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The Ukraine conflict, the largest European diaspora of the twenty-first century?

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Abstract:

On the morning of 24 February, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine following years of tension between the two countries. This military offensive is the first major aggression in Europe since World War II and consequently the largest exodus of refugees.

Since the start of the military offensive, more than 10 million people have been forced to flee their homes: almost 3.5 million refugees have crossed the Ukrainian border and 6.5 million have been internally displaced within the country.

Those leaving Ukraine mainly go to Poland, but some go to Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Moldova.

To address this situation, the EU unanimously agreed to activate the 2001 directive on temporary protection for refugees.

Key words:

Refugees, Crisis, War, Borders, Ukraine, Russia, Europe.

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El conflicto de Ucrania, ¿la gran diáspora del siglo XXI en Europa?

Resumen:

La mañana del pasado 24 de febrero el presidente Ruso, Vladimir Putin, inició la invasión de Ucrania, después de años de tensión entre ambos países. Esta ofensiva militar supone la primera gran agresión en Europa desde la II Guerra Mundial y por consiguiente el mayor éxodo de refugiados.

Desde el comienzo de la ofensiva militar más de 10 millones de personas se han visto obligadas a abandonar sus hogares: casi 3 millones y medio de refugiados han cruzado la frontera ucraniana y 6 millones y medio se han desplazado internamente por el país.

Los que salen Ucrania se dirigen mayoritariamente a Polonia, aunque también llegan a Rumanía, Hungría, Eslovaquia o Moldavia.

La Unión Europea, para afrontar esta situación, acordó activar la directiva de protección temporal de los refugiados de 2001, con un acuerdo unánime.

Palabras clave:

Refugiados, Crisis, Guerra, Fronteras, Ucrania, Rusia, Europa.

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*It is the different, the displaced and the refugees
who enrich all our lives; your tolerance and
fairness towards them will open up new worlds for
you, and will make them welcome wherever they
go.*
Kofi Annan

Introduction

Just when we Europeans thought that changing borders by force was a thing of the past, Russia showed us that this was not so in 2014 by annexing Crimea and aiding rebel groups in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions in the east of the country. From that moment on Ukraine became the main stumbling block in the European security landscape¹.

Despite the present circumstances, the perception in the West was that in Europe one country could not invade another just like that. A zone of eternal peace that had been achieved with the triumph of liberal democracy.

But since satellite images last November suggested that Russia was sending troops towards its border with Ukraine, although Moscow denied it was preparing an invasion, the situation has changed dramatically.

On the heels of the impact of Covid-19 and the vulnerabilities the pandemic has caused among the world's population, and amidst the longed for recovery in 2022, the launch of the Russian military offensive against Ukraine on 24 February has caused the largest exodus in Europe since World War II. In less than 48 hours, more than 100,000 people had already fled their homes and thousands had taken refuge in neighbouring countries according to the UN, which was already predicting that the figure could exceed five million.

Europe opened its doors wide

In a war context like the invasion of Ukraine, military operations leave not only direct casualties due to bombardments but also indirect victims. The UN has already announced that more than three million people have crossed the border into neighbouring countries. These numbers do not include internal displacement by train, bus and car, amounting to 6.5 million people fleeing the war without fully escaping it. They are mainly women,

¹ PARDO DE SANTAYANA, José. Why is Russia so interested in Ukraine? IEEE Analysis Document 25/2021. http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2021/DIEEEA25_2021_JOSPAR_Rusia.pdf

children and the elderly, as men of military service age (18-60) are prohibited from leaving the country.

Many Ukrainians who make it across the border have no further plan than to escape: they have no shelter, no job to go to, no transport, limited resources, and consider themselves lucky to have left.

In Ukraine, 854,000 people were already internally displaced by the conflict that began in 2014 in Donetsk and Lugansk provinces, the scene of active fighting for the past eight years, which has had a major impact on the lives of millions of people, according to the UN refugee agency. It is also estimated that more than 200,000 people living in these provinces have taken refuge on Russian territory, half of them since before the invasion.

