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# UKRAINE AMIDST THE WAR: MAIN IMPLICATIONS

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores the challenges that Ukraine faces during the Russian invasion, focusing on the political and economic implications of the war. Apart from the humanitarian crisis, the war has produced political, economic, and social tribulations, which must be addressed. The more stubborn the Ukrainian resistance becomes, the more likely Russia will implement more aggressive tactics. Ukraine has already acknowledged its inability to join the transatlantic alliance, and recent peace talks with Russia have become more realistic and plausible for its future. Early planning of post-war recovery gained significance against this backdrop, as it proved to be successful when led by 'indigenous drivers'. While this approach placed local actors, institutions, and resources at its center, it also recognized the crucial role of external aid. This paper argues that the war is a 'resilience test' for European solidarity and the EU's crisis management competency. This paper inquires into the challenges of Ukraine's post-war recovery and concludes that national consolidation, along with Western solidarity, is critical to addressing the 'Russian problem' of Ukraine.*

**Keywords:** *Ukraine; Russia; War; European Union; Post-War Recovery*

## INTRODUCTION

The war in Ukraine is unfolding on different battlefields. It resulted in a human toll and substantially damaged the Ukrainian economy, which is still yet to recover from the hardships caused by the pandemic. Its infrastructure, particularly its energy sector, has been completely or partially devastated. It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the wartime economy. The war also resulted in the fastest-growing refugee crisis, with more than 2 million Ukrainians fleeing their country within two weeks. As a result, the difficulties caused by the war are not confined to the fighting countries alone. The conflict is a major blow to the global economy due to the influx of refugees and the heavy European dependence on Russian gas. It can also be considered a 'resilience test' for European solidarity.

In the light of the evolving events, early planning of post-war politics and recovery is acquiring particular importance. Post-war politics often accentuate and perpetuate divisions rather than act as an institutional conflict resolution form. Armed conflict such as this, historically speaking, always changes power dynamics and allows certain stakeholders to rise to prominence and consolidate gains at the expense of others. At the same time, the post-war contexts present opportunities for positive reforms if stakeholders are willing to think critically about the causes

of conflict and address grievances on all sides (Eriksson and Khaleel2019, 2). This challenging task involves addressing different, often conflicting, seemingly conflicting interests.

This paper examines the social, economic, and other hardships Ukraine faces amid the war and outlines the possible ways out from the current political, social, and economic implications.

## ON THE CHALLENGES OF POST-WAR RECOVERY

Post-war countries must deal simultaneously with many challenges: preserving peace and security; reintegration of ex-combatants and returning refugees; restoration of essential infrastructure; reestablishment of private investors' confidence, etc. Beyond this, they must promote conditions that make the resumption of hostilities less likely, including by "generating employment opportunities, tackling horizontal inequalities and rent-seeking, as well as by re-establishing mechanisms to ensure the rule of law, such as transitional justice processes" (UNDP report 2008, 3).

Post-war reconstruction heavily burdens the countries themselves and the international community, facilitating and financing the transition to peace. Reconstruction involves a wide variety of international actors, ranging from the UN system to the international financial institutions (IFIs), the development organizations, bilateral and regional donors, and often a large number of non-governmental organizations (Del Castillo 2008, 1268).

Since the Second World War, the post-conflict recovery was largely led by the state or states in which the war had occurred, most often with funding from the USA or USSR. During the late 1970s and 1980s, reconstruction and recovery revolved around economic liberalization in Sudan, Egypt, Mozambique, Latin America, and elsewhere. These economic transformations were based on the premise that 'the surest foundation for peace, both within and between states, is market-democracy, a liberal democratic polity, and a market-oriented economy'. Post-conflict recovery activities in the post-cold war period became increasingly broad and deep, with disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants and various other aspects of security sector reform as core activities in post-conflict contexts. The major transformation in post-war recovery took place after 11 September 2001. This refers to the tendency to engage in post-conflict recovery during rather than strictly following conflicts (Barakat and Zyck 2008, 1069-1086).

According to Del Castillo and Phelps (2007), economic recovery should be a priority for war-torn countries, not only because this is essential to maintaining political and social stability but also because donors are unwilling to support economic reconstruction unless countries do their part to create an environment conducive to ensuring its sustainability. Amid political, social, and institutional vulnerabilities and substantial damage to human and physical infrastructure, this is a monumental task (Del Castillo and Phelps 2007). The economic recovery is believed to have more chances to succeed based on 'indigenous drivers'. The notion of 'indigenous drivers of the economic recovery' highlights the initiatives of local communities, individuals, households, and enterprises to stimulate post-war economic activity. It locates local efforts within their socio-historical context and views them as the most viable platform to build post-war recovery and external assistance. While this approach places local actors, institutions, and

resources at its center, it also recognizes the crucial role of external aid (UNDP report 2008, 48-105).

