

LIFE AND POLITICS IN TIMES OF WAR

The Post-Soviet Situation, Eastern Europe and Former Yugoslavia



PAAW

Permanent Assembly
Against the War

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What follows is the collection of the initial contributions which animated the assembly *Life and Politics in times of War. The Post-Soviet Situation, Eastern Europe and Former Yugoslavia* organized by the Permanent Assembly Against the War on June 4th, 2023. Women, workers, unionists, artists, organizers, activists, migrants and queer people coming mostly from East—Serbia, Bosnia, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Slovenia, Kyrgyzstan, Romania—but also from France, Italy, Germany, Mali, Palestine, Canada and more, animated a discussion on the effects of the war in Ukraine in Post-Soviet, Eastern Europe and Former Yugoslavia countries.

As the Permanent Assembly stated since the beginning: we need to shift the perspective on this war, if we don't want to be trapped in its deadly logic. We need to fight against the war for the tremendous effects it has particularly on workers, women, migrants, well beyond Ukraine. The political focus on post-soviet and post-socialist experiences emerged from within the process of the Permanent Assembly as an urgent necessity. In fact, the polarization between East and West exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, the definition of the war in Ukraine as a decolonising war, the language of imperialism which establishes an uninterrupted historical continuity from the Tzar-era to the Putin-present, passing through the USSR, are increasingly erasing what is at stake in this war for women, workers, migrants, queer people, and to what extent what is happening in the Post-Soviet and post-socialist contexts concerns all of us.

Seen from this stance, it is manifest that the war has accelerated processes of decommunisation, neoliberalisation and ideological suppression of the memory and aspiration to any political alternative to the existing state of being, while imposing nationalistic readings that erase all social struggle within each nation.

The war is paving the way for new opportunities of accumulation, whose hidden face is the radical reduction, when not elimination, of social expenditure. This is prescribed by the agreement between the Ukrainian government and the IMF, but involves all countries, committed to strengthen rearmament spending and anti-workers laws, while Soviet-era infrastructures are being used as a leverage for implementing new plans for investments. In Russia, the pressing necessities of the war are used by the government to increase the internal repression against women, workers, unions and LGBTQI people who in different ways oppose the war and the increase in exploitation and patriarchal and racist regimentation it requires.

The war situation becomes also a way to push back from achievements made by social movements in the past and set aside environmental and social issues, such as in the attempt to reinvest in nuclear plant made by the government in Kyrgyzstan, against a moratory for nuclear energy imposed by local activists. Moving across the post-soviet and former socialist spaces made it possible to discuss transnational elements in the present situation beyond a geopolitical or regional approach. When seen from the experiences of impoverishment and struggle of this part of the world the European Union appears very different from the champion of democracy confronting the oriental barbarianism.

In countries such as Romania and Slovenia, just like in other EU countries, the war provided the opportunity to change the destination of the European Recovery and Resilience Facility (ERRF), triggering fast mechanisms of production for military infrastructure, and neoliberal State policies. This is even cleared after the vote in favor of ASAP—Act in Support of Ammunition Production—a provision that allows member states to spend for arms production (for the war in Ukraine but not exclusively) also money that originally could be allocated for social expenditures.

The EU, however, does not affect only its Member States: as contributions from Georgia and Bosnia made clear, the ideology of European democracy and rule of law is operating also there where an integration process is active. Albeit the prospect of membership remains suspended, this ideology is mobilized as a way to legitimize neoliberal capital unleashed activity as the only available alternative to economic, social and political “backwardness”, that is, as the only way out of poverty and the

specter of socialist economy.

What this ideology conceals, though, is that poverty has been produced precisely by the neoliberalising policies ensuing from the end of the Soviet and Yugoslavian experience; by the equation of communism and fascism aiming to erase from historical memory and political imagination the emancipative and modernizing effects of the soviet and socialist past; by the legitimization of far-right organizations that are responsible of violent attacks against queer people; and by the reinforcement of nationalism as the only form of alleged political opposition to austerity policies.

Looking at the present state of affairs from the point of view of former Soviet and socialist countries in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, we can see as well that behind the promise of integration within the European economic civilization, differences and hierarchies are continually produced and reproduced.

One example is the way the Balkans become the trash-bin of EU countries and production chains who are “going green”. We see that, notwithstanding the various promises associated with European integration, Europe is not the solution, but rather part of the problem, as we have already stated in the [Manifesto for a Transnational Politics of Peace](#) right after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

As all previous meetings of the Permanent Assembly against the War—both online and in presence, such as those in [Sofia](#) and [Frankfurt](#) within the gatherings organized by the [Transnational Social Strike Platform](#)—the event *Life and Politics in Times of War* provided a unique space where disagreements can be faced without fear and differences can be put in communication and connected in the common effort of building together a shared discourse and the conditions for an effective transnational political initiative.

As a result of this encounter, we agreed that establishing a continuous exchange between post-Soviet and former Yugoslavian countries is crucial for strengthening our common politics. We further agreed that, if it is true that the EU is part of the problem, neither an exclusively Eastern, nor an exclusively Western initiative against the war and its effects of

fragmentation, neoliberalization and impoverishment of our work and lives are up to the present condition.

For the PAAW, focusing on the ‘Eastern’ difference and discussing its relevance for all of us is a move to help bridge the divide between the East and the West, against the capitalist ideology of war and the hegemonic grasp of the EU.

Beyond the war fought by States, by the Atlantic and the Asian fronts, by capitals in search for valorization, we have a class war to fight by connecting workers, women, migrants and LGBTQI people across divisions imposed upon them. In doing this, we need recognize and tackle the different conditions that compose today’s transnational working class.