While Europe has a duty to take in refugees, who as feared number in the millions, this rapid increase places an enormous burden on host states, and reception systems and corresponding resources are undoubtedly being put to the test, as are all refugee-hosting countries around the world. This is why they cannot be left alone to shoulder this responsibility, as Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner of the UN Refugee Agency, pointed out in his speech to the UN Security Council on Ukraine².

Since the first day of the invasion, thousands of Ukrainians have flocked to neighbouring territories in an attempt to flee the fighting, the roads leading to the EU borders in Moldova, Poland, Hungary and Romania crowded with people. In inhumane conditions and freezing temperatures. Many of them wait up to 60 hours to cross at border points into Poland in queues up to 15 km long. These displaced people are depending on humanitarian aid for their survival.

Ukrainians could already travel to some countries in Europe without a visa as there has been a visa-free system between the EU and Ukraine since 2017. This means that Ukrainian passport holders can enter the EU for tourist purposes without special permission and stay for up to three months. Many have joined relatives or family members in Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic and Spain. Most of them, with biometric passports, have the right to stay in the EU for 90 days. A right that does not benefit those who do not have proof of their legal status in Ukraine.

² GRANDI, Filippo. High Commissioner's Statement to the United Nations Security Council on Ukraine. In: UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency [online]. [accessed 1 March 2022]. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/admin/hcspeeches/621d33da4/high-commissioners-statement-united-nations-security-council-ukraine.html>.

In Lviv, the population organised itself from the outset to help the displaced. Located a hundred kilometres from the Polish border, the town has become a crossroads where refugees can either wait some days or go abroad. For several days, the Ukrainian authorities have been bringing in trains from the east and centre of the country, and especially Kiev, making it a crossroads; a free refugee train that only women and children can board.

In fact, France has moved its embassy there from Kiev, after holding out in the capital as long as possible. Italy, the United States, Canada and Israel had already done so, some even before Russia's invasion on 24 February, obviously for security reasons and to help their nationals from there. Unfortunately, the latest news is of an attack on this city's airport, which is considered almost a "safe haven" within the country.

Despite the rush of events, the European Commission understood the scale of the problem and urged member states to cut red tape for Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war to safety. Faced with the wave of refugees, in the first hours the European Union tried to adapt and accept Ukrainian refugees without asylum applications, releasing funds to support the countries in the front line of this crisis and proposing the activation of the temporary protection mechanism to provide these refugees with safe status and access to schools, health care and work³.

By definition, refugees are persons who, given that they are outside their country of origin, are in need of international protection due to serious threats against which the authorities in their country of origin are unable or unwilling to protect them, as set out in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees⁴ and its 1967 Protocol, the main international instruments for refugees.

The protection granted by the international community to people who are forced to flee their countries aims to restore the link between the person and the state by offering the refugee a state that provides protection on a surrogate basis because his or her state of origin denies or is unable to provide it.

³ VON DER LEYEN, Ursula. "We propose to activate the temporary protection mechanism to provide these refugees with a secure status and access to schools, medical care and work". 1 March 2022, 1:33 p. m., [Tweet]. <https://twitter.com/vonderleyen/status/1498637437358292997>

⁴ Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. *United Nations*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/es/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-relating-status-refugees>

Although countries used to have time limits on how long refugees could stay in reception centres, most noted that in this case they would probably not apply them and that Ukrainians could stay as long as they needed to.

The Directive on “temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons”⁵, in which Denmark does not take part, ensures above all a balance in the reception efforts made by the Member States. It applies for a period of one year and can be extended for a further two years. Countries must ensure that people want to return to their country before granting them a residence permit and will allow them to move throughout the European Union, the directive applying in all 27 Member States. They are automatically given one year of legal residence as refugees. These periods can be extended for up to three years, during which time they can apply for asylum or permanent resident status, to be managed by each Member State according to its national rules.

