

Selected Economic and Social Aspects of the Ukraine Conflict

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Abstract

The declared reason of the “special military operation” was the anti-separatist activity of Ukraine in Donbas since 2014. Suppression of separatism within national borders is justifiable, exemplified by Russian anti-separatist operations in Caucasus (1994-2009). The Ukraine war, having undermined the internationally agreed status quo, has triggered conflicts in different parts of the world. If the power in Europe shifts to the East, it would come along with losses of human rights. Disregard for laws and regulations, corruption and collectivism will come instead. Selected economic, demographic and environmental issues, related to the Ukraine conflict, are discussed here. Certain environmentalists act in accordance with the interests of governments selling petroleum and natural gas. The overestimation of medical and environmental side effects of nuclear energy contributes to its strangulation, supporting appeals to dismantle nuclear power plants (NPP). Health risks and environmental damage are maximal for coal and oil, lower for gas and much lower for the nuclear energy. More international trust and cooperation would enable construction of NPP in optimally suitable places, notwithstanding national borders, considering sociopolitical, geographic and geologic factors. The weightiest argument against NPP is that they are potential targets in armed conflicts. One of the motives to unleash the war in Ukraine, of militarist rhetoric and threats to use nuclear weapons, has been the strangulation of nuclear energy and boosting fossil fuel prizes. An optimal solution would be leadership centred in the most developed parts of the world. Ukraine must become a test field for international trust and cooperation.

Keywords: Ukraine; armed conflict; economics; demography; environment; Russia

Introduction

The declared reason of the “special military operation” (SMO), which began in February 2022, was the anti-separatist activity of Ukraine in the Donbas since 2014. Apparently, this activity was exaggerated by Russian officials and media. In principle, combating separatism within national borders is justifiable, exemplified by Russian anti-separatist operations in the North Caucasus (1994-2009). The Ukraine voted for independence (~83%) in the 1991 referendum. The pro-independence vote varied from 95% in the west of the country to 76.5 % in the Donetsk area and 54% in Crimea (Sneider, 1993). The 1991 borders of Ukraine were recognized by all nations, including the Russian Federation (RF), which consented to guarantee the borders by virtue of the Tripartite Accords (with participation of the United States) of January 14, 1994, and the Budapest Declaration of December 5, 1994. On May 31, 1997, the Treaty on Cooperation and Partnership between Russia and Ukraine was signed, recognizing the borders. The State Duma endorsed the Treaty in December 1998 and the Federation Council in February 1999 (Trenin, 2001). The United Nations considers SMO to be a violation of territorial integrity and sovereignty, which is against the UN Charter.

The Ukraine war, having undermined the principle of internationally agreed status quo, has triggered a series of conflicts in different parts of the world. The Russian military establishment earns credibility and funding by exploiting supposed threats from the West (Buwalda et al., 2003).

Admittedly, a majority of residents in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine are Russian-speaking and many people were disappointed that their region had not become a part of RF. The Ukraine in today's borders was created by Bolsheviks disregarding ethnic and linguistic realities. Statistics about ethnic composition are potentially misleading because some residents registered themselves as Ukrainians for reasons of convenience but continued sharing the Russian identity and loyalty. Numerous Russia-sympathizers probably contribute to the misappropriation of foreign aid. Recent referendums in occupied territories were met with scepticism because residents voted for the unification with RF to avoid trouble as they did not believe that the situation will be reverted. The Soviet-trained collectivism has influenced referendums, elections and opinion polls. Almost everybody voted the ruling party in the former SU. Some Russian-speaking areas may become parts of RF if people really want it. A workable solution must be found by means of negotiations. The question is, however, whether there are responsible negotiating partners. The history of the 20th century demonstrated that European leaders sometimes took short-sighted decisions. The main thing is to avoid a large-scale war. Consequences would be unfavorable for both sides, as it was 100 years ago.

