

<https://npa31.org/spip.php?article7918>



Ukraine and Europe

# Against the Russian war of aggression, the urgency of a radically decolonial left

- Debate - 2022 - Ukraine -

Publication date: Thursday 22 December 2022

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**This contribution highlights the effects of this war in the opposite direction to what Putin was seeking, both in Ukraine - on the basis of popular mobilizations for dignity - but also in its Eurasian neighbourhood, as well as in NATO and the EU. It discusses interpretations of a NATO essentialized as hostile to Russia and of a reactive Russian war. While underlining the negative legacies to be overcome on the left on national questions in an internationalist project, the aim is to identify, from the issues raised by the war and the Ukrainian popular aspirations, axes of alterglobalist resistance in/against the EU.**

The invasion of Ukraine decided by Putin on 24 February has produced the opposite of all its objectives. The resistance to this aggression reveals what is happening to a Ukraine that is supposed to belong to “one Russian people” and to be marked since the crisis of 2013-2014 by a “Nazi coup” supported by the West and threatening genocide against the Russian-speaking population.

I share the criticism of this thesis by left-wing Ukrainian authors who are critically independent of all imperialist and state propaganda (including Zelensky's). [1] These criticisms do not, of course, imply neglecting the importance (in Ukraine as in Russia, in France and elsewhere in the world) of extreme right-wing forces, their ideological evolution and differentiation and their relationship to institutions and violence, their means. [2] The outcome of the war will also weigh on these factors. From the point of view of the totalitarian excesses of the state apparatus, Ukraine compares very favourably with the state of the Russian Federation and its control of the oligarchs against the “oligarchic pluralism” of Ukraine and its greater margins of freedom. [3]

## **A society mobilized for its dignity - in peace and in war**

It is precisely such margins, which do not exist in Russia, that have repeatedly allowed for the challenge of the autocrats in power at the ballot box and on the streets. This was the case with the “Orange Revolution” of 2004, which was catalysed by the rejection of corruption and electoral fraud and marked by popular hope in new, supposedly democratic parties that claimed to be “pro-European”. Disillusionment with these parties, themselves plagued by corruption, explains the victory of Yanukovich (said to be pro-Russian) in the 2010 elections in a policy that was intended to provide balance between Russia and the EU. But the process of checking the promises made against the test of power continued in the face of the practices of the new oligarchic president, his vertical decisions, the enrichment of his family and the violence of his repressive forces. In 2014, these were the deep sources of his discredit even in his own region - hence his flight to Russia. Thus, beyond the violent and confused episodes, certainly marked by both Western support and the harsh stewarding force of the extreme right protecting the demonstrators in 2014, the fall of Yanukovich (ratified by the parliament) was first and foremost due to a new popular “disengagement”, whatever its instrumentalization by various right wing forces.

The confusions of these uprisings resemble those of the Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Jackets) and so many other mass movements in confused political and social contexts. The limits of this “revolution” are also obvious: the oligarchic regime has by no means been removed. But the label “revolution” expresses the accumulation of experiences that give lasting and profound force to the periodic mobilizations of a society in search of social justice.

It was the mass uprising of 2014 that was called the “revolution of dignity”, evoking the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators who organized themselves to occupy Independence Square (Maidan) while expressing multiple

demands. It was also referred to less convincingly as the “Euro-Maidan” - which tended to misleadingly reduce the movement to a “pro-European” uprising. But it was assimilated, in Moscow and by part of the left, to a “colour revolution” (like 2004), reduced to being a pawn instrumentalized by the NATO powers. This approach (or rather ignorance) of the society can be found in the current war. Another part of the left chose to join Maïdan by fighting on several fronts. [4]

However, these popular aspirations and this critical autonomy of society from the institutional parties continued to manifest themselves, after the supposed “Nazi coup”, during the five-year term of the new president and oligarch Petro Poroshenko elected in 2014: this was shown by the lack of stabilization of the new power and its final fall in 2019. After the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the hybrid war in the Donbas (killing some 15,000 people), the country experienced government crises and financial scandals affecting the president. He took hardly any social measures to help the thousands of people fleeing the conflicts in Donbas and was unable to overcome the impasse in the Minsk Agreements. [5] The population’s autonomy of choice was again manifested, five years after the so-called Western-controlled “coup”, by the surprise election of a Jewish actor from outside the existing political parties whose mother tongue was Russian. It was a campaign promising a peaceful resolution of the Donbas conflict and a crackdown on corruption that secured him an unprecedented landslide majority across the country (far removed from the far-right themes that Poroshenko had partly taken up). [6]

The popular mobilization against the invasion and the mobilization of the Zelensky government at its head - also unforeseen by NATO forces - consolidated Zelensky’s popularity, across the political spectrum, throughout Ukraine. It was in practice a popular choice of Ukrainian sovereignty. This is especially true among the large mass of the country’s Russian-speaking eastern and southern population - supposedly saved from “Nazi genocide”. Russian forces are far from controlling the territory of the regions annexed after pseudo-referendums and are struggling to find mayors willing to run the cities.

Against the interpretations (and multiple quotes) according to which NATO pushes Ukraine to an endless war to bring down Russia, it is rather in the opposite direction of the pressures to temper the Ukrainian offensive that we witnessed in early November. It was the NATO staff that moderated Zelensky’s denunciations attributing to Russia the strikes that killed two people in Poland. In reality, if it is true that without the arms and the obvious logistical help provided to the Ukrainian army, it would have been in a weak position and would have been forced to surrender quickly, the strength of the resistance and the victories won are - beyond the weapons - due to the determination of a population resisting an aggression experienced for what it is - neo-colonial, imperial.

Which left called on the Vietnamese to negotiate - rather than to win?

