs, being a reasonable alternative to excessive military expenditures.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Government in democracy is usually more transparent. This in turn reduces corruption. The rule of law is more likely to work efficiently in a democracy [32]. Should the power be displaced to the East, it would come along with losses of certain values like individual liberties and human rights. Some disregard for laws and regulations, corruption and collectivism will come instead. The Soviet-trained collectivism and discipline might influence results of referendums and elections. During the Soviet time, almost everybody voted the ruling party. The quality of many services, foodstuffs and beverages would decline. Environmental protection, waste management, alternative energy sources etc. would partly lose priority. The culture of environmental protection is much less popular in Russia than in other industrialized countries. By analogy with the Chernobyl accident [33], the war damage and shutdown of the Zaporozhie NPP (the largest NPP in Europe) will enhance demands for fossil fuels. Military officials, their relatives and protégés, are occupying superior positions in educational, scientific and medical institutions. Their dominance will increase in consequence of the current conflict. This has contributed to the persistence of suboptimal and outdated methods in medicine due to lacking professional autonomy [34], autocratic or military managerial style discouraging criticism and polemics. Attributes of this style include the paternalistic approach to patients, insufficient adherence to the principle of informed consent, bossy management, harassment of colleagues if they do not follow instructions or not collaborate e.g. in dubious publications [3,35,36]. Under conditions of paternalism, misinformation of patients and compulsory treatments are regarded permitted [37]. Suboptimal practices have been used as per instructions by healthcare authorities and leading experts' publications; numerous examples have been discussed previously [3,4,38]. To name but a few: extensive use of Halsted and Patey mastectomy with excision of pectoral muscles, electrocoagulation of cervical ectropions without cyto- or histological check for precancerous lesions, overuse of gastric resections for peptic ulcers, thoracic and abdominal surgery for bronchial asthma and diabetes mellitus, excessive use of surgery in tuberculosis, overuse of bronchoscopy [39-41] e.g. in conscripts with supposed pneumonia: 1478 procedures in 977 patients in one study [42]. Certain invasive methods with questionable indications were advocated by former military surgeons [4,40]. The personnel training could have been a motive. Being not accustomed to hard and meticulous work, some of the functionaries' protégés have been involved in professional misconduct [3,4]. Moreover, sons of superior officers were involved in immoral and illegal activities. High social positions held by perpetrators or their relatives prevented reporting [43].

If Russians are indeed predestined to be leaders, a lot of modesty and devotion is needed. Among others, this would necessitate some crew change. The today's rhetoric goes obviously

too far [44]. At the same time, the propaganda avoids important issues such as the comparatively low life expectancy in Russia, world highest abortion rate and inter-ethnic inequality in the birth rate [7]. The propaganda should popularize the image of scrupulous and hardworking people. Moral principles, based on modesty and mutual help, aimed at preservation of as much life and wealth as possible, should be invigorated. In conclusion, confidence-building measures, international trust and reliability are necessary for cooperation and prevention of conflicts.

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