If the power in Europe shifts to Russia, it would come along with losses of liberties and human rights. Disregard for laws and regulations, corruption and collectivism will come instead. The quality of many services and products will decline: spoiled foods on sale, antibiotics in milk, falsified wines and other beverages, impolite service, wrong price tags in shops, misquoting of legal codes by civil servants in their correspondence, backdating of official letters, embezzlement of registered correspondence, etc. The former president Dmitry Medvedev talks that Russian residents have the freedom to download and distribute illegal versions of films over the Internet (FP Staff, 2023). Tomorrow they might say that theft is generally permissible. Corruption and lawlessness are generally harmful for economy (Fukuyama, 2011). Those who advocate lawlessness should not complain of illegal action against themselves.

The reasonable proposal was published in 2013: "Russia must be brought into the world and European community. And in order to reduce distance and fear, NATO should move to Moscow... What is needed is a reform of both NATO and the European Union (EU) in the creation of confederation from Vancouver to Vladivostok" (Gardner, 2013). Russian rulers and a part of the population are against the coexistence in one legal field with the West. This is not entirely groundless considering formally legal but unfair practices. Russians travelling abroad encountered various kinds of deception and fraud. The fraud had been on both sides. Mutual efforts are needed to restore the trust. Admittedly, commerce in the West is well-established being generally based on laws, regulations and mutual trust. The new Russian business has broadly applied illegal practices, deceit and intimidation since the 1990s. As for the pan-European solidarity, it is also difficult to say, who and when started to violate it. If the world will be multipolar (Biscop et al. 2022), armed conflicts of various magnitudes might become permanent. In a sense, it would be a return to the Middle Ages. The well-known ideologist Alexandr Dugin opined: "Middle Ages were the golden age of mankind" (Dugin, 2007) and "Every civilization has the right to decide about... death, good and evil" (Mettan, 2023). Indeed, some terrorists do decide about it. A constructive alternative is the global leadership centered in developed parts of the world, based on the principles of mercy, modesty and forgiveness, aimed at the preservation of human life and health.

Demographic and environmental perspective

The overpopulation and gender imbalance are increasingly important these days as potential causes of conflicts. The growing excess of males in consequence of sex-selective abortions may contribute to militarism. The ecological damage, shortages of drinking water and food are generally proportional to the population density. The agricultural production increases partly through overexploitation and pollution of water resources, groundwater depletion, deforestation and environmental degradation. In the last quarter of the 20th century, the population grew faster in less developed countries than in more developed ones; the ratio of greenhouse gas emissions to the population growth being estimated at 2.8 in developing countries vs. 1.6 in developed parts of the world; details and references are in (Jargin, 2022). The industrialization of regions formerly regarded as developing is significant because of insufficient environment conservation measures, and above all due to the vast dimensions of the process, proportional to the population size.

The Ukraine war has impeded environmental policies in Europe and elsewhere. The conflict between two major agricultural countries has impact on the global food supply. Environmental protection and energy conservation are less popular in RF than in other industrialized countries. The war itself is damaging for the environment. The birth control has been obfuscated by presumed national interests: the demographic growth was used to strengthen the sovereignty and defenses. International tensions and conflicts are among reasons to boost childbearing in Russia and some other nations. Pro-natalist policies are harmful in view of the global overpopulation. The demographic growth contributes to the shortage of food and energy in many regions. The ecological damage, shortages of drinking water and food are generally proportional to the population density. As food prices rise, some nations are likely to cope by converting forests to fields. The agricultural production increases partly through overexploitation and pollution of water resources, groundwater depletion, deforestation and environmental degradation.

In the past, overpopulation was counteracted by wars, pestilence and famine. Today, scientifically based humane methods can be used to regulate the population size. Under conditions of globalization, an authority based in developed countries could counteract the overpopulation and environmental damage. Among advantages of globalization are the ecological management, governance of the world economy, control of warfare and fostering of transnational democracy (Giddens, 2002; Ross, 2002). A globally coordinated unemployment protection would inhibit migrations and help people to develop professional skills according to new demands (Ghislieri et al., 2018). Of particular importance is the globalization of human rights including tools and sanctions reinforcing accountability (Kim, 2017). Great projects could be accomplished by the unified humankind to improve the quality of life worldwide: irrigation systems, nuclear and other energy sources as alternative to fossil fuels, hydroelectric power plants on large rivers to produce hydrogen as eco-friendly energy carrier. New substances used in the industry, nutrition and medicine must be tested in large animal populations to achieve statistical significance and register rare outcomes. Such projects would create many jobs, being a reasonable alternative to the warfare and excessive military expenditures. Not much is needed for that: a globalised administration and English as the first or second language for everyone. Moreover, should the birth rate decline in the future, it means that the workforce is at its maximum today, and this is an opportunity to accomplish great projects.