The system is designed to allow arrivals to be automatically granted refugee status and not be left in legal limbo while their application is being processed. Given the human avalanche that is taking place, under normal procedures this would mean that most of them would be left without papers and therefore without access to basic services such as health and education and, most importantly, without the possibility of working legally.

This system, established at the end of the wars in the former Yugoslavia in 2001, has never been used before. It had to be approved by a relative majority (15 member countries, representing 65% of the EU population). Some ministers expressed reservations, no doubt fearing setting a precedent, including Poland and Hungary who argued that they were already coping with the current situation and that the adoption of a text was not essential.

The activation is made on the basis of a Commission proposal. The European Parliament is informed and can vote on a resolution, but its opinion is not binding. If on paper it seems simple, because it is based on facilitating processes by granting refugee status on a mass scale to a collective rather than on a case-by-case basis, in practice it can become a legal and logistical nightmare.

⁵ Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof. Official Journal L 212 of 07/08/2001 p. 0012 - 0023. [online]. [accessed 1 March 2022]. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32001L0055&from=ES>

On 2 March, at the request of France, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, the implementation of the temporary international protection directive was formally proposed and the following day, as expected, the Council accepted it, being described as a "historic decision" by the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson. "The EU stands united to save lives!" she said on her official Twitter account⁶.

But this mechanism only reaches Ukrainians and their families. Although the European Commission's proposal initially advocated that long-term migrants from third countries should be directly covered by this directive, European governments have decided to restrict its coverage, leaving it up to each state to decide whether to apply it automatically or to grant an appropriate or comparable status from the host country's own legislation. Migrants who, at the time of the invasion, had been in Ukraine for less than five years may enter Europe, but the receiving Member State may deport them to their country of origin provided that this return operation can be carried out in a safe and sustainable manner, and if not they will be given another status to remain in the EU, such as asylum, international protection, etc. This is the case of the thousands of foreigners of African origin who are university students in Ukraine.

With the proposal activated, the mechanism known as "double voluntarism" is used. Member states must indicate how many refugees they are willing to accept and Ukrainian refugees will have to give their consent, individually, to be sent to one or another European country. Ultimately, this system will primarily serve to relieve asylum systems of an unsustainable pressure to manage.

Europe thus regains the role it has always had in the establishment and development of the international system for the protection of refugees, which is a reflection of the historical figure of asylum, protected by Article 18 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and considered a general principle of EU law derived from the constitutional traditions common to its member states.

Ultimately this conflict will put pressure on Europe's public coffers just as it was preparing to consolidate its finances after two years of stimulus due to the pandemic, which has sent debt and deficit levels soaring.

⁶ JOHANSSON, Ylva. "Historic decision in #JHA right now; the EU will give temporary protection to those fleeing the war in Ukraine. The EU stands united to save lives! @GDarmanin". 3 March 2022, 4:30 p. m. [[Twit](https://twitter.com/YlvaJohansson/status/1499406846582530049)] <https://twitter.com/YlvaJohansson/status/1499406846582530049> [Accessed: 5 March2022].

But why has this directive never been implemented before in the two decades since its adoption? A case in point is the Syrian war in 2015. At that time the Commission did not put pressure on the member states, and Angela Merkel herself was heavily criticised, even by members of her own cabinet (Thomas de Maizière), for the sort of unilateral international protection directive, when she stated: “Those who come from Syria will be guaranteed protection”, making Germany the first country to suspend the Dublin protocol⁷ and facilitating the asylum process for the thousands of Syrian refugees arriving in the EU.

It should therefore come as no surprise that the natural compassion that comes with seeing refugees fleeing the horror of war seems to unleash more lenient and tolerant feelings in Europe towards Ukraine than those felt as a result of other recent conflicts. The refugees have fortunately encountered a much friendlier landscape than has been the case in other situations.

The message could be understood as a matter of preference for some refugees over others. But the very spirit of this crisis is different: the geographical, cultural, social and historical proximity to Ukraine has meant that most governments of European countries, despite the traditional anti-immigration stance of some, have been largely willing to take in displaced Ukrainians.

