



Solidarity for Ukraine – 01/01/2023- issue 11 – a taste for miracle

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no miracle for Putin

Zelensky, a miracle

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The Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering (iriv) is associated to the international solidarity for Ukraine attacked by Russia on 24th February 2022. After a pandemic that has weakened democratic countries with the disturbing rise of conspiracy theories and hate speech on social networks, we do hope this war in Europe will be an opportunity to reflect on a new solidarity, among European and international allies. This newsletter is the first for 2023 and the 11th since March 2022. We publish a new issue every first day of the month as long as this brutal, total and illegal war lasts. The taste for miracle can be understood in different ways. It may inspire pioneers who have achieved remarkable things that were never done before. It can also characterize exalted

people who do not realize that the enterprise was lost since the beginning, and sometimes persevere in error. Until we try, we can't know the outcome of a fight or an initiative. According to a quote attributed to French writer Antoine de Saint Exupéry: «*They didn't know it was impossible, so they did it*». The motto of the Villeneuve family, who gave so many admirals and great sailors to France, shares the same spirit: "*Remember to dare*". This new issue of our newsletter evokes different facets of a miracle.

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* the logo was sdesigned by Caritas Canada in February 2022

No miracle for the Russian president

Nicolas Vassiliévitch Gogol, Ukrainian writer of Russian nationality wrote in his fantastic short story “The Portrait” (1835), “*Glory cannot bring joy to those who stole it without deserving it; it only vibrates the soul that deserved it.*”

For the first time, Vladimir Putin spoke to the press in Moscow on Thursday, December 22, 2022, about “war” to designate the conflict between Russia and Ukraine (1). Until then, he had exclusively used the term “special military operation”. Following Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s visit to Washington, on the 300th day of the war, he also tried to downplay the upcoming deployment of the American Patriot missile system in Ukraine, promised by the United States pretending that it was “old” and that Russia would always find « the parade».

In the beginning of 2023, we can easily imagine the psychological state of mind of the Russian president, devastated and very worried about his future. He is not a man to cry, he has the reputation of being a «tough guy» but the heart is no longer there. The storm Elliott , a “destructive” blizzard that only happens “once in a generation,” according to the *New York Times*, “the worst in over 50 years” (2) that hit the United States in December 2022, can pretty well describe Vladimir Putin’s mental state. A great cold fell on his expectations. Sadly, he must be thinking about the beginning of 2022, when he triumphantly stood with his Chinese counterpart at the Beijing Olympics. He was about to strike a blow. Westerners were going to see what wood he was heating himself with. He thought he could easily confirm his place as «favourite» with China, which could count on Russia.

We saw. Nothing happened as the Kremlin leader had predicted. He was obviously abused by the “hawks” around him, who are very adept at flattering his vanity, and who encouraged him to flee. After Chechnya and Syria, the work started in 2014 in Crimea had to be “finished” – all of Ukraine had to be occupied. These wise advisers, fierce nationalists, defenders of a “Great Russia”, played on the paranoia of an aging man, terrorized by Covid, and even more so by the fear of being overthrown by his population, which he has watched, brutalized and terrorized for more than twenty years. But Putin is not a military man, he reminded the whole world that he was above all a former KGB man, an intelligence agent. He has lost his superb on the international scene, as pointed out by specialists of Russia on the French channel BFM, on the very day of the American visit of Volodymyr Zelensky (3)

We know the Russian president very religious, and even superstitious; some elements must worry him. To display himself alongside the Belarusian autocrat as he has done on several occasions is not likely to improve his reputation. The repeated requests of several NGOs to prosecute Russia for war crimes and against humanity in Ukraine are another front to watch. The greatest threat comes from within- Ilya Prigogine at the head of the Wagner, the “war dogs”, an unofficial Russian army, known for its brutality and abuses, is waiting for his time.