The Permanent Assembly Against the War is making the speeches available to the public in the days leading up to the meeting [Breaking the Barrier: Confronting the Transnational Dimension](#), organized by the Transnational Social Strike Platform in Bologna (Oct. 27-29). These interventions give a unique grasp of the world dimension of the war that began in February 2022. Understanding the transition period after the collapse of the USSR is crucial to understand the background of this war and the condition in which both Russia and Ukraine are immersed. It is also a way to contribute to a better understanding of the political stakes and struggles that are often hidden behind the chronicles of war and geopolitical rivalries.

As pointed out by one participant in the event, “by highlighting the point of disintegration and the literally horrible devastation after the collapse, we, the children of that time, saw what is now called neoliberal democracy, shock therapy and radical nationalisms grow before our eyes. Today, as adults, we can look back and see the very elements that led to this war”.

This war is not just a geopolitical game, it is also the culmination of the processes that have led each nation-state to be integrated into a transnational landscape ruled by game of powers and capitalist accumulation. With this publication we want to give voice to alternative visions of these processes and contribute to the major task of building a transnational politics peace.

Introduction

BY AIGUL HAKIMOVA (PERMANENT ASSEMBLY AGAINST THE WAR/INFOKOLPA—SLOVENIA)

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the [Permanent Assembly Against the War](#) has organized several online and physical meetings to discuss the consequences of the war, its transnational dimension and the perspectives for a transnational politics of peace. In these meetings we have always tried to connect the experiences of activists from different corners of Europe and beyond.

From the beginning we have realised that the war in Ukraine and its prolongation is not only about geopolitics. The politics of war now resonate globally, leaving behind destruction and death. Economic sanctions, rising costs of living and militarisation are contributing to the general crisis of social reproduction which has already occurred following the Covid pandemic and decades of neoliberal reforms.

We soon realised that in the specific situation of the regions and states of the post-Soviet space, Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia, there was little knowledge and little discussion of the wider implications of the war.

We think what is happening in these situations is very important for imagining any kind of transformative politics today, and of general interest to all activists, including those from the West.

Seven interventions will try to open and shape themes that shed light on the period of disintegration after the collapse of both the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – which ended up as a tragic war with more than 250,000 dead in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone – discussing what has been going on in the last thirty years in terms of social destruction, class decomposition, depopulation, forced displacement, and the collapse of the welfare systems of mentioned regions and states.

The authors of these interventions are Sopo Japaridze, a trade union organiser from Georgia; Olena Lyubchenko, an activist and researcher from Ukraine currently living in Canada; Bermet Borubaeva, labour rights activist and artist from KyrgSoc, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; Luba Zakharova, activist from Feminist Anti-War Resistance, a Russian anti-war movement; Maja Breznik, a labour rights researcher from Slovenia; Tijana Okić, a philosopher from Bosnia-Herzegovina; and finally Valentin Cernat and Ovid Pop from Romania.

The war in Ukraine is not an isolated event. Its causes go far beyond the acts of malice committed by one or a small number of individuals. Unfortunately, war, especially in the post-Soviet area, is the norm in the 21st century. The collapse of the Soviet Union has been the source of many unresolved issues and contradictions between the countries involved. Military clashes have been the norm for a long time in order to resolve these contradictions.

The list is long: the Abkhaz-Georgian and Ossetian conflicts, the two Karabakh wars, the wars in Chechnya and the civil war in Tajikistan. Kyrgyzstan is no exception to the list—this country has a history of both territorial border conflicts, the most recent of which is the conflict with Tajikistan, which regularly takes the form of active hostilities, and inter-ethnic conflicts with the use of arms, as was the case in the city of Osh in 1990 and 2010.

As already stated in Sofia, during the first live meeting of the Permanent Assembly against the War after Covid, the Russian invasion and war are absolutely intolerable and unbearable tragedies, not only since last February, but as the culmination of those processes of the last 30 years, which often led to bloodshed.

Many attempts to do justice to the smaller peoples, the smaller nation states, end up with the uncritical use of terms, including Soviet colonialism. As I was recently told, I represent an indigenous people, I'm a native and I speak one of those local languages, and we are victims of old Russian imperialism, later of the Soviet Union, and since the beginning of the war in Ukraine we have again become victims of a combination of old Russian imperialism, Soviet colonialism and new Russian imperialism. These debates and studies, materialised in numerous conferences and summer schools, overlook the notion of the rebirth of a much more destructive nationalism in the republics of Central

Asia. The socialist legacy tends to be erased forever. What is important today is the image of a map of Kyrgyzstan from the 9th century (President's post), which creates a sense of pride and unity. The unity that hides the purely economic interests of the newly established classes of owners and capitalists, the unity that turns a blind-eye to the deteriorating situation of workers, village women, children who are left with ageing relatives. Educational welfare, access to good schooling and extracurricular activities are not discussed as much as issues of national ideology and national identity.

Contrarily to any over-simplification, we need a language for describing and understanding the Soviet that does not reduce it to one of its aspects, but captures both the emancipatory and the repressive.

We need a dialectical understanding of the Soviet in historical review and as a response to the construction of a political vision based on the Soviet experience of internationalism, social justice and radical imagination.

Austerity and Marketization during Wartime

SOPO JAPARIDZE (SOLIDARITY NETWORK UNION—GEORGIA)

In this intervention I will try to sketch out why I think it is important to develop a different way to understand what is happening these days, to consider the current situation as something different, instead of either using the decolonisation language or anti-communist language, which have become so predominant.