The reality is that countries such as Hungary and Poland, which have always been restrictive, are now experiencing conflict on their own doorstep. Objectively speaking, the journey for these people is short and they do not have to cross the border illegally, many of them with family or friends waiting for them on the other side of the border to facilitate their arrival.

Quo vadis Ukraine

But how should we deal with this maelstrom that involves European politics, the politics of individual states, civil society’s humanitarian impulse and the uncertainty of tomorrow?

Displacement is one of the tragedies of war. People fleeing their homes seek safety, protection and assistance.

⁷ According to the Dublin agreements, the responsibility for dealing with a person seeking refugee status lies with the state where they first crossed the border.

In light of the emergency and the overriding humanitarian needs of refugees, a solidarity response is emerging to support the efforts of host countries: The UN, NGOs and other partners to ensure safe access to the territory for refugees and third country nationals fleeing Ukraine.

The EU, which already provided 25 million euros a year in humanitarian aid to Ukraine, will increase this amount to 90 million⁸. Eighteen countries are also providing bilateral assistance to Kiev, for which the UN is launching an emergency appeal.

But where you really see solidarity is in those anonymous people of goodwill who, even at the risk of losing their own lives, go to a conflict zone to offer their help. Solidarity actions are largely the outcome of private or local initiatives in border areas.

The NGO World Central Kitchen, a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing meals after disasters, has travelled to Ukraine to feed the thousands of refugees arriving at the border. From the town of Medyka on the border with Poland, according to the Asturian chef José Andrés on his Twitter account⁹.

Airbnb is offering free short-term accommodation for 100,000 Ukrainians who have been displaced by the war with Russia, the company announced on Monday 1 March¹⁰. Brian Chesky, co-founder and CEO of Airbnb, called on people to open their homes in Poland, Germany, Hungary and Romania as more Ukrainians flee the conflict in their home country. The company will fund these stays with the help of Airbnb hosts and donations to the Airbnb.org Refugee Fund.

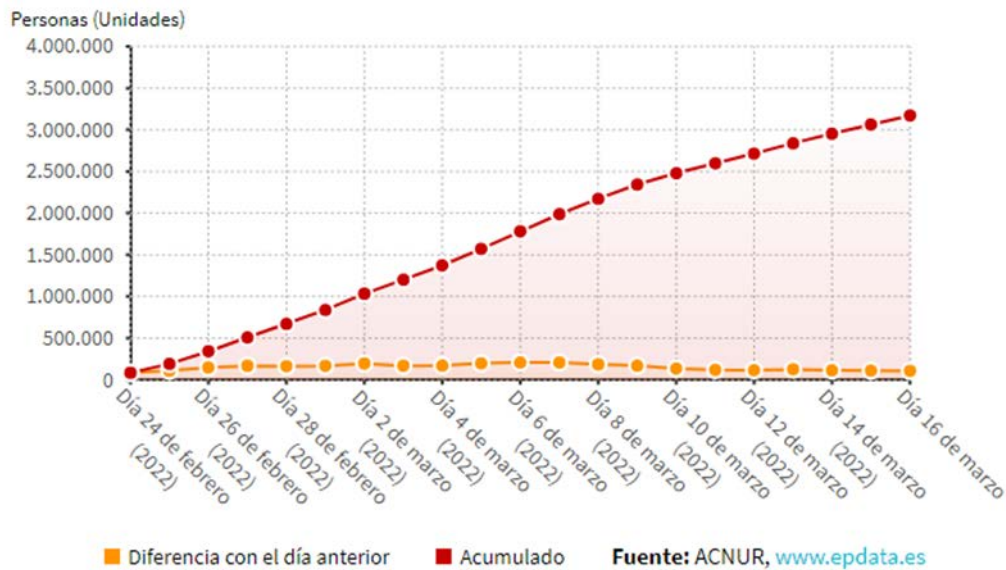
For the more connected, there are cryptocurrency donations. This medium is widely acclaimed by the Ukrainian government. The day after the Russian invasion began, the Ukrainian Minister of Digital Transition even launched an appeal for these donations. In times of war, this digital money is an alternative to banknotes. More than five million Ukrainians use bitcoin or stable currency. This currency is even more secure because it is backed by the dollar.