There is also a longstanding debate regarding the economic impact of external aid on growth. In several cases (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mozambique, Uganda, etc.), war-torn economies have become highly aid-dependent and thus provide an unsuitable model for economic reconstruction in the future. Inadequate economic policy frameworks and aid practices in Kosovo, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Iraq, and many other countries, have not only impeded the creation of jobs necessary to improve the wellbeing of the populations but have also failed to facilitate long-lasting peace (Del Castillo 2008, 1268). In their article 'Aid, Growth and Policies', Burnside and Dollar (2000) argue that although aid has no impact on growth, it enhances growth in good policy environments. Their definition of good policy rests on a policy index comprised of budget surplus, inflation, and trade openness. The authors show that the better the policy, the greater the impact of aid on growth, but more aid does not necessarily result in more growth. Therefore, the authors advocate prioritizing countries with good policies when allocating aid (Burnside and Dollar 2000, 847-868).

Meanwhile, reconstruction is not only about physical or economic rebuilding. It can never be fully separated from politics, and the looming choices will rarely be driven only by humanitarian or economic needs. Behind the rhetoric of benign rehabilitation lies the realpolitik of hegemonic interest (Jacoby 2007).

## THE EFFECTS OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION

The war in Ukraine began on 24 February after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his forces to enter Ukraine. It is unfolding across multiple levels. Russia has called its actions since 24 February a 'special military operation', has denied targeting civilians in Ukraine, and said it has no plans to occupy Ukraine, which was once part of the Soviet Union under Moscow's sway (Aljazeera 2022a). In the meantime, Between 24 February and 15 March, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recorded 1,900 civilian casualties – with 726 people killed, including 52 children - mostly caused by explosive weapons in populated areas (UN news 2022a). Three rounds of talks in Belarus have been followed by video calls between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators. Ihor Zhovkva, Zelensky's deputy chief of staff, said the talks between Russian and Ukrainian representatives have become "more constructive" (The Times of Israel 2022).

The war resulted in a human toll and significantly damaged Ukraine's economy, which is yet to recover from the hardships caused by the pandemic. Moreover, it originated at a horrible time for the world, as inflation was already rising. The President of the World Bank described the war in Ukraine as a 'catastrophe' for the world, stressing the fact that the economic impact of the war stretches beyond Ukraine's borders, and the rises in global energy prices "hit the poor the most, as does inflation" (BBC 2022a).

As to the Statement of IMF (2022) on the economic impact of war in Ukraine, "Energy and commodity prices - including wheat and other grains - have surged, adding to inflationary pressures from supply chain disruptions and the rebound from the Covid-19 pandemic (...) Seaports and airports are closed and have been damaged, many roads and bridges have been

damaged or destroyed" (IMF 2022a). It is held that the Ukrainian economy could shrink by more than a third this year if the war with Russia continues (BBC 2022b).

While it is difficult to assess the precise financial needs at this stage, it is clear that Ukraine will face high reconstruction costs. UNDP warned that if the conflict drags on - and if more support to the country is not forthcoming quickly - it could wreck almost two decades of economic progress (UN News 2022b). An estimated \$10 billion in damage to transportation infrastructure has only been recorded since the war started. Infrastructure Minister Oleksander Kubrakov said that "most damaged structures will be repaired in a year, and the most difficult ones - in two years" (Reuters 2022a). According to Kubrakov, in restoring infrastructure, Ukraine will rely on the help of the world: "Of course, this tragedy is not ours, this war is not ours - Ukraine protects the interests of the entire civilized world, we will also restore the country not alone" (Ukrinform 2022).

The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has already approved a disbursement of US\$1.4 billion under the Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI) to help meet urgent financing needs and mitigate the economic impact of the war (IMF 2022b). The head of the NBU, Kyrylo Shevchenko said that the territories of more than ten regions and the City of Kyiv, which accounted for more than half of the country's GDP, are currently enduring hostilities and massive shelling. Shevchenko pointed out that the impact of the war across sectors is uneven: the service sector suffered the most, while some sectors reoriented production under martial law to the production of products for the needs of the country's defense (food and textile industries, engineering, production of building materials) (Interfax Ukraine 2022). This can somehow reduce the impact of the war on the economy.