Would the Left doubt the reality of resistance as a national liberation struggle if the “military operation» had been launched by France against “French Algeria”? The form taken by Russian colonization, and then Stalinist policy, weighs heavily. This is a fact that the feminist decolonial writer from Sri Lanka living in India Rohini Hensman points out:

While the colonies of the Western European imperialist powers were mainly overseas, the Mongol, East European and Ottoman empires colonized adjoining countries, so it was easy to make the mistake of blurring the distinction between empire and state. While no one would think of India as part of the British state, when Putin considers Ukraine to be part of the Russian state, he is not alone, and it is not the first time he has done so. [7]

But it also highlights, as Bernard Dréano does very clearly (also comparing Ukraine and Ireland) [8] disagreements

dividing Marxists (and Bolsheviks) in particular on national issues. [9]

Ignoring, obscuring or denigrating Ukraine as a decisive actor in both Putin's aims and the resistance to his aggression is at the root of a mistaken assimilation of the current war to an inter-imperialist world war - as was the First World War. Such a presentation obviously justifies the revival of the great slogans of pacifism and revolutionary defeatism of the time and the call to turn everywhere against an "enemy" that is "in one's own country". I dissociated myself from this interpretation of the ongoing war as soon as I refused to sign the international feminist pacifist appeal [10] which - rightly - showed solidarity with Russian feminist pacifists but failed to recognize the Ukrainian feminists' "right to resist". [11] Numerous texts (by left-wing women and men in Ukraine defending this right - and the right to protect themselves, now and in the future, including with weapons) make this debate explicit in a collection that should be read and discussed. [12]

This right to resist Russian domination obviously has globalized effects. We will come to this later. It is important to underline a specific impact, essential for the future and the outcome of this war, in the former Soviet republics that are in Russia's immediate environment. This is what we will limit ourselves to mentioning here in order to draw attention to it. This will be Belarus [13] - associated with several Russian projects, including the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) - on the one hand, and Kazakhstan, which is essential to the military alliance with Russia and several other states (Collective Security Treaty Organization - CSTO) that was formed at the very beginning of 2022 following the unprecedented riots affecting this country in 2021.

## Geopolitical issues in Eurasia

*Belarus between organic union with Russia and the EEU*

Putin's decision was not only marked by a misjudgement of Ukrainian society. It was also based on the outcome of the annexation of Crimea. While that annexation had been greeted with patriotic popular enthusiasm in Russia, it had produced quite different reactions among the autocrats of the allied post-Soviet republics. But Putin was to underestimate this factor because of recent developments in Belarus and Kazakhstan.

First, it should be recalled that the annexation of Crimea broke with the 1994 Budapest Protocol signed by Russia with Ukraine (and similarly with Belarus and Kazakhstan) with US support: the agreement provided for Russia to recover all Soviet-era nuclear weapons but in return had to respect the borders of the newly independent states. While this annexation was popular in Russia, it was viewed with apprehension by the oligarchs of Belarus and Kazakhstan who were attached to their state sovereignty.

Therefore, Putin's orientation pragmatically played on several scenarios and types of unions. On the one hand, he hoped that Ukraine and Belarus would move closer to Russia to consolidate a "Russian pole" in the construction of a Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). This was inspired by the European Union in its shared community and separate dimensions (respecting state sovereignty). The project aimed to integrate all the ex-Soviet countries located between the Russian Federation and the EU (including in particular Georgia and Armenia, in addition to Belarus and Ukraine) - exactly the same countries that were targeted for participation in the "Eastern Partnership" project launched by the European Union in 2009. It was Yanukovich's hesitation and ultimately his choice not to sign the partnership agreement with the EU that provoked the 2013 crisis. [14]

Following the annexation of Crimea, President Lukashenko, who had been ruling Belarus for some 25 years, had distanced himself from Putin, moving closer to the EU to diversify his dependencies and escape sanctions. The autocrat preferred to negotiate with a Russian power weakened under Yeltsin than with a Putin who had

reestablished control over his own oligarchs and had clear ambitions. But he did not hesitate to turn to the latter when his own power was threatened in 2020-2021 by the popular uprising against electoral fraud.

A process of negotiation of a close union involving constitutional changes in Bela-rus then began between the two leaders: they allowed the presence of Russian mili-tary bases (even nuclear ones); but they reaffirmed the country's neutrality and thus ruled out (for now) any direct entry into war. Lukashenko found himself obliged to specify that the country had not been "swallowed". [15]

But this development underlines - far from fatalistic interpretations of Russian expansionism - that these recent rapprochements have gone against the grain of the tensions visible between 2014 and 2022. It was thus a key context for understanding Putin's optimism in deploying troops to Ukraine's borders in Belarus in early 2022. But it was also the instability of Lukashenko's power in his own society that was re-vealed in the search for such a rapprochement at the top and at the military level. And this underlines that this is also a possible source of weakness for Putin's war adventure.

The resistance encountered in Ukraine and therefore the duration and violence of the war certainly imply a more radical internal repressive course in Russia and in Belarus. But it is far from being without flaws. And these flaws are essential for the future. In the very first days of the war there were expressions of trade union solidarity against this invasion. They were quickly met (like in Russia) with radical repression, especially against the leaders of the Congress of Democratic Trade Unions of Belarus (BKDP) and the trade unions of the metal industry (SPM) and the radio electronics industry (REP). This repression has prompted trade union solidarity protests, par-ticularly from Russia (from the KTR - the Russian Confederation of Labour founded in 1995, which is itself under threat), and from Ukraine - from the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine, the KVPU. [16] The Belarusian railway workers have in fact undertaken "partisan" actions that will surely play a key role in / against this war - to make it difficult for Russian troops to get reinforcements and supplies to Ukraine.