⁸ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Ukraine: EU coordinating emergency assistance and steps up humanitarian aid. In: European Commission. [online], 2020 [accessed: 1 March 2022]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_1462

⁹ @chefjoseandres. 28 February 2022, 1:22, [tweet]. <https://twitter.com/chefjoseandres/status/1498091276205535232?as=10>

¹⁰ ALESSANDRANI, Sarah. Airbnb to offer free housing to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees. In: CNBC [accessed: 1 March 2022] <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/02/28/airbnb-to-offer-free-housing-to-100000-ukrainian-refugees.html>

Refugiados ucranianos que han salido de sus fronteras por la guerra con Rusia



Poland has been overwhelmed by the influx of Ukrainian refugees since the Russian offensive began - two every three seconds. This country, which has deep historical and cultural ties with Ukraine, was already home to some 1.5 million Ukrainians before the Russian invasion and has expressed unwavering support for the invaded country.

The Polish authorities expected the daily arrival of some 30,000 people from Ukraine, but the number is much higher, with the latest figures now standing at 2,050, 392¹¹.

This is the second migration crisis Poland has faced in just a few months, albeit of a very different nature. Polish reception services were already overwhelmed with the arrival of hundreds of people pushed out of the Belarusian border.

People organise themselves on social media, collect money and medicine, and offer free housing, food, work or transport for refugees. Przemysl railway station has become one of the main entry points for Ukrainian refugees.

The 600 km-long Romanian border is another refugee outflow hotspot. According to UNHCR, a total of 527,247 Ukrainians have entered Romania.

¹¹ As of 19 March. Ukraine Situation Refugee. Operational Data Portal. UNHCR. Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/es/situations/ukraine>

Several crossing points are open: Halmeu, Dyakovo, Sighetu Marmăției, Solotvino, Siret, Porubne and Isaccea and Orlivka, where the ferry is used to cross. It is also possible to enter Romania through the Republic of Moldova.

Humanitarian organisations look out for these vulnerable refugees because of the high risk that they may be targeted by human traffickers or victims of other forms of exploitation. Many women are trafficked every year, and even children can be at risk. When these mobilisations take place there are dark elements that can take advantage of the circumstances and capitalise on the pain of these families.

The Romanian authorities have announced their readiness to take in half a million Ukrainian refugees, but managing this humanitarian crisis is proving difficult. Reception centres in the main cities and near the border cannot cope with the huge influx of people.

In Hungary the situation is similar (305,518). The country has five border crossings with Ukraine and several cities, including Zahony, have turned public buildings into rescue centres where Hungarian civilians come to offer food or assistance.

Initially there were less friendly voices, particularly as the election campaign is under way in the country and there were fears that the arrival of these displaced persons could change the political and economic situation, but the relevant authorities began preparations for assistance as soon as the Russian offensive began.

More than 350,000 people from Ukraine have arrived on Moldovan territory, of whom 100,000 will remain in the country¹². This places a tremendous burden on a small state with limited resources.