No realistic solutions of the overpopulation-related problems have been proposed so far. Such solutions would require a revision of some ethical clichés and propagation of new principles, in particular, that no population group, on a local or international scale, may obtain any advantages because of its numerical size or growth. On the contrary, those who have had many children should live in more crowded conditions. Social consequences of the gender imbalance must be borne by those population groups, where sex-selective abortions were practiced. Adherence to these principles could build a basis for globalization and mutual trust. Without procreative competition, different peoples would be more likely to live in peace. The most reliable method of birth control is sterilization. The last (or single) birth should be preferably accomplished by a caesarean section. Although more costly, this procedure is associated with a lesser risk for the newborn and facilitates sterilization by resection of fallopian tubes. Vasectomy in men would be also efficient, especially in the populations, where overt or hidden polygamy and contraception sabotage are common (Jargin, 2018). Sterilization can provide a solution of controversies related to the economic migrations. If an economy needs foreign manpower, sterilization should become a desirable or obligatory condition for a residence and work permit. Such measures are preferable compared to economical sanctions against families with many children, which, to be efficient, must include denial of free education and medical care. The victims of such measures would be children, who are not responsible for their parents' unwillingness to use contraception. It can be argued that sterilization does not prevent sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS; however, these conditions may be regarded as self-inflicted in consequence of negligent or immoral behavior, thus being in a sense a private matter. However, when children appear, it ceases to be a private matter or an inherent human right, as the number of children in a family is of public concern today. There is an objection that birth control and sterilization are unnatural. It should be noted that death from infectious, parasitic diseases and many forms of homicide are natural but survival in a case of perforated appendicitis is unnatural. In fact, it is the human civilization that is unnatural, and it is the civilization that can prevent overpopulation, environmental damage and international conflicts.

It has been argued that birth rates tend to decrease as living conditions improve. There is such tendency indeed but it is obviously insufficient in some regions of Africa and Asia. For example, Uganda is projected to triple by 2050 to about 103 million inhabitants, which will be accompanied by deforestation and soil erosion (Coombes, 2009).

The tenfold population increase in Ethiopia during the last century (Nyssen et al., 2009) went along with a shortage of food supply and unemployment. As for the more developed countries, their population continues growing due to economic, ecological and war-related migrations. Finally, it should be stressed that there can be no religious objections against contraception, sterilization and abortions because these methods are not mentioned in sacred texts. Religious concepts, realized without consideration for realities, may cause geopolitical and demographic problems. Russian leaders should support developed nations in their civilisatory efforts instead of obstructing them as they have done since the last 100 years.