No nation in the world wants war. The Russian, Ukrainian and Belarussian peoples are no exception. Few peoples in the world have suffered such terrible losses and sacrificed the lives of tens of millions of their citizens in their history as have our three peoples, peoples who are so close to each other. And the fact that the Russian government launched a war against Ukraine today cannot be understood, justified or forgiven. The fact that the aggressor invaded Ukraine from the territory of Belarus with the consent of the Belarussian authorities can neither be justified nor forgiven. Irreparable things have happened, and their long-term consequences on the lives of several generations will poison relations between Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians. On behalf of the members of the independent trade unions of Belarus, the workers of our country, we bow to you, our Ukrainian brothers and sisters. We apologize to you for the shame, the shame that the Belarussian government has imposed on all Belarussians, by becoming an ally of the aggressor and opening the border with Ukraine. However, we would like to assure you, dear Ukrainians, that the vast majority of Belarussians, including workers, condemn the reckless actions of the current Belarussian regime in tolerating Russian aggression against Ukraine. We demand an immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, as well as from Belarus. [17]

The progress of the Ukrainian resistance will have a specific direct impact on all post-Soviet societies, especially those (open to relations with Moscow but also with China and the West) with which Moscow wants to stabilize and expand the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). [18] The latter is obliged to respect the sovereignty of the states. Moscow's ability to exploit the internal conflicts of each of the societies in its particular environment (such as Armenia in its conflicts with Azerbaijan) is not a matter of pure power relations. Whether it is a question of autocratic powers in post-Soviet societies or societies aspiring to more democracy and social justice, the inde-pendence of new states is a

strong feature of the new post-Soviet historical phase.

The neo-colonial and brutal dimensions of the Russian intervention in Ukraine are and will be destabilizing factors and tensions in Moscow's relations with its neighbours. This is true for what will happen, beyond Belarus, to the EEU but also to its military counterpart - the Collective Security Treaty Organization - CSTO. [19]

*CSTO - and the Kazakhstan test before and after the Russian invasion.*

This military alliance includes five former Soviet republics (Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan) with Russia. It was born after the failure of previous, much larger projects. Copying NATO and aiming to either counterbalance its weight or negotiate spheres of influence, its Article 4 is the equivalent of Article 5 of the Atlantic Alliance: in case of an act of aggression against one of the member states, all the others must provide the necessary assistance, including military. But in practice, this military alliance had not intervened as such until the beginning of 2022. In 2019, it acquired a 20,000-strong rapid reaction force and a 3,600-strong peacekeeping force recognized by the UN. Opaque power struggles have become entangled with unprecedented social riots protesting against liquefied natural gas price hikes (involving multinational firms).

At the end of 2021, Kazakhstan's president appealed to the CSTO by declaring a "state of emergency" allegedly caused by "foreign intervention". The return to calm was facilitated by social measures. But the CSTO forces intervened at the beginning of January 2022 and withdrew after a week. Moscow was certainly counting on taking advantage of what appears to be a success for other tasks to come in the face of global disorder and NATO's debacle in Afghanistan.

Indeed, it was the fear of Taliban interventions from Afghanistan that, at the end of the CSTO operation in Kazakhstan - and thus just before the invasion of Ukraine - prompted proposals for the consolidation and extension of the interventions of this military Alliance: the Russian representative within the Alliance thus evoked the objective of "creating a 'security belt' not only around Afghanistan, but also around the CSTO". [20]

Such a scenario, undoubtedly desired by Putin, would fit in well with the panorama of a recomposition of the "spheres of influence" negotiated on the basis of the balance of power consolidated for Moscow by the union with Belarus and the success attributed to the CSTO in Kazakhstan in the face of the NATO crisis. It can even be hypothesized that Putin expected his "political operation" in Ukraine to be, like the CSTO in Kazakhstan, extremely short and "effective".

The Ukrainian resistance to this scenario failed. Yet Kazakhstan, which plays a central role in the CSTO and its future, does not openly support what has turned into a war. And, like the Chinese ally, it does not want to burn all its cards in the relationship with the West, nor support a loser, let alone accept an even more serious breach than in 2014 of the Budapest Protocol, according to which Moscow respected the borders of new independent states by recovering their nuclear weapons. Significantly, popular protests against the war took place (without repression...) in Kazakhstan and the ruling power displayed neutrality rather than clear support for Russia. [21]

Illustrating the same issue (which could raise the same concerns for Putin), the Chinese leader, who is supposed to be his ally, went to Kazakhstan in September. Xi Jinping even explicitly stressed on the first day of his visit to this Central Asian country that he will help Kazakhstan "safeguard its national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity" [22] - before going to Uzbekistan...

The war in Ukraine is thus profoundly affecting Russia's weight in its environment, far beyond Kazakhstan, as Vicken Cheterian analyses: "After Russia's invasion of Ukraine: a wave of destabilization from the Caucasus to Central Asia". [23]



The war in Ukraine retains its Orwellian title of “military operation” to minimize its real meaning and evolution. An explicit declaration of war (demanded by far-right hawks in Russia) would be dangerous for Russia’s internal stability (as was discovered in the recent “limited” mobilization); but as has been pointed out here, it would also be problematic for Russia’s closest allies.

### *From maintaining NATO to building the EU*

The fact remains that for all the currents or countries far from Russia - and often ignorant of the long history of its relations with Ukraine - this discourse against the extension of NATO to Russia’s doorstep and against US supremacism carries weight. This is true even when the invasion of Ukraine is denounced: it is often presented as reactive or defensive in the face of an Atlantic Alliance built against Russia and in the context of the obvious superiority of the US imperialist regime in economic and military terms. economic and military superiority. Hence a neocampism (supporting the side of any enemy of the main enemy). [24]

Without sparing Russia’s aggression, Tony Wood sought to highlight a “matrix of war” [25] based on three interacting axes, the United States, NATO and Ukraine. In his introduction, he distinguishes between the “immediate responsibility” of Putin’s Russia in this war, which he condemns, and what he calls a “historical responsibility” - that of NATO. But this responsibility is poorly defined. It either comes down to a “context” that does not explain a real war, or to pointing to the “weapons” (of NATO) that are fighting against Russia - omitting to underline that behind the weapons - and making them more effective than those of the Russian forces - are the choices and motivations of the Ukrainian people. Was it necessary not to resist what is well described as aggression - and if not, with what weapons?