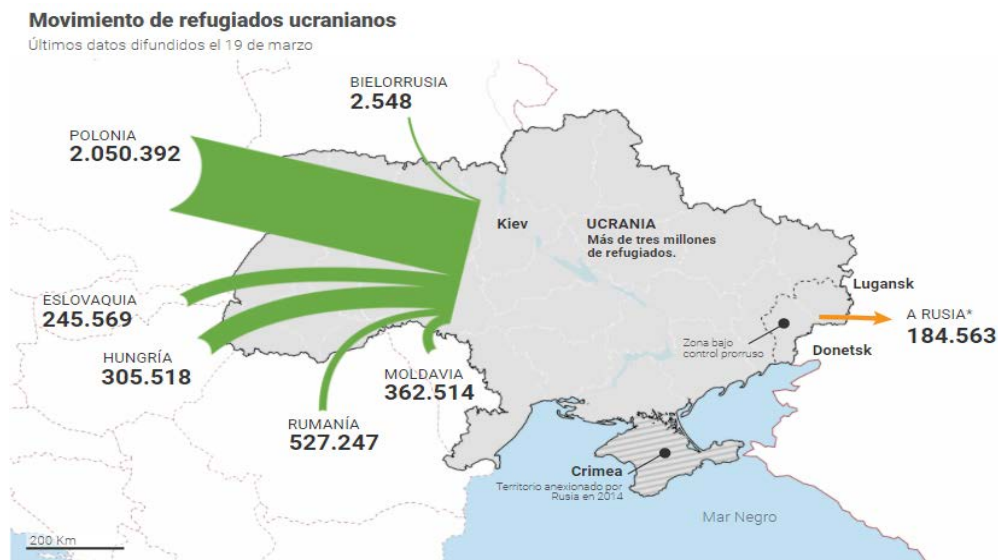
In a context of already high inflation, this refugee crisis has had unprecedented social and economic consequences for the Moldovan government's economy, straining basic services, reducing trade and investment, increasing pressure on scarce natural resources and even jeopardising the country's stability and development.

Meanwhile, 70% of the people entering Slovakia from Ukraine are entering via Vyšné Nemecké, which is also the transit point for most of the goods being shipped. More than 245,569 Ukrainians have crossed this border.

¹²Refugees fleeing Ukraine for Moldova find a way to Romania. UNHCR <https://www.acnur.org/es-es/noticias/historia/2022/3/623138b34/refugiados-que-huyen-de-ucrania-en-direccion-a-moldavia-encuentran-una.html>

In the town of Humenne there is a transit centre with a capacity for 200 refugees, but as a place of transit nobody stays there for long, most of them continuing their journey to other European countries.

It is difficult to have an accurate overview of displacement because of the extreme speed at which the figures are evolving:



Source: UNHCR, Governments of Poland and Moldova, Reuters, AFP, EFE

But in parallel to all these refugee reception initiatives, there is a need to rescue civilians still in the military shock zones by means of humanitarian corridors, pathways that facilitate the safe movement of humanitarian aid and casualties.

This is a measure recognised by the laws of international law and which all countries, in any war scenario, are obliged to comply with, although this has been violated on several occasions.

Attempts to establish them in Ukraine are proving difficult, with both sides accusing each other of not respecting the ceasefire. One of Moscow's proposals was rejected by Kiev, which did not want the corridors to lead to Russian territory as it would act as a mousetrap for a population that wants to flee to Europe, turning them from refugees into hostages.

Amid Ukrainian complaints about Moscow's unwillingness to allow these evacuations, the Russian authorities finally agreed after two weeks of war to open humanitarian corridors in the capital, Kiev, and other cities in the country, including Kharkov, Mariupol and Sumy.

According to Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the Ukrainian Presidential Administration¹³, 26 humanitarian corridors have at last been established in the regions of Kiev, Sumy (350 km north-east of the capital), Kharkiv in the north-east of the country and Zaporozhye (east). Similarly, in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, there are two pro-Russian separatist territories in eastern Ukraine.

Last, among all these shifts, there is another challenge to be added: Covid-19, although the impression is that in this context of crisis it is no longer a priority. The WHO, however, has already warned of a worsening of the pandemic in Ukraine in the wake of the war, with 4 928 032 cases¹⁴, fuelled by low temperatures, overcrowding and the disappearance of masks. This is compounded by the very low vaccination rate among Ukrainians.

Data in Europe are showing an upsurge or stagnation in infections, but still with very high rates, and countries receiving refugee influxes are working to minimise the risks by providing vaccines and testing for these displaced people.