Countries with very close economic ties with Ukraine and Russia are at particular risk of scarcity and supply disruptions and are most affected by the increasing inflows of refugees (IMF 2022a). The war in Ukraine has resulted in a large-scale refugee movement. With hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians fleeing the country or joining the combat against Russia, it is extremely difficult to keep the economy going. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, described this emergency as the "fastest-growing refugee crisis" in Europe since World War II (UNHCR 2022). As of March 18, more than three million were estimated to have fled to neighboring countries. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees predicted that four million people could flee the country in the coming weeks (UNHCR Operational Data Portal 2022). Moreover, the EU estimates that there may eventually be seven million refugees (France 24 2022a). Regardless of the exact number, it is now clear that Europe will face an unprecedented challenge regarding refugees.

Most Ukrainians leave their country to flee to Poland, Moldova, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary, which have opened their borders to refugees. However, reports of pushbacks and racial discrimination have also been recorded (The Guardian 2022a). Many non-Ukrainians of color, including Africans, Afghans, and Yemenis, have reported facing discrimination while waiting in line at the border and trying to access critical resources. While official statistics on the non-Ukrainian refugees facing such issues have not been compiled yet, many worrying reports have led to criticism from United Nations diplomats and refugee officials (Vox 2022).

Overall, the reaction from other European countries to the refugee crisis has been prompt and unified. To put that in context, it took six months for one million refugees to leave

Syria in 2013, nearly two years after that country's civil war began. The two wars occurred at different times and on different continents, but unlike the Syrians fleeing conflict, Ukrainians are finding a much warmer welcome in Europe (CNN2022). Moreover, on March 3, the European Union agreed on a temporary protection plan that allows Ukrainian refugees to stay in its Member States for three years legally. The plan, called the 'Temporary Protection Directive', was designed in the aftermath of the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s to deal with large numbers of displaced persons arriving in the EU. However, it was never used (Council of the EU 2022). The Directive means that refugees from Ukraine would be offered up to three years' temporary protection in EU countries without applying for asylum, with rights to a residence permit and access to education, housing, and the labor market. The decision to use the Directive was unprecedented for the EU, and it resulted in policy shifts for many of its members. The UNHCR welcomed efforts across Europe to deal with the refugee crisis and called for its preservation throughout the coming months and, potentially, years as the violence escalates inside Ukraine (The Conversation 2022).

Beyond this, Russia's military operations have also demonstrated the vulnerability of the country's energy system and the need for resilient energy infrastructure. After disconnecting from the Belarusian and Russian electricity systems, the war made Ukraine appear as an energy island. The country was left with its electricity. On the first day of the war, Moscow's troops took over the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, the world's worst nuclear accident site. A little more than a week later, Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's biggest, was also attacked and overrun by the Russian army (Aljazeera 2022b). The Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) expressed 'grave concern' about the security of Ukraine's nuclear sites, warning that the fundamental principles of safely operating such facilities had been violated at the two captured sites. In its statement of 6 March, the Director-General said he had been informed by Ukrainian authorities that, although regular staff continues to operate the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant, any action of plant management requires prior approval by the Russian commander of the Russian forces that took control of the site (UN news 2022c). As the associate director for nuclear innovation at the Breakthrough Institute, Adam Stein argues, "Attacking the energy system is a particularly effective war tactic, producing widespread damage through strikes on relatively small targets" (Temple 2022). The energy sector plays a pivotal role in the existence and survival of Ukrainians. Cutting off electricity can shut down the subways, buses, and trains that citizens use to flee; flick off the lights in bomb shelters and hospitals, and spoil food and medicine. It also threatens to cut off communications, disrupt government planning, impair military defenses, and undermine morale (Temple 2022).

## INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

In particular, Ukraine has been increasingly frustrated with a lack of so-called Western action during the first days of the war. The Ukrainian President has repeatedly stated that the West must do more to help his country (The Guardian 2022b). Moreover, he has accused his allies of sharing responsibility for casualties: "While Russians are to blame for the killings, responsibility is shared by those who for 13 days in their Western offices haven't been able to

approve an obviously necessary decision, who didn't save our cities from these bombs and missiles - although they can" (Aljazeera 2022a).

The United States and its Western allies have already made it clear that NATO will not back up Ukraine militarily (Aljazeera 2022c). The United States and NATO have said that implementing a no-fly zone over the country could put the alliance into a direct confrontation with Russia and lead to a full-fledged war. In general, the international strategy for deterring Russia from launching another invasion of Ukraine is to make such an intervention more costly for the Russians. After rejecting Ukraine's calls for a no-fly zone, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said more military support and more sanctions and increased humanitarian aid for Ukrainians focused on his talks at the NATO and EU headquarters (France 24 2022b).

