The security of Europe through the experience of the russian-Ukrainian war

Abstract

The issue of countries' security, namely the protection of borders, people and interests, has become the cornerstone of today's world. Therefore, it is especially important for Europeans to unite, have a clear position and adhere to approved values. In October 2023, an event in Budapest was devoted to the topic of security. Youth activists from different European countries gathered to discuss current events, risks and opportunities for interaction from the perspective of a green vision. Unfortunately, the future is not as bright as it could be, but we can still fix it.

The importance of security

The full-scale war waged by russia on the territory of Ukraine once again highlights the weak points of society in its inability to resist aggression and armed conflicts. In 2023, the world was also shaken by Israel's war on Palestine. It thus becomes obvious to everyone why Maslow made security a key pillar of well-being in his pyramid. And not just on a personal level: on a larger scale, too, security is the key to healthy development and comfortable coexistence for all.

Currently, the biggest risks to Europe's security can be linked to economic, energy and cultural factors. The russian blackmail with regard to the price of fossil fuels (which are best avoided altogether), attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, and the massive use of bot farms to promote narratives that benefit Putin all cause panic and discredit the democratic European society. So this is what, in my opinion, people should know in order to be on the alert and understand how it is possible to counteract all this.

Energy security

Energy is the driving force of the functioning of the state. Water supply, light, sewerage, transport and communication all depend on it – the need for it can be felt in all aspects of city and village life.

russia's shelling of energy infrastructure has also highlighted the importance of energy for non-domestic purposes too. Why is the world afraid of blackouts? Because in such cases, on a personal level, it is almost impossible to do anything, warm up, or communicate. Blackouts also make it difficult to conduct training in educational institutions and for people to go anywhere, and shopping and entertainment centres are no longer able to provide shopping, let alone entertainment. And at the highest level, the lack of energy disrupts transport connections and makes it impossible for industry and factories to function or to save the lives of people who depend on complex medical equipment. But there are several ways of generating energy, and each has its own particular safety issues and risks for the environment:

Nuclear power is not only a danger for Ukraine from the threat of shelling by russia. The American company Westinghouse is going to build up to 9 new large nuclear units on the territory of Ukraine. This company was responsible for the creation of a nuclear power plant in its homeland, but it did not prove very reliable: projects overran by years, and the budget grew every year. We can therefore see that, in addition to the danger they pose, nuclear power plants are also potential money burners.
Hydroelectric power stations: The tragedy with the russian army blowing up the Kakhovka Dam showed that, while there are problems during the construction of such structures (flooding of existing settlements, destruction of ecosystems, pollution from production), the consequences of emergency situations are even more devastating, and more unpredictable too. The bottom of the reservoir is now beginning to recover little by little, so nature, too, is participating in the fight against the consequences of the man-made disaster.

Thermoelectric power stations: In 2022 and 2023, when the russians were attacking critical infrastructure, there were massive missile attacks on electricity substations and poles, especially. This was because it is not only kitchen lighting that depends on electricity, but industrial production too.

The influence of green parties

So, what actions should the European community take regarding the organisation of energy security, especially in the context of the russian–Ukrainian war?

Firstly, there needs to be active support for renewable energy. It is also important that Ukraine does not talk about reconstruction to the pre-war state, but about a just transition to green energy sources. Secondly, the formation of a decentralised but integrated electrical network is also important. It is therefore necessary to encourage local farms, smallholdings and enterprises to use resources rationally and, of course, to switch to renewable energy sources.

And thirdly, we should not forget about frugal energy use by every one of us, because enough is enough.

Information security despite propaganda and narratives

In the world today, there is more and more talk about information hygiene, media literacy and the need to increase the level of critical thinking. And for good reason. Because education, a knowledge of contexts and the ability to compare different things not only help us to see the world without rose-coloured glasses but also to be able to differentiate fact from fiction.