And in the midst of all this solidarity, one might think that there is a double standard and a Eurocentric bias in the media reporting on this conflict that makes one group of human lives more valuable than others suffering similar situations in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. Multiple journalists have highlighted the physical differences between Ukrainian refugees and other refugees to justify their sensitivity or empathy towards the suffering of Ukrainian refugees.

This idea is not so far-fetched if we judge by some unfortunate statements by journalists in the early stages of the invasion, including CBS News correspondent Charlie D'Agata, who had to apologise after saying on air that the situation in Ukraine could not be compared to Iraq and Afghanistan, because this European nation is "relatively civilised"¹⁵. And British Conservative politician and columnist Daniel Hannan when he referred to the Ukrainians in these terms: "They are so much like us. That's what makes it so shocking. Ukraine is a European country. Its people watch Netflix and have Instagram accounts,

¹³ Humanitarian corridors along nine routes scheduled for Thursday - Vereschuk. *Interfax News Agency - Ukraine*. [online]. [accessed 17 March 2022]. Available at: <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/814785.html>

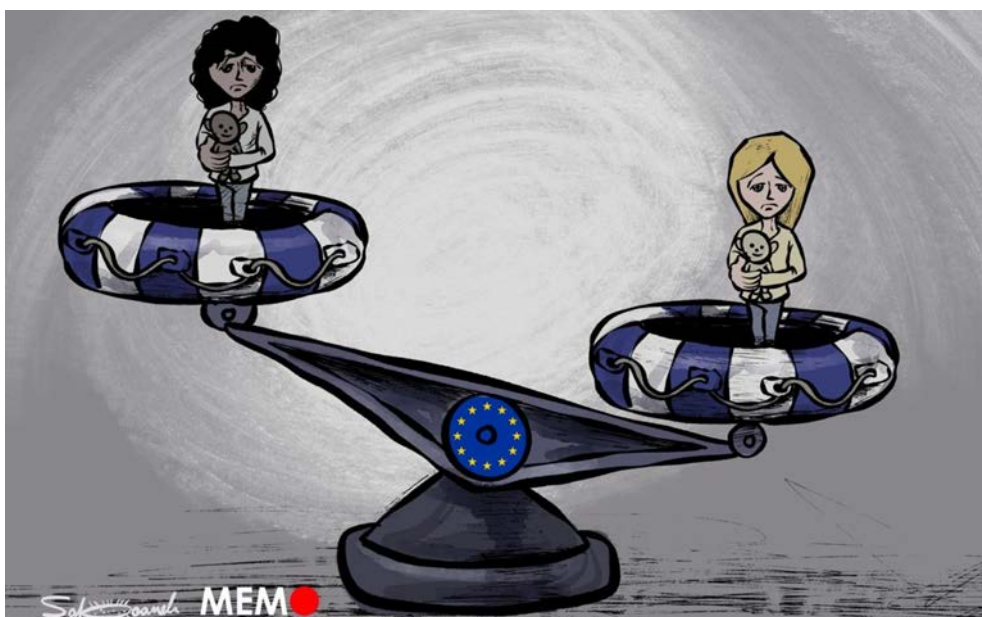
¹⁴ WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. Ukraine The current COVID-19 situation. World Health Organization. [online], 2020 [accessed: 19 March 2022]. Available at: <https://www.who.int/countries/ukr/>

¹⁵ KESSELEN, Ben. CBS News' Charlie D'Agata apologizes for saying Ukraine more 'civilized' than Iraq, Afghanistan. In: *New York Post* [accessed: 2 March 2022]. Available at: <https://nypost.com/2022/02/26/cbs-news-charlie-dagata-apologizes-for-saying-ukraine-more-civilized-than-iraq-afghanistan/>

vote in free elections and read uncensored newspapers. War is no longer something that visits impoverished and remote populations. It can happen to anyone"¹⁶.

Could the attitude adopted by these Western media outlets, masking hidden feelings, be considered moral dishonesty?