Birth rate inequalities lead to a growth of certain minorities that may become majorities and cause political instability. Differences in population dynamics between ex-Soviet countries and ethnicities within RF are considerable. The greatest ethnic shifts have been observed in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Emigration of Russians from these regions has started decades ago having accelerated after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (SU), while the immigration to RF of ethnically non-Russian people is conspicuous. The highest birthrates within RF were registered in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Tuva; the fastest population decrease - in Pskov, Tambov, Tula and Tver provinces (Arkhangelsky et al., 2015). Migration of ethnic Chechens from mountains to lowlands is going on while ethnic Russians are leaving the area (Panin, 2018; Riazantsev, 2003). According to surveys, most frequent reasons of emigration from the Caucasus were crime, threats and abuse of children (Gadzhieva, 2019). Almost in all Far Eastern provinces of RF, the ethnic Russian population is dwindling. Since the 1990s, immigration to the Far Eastern parts of RF has occurred from the Central Asia, China, North Korea and Vietnam, compensating for departures of ethnic Russians. Some analysts forecasted that by mid-21st century there will be 7-10 million Chinese in Russia (Trenin, 1999). The population growth in the Far East has been maximal in Buryatia and Yakutia thanks to higher birth rates of the indigenous ethnic groups (Simagin & Murtuzalieva, 2020). The maximal contribution to the population decline in the period 1992-2019 was made by St. Petersburg (652 thousand people lost) with surrounding oblast (414), Pskov (237), Vologda and Novgorod provinces (185 thousand each) (Rybakovsky & Fadeeva 2020). In Dagestan, the birth rate of indigenous peoples is approximately twice as high as among Russians (Gadzhieva, 2019). The birth rate in Moscow is one of the lowest in RF, while the population growth is nearly the highest thanks to the immigration accounting for 83.7% of the growth in the period 2012-2018. One of 7 infants in Moscow is born to a migrant woman coming predominantly from the Caucasus or Central Asia. The phenomenon of “guest” or “parallel” (i.e. temporary or fictive) marriages becomes more widespread (Arkhangelsky et al., 2019a,b). Sexual and reproductive coercion is used for the purpose of migration, to cement relationships and marriages, to obtain a residence permit and lodging, or to spread a certain genotype often with geopolitical motives (Jargin, 2022). In November 2022, Vladimir Putin awarded the Soviet-era medal for “mother heroines” to the wife of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who has 3 wives and 12 children at least (Cullen, 2022). Chechnya receives considerable federal funding (Sokirianskaia, 2017).

In societies with the rape myth acceptance, sexual violence is seen as a method of acquiring wives (Renzetti et al., 2012; Russell, 1990). In this connection, battered woman syndrome and learned helplessness must be timely recognized. Temporary and fictive marriages are becoming more widespread within the framework of migrations (Arkhangelsky et al. 2019b), being used to obtain lodging and residence permit. Reportedly, ~70% of sexual violence cases in Moscow are committed by immigrants from Central Asia; some other ethnic groups are also active in this field. About 75% of rapes in the Moscow province were perpetrated by migrants (Strauning, 2019). Certain official or unofficial policies in Russia, aimed at fertility elevation, potentially have disregarded reproductive rights of women (Jargin, 2021). Pro-natalist policies are conspicuous in Russia these days. Risks associated with oral contraceptives are invented or exaggerated by mass media and some literature. For example, the extremely popular TV series “Sled” (Trace) and “Slepaia” (The Blind) depict unexpected and unintended pregnancies both in and out of wedlock as something natural and unavoidable while contraception is mentioned rarely. Risks associated with contraceptives have been invented or exaggerated.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution comes along with fears of unemployment but expected to create new jobs for skilled workers (Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020). The artificial intelligence offers opportunities for industries employing workforce with applicable modern training, while numerous less prepared workers may lose their jobs (Frank et al., 2019). Considering the widespread poverty, the increase in the labor productivity per se is favorable because few workers will be able to provide livelihood for many people. Globally coordinated unemployment protection could support the disadvantaged, help people to deal with changes and develop professional skills according to new demands.

For the international projects, a stronger global governance by a compassionate leadership is needed (Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020), which is hardly imaginable today in view of current and potential conflicts. Coming back to Ukraine and the former SU, the service in overmanned militias both in the Donbas and in Chechnya has been a remedy against exuberant unemployment due to the overpopulation in the latter area and coal mines closures in the former one. The unemployment in the Donbas has been caused by an abrupt decline in coal production and corrupt policies in the 1990s (Perov, 2017). Apparently, this is one of the reasons of subsequent conflicts.

Based on available information, literature and own observations, 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. Commanders of the Ukrainian army and Donbas militias established communications by mobile phones to arrange local ceasefires and avoid casualties (Shirokorad, 2018). Among others, SMO was aimed at the personnel training, absorption of foreign aid and military technology. The war is distracting people from internal problems facilitating screw-tightening, postponing solutions in social affairs and public health. As for casualties and hardships, they have been sometimes disregarded in the former SU. All those participating (factually or on paper) in the current conflict will obtain the war veteran status thus acquiring 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 from other conflicts in the post-Soviet space. Abandoned dilapidated buildings were often shelled, as it was in Chechnya in the 1990s, while residents were warned about forthcoming bombardments.

