

# The Conflict around Ukraine: Social and Environmental Aspects

**Keywords:** Ukraine, Armed conflict, Peace initiative, Environment

## Abstract

The conflict in Ukraine and ensuing energetic crisis has hindered environmental policies in Europe and elsewhere. The war itself has severe environmental implications. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, both major agricultural countries, has negative impact on the global food supply. As food prices rise, some nations are likely to cope by converting forests and grasslands to fields. International tensions and conflicts are among reasons to boost childbearing in Russia and some other countries. The necessity of birth control has been obfuscated by conflicting national and global interests, the population growth being regarded as a tool helping to the national sovereignty and defense. The demographic growth contributes to the scarcity of energy and food in many regions. The energy could be supplied by nuclear power plants (NPPs). Well-managed NPPs pose less of a risk than those running on fossil fuels. Obviously, a lasting peace is needed, since NPPs are potential targets. In the past, the overpopulation was counteracted by wars, pestilence and famine. Large projects could be accomplished to improve the quality of life all over the world: irrigation systems, nuclear and other energy sources instead of fossil fuels. Hydroelectric power plants can be built on large rivers to produce hydrogen as eco-friendly energy carrier. Such projects would create many jobs, being a reasonable alternative to excessive military expenditures. Should the power be displaced to Russia, it may come along with worldwide decline in liberties and human rights. Some disregard for laws and regulations, corruption and mass intimidation would come instead. As for the healthcare and medical research, various kinds of professional misconduct may spread to other countries. Environmental protection, waste management and alternative energy sources would lose priority. The culture of environmental protection is less popular in Russia than in other industrialized countries. Instead of machismo and militarism, propaganda should popularize the image of scrupulous and hardworking people. Moral principles, based on modesty and mutual help aimed at preservation of as much life and wealth as possible should be invigorated. Ukraine must become a testing ground for the international cooperation.

## Introduction

The separation of Russia from the rest of Europe has started after 1917 and continued thereafter [1]. The following distinctions should be stressed: comparatively low life expectancy in the former Soviet Union (SU), insufficient public assistance, science not always repelling falsification. Inefficient medications are advertised and prescribed, invasive procedures applied without sufficient indications [2-5]. The following proposals have been made: "Russia must be brought into the world and European community. And in order to reduce distance and fear, NATO should move to Moscow" [6]. "What is needed is a reform of both NATO and the European Union [EU] in the creation of confederation from Vancouver to Vladivostok, Much as was originally proposed by James Baker, François Mitterrand and Mikhail Gorbachev toward the end of the Cold War" [6]. Russian power holders and a part of the population have generally been against the coexistence in a legal field with the West. This is not entirely groundless considering formally legal but unfair practices.

On the other hand, some people would welcome a Russian



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advancement to the English Channel, demographic transformations being one of the reasons [7,8]. The westward expansion is supported by the ideology of Neo-Eurasianism and personally by Aleksandr Dugin, professor of Sociology at Moscow University, the well-known "political philosopher, analyst, and strategist": [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksandr\\_Dugin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksandr_Dugin) Eurasianists underscored Russia's non-European alterity [9]. Dugin's geopolitical doctrine has been introduced into school curricula [10]. Using numerous neologisms, Dugin has written the following (verbatim from Russian): Shutting down (zakryt') America is our religious duty. Americans cause rejection, repulsion, a desire to hide from their influence, sometimes even to unmask and to expropriate them [11]. The prohibition of war propaganda is pharisaism. You can't get away from the war and you shouldn't try. America is our historical enemy, it is an absolute fact. Western civilization is deadly for our historical way [12]. About science: "Death is the only truly scientific fact. Everything else is hypothesis. Therefore, true science can be built only upon direct experience of death. Without it, we are dealing with charlatans. It is the battle, the rage of war that must become a true Russian university" [13]. Obviously, such discourses of the leading ideologist have contributed to the current conflict.