Certainly, saving lives on the basis of colour, ethnicity or religion would not be acceptable, but it is clear that statements like those of Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov, who without flinching publicly differentiated between two classes of refugees, do not help in many respects to disprove the West's supposed hypocrisy:



Source: Sabaaneh/Eastern Monitor

Some argue that the invasion of Ukraine will change human history, while others are criticised for their allegedly imperialist mentality according to which what happens in Europe has more relevance than what happens, for example, in the Middle East.

But since we are walking on shifting sands, we should note that the actors in the Arab world have themselves failed to welcome refugees from the conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq to their territories. Is there not a hint of cynicism to be detected here?

Of course, perceptions are different depending on which side of the world we live on and on our interpretations of the stimuli we receive.

¹⁶ HANNAN, Daniel. Vladimir Putin's monstrous invasion is an attack on civilisation itself. In: The Telegraph [accessed: 28 February 2022]. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/26/vladimir-putins-monstrous-invasion-attack-civilisation/>

However, this global media attention on the war and the ensuing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine has prompted humanitarian institutions and associations to warn of the dangers of looking away from other territories that continue to suffer today. Disasters currently affecting the Horn of Africa, Burma, Haiti, Ethiopia and the Sahel, as well as three other crises in and around the Arab world.

At the UN Security Council session on Ukraine on the 7 March, Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, stressed the need to remember that this armed conflict "is not the only war".

"We simply cannot afford to have political attention and donor funding diverted from other pressing humanitarian crises," he said.

Conclusions

It is estimated that almost 10 million people have been forcibly displaced since the Ukraine crisis broke out on 24 February. This includes the 3.3 million refugees who have fled to other countries, as reported by the UN High Commissioner's Office for Refugees, and the 6.5 million internally displaced persons seeking safer areas.

The cost of the war in terms of human lives is already extremely high, the Ukrainian population the victim of this fratricidal struggle, while diplomatic initiatives by both countries continue to fail to achieve positive results, fuelling an uncertain future.

This comes on the heels of a massive human rights impact for millions of people across Ukraine, with at least 1,900 civilian casualties recorded up to 18 March from the start of the armed conflict, including 52 children, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), although the actual number of dead and wounded is difficult to verify¹⁷.

The humanitarian collapse has prompted Europe to make an unprecedented shift in its refugee protection policy, triggered by the brutality of Russia's attack and the proximity of the conflict.

¹⁷ Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General. 18 MARCH 2022. In: United Nations. Meetings Coverage and Press Releases [accessed 18 March 2022]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/db220318.doc.htm>

Despite multiple warnings about Putin's intentions and no strategy planning for the expected influx of people, instead of debating for months to agree on a quota for displaced people, it has in fact taken only a week to reach an agreement. The Europe that did not want these people as part of its territory and preferred to close in on itself has given way to a Europe that is committed to helping and protecting them.

This determination to apply the temporary protection mechanism is a step forward in the management of future problems.

In this strategy of openness we cannot deny the political component on the playing field of the European strategic landscape. The euphoria of its leaders at having reached a unanimous agreement on this issue is more geared towards its foreign policy than to the refugee issue, especially considering that Europe needed to assume a more prominent role on the world stage.

And we should not forget the threat posed by Russia's nuclear drive that has helped bring the 27 closer together over the reception of Ukrainian refugees.

One wonders how long the momentum of generosity will last, given that we could see a sudden halt to the financing of a crisis of this scale and one which could be prolonged over time. The international humanitarian system is subject to a compassionate subjectivity that is emotional and ephemeral.

The shocking images of refugees waiting in long queues to leave Europe's borders are making an impression on the hearts of the West for the time being. If it were not this way, the consequences would be very serious for the fate of millions of people who would otherwise be neglected.

But is Europe ready to welcome these millions of refugees? It is our hope and wish that this will not turn into a humanitarian catastrophe and that Europe will be able to face this great challenge by forgetting the ghosts of the past.

No one chooses to be a refugee; those who cross the border today leave their homeland without knowing when they will be able to see it again.

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