Most leftist were trained that neoliberalism got its start in Chile, with Pinochet suppressed the people and then did shock therapy on them. And this is basically our understanding of what shock therapy is. Then they started exporting that case study to other countries. Neoliberalism in the U.S. or in Western Europe looks more like cutting down budgets. In the U.S. there is never been a budget for public works, minimizing state municipal ability to actually give services to the city and wages, cracking down on unions, and so on.

So, neoliberalism looks like having a sort of welfare state and then you have a slow dismantling of it. But this is not what happened where we are from. It was literally just like bulldozed completely. And so even neoliberalism, I hate this term, is incorrect for what this is.

This is like unbridled capitalism, the most intense form possible without the mediation of unions and organizing for years and decades and centuries as, say, Europe has or even the US has.

First, they completely vilified communism, so there was no resistance to it whatsoever. And then it was just full-form destruction of not just the social state, but culture, society, all the kinds of cohesion—even the Soviet socialist state kind of cohesion that was what existed—all of it was destroyed. Of course, a lot of this was shown in these sorts of civil war and ethnic war, like the three Georgia has gone through. And so, this

is how a lot of it manifested. And since you took away any kind of socialist, communist, or working-class politics from the arena of politics, the only thing that exists now is this ethnic kind of violence or “this territory is mine” and “this is your territory”—and it absolutely has right-wing content. Mostly all the politics is around this and being more or less pro-Europe or more Asian or not, and so on. This polarization has now also reached Western Europe because of the polarization between China and the West, which is interesting because Europeans were like: “we never actually had to make this choice before and now it’s being forced upon us”.

When [TSS had a meeting in Tbilisi](#) some years ago, before the pandemic, we discussed how most of the businesses that exist in Georgia almost all use Soviet-era facilities and pretty much everything comes from there. Even we went to a mining town and the women there said, “Oh, they like the Soviet planning system. Well, we have to, you know, have a certain amount ready. They love the Soviet quotas, don’t they?” But they don’t have any of the other stuff that the Soviets gave us, you know, housing or education or free food, and so on. And so, it is really important to see what is happening in this part of the world. Most of the structures that exist, even those utilized by the new political economy of capitalism, or the weapons to fight the Ukraine, are Soviet-era.

They are still using Soviet-era things while at the same time, of course, denouncing the Soviet Union at every turn, and then also now ultimately making it one to Russia.

So, they become synonymous and the political movements are very much shaped by that. I’m sure all these political movements in Georgia will say that their logo will never go back to the USSR and that literally means territorial unity with Russia. The content is once again taken away from it.

What is also interesting about this, and not a lot of people seem to be paying attention, is that it is almost unheard of to cut social labour and all these things during the war, as Ukraine is doing as an austere free market state. Making cuts during war is something that existed during World War I. Isabella Weber has a great book on this, comparing China’s rise to power and discussing where these ideas come from. She talks about how World War I was fought in a similar way when there were no

price controls. You know, there was no sort of “more State” in the sense of interventions and protective measures, that it was much more free market. By contrast, World War II was fought with much more intervention by the state. This change in WWII happened because World War I was discredited not to have stronger interim economic interventions by the state. The book shows how actually in every possible way—employment and so on—everything was doing much better when you actually have more protective measures to protect workers.

We have somehow come back to a World War I type of war, where during wartime you are going completely austere. This could only happen because it is a post-socialist, post-Soviet space where the memory of socialism is cannot absolutely be discussed or even thought about—and so it is just vilified. So, there is nothing you can rest on to actually fight the brutal capitalism that has been brought.

Ukraine has become a testing ground even for increasing these kinds of austerity and free marketization in wartime, which again, as in Chile, will always be used somewhere else.

There are always testing grounds for economic experiments elsewhere.

Gender Equality as Decommunization of Ukraine. A Mockery of Feminist Values

OLENA LYUBCHENKO (LEFTEAST—CANADA/UKRAINE)

In my short intervention, first I want to follow up on what Aigul has already said, namely how there is a simplistic conflation between quite different political projects—the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire—as one continuous colonizing actor. Second, I want to take up what Sopo has mentioned, the idea that state intervention is almost non-existent or maybe that there is less state intervention in this war in Ukraine. On the contrary, what we witness is not less state intervention, but rather more state intervention. However, an important question we must ask, is: state intervention to what end?

I approach these two questions by analysing how the EU gender equality agenda has become synonymous in some ways with decolonization of Ukraine and also de-communisation of Ukraine (and Russia, but let us leave this to another discussion). More specifically, at the level of policy, this discourse (with drastic material consequences) is taking place in discussions around the Reconstruction and Recovery Plan for Ukraine.

Let me briefly outline the agenda of this so-called Reconstruction Plan and the way in which gender equality and de-communisation + decolonisation are wedded together. The National Recovery Council was set up by the Zelensky government and this council drafted the Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Ukraine in July 2022 and again in July 2023. Evidently the war is not over, so it is an ongoing plan, right? So, more elements are added, more projections, more plans as to how to reconstruct Ukraine after the war while the war is ongoing.

In July 2022, Switzerland jointly with Ukraine, hosted an international Ukraine recovery conference in Lugano. All kinds of officials participated representing 41 countries, organizations like Council of Europe, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Commission, Investment Bank, and so

on. The event was an international kick-off for the recovery process in Ukraine. The funny part about this is that

alongside transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and democratic participation, the Lugano conference asserted that gender equality and inclusion must be one of the guiding principles for the recovery process in Ukraine.

The conference document stated something like, you know, Ukraine's recovery process has to be inclusive, ensure gender equality and respect for human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, recovery needs to benefit all, and no part of society should be left behind. There should be no disparities. I mean, it sounded really amazing, almost like full communism, you know? In practice, this 'Plan', is a mockery of any feminist agenda and arrives to Ukraine in the form of a politics of dispossession.