Russian leaders are often accused of aggression these days. In fact, they may be pioneers of a new historic period. If the world is indeed becoming multicentric [14], armed conflicts of various magnitudes may become permanent. In a sense, it would be a return to the 19th century. A constructive alternative might be the global leadership centered in the most developed parts of the world based on humanism and modern science. The role of Russia would be that of a regional superpower. Great projects could be accomplished by the unified humankind instead of the warfare and military expenditures.

Civil liberties and human rights would be gradually abandoned worldwide if our future is a series of conflicts. This perspective seems to be inevitable unless new ethical principles are accepted: no population group on a national or international scale, neither ethnic nor confessional minorities, may obtain any advantages because of the present or recent numerical expansion. Social consequences of the gender imbalance must be borne mainly by those countries

and population groups, where sex-selective abortions have been practiced [15]. Acceptance of these principles could build a basis for international understanding. Without procreative competition, different peoples would be more likely to live in peace [16].

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

The reason for the “special military operation” (SMO) started in February 2022 was the anti-separatist activity by the Ukrainian army in Donbas since 2014. In principle, the fight against separatism within national borders is justifiable. The Ukraine in her 1991 borders was recognized by all nations including Russia. However, another argumentation is also possible. The Ukraine in today’s borders was created by Bolsheviks disregarding ethnic and linguistic realities. A majority of residents in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine are Russian-speaking. It is known that many people in the Donbas were disappointed that their region had not become a part of the Russian Federation. These considerations were published in 2015 [17]; today they are often discussed [18].

Statistics about ethnic composition may be misleading. During the Soviet time, many people registered themselves as Ukrainians for reasons of convenience but continued to share the Russian identity. Reportedly, 25.5% of Ukrainian citizens defined their ethnicity as both Ukrainian and Russian in 1997. Around one-third of the population believed that the two countries should be unified [19]. It is known that the public opinion in the western and eastern/southern parts of the Ukraine is different. The recent referendums in occupied areas have been met with skepticism. However, here is a possibility to settle two long-lasting disagreements at once. Considering the analogy between Donetsk/Lugansk provinces and Taiwan, the following peace initiative has been proposed [20]. Referendums under international control should be held both in Taiwan and in some predominantly Russian-speaking provinces of Ukraine with a proposal of 3 options: unification with Ukraine/China, independence, inclusion in the Russian Federation, or for Taiwan - a protectorate by the United States and/or Japan. Analogous solution was proposed for the Crimea in 2015 [17]. The double standards should be pointed out: no sanctions were imposed against Israel for comparable SMOs. In Kosovo, geopolitical decisions were taken in consideration of the Albanian majority that had developed due to the higher birthrate and immigration [21,22]. Another analogy is Nagorno-Karabakh, a disputed territory widely recognized as a part of Azerbaijan, where the people would probably prefer unification with Armenia.

An alternative solution could be a division between the EU and Russian Federation following referendums held under international control in each province separately. It can be reasonably assumed that a large part of the Ukraine’s population, possibly except Bukovina, Galicia and Transcarpathia (Subcarpathia), would vote for the unification with Russia mainly because of economical and linguistic reasons. The Polish territory could be extended in the East in return to German lands in the West of the country. Furthermore, the Soviet-trained collectivism and mass intimidation may influence results of referendums and elections. During the Soviet time, almost everybody voted the ruling party. Along the same lines, residents of currently occupied territories would support the annexation by Russia to avoid personal trouble as they don’t believe that the situation would be reverted back. Many people in these areas do not place much value

on liberties and human rights; what is important, is security and wealth. Considering the above, the significance of referendums is limited. An international agreement delimitating spheres of influence is needed. Some areas in the East and South of today’s Ukraine should logically belong to the Russian sphere of influence as the majority of residents are ethnically and linguistically Russians. The new-tailored neutral Ukraine as per Elon Musk is not an optimal solution as it will be threatened with punishments for supposed nationalism or liberalism condemned in Russia these days [18]. A clear delimitation of the spheres of influence would be preferable. The undermining of globalization is another nail in the coffin of democracy and human rights. This is not automatically unfavorable: more order is needed in our age of overpopulation and mass migrations. However, these problems should be openly addressed instead of using international conflicts for the tightening of screws. Great projects could be accomplished by the globalized humankind, being a reasonable alternative to excessive military expenditures. Not only durable peace but also mutual trust is required for that. Unfortunately, certain individuals and organizations are unreliable. Ukraine should become a testing ground for the international cooperation.