Moreover, many other grey areas and blind spots in the proposed analyses need to be discussed if we are to understand what is at stake in a situation without historical precedent. On the one hand, we have to talk about a concrete war in a concrete situation. And it is rather the open and real crisis of NATO in 2021 - and not a threat of NATO against Russia - that explains the adventurism of the war offensive launched by Putin. Added to this, and also prompting the Russian offensive, are the causes of Putin’s optimism mentioned above regarding the fragility of Zelensky, the union with Belarus and the success of the CSTO in Kazakhstan. There was no threat to Russia.

Finally, the target and victim of this offensive - and the resistance it met - can only be understood from the neo-colonial imperial Russian content denying Ukraine’s right to self-determination. The shift to an offensive concretising such a relationship is permitted by the short-term context perceived as favourable by Putin, but it is based (as he himself has explained) on a legitimization that is intended to be historical by including the contestation of Lenin’s recognition (Putin says the “creation”) of an independent Ukraine [26]; to this is added an “anti-Nazi” argument mobilizing the memory of the Second World War. Again, this is a separate issue from NATO.

But the concrete analysis of the Atlantic Alliance and its evolution must also be clarified. Putin, like everyone else, knew that its dominant members would not vote for Ukraine’s membership - precisely in order to protect shared interests with Putin. This point is not a detail. Its omission is part of an outdated and essentialized vision of an anti-Russian NATO that merges and obscures several opaque contexts that can only be briefly mentioned here. On the one hand, Russia is not the USSR (the axis of “communist” evil), nor its continuity. And it was the Russian Federation, headed by Yeltsin, which was a key player (along with representatives of Ukraine and Belarus) in the dissolution of the Union combined with the capitalist dismantling of its system welcomed with open arms by the US and the IMF. This was not an external aggression but a choice where historical shifts of an essential part of the former communist nomenclatura were weighing. The scenarios of insertion into capitalist globalization were not the same for the opaque German unification [27], Yeltsin’s Russia or China - nor for the different countries of the former USSR or Eastern Europe. [28] The new Russian Federation was supported with open arms by the US - including its dirty wars against Chechnya, among others the one led by Putin as part of the ideology of partnership with NATO

and its new “wars of civilizations” against Islamic terrorism replacing communism.

Indeed, (new) Russia was not the target of NATO’s continuation in 1991 and then of the first shifts in its functions (with NATO’s first offensive war over Kosovo in 1999). In these two contexts, it is more credible to underline what was Washington’s main concerns: German unification and the (simultaneous) construction of a new European Union incorporating this unified Germany. [29] This was an unforeseen event catalysed by the decision to unify the currency after the fall of the Berlin Wall - a historic fall, without repression on the part of the GDR, because it was supported by Gorbachev who came to negotiate credits with Federal Germany. The USSR leader hoped to build a “Common European House” - not without a sympathetic ear from Mitterrand. And while the US (and the UK) wanted to control a unified Germany by incorporating it into NATO, France was negotiating with the new Germany to put an end to the DM and build a new European Union (EU).

And it was against this EU’s desire for political autonomy and its expansion into Eastern Europe that the United States used NATO operations for its own interests. The Alliance was on the verge of collapse during the first “strikes” against Slobodan Milosevic’s Yugoslavia. [30] The scenario of the three-month war in Kosovo is very different from that in Ukraine. NATO’s offensive intervention (without a UN mandate) was supposed to be limited to a few “strike”. And to avoid the break-up of the Alliance and the worst fiasco, it was necessary to quickly insert the UN Security Council (and thus Russia) into the process of negotiating the end of the war. Its Resolution 1244 - regularly claimed by Milosevic (but not by the Kosovo Albanians) - set up a deeply unstable and corrupt provisional international protectorate.

It was possible to support the Kosovo Albanians’ right to self-determination - against the dominance Milosevic wanted to impose - while at the same time radically criticizing the continuation and impasses of the new functions the US was assigning to NATO [31], accompanied by fake news to legitimize them. [32] None of this was a threat to Russia. The provisional choices of alliance of a part of the Kosovo Albanians (the KLA) with the US and NATO did not question the deep root of the (historical and recent concrete) conflict with Belgrade - and thus the issue of self-determination of the Kosovo Albanians. This was expressed in evolving contexts, until the country’s parliament proclaimed independence in 2008 - which to this day has still not been recognized by Belgrade or (therefore) by part of the UN and the EU.

As in Ukraine, the people of Kosovo have judged the country’s deep corruption and economic disaster, irrespective of global geopolitical issues. And in 2021 an unprecedented mass popular vote in this former province of Serbia marginalized the “historic” parties allied with the US by switching to the young left-wing party, “Self-Determination”: it campaigned on the basis of a radical critique of corruption and in defence of a substantive social agenda - while turning its hopes towards the EU. [33]

Ukraine has also applied for membership. How should the (EU-critical) left deal with such a request?

## What axes of alterglobalist solidarity?

Ukraine’s application for EU membership, the militarization of budgets associated with NATO and the challenges of ecological transition associated with war are the three “dossiers” that should be opened and managed urgently, but in a sustainable way, on a European scale and beyond, from an alterglobalist perspective. The magnitude of the combined crises that war aggravates with globalized effects affecting first and foremost the poorest populations requires responses on the same scale. We must face the reality of the divergences and the complexity of the conflicting issues in these various dossiers in a deliberately pluralist perspective in order to try to broaden our horizons (and the different perceptions of the issues according to the regions, countries from which we speak, lived



histories), the necessarily unequal knowledge of a complex past and present, in order to bring together the criteria for judgement and the priority objectives - by striving to identify what makes it possible to act in common.