The Reconstruction Plan for Ukraine, the way in which this recovery is being unrolled, is embedded in a revival of post-World War II modernization theory, the idea that democracy equals capitalism. But this time with a new spin.

In Ukraine, we are witnessing democracy being equated specifically with the neoliberal regime of accumulation, which has been reanimated in the language of the nation's self-determination. (As Ishchenko recently said, Ukraine seems more like a start-up than a country.)

What is very fascinating about this logic is that Ukraine's path towards self-determination is literally the process of Europeanisation. We have seen all of that already in other contexts, with gender equality and decolonisation. But in Ukraine today it is presented as also synonymous with decommunisation and deepening, dispossessing neoliberal reforms. In a strange way, it kind of bears a striking resemblance to Putin's own decommunisation rhetoric that justified his regime's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Materially, these so-called feminist 'recovery' policies will have horrific consequences for women, for working class people, for children and the elderly. Is this gaslighting? Gender equality for whom? (Perhaps for those Western Europeans who will be taken care of by the arriving cheap feminized Ukrainian migrant labour?)

I will say just a few words about the kind of material destruction

that Ukraine is facing and then turn to the dispossessive policy reforms. 8 million people, most women and children have left the country, many of them now in Western Europe, many in Canada. 60% of Ukrainians only have been able to keep their jobs. People are unemployed.

The reconstruction and recovery cost have grown to about 411 billion U.S. dollars. The World Bank reports that 7.1 million people have been pushed into poverty. They are living on less than 6 bucks a day. And we have damage of the Soviet-era public infrastructure—its own process of de-communisation. The war and its military-industrial profits are socialized by the former Soviet infrastructure—it is a process of primitive accumulation. Whether we are talking about military infrastructure or roads, railways, and water pipes, or kindergartens and hospitals, it is all being expropriated in Ukraine in real time. Okay, well, our Western ‘partners’ want to recover Ukraine and reconstruct it, and so the slogan of this national recovery plan has been something like “European Ukraine is a magnet for international investment”. We can only imagine what kind of gender equality principles this magnet will attract.

European gender mainstreaming arrives in Ukraine hand-in-hand with the promise of conversion of new spaces towards accumulation, basically attacking households’ means of subsistence.

(We already know what happened with the labour law reforms last year). In March of this year, the Zelenskyy government reached a loan agreement with the IMF, and it is unprecedented. The loan is worth \$15.6 billion, a four-year financing package which ties the government to an agenda of cutting back on social expenditures. As a result, there will be substantial changes made to pensions and the social safety net. And in the best of decommunising fashions there is the move away from Soviet status-related benefits. For instance, whereas before single mothers, veterans, people with disabilities that would have received financial assistance based on status, there is a move towards more means tested methods.

While describing these Europeanising and decommunising reforms, Ukraine’s minister of social policy has recently said something like “we want our people to stop living with the feeling that someone owes them something ... want to give everyone a fishing rod that will help them catch fish to gain economic

independence and with it a decent life.” The idea that the state is responsible for social reproduction of its citizens is being eroded.

In another part of this Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, Ukrainian authorities outline a target of the corporatization of the biggest 15 state-owned firms with the potential sale of up to 49% of shares in these companies to global capital. What is up for privatisation is, of course, Soviet-era state owned facilities that have been deindustrialised during Shock Therapy reforms and are becoming more deindustrialised as we speak.

At the outset I posed the following question: state intervention to what end? Simply put, the Zelensky government’s adoption of these openly neoliberal austerity measures, under the guise of being ‘European’, self-determining, and therefore anti-communist, would normally violate even the lowest of EU standards. More than that,

the civilisational ideas of gender equality as European values, now included in Ukraine’s post-war recovery plan, actually eliminate vestiges of social citizenship, download responsibility for social reproduction onto women, and produce a more disciplined and devalued labour force.

Depending from Russia in the Turmoil of War

BERMET BORUBAEVA (KYRGSOC—KYRGYZSTAN)

First of all, I want to thank everyone and say that we need to meet and act more. I am a member KirgSoc, which is a Marxist organisation in Bishkek. We published an anti-war statement because we strongly stay on anti-fascist, anti-nationalist positions in Kyrgyzstan and try to make all our efforts again these. And it's very sad that Kyrgyzstan is actually not excluded from this legacy of violence and war conflicts. The last military conflict was with Tajikistan, for like five days in September, but it has already killed around hundreds of people and thousands of people came without home.

It is incredible to see how the situation in Ukraine has been going on for more than a year. But it is really, since I was born in the Soviet Union, that I can see how it is still collapsing. And we are actively protesting. In Kyrgyzstan, like in many countries, labour reforms are going down. So, people are very precarious, and now we have a lot of attempts to decrease freedom of expression and to repress activists.

Also, it is very problematic, in this turmoil of war, that Kyrgyzstan is very dependent on Russia. I can't say how much, but a share of Kyrgyzstan's GDP is migrant money coming from Russia.

And it's very politically manipulative news. For example, there was once talk about the status of the Russian language because Kyrgyzstan is one of the countries where the Russian and Kyrgyz languages are constitutionally equal. So, we have two languages, and when someone speculated about changing the status of Russian, Russia immediately cancelled all dairy products from Kyrgyzstan. That is very problematic for the economy.

All the time you have tools to manipulate, and for example, when it was the parade of the victory day, on the 9th of May, the president from Kyrgyzstan was actually only one person who was

expecting on the spirit of military. So, it was very strange that actually on external affairs, our countries pretend to be very neutral, but actually they really support Russia, in the silence.