The conflict in Ukraine is not objectively elucidated by Russian media. Based on available information, literature and own observations [17], the author believes that the warfare, harm and casualties were exaggerated prior to the SMO at least. Neither destroyed buildings nor other damage was seen in the Donetsk area in March 2022. The same was observed in 2014. Apparently, the SMO was aimed among others at the personnel training, absorption of foreign aid and military technology. The conflict is distracting people from internal problems, facilitating screw-tightening, postponing solutions in the field of public health and assistance. There are hopes that the war would contribute to the national unity and solidarity of some peoples of the former SU. All those participating (factually or on paper) in the current conflict will obtain the war veteran status thus acquiring considerable privileges over fellow-citizens. This is a motive both to participate in the warfare and to exaggerate its dimensions.

There was a tendency to exaggerate military activities and harm also regarding other conflicts in the post-Soviet space. The real or claimed dangers together with bribery at frontier crossings have been damaging for tourism, trade and, consequently, for the international understanding. This, in turn, contributes to further conflicts. Commanders of the Ukrainian army and Donbas militias established communication by mobile phones to arrange local ceasefires and avoid casualties [23]. Abandoned dilapidated buildings were often shelled, as it was in Chechnya in the 1990s, while residents had been warned about forthcoming bombardments. In the meantime, the towns and villages have been newly rebuilt; some Soviet-time facilities were replaced by modern constructions. Apparently, the service in overmanned militias both in the Donbas and in Chechnya was a remedy against unemployment due to the overpopulation in the latter and coal mines closures in the former. The unemployment in the Donbas was partly caused by a decline in the coal production thanks to ill-considered and corrupt policies during privatization of state enterprises in the 1990s [24].

### **Ecological aspects**

The war in Ukraine and ensuing energetic crisis has thwarted

many environmental policies in Europe and elsewhere. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, both major agricultural countries, has negative impact on the global food supply. As food prices rise, some nations are likely to cope by converting forests and grasslands to fields [25]. The war itself has severe environmental implications and waste of non-renewable resources. International tensions and conflicts are among reasons to boost childbearing in Russia and other countries. There are inter-ethnic differences in the birthrate. The pro-natalist policies are counterproductive in view of the global overpopulation. The ecological damage is generally proportional to the population density. The demographic growth contributes to the scarcity of food and energy in many regions [26,27]. The energy could be supplied by nuclear power plants (NPPs). Well-managed NPPs pose less of a risk than those running on fossil fuels. The nuclear facilities practically do not emit greenhouse gases thus not contributing to climate changes [28]. Note that ambient heat heightens mortality [29]. Obviously, a lasting peace is needed, since NPPs are potential targets. By analogy with the Chernobyl accident, the war damage and shutdown of the Zaporozhie NPP (the largest NPP in Europe) will enhance demands for fossil fuels.

Probably not all writers and Green activists exaggerating medical and ecological consequences of nuclear energy production do realize that they serve the interests of fossil fuel producers [30,31]. Many of them have good intentions; some are ideologically biased, serve certain governments or companies. Fossil fuels will become increasingly expensive in the long run, contributing to excessive population growth in fossil fuel-producing regions and poverty elsewhere. Citizens should be aware that their best intentions are exploited to disadvantage their own countries. For example, some statements by Yuri Nikiforov attributing the thyroid cancer (TC) incidence increase “in the United States and many other countries” to radioiodine as a result of nuclear explosions or accidents and postulating that Chernobyl fallout “resulted in the development of TC in more than 4,000 individuals” seem to be indicative of an ideological bias in favor of fossil fuel producers. The Chernobyl accident has been exploited for the strangulation of nuclear energy [32,33]. It should be commented that the incidence of pediatric TC is higher in more developed countries, while the general tendency of the incidence increase is probably caused by an improvement of diagnostic equipment [34].