The Ukrainian president Zelensky, a miracle

Jorge Luis Borges wrote in his 1968 short story “The Gaucho”: “*His poverty offered a luxury: courage.*” The visit of the Ukrainian President to his American counterpart on Wednesday, December 21, 2022 exactly expresses this message – Ukraine and its President may seem poor and destitute in the face of Russia and its predatory President but their bravery and heroic resistance for ten months were their first wealth.

The courage of the Ukrainian people is documented every day – they have taken up arms, continue to resist valiantly despite repeated attacks by the Russian army, torture, war crimes and even genocide (with the deportation of 12,000 Ukrainian children) and abuses committed by Russian soldiers. The civilian population in the back is equally affected; it is facing a deluge of missiles (4), electricity and running water cuts; after long stays in the Kiev metro to protect itself (at the beginning). But the population always stands up, valiant, and even provocative.

Ukrainians decided in 2022 to change Christmas Day, normally celebrated in January as the Russian Orthodox, choosing this year December 25, as Catholics and Protestants, but more broadly Westerners. Religion is not exploited as in Russia by a hateful and nationalist patriarch; it is a telling symbol of a whole people gathered and united. Religion takes back all its nobility as in the times of the Cold War when the Catholic (in Poland) or Orthodox (in other Central European countries) religion was sometimes a formidable weapon of resistance. Everything counts in wartime to hold, galvanize, and rally internal and external public opinion to the flag.

Above all, courage has been embodied since the beginning of the conflict by a man, a president, elected only three years before, who did not present himself as a war leader. Yet he has proved his talents as a strategist, to a Ukrainian population that supports him unanimously but also to a public opinion in democratic countries that is fully on his side. The most convincing testimonies came from NATO countries, and in the first place from the United States and its president Joe Biden, who provided a material, financial and human assistance (through the intelligence services on the ground) always renewed. The European Union, from the beginning of the conflict, has shown its full and unwavering support by the representatives of its institutions - European Commission in the colours of Ukraine with its President, Ursula von der Leyen; President of the European Council, Charles Michel or Joseph Borrell , EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

President Zelensky’s strategy is admirable. Ukraine has scored points on all fronts. The Ukrainian army repelled the Russian troops who began to retreat ; Crimea and Donbass could even be liberated. The war of the image or psychological war was very early won by President Zelensky with panache, inventiveness and intelligence to make pale with envy President Putin totally outdated.

« Dreamers »

At the end of 2022 the images of the belligerents are contrasted. Russia is on land and full of uncertainty. Ukraine is bruised but still early, full of energy and optimism. The old rancid world of the past opposes a new world full of promise.

French journalists described President Zelenski as “Ukrainian Churchill” in front of the US Congress on Wednesday, on the 21st of December in Washington (5). On this occasion, the American President announced a new tranche of aid to Ukraine for about \$1.85 billion (6). In Paris, on Tuesday 13 December, representatives of 48 countries promised €1 billion against Putin’s “energy terror” (7).

The same journalists quote the results of more optimistic polls in Europe than in the United States, where only 48% of Americans unconditionally support Ukraine (whatever it takes); they were 58% in July 2022 (Chicago Council on Global Affairs opinion surveys). In Europe, the citizens are still united. The war is taking place on European soil, so the threat is much closer. The latest Eurobarometer which regularly surveys the state of mind of Europeans (in the sense of European Union) indicates that in November 2022, 74% of citizens were in favour of support for Ukraine – 73% in France, 72% in Germany, and more than 90% in Finland and Sweden (both candidates for NATO entry). The same proportion is observed in the Netherlands, Denmark, and Ireland. Solidarity is tinier in Greece, Slovakia, Cyprus, or Bulgaria because of the Russian and Orthodox influence (5).