And another thing that I can add is that we now, because of all this policy of dependence, the minister of energy of Kyrgyzstan recently signed the agreement with Russia “Rosatom” about creating nuclear power station in Kyrgyzstan. There are a lot of reasons not to do so. I mean, it also has like health problems for poor people. We have some laws actually reducing it.

We have one moratory for nuclear energy and for nuclear extraction, that it was actually achieved with many, many efforts by local green activists, that prohibited all these nuclear extractions.

We have a green alliance of Kyrgyzstan who made like opening statement against this, because it's not only like health reasons, it's not only ecological reasons, because in Kyrgyzstan we have tourism, which is actually one of the main resources. And since we are on the roof of Central Asia, our rivers and water systems go down to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. So, it's water and life security for all, a whole reason, and if anything can happen like this, these situations will be a disaster for the whole region.

There are many, many opportunities for energy. And now I work on a research about actually cycling female culture in Kyrgyzstan. And I everyday think that cycling culture can be also some alternative way from this neo-colonial situation to such a country like Russia with dependency on fossil fuels. For sure it works for many countries. On our level, it is also one of the possibilities to develop independent, renewable energy. So not many people connect environmental issues with policy, imperialism, and actually neo-colonial relationship. In my statement, I wanted to make this input about these places and to interrupt this dependent relationship.

What Consequences for Workers, Migrants, Women, and LGBTQ+ People Living in Russia?

LUBA ZAKHAROVA (FEMINIST ANTI-WAR RESISTANCE—RUSSIA)

I want to address some crucial questions regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These questions shed light on the ideological strategies employed by Putin to legitimise the invasion, the impact it has had on social infrastructure and the lives of workers, as well as the broader consequences for individuals in Russia, particularly women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and migrants.

We've witnessed extensive efforts through state-owned media channels to justify this invasion. One of the early tactics employed was framing it as a repetition of World War II. Despite Putin's general anti-communist stance, the government tried to leverage the sentiment of nostalgia, portraying Russia as the heir to a victorious past and framing the invasion as a liberation from the Nazis.

This notion of heritage and liberation was not new and was forced throughout state owned-media long before the current stage of war commenced.

The state implemented unifying practices by adopting grassroots ideas from other movements, such as creating a material symbol for commemorating the end of WWII

such as the use of St. George's ribbon similar to the red poppers in UK, or by co-opting Russian grassroots movements like the Immortal Regiment. The celebratory slogan often shifted from "Never again" to "We can do it again."

During the initial months of the invasion, the propaganda machine worked to draw parallels between the current Ukrainian government and Nazi Germany. On May 9, 2022, Vladimir Putin utilised Victory Day festivities and military parades to further bolster this cause, emphasising that Russian troops were fighting for their homeland, its future, and the preservation of the lessons

learned from World War II. However, it is important to recognize that the current stage of this war is deeply rooted in the persistent mentality of conquest that spans centuries.

While some social changes occurred after the 1917 revolution, the core issues of imperialism, chauvinism, and the desire for territorial expansion were never truly dismantled. From Stalin's declaration in 1945 naming the Russian nation as the most prominent within the Soviet Union to Putin's classification of the people of Russian ethnicity as the state-forming nation in 2018, the sentiment of Russian's superiority has consistently been utilised.

This sentiment gave rise to the concept of the so-called "Russian world," developed in Moscow in the early 1990s, which assumes a kinship between ethnic Russians in neighboring countries and Russia itself. This imperial construct evolved into a desire to assign Russia a special role in reshaping the world and defending so-called "traditional" values, which are often anti-Western in nature. Putin and his regime present Russia as a liberator, accusing the West of perpetuating colonial policies and maintaining a neo-colonial system. Simultaneously, those who advocate for the decolonization of Russia are prosecuted, labelled as extremists or separatists.

Cultural, religious, and linguistic belonging to the "Russian world" is used as justification for colonial conquest. The suppression of national liberation movements and liberation movements in all regions has been marked by violent means, particularly evident in regions like Chechnya in the 1990s. Autonomous regions such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Kalmykia, Yakutiya (Saha) have also faced persecution and restrictions on their rights, other regions saw deprivation of the subjectivity of peoples in the republics (for example, Pomortsy and Erzya).

These regions have been reduced to serving as raw material bases for the capital, forced to send their natural resources to the metropolis.

Non-ethnic Russians or people who do not look like ethnic Russians are subjected to daily violence and discrimination (insults, violence, unwillingness to rent an apartment or take a job). For their safety, people are forced to hide their ethnicity, change their first or last name, and force themselves to speak Russian without a regional accent.

The wars in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, and the attempted conquest of Ukraine all stem from the underlying principles of dictatorship, colonialism, and territorial expansion. This underlying colonial mentality can be seen in the struggles faced by Crimean Tatars, who have endured oppression and displacement since the Russian conquest of Crimea in 1773. The apogee of their suffering came in the form of a full deportation in 1944, and these injustices persist to this day under Russian occupation.

Many individuals are unjustly detained by Russian authorities simply for going about their daily lives. This colonial mindset is also reflected in the use of the St. George ribbon, which has little to do with World War II and more to do with the awards for the conquest of Crimea in Tsarist Russia. Its adoption as a militaristic symbol during the invasion of Ukraine further exemplifies this ideology.

The economic situation in the regions has been further exacerbated by the full-scale militarization and worsening economic situation.

Increased production related to the military, coupled with the introduction of laws allowing overtime work and prohibiting the refusal of government contracts, combined with sanctions and worsening economic situation have resulted in reduced jobs, lower wages, and the dismissal of migrant workers.