The birth control has been obfuscated by presumed national interests: the demographic growth was used to strengthen the sovereignty and defenses. International conflicts provide motivation for the population growth. The humankind is in a demographic deadlock [35]. Solutions would require new ethical principles, in particular, that no population group on a national or international scale may obtain advantages because numerical growth. In the past, the overpopulation was counteracted by wars, pestilence and famine. Today, scientifically based humane methods can be used to regulate the population size taking account of ecological and economical conditions in different regions. An authority based in developed parts of the world could counteract the growing overpopulation and environmental damage. Globalization has been studied by Baron Giddens [36]; among advantages are the ecological management, governance of the world economy, control of warfare and fostering of transnational democracy [37]. In conditions of globalization, the

project of universal basic income (UBI) could be implemented [38]. It must incorporate the concept of birth control. For example, the following can be proposed: the basic UBI divided by the average birth rate in a given country during e.g. last 50 years. Legal migrants and their offspring would preserve the UBI of their native countries for 25 years. A globally coordinated unemployment protection would inhibit migrations and help people to develop professional skills according to new demands [39].

## Discussion & Conclusion

Governments in democracy are usually more transparent [40]. This in turn reduces corruption. It is less probable in conditions of democracy that power would be sized and kept by a psychopath. The reduction in conflicts after the early 1990s was explained through the balance of power, democracy, international institutions, and economic interdependence [41]. Should the power be displaced to Russia, it would come along with losses of values like individual liberties and human rights. Some disregard for laws and regulations, corruption and collectivism will come instead. As mentioned above, the Soviet-trained collectivism and mass intimidation influences results of referendums and elections. During the Soviet time, almost everybody voted the ruling party. The quality of many services, foodstuffs and beverages would decline. Environmental protection, waste management and alternative energy sources would lose priority. The culture of environmental protection and energy conservation is less popular in the former SU than in other industrialized countries.

As for the healthcare and medical research, various kinds of professional misconduct may spread to other countries in conditions of Russian dominance [2,42]. Military officials, their relatives and protégées are occupying superior positions in educational, scientific institutions and health care authorities in this country. It contributed to the persistence of suboptimal and outdated methods in medicine due to lacking professional autonomy [43], autocratic or military management style discouraging criticism and polemics. Attributes of this style include the paternalistic approach to patients, insufficient adherence to the principle of informed consent, bossy management, harassment of colleagues if they do not follow instructions or not collaborate e.g. in dubious publications [2,44,45]. Under conditions of paternalism, misinformation of patients and compulsory treatments are deemed permitted [46]. Suboptimal practices have been used as per instructions by healthcare authorities and leading experts' publications. Numerous examples have been discussed previously [2-5,47-50]. Being not accustomed to hard and meticulous work, some of the functionaries' children and protégés have been involved in professional misconduct, illegal and immoral activities [51]. Considering shortcomings of medical practice, research and education, a simple increase in funding is unlikely to be a solution. Measures for improvement of the public health in the former SU must include participation of authorized foreign advisers.

If Russians are indeed predestined to be leaders, a lot of modesty and devotion is needed. Among others, this would necessitate some crew change. The today's rhetoric goes obviously too far: fecal language, obscenities, declarations of jihad and appeals to use nuclear weapon [52-55]. Many people in this country don't like democracy and liberals, whom they call “liberast” [56]. The above is associated with shame. Repressed shame may cause aggression [57]. Psychotherapy

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and tranquillisers might be tried instead of the fratricidal war with the “ecstasy from shedding someone else’s blood” [58]. Rectal infusions of Chlorpromazine were recommended for cases of non-compliance [59]. At the same time, the propaganda avoids important issues such as the comparatively low life expectancy in Russia and world highest abortion rate. Instead of machismo and militarism, the propaganda should popularize the image of scrupulous and hardworking people. Moral principles, based on modesty and mutual help aimed at preservation of as much life and wealth as possible should be invigorated. Ukraine must become a testing ground for the international cooperation.

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