

War in Memory - Can I Still Live in Peace? Five Theses About Truth

Sonya Koshkina, (Olomouc. 11.2.2023)

In two weeks, it will be exactly a year since the big war has escalated in my country. And exactly nine years since Russia has annexed Crimea and invaded the Donbass. I bet that a year ago, many of you thought it would all be over quickly. That Kyiv, as Putin planned, would be taken within 72 hours and most of the country would also capitulate. Few believed that the Ukrainian army would have the strength and skills to fight back.

But we know how events unfolded in the last 12 months. Today, I think, none of you doubts that Ukraine will win the war.

Unfortunately, it won't happen tomorrow. Right now, these days, we are expecting a Russian offensive again. Perhaps at the end of February, on the occasion of the anniversary of the big invasion. After all, Putin loves symbols, and dates are very important to him. Or maybe this will happen a little later, in March-April, when the weather conditions will be more favorable for the movement of heavy vehicles. Such an offensive will definitely take place, as well as a second attempt to capture Kyiv.

But there is no doubt that this offensive will fail again. These are not my assumptions, but the assessments of experts, in particular, the analysts from the American Institute of War.

This is not about underestimating the enemy - the Russians do not spare people. For them, it's just "cannon fodder." The mobilization process practically does not cease, and they are able to bring to the front from 300 thousand to half a million those mobilized. In addition, Moscow still has enough weapons. But they do not have the main thing, which makes them different from the Ukrainians – a high motivation and fighting spirit. Also, they do not have the support of the civilized world, against which Russia unleashed this war.

We can discuss the military aspects of this war for a long time, but the most accurate assessment seems to me to be by the Executive Vice President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans. In the very end of 2022, Timmermans compared Vladimir Putin to Adolf Hitler in 1943, when in fact he had already lost the war, but physically it continued for another year and a half. Today, the pace of our life has accelerated significantly, and this would probably be not a year and a half, but Ukraine's victory, I hope, will come faster.

Should we be afraid that military assistance to Ukraine, which brings the defeat of Russia closer, will lead to the use of nuclear weapons, uncontrolled chaos in the world, and so on?

I do not believe so. This narrative is being subtly promoted by Russian propaganda here in Europe in order to dilute aid to Ukraine as much as possible. Russia is now interested in an operational pause - a break, to regroup its forces, allowing thus to launch a new attack. Russia does not intend to stop and it certainly does not intend to stop in Ukraine. The Baltic countries and Poland are under direct threat. Other European countries may follow. If you

think that the inscriptions on Russian tanks "To Berlin!" is a joke, an unsuccessful reference to 1945, then you are mistaken. The Putin's regime really believes in its ability to reshape the existing world order.

Ask yourself if you are ready to see Russian tanks on the streets of European cities. As it was in Budapest in 1956 and in Prague in 1968. I think the answer is obvious. We are very grateful to our friends and partners for their support. It should not stop. The faster Ukraine defeats Russia, the fewer people will die, the less damage to the economy and the environment will be. Only one party is interested in prolonging the war – Russia.

Our topic today is: *will I be able to live in peace after the war?*

The new post-war world must be based on truth. On honest answers to questions about what happened. Even the most uncomfortable questions, such as, why did this become possible?

I want to bring up five theses about the future.

1. Russia must pay for what they have done.

According to the assessment of the Prime Minister of Ukraine Denys Shmygal to the *Spiegel* magazine at the end of January, one third of the Ukrainian economy has been lost. Many large plants have been destroyed. For example, Azovstal - this plant was the largest metal producer in the country.

Inflation in 2022 was 26%.

According to the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development, as of September in Ukraine (on its controlled territory, where it is possible to count) 6,000 apartment buildings were completely destroyed, 9,500 were damaged. Almost 66,000 private houses were completely destroyed and 54,000 were damaged.

This, I emphasize, is not complete data.

At the same time, the treasury received 10% more taxes than in 2021. The banking system has never failed. 37% of Ukrainians monthly send donations to ZSU from each salary.

Answering Spiegel's question about how much the post-war reconstruction would actually cost, Denys Shmyhal gave a figure of 600 to 750 billion euros. It is important that these costs should not fall on the shoulders of taxpayers in Europe or the United States - this money should be compensated by Russian assets frozen abroad. Today they are estimated from 350 to 500 billion dollars. The Russians must pay for the restoration of Ukraine. Literally.

2. Russia must be held accountable for war crimes

After what we saw in Irpen, Bucha, Borodynaka, the whole civilized world shuddered. Only those who carefully studied the history of the twentieth century were not surprised. Massacres of innocent civilians, violence against women, torture and kidnapping - the Russian soldiers practiced this more than once. Including during the already mentioned invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. In

this sense, we, Ukrainians, have a common historical memory with the Czech people. And, again, we are very grateful for the support you are giving us today. But the war continues. After Bucha, there were also found mass graves in Izyum, numerous torture cellars in Kherson. And we have not yet liberated Mariupol, on the streets of which mobile crematoria were actively working in the spring to hide the scale of war crimes. There is no doubt that this is a genocide. Putin is systematically trying to destroy the Ukrainians, as Hitler, in his time, tried to destroy the Jews. Russia is fighting with openly terrorist methods - destroying the energy system and infrastructure facilities, bombarding residential buildings, schools, railway stations, maternity hospitals and shopping centers. Mariupol, Odessa, Kramatorsk, Dnipro. This is completely contrary to all the laws of war and is simply called terrorism.