This has led to a significant rise in appeals regarding dismissals, non-payment of wages, and the reduction of migrant workers, as reported by the Migrant Trade Union. Moreover, the persecution of trade union leaders, independent activists, human rights advocates, and lawyers has significantly curtailed the avenues available for working people to protect their rights.

The recent attacks on feminist movements, the assault on LGBTQ rights, and the discussion of the ban on transgender care have only intensified the patriarchal offensive against women and LGBTQI+ individuals.

A particularly alarming development occurred on December 5 last year when a law banning “LGBT-propaganda” was signed, effectively suppressing the visibility and rights of the queer community. The already vulnerable has been further eroded, with discussion on preventing gender marker changes and medical transition. The repercussions of these policies will likely result in a catastrophic deterioration in the quality of life for trans people,

pushing them into the shadows, reinforcing institutional and social transphobia, and increasing the number of hate crimes.

Considering all the aforementioned challenges, it becomes evident that it is crucial to fight against the oppression and the military machine of Russia and stand in solidarity with the struggles of the Ukrainian people, decolonial activist and LGBTQI+ individuals, feminists, indigenous communities, and all those who resist this regime and its full-scale invasion.

It is crucial that we address the underlying basis of imperialism, colonialism, and patriarchy rather than focusing solely on the individuals who currently embody these ideas. It is important to make room for non-ethnic Russians from colonised people to share their experience. Our collective efforts are needed to create a better future, free from oppression and injustice.

I'm supposed to speak from the geographical perspective of Slovenia, that is, as you know, the final part of the European Union and the Eurozone. I must go back to the 2008 financial crisis for two reasons. First, the crisis negatively affected the Slovenian economy. But even more so, the EU management of the crisis, and namely the EU institutions, imposed on the Slovenian government three things: 1) the bail-out of banks nine times bigger than the one calculated by IMF standards; 2) the selling of strategic companies and banks; 3) the constitutional change that took away the direct power of people to alter politics by referendum.

These measures buried dreams about the social market, economy, and political independence. European institutions took over the power.

This explains why Slovenian political elites blindly follow EU and NATO, notwithstanding the presence of illiberal political parties such as Orbán. This context is important also because the 2008 crisis showed that capitalism came to a deadlock. It became clear that we face a choice, a choice between socialism and barbarism. The choice is either to regulate financial institutions, resolve the problem of debt slavery, of public debt, restrain the exploitation of labor, and re-establish the universal public services, or capitalism resorting to violence (authoritarianism) in order to return to business as usual.

Corona crisis and the Russian Ukraine border provided an answer to this dilemma. They helped to pave the way for the politics of repression. This explains why political military media propaganda is prone to use the Russian-Ukrainian war to a conflict between the aggressor and the defender. This propaganda has no limit in the falsification of facts and demonisation of the enemy (Putin, Russia, and so on) and also of

all those who speak for peace and demand to stop sending arms to Ukraine and escalate the conflict. Although those who signed the petition on unprovoked war are Nobel Prize laureates, this is not an unprovoked war. There are several conflicts at stake simultaneously: the rebellion of the Russian-speaking population in East Ukraine and, consequently, a civil war since 2014; there is a proxy war between the West and NATO on the one hand and the Russian Federation and China on the other; and there is also a class war.

With the support of Western allies, the Ukraine government took advantage of the war to adopt anti-labor laws: 70% of the working population now in Ukraine has no protection of labor law. Zelensky also tried to confiscate trade union e-mobility assets. I don't know whether he succeeded or not. Ukraine is privatizing more than 400 state companies, including their nuclear power plants. And the Ukraine also tried to implement tax reforms, 10% corporate tax, which will make Ukraine a tax heaven state. And thirdly, Ukraine is going to reduce the social cash benefits during the war in a time of extreme hardship for many.

That's why Ukrainians are fighting. Western allies are looting the country. And carrying out a social experiment like children. It was mentioned before. It aims to establish an ultra-liberal state where deprivation of social rights and the capital friendly regime can be enforced by repression, also by the means of militias of dubious ideological backgrounds.

I claim the different levels of conflict which I mentioned, civil war, aggression of the Russian Federation over Ukraine, proxy war and class war must be thought to in their entanglements. Many believe they must be kept separate. For instance, according to the socialist movement from Ukraine, Russians must be defeated first, and then comes the turn to Zelenskiy's neoliberal government. Yet, soon, there will be nothing to fight for, if we adopt this strategy.

The war creates the conditions for the dispossession of social rights and primitive accumulation. Land grabbing by foreign multinationals, for instance. The situation is a creative destruction for capital.

Demands for peace have thus never been so tightly connected with labor struggles in Ukraine, Slovenia, and elsewhere. The well-being of labouring population depends on the strength of anti-war movements.

At the Edge of Europe. The Balkans amidst Eastern Connections and European marketisation

TIJANA OKIĆ (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA)

The first thing I would like to say is that I can express my regret—coming from Bosnia—that during the last thirty years—and this is obviously prolonged and dates even back from former Yugoslavia—that our connections towards the East have been cut and that we—meaning people from former Soviet Republics and people from Yugoslavia—have exchanged so little of our experiences. I think this is a regrettable historical situation given that we share similar histories.

What I don't want to talk about or what I don't want to focus on is war. Now, what I want to talk about and what I'm interested in is the problems that we face regionally, as people who are interested in building or constructing the left.

The problems that we face in the Balkans are multiple. In the first place, the main or the most important problem is the way ideological representations are set in our societies. And I do want to remind everybody that we are societies without sovereignty, like most of countries in the European Union these days are, given that most of the countries don't have any or have very little monetary sovereignty, which I think is quite important.