The concept of hybrid war is increasingly appearing in the speeches of important political figures. Information is a weapon on a psychological level, and we have a precedent with russia, which is now actively using it – so it is important to raise public awareness and prepare people for possible psychological operations.

Propaganda itself is the dissemination of a particular opinion among the public, for example, the well-known propaganda about a healthy lifestyle. But we also know that anything that has an influence on the public can be used against it. This is why russia is now trying to cover up the traces of its crimes not only physically, but also informationally. Fake news, bots and bot farms, denial of facts and manipulation of data are the most obvious methods used by various russian sources.

But the problem with narratives is much more serious. A narrative can be a toxic idea that seeps into the brain through certain words and phrases used in a particular way. Unlike fake news, narratives exploit the vulnerability of the addressees and are hidden in messages dealing with facts and real events. They do this using "hooks" placed "between the lines". For example, references to "fraternal nations" or comments about the similarity of the russian and Ukrainian languages play in favour of terrorist russia, which is trying to promote the idea that it is carrying out a "liberation of its original russian territories". Sakartvelo (Western name: Georgia), unfortunately, is familiar with this kind of situation, because it is required to understand russian spoken by russians who came from russia but do not want to learn another language.

The best way of identifying narratives and propaganda is through media literacy courses. It is also important to try to avoid becoming emotional when the topic is highly sensitive. It will also be useful to develop a habit of not being lazy, of checking original sources, and of not taking everything "experts say" at face value.

Decolonisation

Talking about decolonisation is important. This is a useful process for countries in terms of finding their own development path. Decolonisation is the process of a former colony regaining its self-identity and independence. And at the same time, the colonising country must renounce all encroachments on the territory that may once have belonged to it territorially, industrially, or even culturally. As we can see,

at least two parties are involved in this process, both of which need to reach a compromise and defend their own interests in a way that it is agreed upon by both parties.

From history, we can recall the examples of the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Russian Empire and the USSR. Nowadays, all these empires have collapsed, but their successor countries still have a certain hold over their former colonies. For example, the self-proclaimed republics of LPR and DNR in Ukraine and South Ossetia in Sakartvelo are the consequences of russia's unwillingness to let go of its former territories and recognise their right to independence.

It is also important to understand that colonialism is not limited to territorial absorption, but also captures spheres of public life – education, culture, politics. But before looking for ways to make balanced and correct decisions, it is necessary to consider the problems and interests of each of the parties.

Colonising countries

These are usually countries that used to have empires and actively occupied other territories, especially in the era of geographical discoveries. However, colonisers also include states that now have significant industrial potential, wealth and opportunities that allow them to manipulate others.

Colonised countries

In turn, countries that used to be colonies suffer from this kind of onslaught from the colonising state that previously had significant influence over them. This dependence could be economic, legal, cultural and more. In most cases the coloniser tries to erase the identity of the colony in order to make it belong to the empire and convince it that they are one.

The meaning of decolonisation

The importance of both parties understanding the processes and problems is therefore obvious. But what solutions can there be to conflicts resulting from decolonisation? From a green perspective, we can try to start with the following steps, no matter how small they may seem at the beginning:

- Public visibility of cases, not silence, as if it were an internal conflict that did not concern others.
- Support for a colonised country that is on the way to independence. This can relate to culture, technology or production. Support for its exports. Various subsidies or loans. In short, help in those areas where the influence of the colonising country can still be felt.
- Influence on the colonising country through certain restrictions will reduce the risk for other colonised countries. In addition, this will help society to see that countries are responsible for their actions and no one goes unpunished. And it is equally important to monitor statements about other countries in the public space, to be able to react in time.

Conclusions

As we can see, the issue of security is relevant for all countries in Europe and beyond. Various geopolitical processes, as well as the russian-Ukrainian war, continue to highlight the foundations of our security and possible weaknesses in it. However, European youth activists are ready to defend democratic interests, protect human rights, and be drivers of green transformations.

By Nataliia Volik