I believe that it is possible and necessary to integrate the three issues mentioned above into a general approach in/against the EU - which could find its place in the revitalization of a public and activist space for European debates as the Altersummit could have been.

### *Decolonizing approaches to Europe*

First of all, there should be an awareness of the evils of ignoring a whole “continent” - Eastern Europe, in the broad sense, towards Eurasia. The decolonization of analyses and responses involves a semantic struggle. It involves systematically rejecting the assimilation of the EU to “Europe” - just as the United States has proclaimed itself “America”. To the extent that it was proposed to Eastern Europeans to “join Europe” and that early radio commentary on the war in Ukraine placed it “at the gates of Europe”. There are several dimensions to this vocabulary: how can one criticize ‘Europe’? Unless one becomes a “nationalist”? This was the stigma and choice generally associated with the political upheavals in Eastern Europe. Joining “Europe” could only be evidence of progress and civilization compared to “non-Europe” (Eastern, or Communist, or Balkan...). I criticized such a vocabulary in the framework of the 2012 Zagreb Subversive Forum where Attac intervened, reversing the necessary light from the “Balkanized” periphery to criticize the “civilizing” practices and vocabulary of the EU towards the Balkans and Eastern Europe: “The Balkan Social Forum: a chance for another Europe”. [\[34\]](#)

It is our responsibility - to be shared with our colleagues and comrades in these countries - to take stock of the conditions under which these countries have been exploited (in the context of the dismantling of their system and the dictatorship of the single party), by radical social and fiscal dumping supposed to “modernize” and democratize them. [\[35\]](#)

The fact that such apologetic vocabulary is used by Volodymyr Zelensky in his speeches in the European Parliament does not help to convince those leftists who already tend to ignore Ukraine in their approach to the war. But in this regard, we must distinguish between two aspects: the denunciation of Russia’s neo-colonial war and the recognition of the right of self-defence of the aggressed country does not depend on the nature of the leadership of that country (and does not require an “ideal” country); but we are obviously politically free to decide how we express our solidarity.

From this point of view I subscribe and propose to join the European Network of Solidarity with Ukraine [\[36\]](#) which has the following platform:

We, collectives of social movements, trade unions, organizations and parties, from Eastern and Western Europe, opposed (...) to war and to all neo-colonialism in the world, want to build a network from below, independent of any government FOR :

- 1/ *The defence of an independent and democratic Ukraine!*
2. *The immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from all Ukrainian territory. The end of the nuclear threat posed by the alerting of Russian nuclear weap- ons and the bombing of Ukrainian power plants!*
3. *Support for the resistance (armed and unarmed) of the Ukrainian people in its diversity, in defence of its right to self-determination.*
4. *The cancellation of Ukraine’s foreign debt!*
5. *The reception without discrimination of all refugees from Ukraine and else-where!*
6. *Support for the anti-war and democratic movement in Russia and the guar-antee of political refugee status for opponents of Putin and for Russian sol-diers who desert!*

7. Seizure of the assets of Russian government members, senior officials and oligarchs in Europe and around the world; and enforcement of financial and economic sanctions by protecting the disadvantaged from their effects.

### **Beyond this, we also fight, in conjunction with like-minded currents in Ukraine and Russia:**

1. For global nuclear disarmament. Against military escalation and the militarization of minds.
2. For the dismantling of military blocs.
3. For any aid to Ukraine to be free from the grip and austerity conditions of the IMF or the EU.
4. Against productivism, militarism and imperialist competition for power and profit that destroy our environment and our social and democratic rights.

As the beginning of the platform indicates, the network organically integrates (in its meetings, campaigns, debates) components (associations, trade unionists, parties) from Eastern Europe. In practice, priority has been given to links with the socialist NGO Sotsialnyi Rukh [37], trade unionists from Belarus, and components of the Russian left (with campaigns in solidarity with those who oppose or flee the war in Russia). This means that the struggle against the war is combined with several campaigns that can be joined: the demand for the cancellation of the Ukrainian debt that spares the oligarchs and allows the IMF to exert pressure for the dismantling of public services and the increase of energy tariffs; but also trade union campaigns against the laws that have been proposed and finally adopted, exploiting the context of war to dismantle social rights. Also on the site is the radically critical analysis of the “reconstruction of Ukraine” project prepared in the Lugano conference in July 2022, which is geared towards a socially and ecologically disastrous exploitation of Ukraine subordinated to the logic of profit. [38]

“Should the European left support Ukraine’s application for EU membership?” asks a text by an activist from Sotsialnyi Rukh (SR). [39] She answers positively - including from the collective point of view of her organization - to this question. Not without a lucid analysis of what the EU is - and what its effect has been in its eastern and southern peripheries. She writes on this subject: She answers positively - including from the collective point of view of her organization - to this question. Not without a lucid analysis of what the EU is - and what its effect has been in its eastern and southern peripheries. She writes on this subject:

We can learn from the experience of other countries in Eastern and Southern Europe. Poland, Slovakia and other EU countries have experienced liberalization in various areas, directly encouraged or tolerated by the EU. In many Eastern European countries, the share of fixed-term contracts increased in the 2000s, while permanent contracts became rarer. At the same time, reforms were implemented to make it easier to dismiss workers, for example, with the argument that this would lead to the creation of new jobs. These developments occurred, albeit unevenly, in all Eastern European countries and were accelerated by crises such as the 2008 financial crisis, which led to a deepening of neoliberal policies in the EU and globally. It is also worth mentioning the role of the European Central Bank in promoting fiscal conservatism and its consequences on the welfare of the population, which we have seen in the example of Greece.

So why support EU membership?