Boosting of fossil fuel prices by overestimation of radiation-related risks

It is important in the time of international tensions that researchers preserve objectivity. Potential conflicts of interests should be discussed. Since decades we tried to demonstrate that certain environmentalists and grassroots act in accordance with the interests of companies and governments selling petroleum and natural gas (Jargin, 2023). Most evident is this tendency in regard to ionizing radiation, whereas the overestimation of medical and environmental side effects of nuclear energy contributes to its strangulation (Jaworowski, 2010), supporting appeals to dismantle nuclear power plants (NPP). The nuclear power is on the agenda today due to increasing energy needs of the growing humankind. Of note, health risks and environmental damage are maximal for coal and oil, lower for gas and much lower for the atomic energy - the cleanest, safest and practically inexhaustible energy resource (Jaworowski, 2010; Markandya & Wilkinson, 2007). Moreover, nuclear research and technology employs many objectively thinking scientists: the laws of physics are not steerable by directives like man-made laws and mores. Militarism is generally known to be associated with suppression of independent public thought. It is not surprising that scientific work has lost its priority status in Russia. More international trust and cooperation would enable construction of NPP in optimally suitable places, notwithstanding national borders, considering all sociopolitical, geographic, geologic factors, attitude of workers and engineers to their duties, the latter possibly influenced by observance of human rights. Consideration of all these factors would make nuclear accidents improbable.

Fossil fuels will become increasingly expensive in the long run, contributing to excessive population growth in fossil fuel-producing regions and poverty elsewhere. 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. Many of them have good intentions; some are ideologically biased, serve certain companies or governments. Citizens should be aware that their best intentions are exploited to disadvantage their own countries. The weightiest consideration against NPP is that they are potential targets during armed conflicts. 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. Apparently, one of the motives to unleash the war in Ukraine, of the militarist rhetoric and threats to use nuclear weapons (Light, 2022; Stewart, 2022; TASS, 2023) has been the strangulation of nuclear energy and boosting fossil fuel prices.

Discussion and conclusion

Should the power in Europe shift to the East, it would come along with losses of democracy and human rights. Disregard for laws and regulations, corruption and collectivism will come instead. The quality of many services and products will decline: spoiled foods on sale, antibiotics in milk, falsified beer and wine, impolite service, wrong price tags in shops, misquoting of legal codes by civil servants in their correspondence, backdating of official letters, embezzlement of registered correspondence, different types of misconduct in the healthcare (Jargin, 2020). The autocratic management style discourages criticism. In the healthcare, attributes of this style include a paternalistic approach to patients, bossy management, and harassment of colleagues if they do not follow instructions. Under conditions of paternalism, misinformation of patients, disregard for the principle of informed consent, and compulsory treatments are deemed permissible (Mikirtichan, et al., 2022). Finally, the obstacles to the import of drugs and medical equipment should be mentioned. Domestic products are promoted sometimes despite questionable quality and possible counterfeiting (Senokosova, 2019).

The nuclear threats and declarations of jihad by Russian officials (Light 2022; Stewart 2022) have appeared against the background of Soviet atheism, while religious vocabulary is misused for political purposes. It can be reasonably assumed that many church officials supporting the war in Ukraine are acting in accordance with political directives. Certain non-Russian subjects of RF may be interested in a continuation of the fratricidal war, and there are misgivings that Vladimir Putin has come under their influence. The well-known ideologist Alexandr Dugin opined: "Every civilization has the right to decide about... death, good and evil" (Mettan 2023). Indeed, some terrorists have made such decisions. A preferred alternative would be a leadership centred in the most developed parts of the world, based on the principles of mercy, modesty and forgiveness, aimed at preservation of human life and health. The role of RF as a regional superpower would be honorable and satisfactory for sober-minded citizens. Instead of machismo and militarism, the propaganda should popularize the image of scrupulous and hardworking people. Ukraine must become a test field for the international trust and cooperation.

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