Now, what's relevant is obviously when you have war happening and when you have nationalist ideologies appearing, that everything is presented through the national or nationalist ideology. Things that happen in the background are usually put aside and we don't see or we don't understand them, or we only come to understand them later. And that is namely everything that happened in the former Yugoslavia during the war and just after the war, namely the privatizations, the cessation of our sovereignty, the transposition of our sovereignty to the European Central Bank, which happened in Croatia, in Bosnia, in Serbia, in Slovenia.

So that's the first problem: countries that don't have sovereignty.

And let me remind you that on their way to the accession to the European Union, Macedonia was forced against the will of its people to change its name. So, the country was forced to change its name. We had the situation of Bosnia and Kosovo, which are de facto protectorates of the international community and are countries without sovereignty whatsoever.

Within Bosnia, we have a very divided society, three nationalisms and parts of the political establishment that is part of the people who run the country, who have very particular class interests. Part of the country supports the NATO, part of the country supports Putin, that is Russia. So, we have a very divided public opinion.

Second thing is the question of the European Union, which is very difficult to even debate precisely because of the way it is presented. Now, for you who are coming from the countries of the European Union, most of you understand that European Union is a union which more or less generates austerity. And that's the only task of the European Union. European Union equals austerity. In Bosnia to even propose such an idea for the most part of the public opinion is something that appears as abomination, because

you cannot criticize the European Union since this is the very end that we are supposed to reach. And once we reach this, we will become democratic, mature and what not.

So, the very idea that you could or should criticize the European Union is beyond the public, beyond the public debate. Apart from obviously, again, having the problem that part of the country supports the accession to the European Union, part of the country does not. And this is also very important because it also relates to the ideological problems.

I do want to remind everybody that up until six or seven, eight years ago, nine maximum, even the Serbian part of the country, that is Republika Srpska, a majority of the population there, according to some research that was done, people were for the European Union. This has now changed. So, it just tells you the way the ideology works and functions.

Why am I interested in these things? Because what I'm interested in is the obvious crisis of militancy in the Balkans. Now, it's very difficult to organize the left in a moment when the main political task is presented, that is the accession state to the European Union,

when this is exactly the same thing which disables the organization on the left. The other thing that is related to the process of accession to the European Union and NATO is not just giving up sovereignty, territorial sovereignty, monetary sovereignty and so on and so forth, but it is precisely accepting the ideology that comes in.

What is this ideology? It is the ideology of historical revisionism. That is the reduction of communism to fascism. It is the equalization of communism.

I do want to say that obviously not everything in former Yugoslavia was perfect. The society had its problems, had its divisions. Obviously, the disintegration of Yugoslavia is very much a product of these internal contradictions, but nonetheless what I do want to stress is that there is a positive legacy that nobody talks about, and that is basically in terms of the Bosnian society, de facto, a transition from basically more or less feudal relations to a society which was building nuclear reactors. So, in one or two generations going to school, for example, Hegel and the great works of European literature and philosophy were translated. This is the experience of what we call "socialist modernisation." This experience has been completely obliterated. Nobody talks about it. The thing which in effect poses the problem for the organization of the left is presented as the solution.

Finally, the most important thing, which we are now facing and I'm talking about the Balkans in general. It's not just the ideology of historical revisionism, which works in different ways and in different subways, as it were.

But it is also the idea that Europe can solve its own energetic problem and its own crisis of energy via, in fact, polluting the Balkans.

And that is the green transition for Europe. And the Balkans gets a difficult end in this story. And we know, for example, a couple of years ago a story came out that all of the medical waste was exported from Britain to, say, Macedonia. So that's the way Europe understands the function of the Balkans and what the role of the Balkans should be, green transition for Europe and pollution and extraction from all of our resources.

What came first, the Recovery and Resilience Plan or the Sanctions?

OIDV POP AND VALENTIN CERNAT (ALTERNATOR—ROMANIA)

VALENTIN. I will start just thanking you for all these important perspectives from which we address the current wars. And I think it's really important to meet and work out a situation in the process that simply overcomes the capitalistic wars and find mechanics that put people in the first place, the human species, and the species in a non-conflictual relation with nature. I found our struggle as being dialectical one and nondestructive. It's a struggle for life and for love, and we hope that their democracy will become our democracy.

In this analysis we made we look at the current war in Ukraine rather from economic perspectives, then ideological or identitarian standpoints. So, first of all, we kindly invite you to read whenever you find time the article we published on the [Climate Classic Conflict Journal](#). In this article, we have a look on an economic and political triangle, that is: 1) the European Recovery and Resilience Funds (ERRFs); 2) the economic sanctions imposed on Russia; 3) inflation.

First, the ERFs were meant to support the recovery of the European countries in the European Union after the pandemic. There were grants and loans that were aimed—as quoting from their official official discourse—to restore our nature to ensure clean energy and transportation for advancing new technology digitalization. And it was basically an amount, a huge amount of money pumped into the nation systems to the aging body of Europe's technologies.

So, until 2026, all this money will need to be spent in the name of green energy. Romania obtained a positive feedback from the European Union in the autumn 2021, that is, a couple of months before the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine. Of course, when the war started, they imposed sanctions. You might know about them pretty well. They were somehow also narrowing the market that had been shaped by the pandemic. So, what happened?

Within the pandemic, we had a redistribution of the logistic system and a complete redistribution of the resources, and all that means. While the sanctions had a very clear target. As we remember, it was this device to turn the ruble into rubble. Well, not that it didn't happen, but it also had great consequences upon us all. So, the sanctions, as we remember them, they were aimed to reshape and reshuffle the energy sector. The gas and oil shortages also influence the imports of fertilizers, cereals, minerals, iron, and so on and so forth.