The question is actually outdated, but interesting to discuss. Outdated because the official application for membership was submitted, and four months later - last June - the 27 accepted Ukraine and Moldova as official candidates. But the question remains interesting because “candidate” status does not imply actual membership. It opens a long negotiation process - from which some of the Balkan countries have still not emerged for years: from the former Yugoslavia, only Slovenia and Croatia have been integrated. All the other republics are waiting for the process to be completed (and it is partly on the back burner for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo). Representatives from the Western Balkans would find it difficult to accept that Ukraine would be integrated more quickly than them.

So the real question is the terms of integration - what is being “negotiated”? And does the left have any solidarity campaigns to run on this front. What does our Ukrainian comrade say about this?

On the one hand she points out that it is possible to exploit the solidarity expressed towards Ukraine in the face of war to forcefully legitimize specific conditions granted to the country:

The EU should admit Ukraine under conditions that guarantee the possibility of a social and egalitarian reconstruction and not create obstacles to it (...) European competition law and the radical restriction of protectionist policies create significant obstacles to a social and progressive reconstruction of Ukraine. Exceptions to these laws should therefore be made for Ukraine. This would not be the first case of this kind. Countries like Denmark have even joined the Union with special conditions that have created exceptions to other laws.

She furthermore points out that neo-liberal policies have been promoted in Ukraine without EU membership - and in particular within the framework of the “Eastern Partnership”. Membership would at least confer rights and would not be worse than absolute peripheralization without rights.

Moreover, she says, for the Ukrainian people

EU membership is of great symbolic importance - it has been the main goal of the country’s foreign policy since 2014. Opposing it would be very unpopular and would require clear equivalent alternatives that do not currently exist.

She believes that European rights are in some areas more progressive than Ukraine’s, and therefore that EU integration favours the fight for social advances. Most importantly:

integration can facilitate the networking of local organizations like Sotsialnyi Rukh with other left-wing actors and lead to the development of long-term re-lationships - which, in turn, can ensure that attention to the problems in Ukraine does not remain tied to the events of the crisis.

In fact this is what the European left should be building - European links with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans for campaigns for common rights and goals. And for an overhaul of the terms of membership. In doing so, what is needed is a questioning of the existing treaties, their ongoing modifications (without a constituent process) and the policies implemented in the face of the major intertwined crises: environmental, financial (since 2008 - what transformations and banking fra-gilities) and political (effects of the ongoing war).

*Aid to Ukraine does not imply the militarization of budgets: for the submission of the budgetary and military policies of each country to the control of the society.*

It is essential to be able to defend a policy of solidarity with the (armed and unarmed) resistance of Ukraine against a murderous neo-colonial aggression, and to keep an independent and critical judgement on the policies of our governments. I have explicitly quoted the platform of the European Solidarity Network Ukraine (ENSU). I repeat its last points:

1. For global nuclear disarmament.
2. Against military escalation and the militarization of minds. For the disman-tling of military blocs

3. For any aid to Ukraine to be free from the grip and austerity conditions of the IMF or the EU.
4. Against productivism, militarism and imperialist competition for power and profit that destroy our environment and our social and democratic rights.

But the way to fight for these goals requires breaking down a “globalizing” and essentialist approach to NATO and aid and distinguishing between several issues that should be debated in order to develop a globalized platform “for a just and lasting peace”:

– NATO should have been dissolved with the Warsaw Pact in 1991. Its continuation and the evolution of its functions (from a defensive alliance to an offensive alliance and intervening anywhere) have been neither transparent nor democratic processes. The assessment of its interventions should be made in each country involved. But the same goes for all military pacts: we must oppose the logic of sharing spheres of influence based on permanent pacts that poorly disguise relation-ships of domination.

– All armies should be returned to their home territory and placed under the control of the countries concerned. This would open up a concrete process of demilitarization - and the case-by-case judgement of military aid for causes deemed just. Within this framework, the armed forces of a country can also be involved by international agreement in peacekeeping action outside their territory - under the control of the UN or the countries concerned.

– The war in Ukraine was launched by Russia. Aid to Ukraine does not turn the war into an inter-imperialist war. Defence aid to Ukraine is legitimate and should remain under the control of the Ukrainian people and their choice of negotiating conditions.

– Every population in every country should be able to control what budgets are actually allocated to Ukraine and other goals and conflicts: a progressive global anti-war movement cannot equate a dominant country’s war of aggression with an aggressed country’s defensive war. A just struggle - with arms in hand against armed aggression - must be defended, even if one also recognizes conscientious objection and the possible choice of non-violent resistance. but this choice belongs to the people and peoples under attack.

The reconstitution of an autocratic state and regime in Russia with military and imperial interventionist dimensions poses obvious security problems for the countries close to Russia and the populations of the federation likely to revolt against relations of domination. This was the case in Chechnya. The fact that the countries concerned perceive (rightly or wrongly) NATO as a protective framework makes it impossible for the left to mobilize for the dissolution of NATO as long as this threatening situation from Russia continues. But this does not mean that there is no need to criticize NATO’s plans and the expansion of its budgets.

*From sanctions against the Putin regime to European environmental policies.*

The climate emergency and solidarity against this war should be combined with our criticism of the EU: the Putin regime feeds its aggressive policies on the income from fossil fuels. Sanctions on Russian imports must at the same time accelerate the process of energy transition - and thus obviously reject the increase of fossil fuel production elsewhere, and in particular the deployment of liquefied natural gas production and distribution.

At the same time, this policy requires the protection of social rights and jobs - implying a vast pan-European project of planning reconversions and investments in re-newable energies. This could be addressed to the populations of all European countries - including Russia, on condition that the war stops.

Utopia? Let's turn it into a "real utopia" - and "if they won't let us dream, let's make sure they don't sleep"...