Overall, donor countries and multilateral organizations have mobilized, extending large-scale economic assistance to Ukraine. On 1 March, the United Nations and humanitarian partners launched coordinated emergency appeals for a combined US\$1.7 billion to urgently deliver humanitarian support to people in Ukraine and refugees in neighboring countries (UN in Western Europe 2022). The World Bank Group is preparing a \$3 billion package of support for Ukraine in the coming months and additional support to neighboring countries receiving Ukrainian refugees (The World Bank Press Release 2022). The International Monetary Fund is exploring options to increase financial support to Ukraine (IMF 2022b). The Biden administration announced that it would ask Congress for \$10 billion in security, economic, and humanitarian aid for Ukraine and its neighbors. The United States is also providing over \$186 million in additional humanitarian assistance to support internally displaced persons and the more than three million refugees affected by the war in Ukraine (US Department of State 2022).

In addition to this, President Zelensky announced that special funds (in particular, the Fund for the Restoration of Destroyed Property and Infrastructure, the Fund for Economic Recovery and Transformation, the Public Debt Service and Repayment Fund, and the Small and Medium Business Support Fund) are also being formed in Ukraine, with the major task to rebuild the country after the destruction (President of Ukraine official website 2022).

To somehow overcome the energy crisis, on February 27, Ukraine applied for an emergency connection to the European energy grid - ENTSO-E (2022). Following the request by Ukrenergo and Moldova for emergency synchronization, the TSOs of Continental Europe agreed to start on March 16, 2022, the trial synchronization of the Continental European Power System with the power systems of Ukraine and Moldova (ENTSO-E official website 2022).

Another serious challenge to address is the refugee crisis, which is believed to become the fastest-growing one since World War II. Medium and long-term support will be needed to balance the needs of both refugees and host countries with financial and policy support, thereby reducing refugees' vulnerability and assisting the host countries (The Conversation 2022). There are already warnings from the refugee host governments that the aggression could spill into their countries. Poland, which hosted the largest number of refugees (over 1.7m Ukrainians), is holding its breath. It feels vulnerable on two fronts as the number of refugees coming into the country swells, and a military base near its border with Ukraine was attacked (BBC 2022c). Thus, it needs strong security guarantees to continue hosting the vast flow of Ukrainians.

The hopes of the Ukrainians for an immediate reconstruction are closely related to the EU membership. Overall, since 2014, the EU and financial Institutions (European Investment Bank

and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) have allocated over €17 billion in grants and loans to help Ukraine stabilize its economy, carry out comprehensive reforms, to improve the lives of its citizens, as well as to mitigate the consequences of the conflict in the country's eastern regions. Four days into the war, on February 28, President Zelensky addressed the European Parliament to request the implementation of a fast-track procedure to join the European Union. Later that day, he officially signed Ukraine's application for membership. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, endorsed Ukraine's bid, stating, "They belong to us. They are one of us, and we want them in" (Euronews 2022). An overwhelming majority of MEPs also backed the idea with a non-binding resolution (2022), demanding Ukraine receive candidate status in line with the EU treaties and a "merit-based approach" (Euronews 2022).

Regardless of the high-level support from the European side, it is largely characterized by a symbolic nature. "Nobody entered the European Union overnight", Croatia Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said at the European leaders' summit in Versailles (Aljazeera 2022d). Admittedly, joining the EU is a long and complex process, requiring the unanimous agreement of all 27 Member States. In normal circumstances, any European country applying for EU membership must meet the EU Copenhagen criteria, which require a certain level of stability of state institutions, a functioning market system, and an ability to take on the obligations of membership. In this regard, formal membership in the EU seems doubtful.

First, the country has a fairly large population, and its GDP per capita is substantially below the average EU member. Furthermore, Ukraine's political conditions are even more chaotic due to its compromised territorial integrity and geopolitical volatility derived from its condition as a perpetual battleground, strong internal rivalries, and Russian troops' presence. In addition, Ukraine's score on the corruption perception index is below Thailand, El Salvador, and Egypt. Finally, Ukraine's regime still cannot be classified as a full-fledged democracy, a nominal obstacle to join the EU (Geopolitical Monitor 2022).