Europeans are not dreamers; they are perfectly lucid. The conflict is likely to last. Yet 65% of them agree to pay the economic price and especially the energy bill that has increased. Inflation, which normally feeds precariousness and withdrawal, has not played a role for Ukraine (8). Europeans are aware that their lives will change, that the abundance of past years, without any shortage of any kind, without any restriction (only the limit of their budget) belongs to the past. Europeans have grown up thanks to the war in Ukraine, but also after three years of Covid, which has created great weariness and real fatigue, with an existential anguish in the face of global warming and the disruptions it generates.

Europeans are no longer the spoiled children they once were. They know full well that our continent was preserved from war for nearly 80 years thanks to the “Pact” that they concluded after the Second World War with the construction of Europe. This pact is threatened by peripheral wars (Balkans in the 1990s, Crimea in 2014, etc.) that could become central. A missile believed to be Russian hit Polish soil in November 2022; the worst was feared, the outbreak of a Third World War.

« I have a dream » (9)

The year 2023 is dedicated to skills and talents by the European Commission. At the time of New Year's greetings, our thoughts are with Ukraine and the Ukrainians, so that their courage, perseverance, and immense talent may be rewarded.

In a speech that became mythical, delivered in 1963 during the civil rights struggle in the United States, at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on the occasion of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the Baptist pastor and man of peace, Martin Luther King, called for a "fraternal America, where Blacks and Whites could live together in harmony and with the same rights." His prophecy has only partly come true; the fight against injustice and discrimination is not over, it is still relevant.

Westerners, Europeans and Americans, but also all democratic countries have sided with Ukraine and its president, because the fight at stake is not only Russia's against Ukraine but autocrats of all stripes against democrats. Democracies and democracy are in danger. The number of democratic countries in the world has even declined. According to the latest study published by Freedom House in 2022, the current threat to democracy is the product of 16 consecutive years of decline in global freedom. A total of 60 countries has experienced declines over the past year, while the fate of only 25 has improved. About 38% of the world's population lives in non-free countries in 2022, the highest proportion since 1997; 20% now live in free countries." (10)

The Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022 is a demonstration of strength, among many others: « *Global freedom faces a dire threat. Around the world, the enemies of liberal democracy (.../...) are accelerating their attacks. Authoritarian regimes have become more effective at co-opting or circumventing the norms and institutions meant to support basic liberties, and at providing aid to others who wish to do the same. In countries with long-established democracies, internal forces have exploited the shortcomings in their systems, distorting national politics to promote hatred, violence, and unbridled power. (.../...). The global order is nearing a tipping point, and if democracy's defenders do not work together to help guarantee freedom for all people, the authoritarian model will prevail.* » (10). The V-Dem Institute, an observatory attached to the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, funded by the World Bank, speaks of "autocratisation of the world." It confirms the same alarming finding: «the number of liberal democracies estimated at 34% has never been so low since 1995» (11)

An exemplary Ukrainian president, at the head of an entire heroic country rallied to his fight, with the unconditional support of Western public opinion in free and democratic countries, cannot solve all the «woes of the world». But he gave us reason to hope- if Ukraine has been able to resist against Russia, we can also face the repeated attacks of authoritarian regimes. Sometimes you can renew with a taste for miracle. "Tomorrow never knows" sings Bruce Springsteen (12) and Martin Luther King echoes "Let freedom ring." (9)