Within all this, we had already, after the pandemic, an inflation. We all know, it was a small rise of inflation due to the very poor management of the of the capitalist countries. What we saw with the sanctions, it was a rampant rise of this percentage. Basically, the sanctions made us look at the previous economic situation from another perspective. That is, before the sanctions, we could imagine somehow that the European Resilience Funds and even the inflation from the pandemic would have been manageable in a way or would have had decent outcomes. However, the sanctions were the point in which the involvement in the war became clear and direct.

Sanctions were a tool of war, that were imposed by some actors that had an interest. And we all know that the capitalist form of production is only governed by the profit motive. So, with the sanctions, we saw the market getting narrower, and also at the same time favorable for, for instance, the US. And it was a great effort that they put in this.

Looking from the perspective of the sanctions to the European ERRFs, we see that their directions somehow changed or otherwise got sharpened in a way or another. When we say this, we think about how the ERRFs after the pandemic basically turned into a mechanism of production on infrastructure.

What kind of infrastructure? And for whom? The military infrastructure and for the neoliberal states, not for the people. And we see that a lot of a lot of spending in Romania are going towards the Black Sea area.

We see highways or railway infrastructure that was once state ruled, or state owned. We see military logistics just becoming the core of this great union of European resilience funds and sanctions. What about inflation? Well, inflation was very poorly managed by the European states, Western states. It still has a great cost on the

people. If all the money spent, the European money and the sanctions were a good opportunity for the small businesses and the neoliberal state. Well, the inflation shows the suffering of the people. And it's the real tool from which we can measure how far the exploitation and I would say also the elimination of the non-productive and non-profitable people for societies, this whole body that cannot be easily assembled in a profit production is just simply put away. And we saw this in different um with different occasion.

OVID. There is a general consensus that has been created by the national media on the question of war. So, in fact, on the political and societal level, you don't have really any other voices than for Ukraine and pro-NATO voice. So, there is no analysis or any kind of organization that is able to articulate the public discourse a bit more, you know, more analytical and more balanced. In this context, we were thinking in preparation of this discussion, what are the social movements that we can see in the society they can take place in the context of war.

There are some strikes that have been taking place in the last year and which are gathering now, and are becoming bigger and bigger. At the moment, while we are speaking, there is a general strike going on organized by the education system. Teachers, school and high school teachers organize the general strike for four days already or for longer than one week. And it's unparalleled in the post-socialist history of Romania. This is one thing going on. And then for instance, I'm just going to list a bit the strikes that took place in the last months. So, there is the general strike scheduled for the 15th of June by the workers in the health system. There was last year a strike organised by the workers working in the public transport in Bucharest. Of course, also in the transportation system like workers at the Wizz Air flying company and all of that. In the chemical sector last year, in autumn, there was a big strike in the western part of the country, rather, at the border to Hungary.

All these strikes are going on in the context of war and inflation, and the social demands are rather limited to the specificities of the workplace. For instance, the unions are asking for raising the wages and better working conditions and also a better funding for education, for health system, and so on and so forth.

But at the moment there is no political demand that gathers all these and through which demands are under a common umbrella.

And another point that we wanted to address very shortly is the militarization. Starting with last year's NATO summit in Madrid, and the pressure by the United States to increase the spending in national budgets in each European country, Romania, as in many other Eastern European countries like Poland, decided doubling the military expenditures. Just to give you some numbers, the Romanian military are going to purchase weapons, tanks, the F-35, the airplane, and the American jets in value for €10 billion. This is a program designed for the next three or four years.

And also, as you might know, maybe from Poland, the logistic militarization, in the sense that that the US Army is organizing military bases in Poland. The same thing is happening in Romania. So, at the southeastern border at the Black Sea, they are now putting up the so-called forward operating base, as it's called in the American military system. The US Army is going to send 4000 American stationary soldiers. To this outpost in the southeast of the country. And the same you can see – and it is even more visible – the trend of militarization in Poland. And I suppose also in other Eastern European countries.

This is a clear example on which the military expenditure is just put in place and overlap with the infrastructure development, which is not named as being military, but it's part of it.

So, when thinking about all of this, again, the name that we gave for the article, from the small anecdote, you know, what came first, the chicken or the egg. And we translated it into “What came first: The recover and the resilience plan or the sanctions?” We should create this this place in which we don't need even to respond to that, but we need to take a step back and to look at the military neoliberal capitalist mechanism that is in place and it's acting against people. And of course, with the cost of people. And nevertheless, it would be good to see and to talk about how to give a transformative push to the protests we have here, not to have only guilt protests, and guilt revindications, the political revindications, not to solve the whole situation only by increasing the salaries of the teachers. Because this doesn't solve the situation. So, yeah, this is the space in which we can talk and think further on how to act upon this struggle. And how to organize around it.



BREAKING THE BARRIER: CONFRONTING THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION

TRANSNATIONAL
MEETING IN
BOLOGNA (ITALY)
27-28-29 OCTOBER



PROGRAM OUTLINE

Friday, Oct. 27th

17:00-18:00: Welcome

18:00-20:00: Opening event
War, right-wing surge, racism,
exploitation: where do we stand?

18:00-20:00: Session 3

Permanent Assembly Against the
War: Fighting the normalization of
war, for a transnational politics of
peace

Saturday, Oct. 28th

10:00-13:00: Session 1

Group 1: Our ecological transition.
Finding ways to fight for the
climate as a class

Group 2: The reproduction of our
lives: subverting patriarchal, racist
and neoliberal domination

Sunday Oct. 29th

10:00-13:00 Final Plenary
A political infrastructure for
transnational politics

14:30-17:30: Session 2

The transnational wager:
constructing new potentials for
organizing

Register here!