The perspective of hasty membership seems rather unrealistic when considering the EU's internal problems. In addition, the EU itself suffers a lot from the ongoing war. The war in Ukraine is the third asymmetric shock, as economists call it, that the Union faced in the last two decades after the 2008 financial and economic crisis and the following Eurozone crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. The war is a real 'burden' for neighboring countries due to the refugees' influx and heavy dependence on Russian gas (EEAS 2022). Even granting Ukraine with candidate-status seems to be too ambitious amidst the war, with a potential to deepen the economic and energy crisis on the continent.

In the meantime, EU Member States' increase in defense spending shows that the EU is emerging as a security actor on the geopolitical chessboard. With NATO membership not currently realistic, Europe identifies certain alternatives to provide Ukraine with security guarantees. The 'European Peace Facility', established in March 2021, is an off-budget instrument designed to fill financial gaps in the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy and support partner countries bilaterally in military and defense matters. The instrument will provide €500 million to equip Ukraine with arms, including lethal weapons.

This is a radical paradigm shift in the EU's foreign policy. The title 'Peace Facility' might appear misleading, as the instrument is used for the first time to fund lethal weapons and to

ship them into a war zone. It results from the ambitious EU's Global Strategy from 2016 and the preceding policy discourse between the EU and its Member States on making the EU a global player rather than only being a global payer (ECDPM commentary 2022).

Currently, Russia insists on a neutral status for Ukraine with its limited army, similar to Austria, as a compromise in peace talks with Kyiv (Reuters 2022b). Putin had spoken in February about neutrality and security guarantees for Ukraine without NATO enlargement as one possible variant. However, the Ukrainian presidency said it rejected proposals of neutrality models based on Austria or Sweden. Ukraine "is now in a direct state of war with Russia. As a result, the model can only be 'Ukrainian' and only on legally verified security guarantees", its top negotiator Mikhailo Podolyak said in comments published by Zelensky's office (Aljazeera 2022e). In the meantime, there are some indications of a possible diplomatic path constructed on the idea of neutrality. Zelensky told European leaders gathered in London on March 15 that he realizes NATO has no intention of accepting Ukraine (The Times of Israel 2022). At the same time, the Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Thursday: "The real issue for Ukraine is hard security guarantees, similar to the ones that members of NATO have" (Financial Times 2022). The Russian side announced that it is ready to provide security guarantees: "We want Ukraine to stay neutral(...) We are ready to talk about security guarantees for the Ukrainian state and security guarantees for the European state, and of course, for the security of Russia. Judging from President Zelensky's statements, he is starting to understand this approach; it makes us cautiously optimistic" (Financial Times 2022), said Sergei Lavrov, Russian foreign minister. Russia's vision of neutrality for Ukraine will mean a Moscow-friendly government in Kyiv that defers the Kremlin in domestic and foreign policies.

## CONCLUSION

Admittedly, the war in Ukraine has dramatically affected the lives of thousands of people and produced numerous social, economic, and other hardships that will take years to recover. The longer and more stubborn the Ukrainian resistance is, the more likely it is to use more aggressive tactics by Russia. The physical and human infrastructure has already been hit very hard, and the devastation is far from over. Zelensky has already acknowledged that Ukraine has no perspective on becoming a NATO member, and the fourth round of peace talks with Russia appears to be more plausible. Meanwhile, Ukraine is still seeking security guarantees within the 'neutral status' option proposed by the Kremlin as a compromise.

The war presents a real economic catastrophe for Ukraine, which is expected to shrink by more than a third this year if it continues. Not only does the Ukrainian economy, but the entire global economy feels the effects of slower growth and increasing inflation. In addition to the alarming economic decline, the war has also demonstrated the vulnerability of Ukraine's infrastructure, in the particular energy sector, which is decisive for the living and survival of Ukrainians. Another challenge posed stems from a large-scale refugee crisis, which requires average and long-term support to balance the needs of both refugees and host countries.

Against this backdrop, early planning of post-war recovery is of crucial importance. The process should largely be based on 'indigenous drivers', involving local communities, individuals, households, and enterprises. At the same time, given the significant damage caused by the war,

substantial external support will also be required. This refers to financial assistance and the enhancement of Ukraine's internal resilience for resisting external challenges in the long run.

The unprecedented decisions of the West amid the war suggest that the major role in the reconstruction process will be attributed to the EU. The Western response is increasingly becoming prompter and more unified. This is particularly evident concerning the refugee crisis, where the West has demonstrated high-level coordination and unity. No more than ever, the West is determined to bolster European economic resilience, drastically reduce energy dependence on Russia, and strengthen the European defense system. How the West handles the Ukrainian issue in the coming period will be vital to the future of common European security and foreign policy.

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