- (1) CNN, 22/12/2022.- <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/22/europe/putin-uses-word-war-fighting-ukraine-russia-intl-hnk/index.html>
- (2) Michael D. Regan, Michael Gold et Mihir Zaveri, “28 Dead in ‘Once in a Generation’ Blizzard in Western New York”, 26 décembre 2022 - <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/26/nyregion/blizzard-storm-snow-deaths.html>
- (3) Stéphane Courtois historian and Olivier Védrine, specialising in Russia and geopolitics, special edition dedicated to Ukraine on the occasion of the American visit of president Zelensky in Washington, French TV channel BFM, 21st of December 2022 ; 20h
- (4) 4000 cruise missiles fired by Russia on Ukraine from February to December 2022 according to Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Chmyhal, interviewed by the newspaper Le Monde on December 13, 2022
- (5) Piotr Smolar, Le Monde, 23rd of December 2022 & François Clémenceau, Journal du Dimanche, 24th of December 2022
- (6) including 1 billion in the form of arms donated to Kiev from the US Army’s stockpile, quickly deliverable; 850 million in orders to the Defence industry - La Croix avec l’Afp, 21 décembre 2022
- (7) Julien Bouissou et Philippe Ricard, « Kiev obtient une aide d’urgence de ses alliés », Le Monde, 15 décembre 2022
- (8) In France, the Centre for research & Observation on conditions of life (CREDOC) created in 2018 an observatory of vulnerabilities; inflation experienced by households, especially the most modest ones, increases the “feeling of vulnerability”
- (9) Martin Luther King, discours prononcé en 1963 - http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xqig5z_martin-luther-king-i-have-a-dream-sous-titres-francais_news
- (10) Sarah Repucci and Amy Slipowitz, “The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule” in « Freedom in the world 2022”, Freedom House , February 2022 - https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/FIW_2022_PDF_Booklet_Digital_Final_Web.pdf
- (11) Institute quoted by Gilles Paris, a journalist specialising in Geopolitics « L’autocratisation résiste dans le monde », Le Monde, jeudi 22 décembre 2022
- (12) Bruce Springsteen, song from his album (2008) « Working on a dream”- <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=tomorrow+never+knows+springsteen#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:871f0186,vid:9e3kD4a4W6o>

orphan children – HelloAsso -

<https://www.helloasso.com/associations/aide%20medicale%20caritative%20france%20ukraine/collectes/aider-ukraine-amcurgence-help-ukraine/don>

Le Comité d'aide médicale Ukraine - refugees in transit in the west of the country, and raises funds, medicines and equipment for accommodation and care through its French partners, the association SAFE and the organization FONDEMOS.- <http://www.cam-z.org/en/news/121/>

JeVeuxAider.gouv.fr is the public platform for volunteerism - a dedicated page Mobilizing for Ukraine . <https://www.jeveuxaider.gouv.fr/engagement/benevolat-ukraine/>

Les Banques alimentaires - emergency assistance to be provided at Ukraine's borders in border countries hosting refugees.- <https://www.banquealimentaire.org/urgence-ukraine>

La Protection Civile et l'Association des maires de France have established a list (camp beds, sleeping bags, wipes, preserves, haemostatic dressings, antiseptic solutions, etc.).

L'Association des maires de France has set up collection sites throughout France. The Mayors of France call for solidarity with Ukraine . Many cities in France organize collections of basic necessities - <https://www.amf.asso.fr/documents-les-maires-france-appellent-la-solidarite-avec-lukraine/41122>

La plateforme officielle « *Je m'engage pour l'Ukraine* » launched on March 8, 2022 by the government to support French people wishing to host Ukrainians refugees and welcomed in France.

Associations, foundations, companies and local authorities can use an online form to inform their hosting capacity.- <https://www.demarches-simplifiees.fr/commencer/hebergement-personne-morale-ukraine>

Bibliothèque sans frontière (BSF) - Since the beginning of the Russian offensive in Ukraine, BSF has been mobilizing and deploying emergency solutions for the reception and integration of refugee populations throughout Europe. «Bonjour France» is an innovative and totally free smartphone app that offers accelerated French learning from Ukrainian, available since October 19, 2022. - <https://www.bibliosansfrontieres.org/2022/10/14/bsf-lance-bonjour-france-une-application-innovante-dapprentissage-du-francais-pour-les-refugies-ukrainiens/>

The Catholic mission of the Polish Church in France also suggests the following link: <https://mission-catholique-polonaise.pl/polska-we-francji/pere-brzys-la-mcp-lance-une-initiative-nationale-pour-aider-lukraine/> - **Source** : French catholic conference of the archbishops