Here I will give one more fact. You may not know, but Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories are massively brought to Russia. According to the estimates of the Russian side, as of June 2022 alone, it was about 307,000 children. Now this figure is approaching 700 thousand. It is impossible to calculate exactly - many of these children do not have Ukrainian documents, but they are promptly made Russians and sent for adoption to Russian families. One such child, a boy abducted from the occupied Mariupol, was illegally adopted by the Children's Ombudsman of the Russian Federation Maria Lvova-Belova.

What is this if not a planned genocide?

It is the genocide of Russia's actions in Ukraine that the entire international community should recognize. Its organizers and performers must be held accountable. But genocide is just one of those crimes. Globally, what Russia is doing against Ukraine is called the "crime of aggression."

In order for its initiator - the top political leadership of Russia to bear fair responsibility, it is necessary to create a Special International Tribunal (since the International Criminal Court does not have such jurisdiction). This process has already begun. Ukrainian law enforcement officers and lawyers at all levels, with the help of our Western partners, are doing everything possible for this. As you know, in mid-January, the European Parliament adopted a corresponding resolution on the need to create a special international tribunal to prosecute the crime of Russian aggression against Ukraine. There are also relevant decisions of the PARE and the EU Committee of Ministers. A special working group (Core Group) has been created, which has already begun active work. Among its participants are the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Canada, the USA, Great Britain, all the Baltic countries, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxembourg and other countries.

The next step is the adoption of a resolution by the UN General Assembly on the establishment of the Tribunal. To do this, we need the maximum consolidation of international support, and I am asking for it here today.

3. State of Russia after the war

The narrative is quite widespread: this war is Putin's war against Ukraine, and ordinary Russians have nothing to do with what is happening. Moreover, they themselves are hostages of the totalitarian system.

But where did this totalitarian system come from? Putin has ruled Russia for almost a quarter of a century, and it didn't come into existence overnight, did it? In 2018, during the presidential election, he received 77% of the vote. 56 million is a record number ever given to a candidate for the presidency of the Russian Federation. Have there been falsifications? Of course. Moreover, there were massive falsifications. The administrative resource was actively applied. Yet, it is technically impossible to falsify 56 million votes. Even in such a large and disorderly country as Russia.

Perhaps in reality in 2018 he got 56%, or 62 or 65, but he still won, and in the first round. It means that Vladimir Putin still remains the leader of the sympathies of Russians. Whether you like it or not, the vast majority of Russians support the aggressive actions of their leadership. According to closed Kremlin polls, it is no longer as significant as at the beginning of the invasion, however, it is still the majority. That is, we are dealing precisely with the Russian people. And the change of power in Russia will not particularly affect their mood. However, two things are clear.

First, Vladimir Putin will never voluntarily give up power. Most likely, the end of the period of his reign will coincide with his physical death. Second, after that, centrifugal processes will intensify in Russia, fraught with its disintegration into several independent entities. How many of them there will be and what kind, we do not know now, but this process is inevitable. It should be perceived not as a threat to the existing world order - which we will discuss later - but, on the contrary, as an opportunity.

As a journalist who has been also covering the topics of religion for many years, I will add that significant cataclysms await the Russian Orthodox Church. It was here that the idea of the so-called "Russian world" was born and established, which has now become the actual state ideology. And this will definitely have consequences for the ROC.

4. How will the global security system change after the war?

The fact that the current system of global security is not sufficiently effective became clear back in 2014, after Russia occupied Crimea. The Budapest memorandum of 1994 did not work, the guarantor countries did not fulfill their function. On February 24, 2022, this was confirmed. Logically, this system should be improved, given current challenges.

First of all, we need security guarantees for Ukraine itself, which should become a member of the EU and NATO. This process is mutually beneficial. As the newly elected President of the Czech Republic Petr Pavel correctly noted, after the war the Ukrainian army will be one of the most experienced and progressive in the world. And the stronger the connection of a united Europe with Ukraine, the stronger the defense will be and Russia will never be able to attack again. Not Ukraine, not any other country.

In the meantime, on the way to NATO, Ukraine must receive reliable security guarantees. An international group of experts, led by Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak and former NATO Secretary General Anders von Rasmussen, prepared a draft of the relevant security mechanisms in the form of a document called the «Kyiv compact». He counts not only on Ukraine, but is a universal mechanism that can become the basis of a new system of world security. In the future, every country faced with aggression should receive assistance within 24 hours.

5. Will the Ukrainians be able to forgive the Russians?

I will answer as a Ukrainian: no. In the life of my generation - 35 years plus - this is impossible. In the life of the generation of 20-30-40-50-year-olds who are now fighting at the front – the same. In the lives of parents whose sons and daughters died defending the country - no. In the life of a generation of children whose schools are bombed by Russian missiles and who are forced to study while sitting in basements - too. Those who were taken out of the country by their parents and who are safe, but at the same time separated from their homes, relatives, friends - the same. My daughter is 3.5 years old, of which she has been living in the Czech Republic for almost a year, and she clearly knows the reason - "the Russians are bombing Kyiv. And my mother, a well-known journalist, was on the list of prisoners if the Russians had captured the capital." But sooner or later, a dialogue will begin to build bridges between the nations. For this to happen, the Russian people themselves must conduct a serious internal audit. To answer the question for themselves: how this became possible, why did they allow it, why did they participate and support it?

25 years have passed since the end of World War II until the moment when German Chancellor Willy Brandt knelt in front of the monument to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. I have already said that in our time events are developing at a faster pace, so I sincerely hope that this distance will be shorter than a quarter of a century.