*The initial version of this article was written in French for the on-line [Revue Les Possibles-Â»*  
[https://france.attac.org/IMG/pdf/samary-possibles\\_34.pdf](https://france.attac.org/IMG/pdf/samary-possibles_34.pdf), Attac, winter 2022.

PS:

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[1] This is the case of the members of the Ukrainian socialist NGO Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement) whose numerous contributions in English or French can be found under this heading on the ESSF website. <https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?auteur23574>. One can also read Daria Saburova "Questions on Ukraine", translated by Dick Nichols for Links from the French original published on the Contretemps web site : <http://links.org.au/questions-about-ukraine> ; Denys Gorbach and Denys Pilash on "people solidarity needed": <http://links.org.au/we-need-peoples-solidarity-ukraine-and-against-war-not-fake-solidarity-governments>; or Hanna Perekhoda on Ukrainian identity in the Donbas "[People in liberated Kherson are greeting Ukrainian soldiers in Russian](#)": [Hanna Perekhoda on Ukrainian identity, language and Donbas](#)".

[2] One should read the following comments which differ on some aspects but all of which reject the thesis of a "fascist coup": cf. Denys Gorbach on the Ukrainian society, 19 March 2022 <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/190322/denys-gorbach-le-changement-de-la-societe-ukrainienne-echappe-poutine> or Volodymyr Ishchenko in *New Left Review* <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii133/articles/volodymyr-ishchenko-towards-the-abys>.

[3] Read on this topic, Denys Gorbach, "L'économie politique de l'Ukraine de 1991 à 2022" in Karine Clément, Denys Gorbach, Hanna Perekhoda, Catherine Samary, Tony Wood, *L'invasion de l'Ukraine. Histoires, conflits et résistances populaires*. La dispute 2022

[4] I explained the divergences running through the Left, on both the present and the past, in "[A Ukrainian Left under construction on several fronts](#)".

[5] Cf. Daria Saburova, note 1

[6] Cf. Volodymyr Ishchenko, note 2

[7] Cf. Rohini Hensman, "Socialist Internationalism and the Ukraine War", 2 June 2022, <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/blog/socialist-internationalism-and-ukraine-war>

[8] Read Bernard Dreano, "Questions nationales. De l'Irlande à l'Ukraine" ("National Questions: From Ireland to Ukraine") on 21 November 2022 at <https://entreleslignesentrelesmots.wordpress.com/2022/11/21/questions-nationales-de-lirlande-a-lukraine/>. I also recall these disagreements among Marxists in particular in "A Ukrainian Left..." quoted note 4.

[9] An item explicitly dealt with in my article "A Ukrainian Left...", cf. note 4

[10] Read my "[Comments on the Feminist Manifesto](#)".

[11] This is the title of the Ukrainian Feminist Manifesto that I supported, published on the Ukrainian on line review Commons on 7 July 2022 <https://commons.com.ua/en/right-resist-feminist-manifesto/>

[12] Cf. Brigades éditoriales de solidarité (Editorial Brigades in Solidarity, linked to ENSU) L'Ukraine insurgée, 2022 Syllepse. read the presentation ("War and peace or the silence of the Black Sea"):

<https://entreleslignesentrelesmots.wordpress.com/2022/11/23/la-guerre-et-la-paix-ou-le-silence-de-la-mer-noire/>

[13] The term Belarus is a transcription of the name used by the country since its independence - rather than Byelorussia.

[14] Read on this David Teurtrie, "Où en est l'Union économique eurasiatique? Entre instabilité sociopolitique et ambitions géopolitiques", (Where is the Eurasian Economic Union ? Between instability and geopolitical ambitions" Ramses 2022 (2021), pages 160 à 165. I also deal with that topics in my article "La société ukrainienne entre ses oligarques et sa troïka" (The Ukrainian Society between its Oli-garchs and its Troïka ", published by the Review on line les Possibles n°2, winter 2013-2014 :

<https://france.attac.org/nos-publications/les-possibles/numero-2-hiver-2013-2014/dossier-europe/article/la-societe-ukrainienne-entre-ses>

[15] Cf. on this topics Benoît Vitkine et Thomas d'Istria, "Loukachenko et Poutine avancent vers 'l'intégration' de leurs deux pays" ( towards integration of the two countries) in Le Monde, 10 Sep-tember 2021.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2021/09/10/loukachenko-et-poutine-avancent-vers-l-integration-de-leurs-deux-pays\\_6094142\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2021/09/10/loukachenko-et-poutine-avancent-vers-l-integration-de-leurs-deux-pays_6094142_3210.html).

[16] See in particular the trade union solidarity actions carried out in defence of the Belarusian trade unionists:

<https://solidaires.org/sinformer-et-agir/actualites-et-mobilizations/internationales/cgt-fsu-solidaires-la-diplomatie-francaise-doit-exiger-la-liberation-des-syndicalistes-bielorusses-arretees/> and the information published by the "solidarity editorial brigades".

[17] Reproduced on the Attac website:

<https://france.attac.org/se-mobiliser/ukraine-pour-une-solidarite-internationaliste/article/declaration-du-comite-executif-du-congres-des-syndicats-democratiques-de>

[18] Cf. Teurtrie, note 14

[19] Read David Teurtrie, "L'OTSC : une réaffirmation du leadership russe en Eurasie post-soviétique ?" (The CSTO: a reaffirmation of Russian leadership in post-Soviet Eurasia?), *Revue de Défense nationale*, 2017/7 (No. 802), pages 153 to 160.

[20] Cf. Aldan Engoian, "Après leur intervention au Kazakhstan, d'autres projets pour les 'casques bleus' de l'OTSC", (after Kazhakstan, new projects for CSTO) *Courrier International*, reproduced by ESSF 14 January 2022 <https://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article60720>

[21] Read Samolovitch Marina & Al "Kazakhstan : comment la société Kazakhe est divisée sur la guerre en Ukraine" (How Kazakh society is divided over the war in Ukraine), <https://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article61913>

[22] These declarations were reported by a Chinese state media according to the Belgian newspaper *La Libre* on 15/09

<https://www.lalibre.be/international/asie/2022/09/14/le-president-chinois-dit-quil-aidera-le-kazakhstan-a-sauvegarder-son-independance-nationale-6YEDFA5CCRCOZH7X3EIG2IDEK/>

[23] Cf. Vicken Cheterian, Agos

<https://www.agos.com.tr/en/article/27848/after-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-a-wave-of-destabilization-from-the-caucasus-to-central-asia> (An earlier version of this paper was presented at: The 27th International Humanitarian and Security Conference of Webster University Geneva, on 1 November 2022)

[24] On the context of the so-called "bi-polar world" at the origin of this notion, its evolution and that of the "anti-imperialists", particularly in relation to the conflicts in the Middle East, read Gilbert Achcar, "[Their anti-imperialism and ours](#)" .... On a critique of "campist" approaches to the Kosovo crisis (1999) and that of Ukraine in 2014, see C. Samary, "[What internationalism in the context of the Ukrainian crisis? Eyes wide open against one-eyed 'campisms'](#)".

[25] His text published under this title in English in the *New Left Review* No. 133-134 (January-April 2022) was reproduced in French (and



discussed) in the collective book *L'Invasion de l'Ukraine...* cf. Note 3

[26] Read on this subject Hanna Perekhoda “Est-ce que Lénine a inventé l'Ukraine “? Poutine et les impasses du projet impérial russe” (Did Lenin invent Ukraine? Putin and the impasses of the Russian imperial project), in *L'invasion... Collective book* quoted note 4. Read also Marko Bojunc, *The Workers' Movement and the National Question in Ukraine 1897-1918*, Brill Publishers, Leiden, 2021. The introduction can be read online at <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/blog/workers-movement-and-national-question-ukraine-1897-1918-introduction>; and Zbigniew Kowalewski, “For the Independence of Soviet Ukraine”, *Historical Materialism*, 12 March 2022, <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/blog/for-independence-soviet-ukraine>

[27] See “Le problème international de la réunification allemande “ (The international problem of German unification); CVCE research infrastructure of the University of Luxembourg, last updated 7 July 2007, [http://www.cvce.eu/obj/le\\_probleme\\_international\\_de\\_la\\_reunification\\_allemande-fr-9dbf0263-d91c-4f7d-9f05-f36f1bfa09e7.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/le_probleme_international_de_la_reunification_allemande-fr-9dbf0263-d91c-4f7d-9f05-f36f1bfa09e7.html); Read also Fritz Vilmar, Gislaine Guittard, *La face cachée de l'unification allemande* (The hidden face of German unification), Éditions de l'Atelier, Paris, 1999; and Rachel Knaebel and Pierre Rimbert, “The economic Anschluss of the GRD “, *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2019

[28] I proposed a synthetic analysis of this item in “Eastern Europe : Origins of Capitalist Restoration” <https://fourth.international/en/407>

[29] I defend and explain this point of view in “Le prisme de l'autodétermination...” art. cited in the book *L'invasion*, op.cit. See also my contribution on the issue of self-determination in the Yugoslav context - “Droit d'autodétermination : le cas Yougoslave” published in the Proceedings of the International Colloquium “Justice and War” / *La justice et la guerre*, Paris, October 1999 *Revue Internationale d'Arts et de Sciences*, Dialogue Volume 8, n°31/32, Autumn / Winter 1999 <https://basepub.dauphine.fr/bitstream/handle/123456789/9480/Le%20droit%20d%20autodetermination.PDF?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

[30] *Idem*

[31] I defended such a view in “What internationalism...?” Note 24

[32] See Serge Halimi, “Le plus grand bobard de la fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle” (The greatest hoax at the end of the XXth century) <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2019/04/HALIMI/59723>. And on the retrospective and evolving legitimization of NATO's intervention read Serge Halimi, Dominique Vidal, Henri Maler, Mathias Reymond, *L'opinion, ça se travaille... Les médias, les “guerres justes” et les “justes causes”* (Opinion is something to be shaped. Just wars and righteous causes), *Agone*, coll. “Éléments”, Marseille, 2014.

[33] Cf. my article and the dossier on 22 April 2021 [“Kosovo a historic turning point”](#).

[34] Cf. <https://france.attac.org/actus-et-medias/le-flux/articles/le-forum-social-des-balkans-une-chance-pour-lautre-europe> (Balkan social forum : A chance for another Europe).

[35] As a contribution to this debate, besides my articles on that issue in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (see <http://csamary.fr>.) read “Des privatisations forcées à la démocratie imposée : quels critères d'adhésion à l'Union européenne ?” (From forced privatization to imposed democracy: what criteria for EU membership), *Revue Internationale et Stratégique* 2002/3 (n°47) pp.29-36, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-et-strategique-2002-3-page-29.htm>

[36] Read on the web site the platform, information on campaigns, links and articles (in several languages) : <https://ukraine-solidarity.eu/>

[37] Read on Sotsialnyi Rukh (SR) “Who are we?” <https://rev.org.ua/sotsialnyi-rukh-who-we-are/> and on the ENSU website, the reports of delegations that went to Ukraine to meet social movement activists and the texts of SR members

[38] <https://ukraine-solidarity.eu/to-read/pour-la-reconstruction-dune-ukraine-dmocratique-indpendante-pluraliste-et-sociale> and 6 October 2022, Karen Yamanaka, [“Ukraine is not the Neoliberal Laboratory for Transnational Capital”](#).

[39] Olena Slobodian, “Should leftists campaign for Ukraine's accession to the EU?”, translated into English from German and published on ESSF

16 August 2022: <https://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article64734>