

SLOVAK CATHOLIC CHARITY AND VOLUNTEERING IN A TIME OF ARMED CONFLICT

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Abstract:

The author describes and identifies the basic forms of assistance of the Slovak Catholic Charity in three stages of assistance and analyzes the consequences of the war in Ukraine not only on adults but especially on children. Although not exactly typical, he also points to the statement of Katarína Pajerská, who is the local coordinator in Mukachevo: „*The mood is such that: “God is behind us, there is a win behind us. „ . There is no way for them to give up on their own. From the beginning, there were ambitions for discussions or some peace agreements. President Zelensky himself was also interested in negotiating, but the Russians wanted all of Ukraine to give up what they would not allow.*“ [5]

Key words: Slovak Catholic Charity, Volunteering, time of armed conflict, stages of assistance

Introduction

Few people could have expected Europe at the turn of 2013 and 2014 to witness events that would clearly undermine peace and order on the old continent. These events concern the situation in Ukraine, from the time of the resignation of its then President Viktor Yanukovich from the signing of the association agreement with the EU to the present. The events that have led to increased political and military tensions between Ukraine and Russia, but also between Russia and Western Europe and the United States.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, launched by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022, is an escalation of the war that has been going on since 2014. It was preceded by a Russian requirement to rule out further NATO enlargement and reduce the Alliance's military capabilities in Central and Eastern Europe. In February, troops gathered along Ukraine's borders moved to attack. The first days of the conflict did not bring great success to the Russians, but they significantly united the Ukrainians in resisting the invaders and public opinion of most countries, governments and international organizations in protest against the invasion. Significant economic sanctions were imposed on Russia, while Ukraine received aid, including humanitarian and military support.

The experiences of modern migrants are often family separation, the death of loved ones, the disintegration of the community due to conflict. Often - disasters and natural disasters. Migrants often suffer from economic exploitation, loss of social status or violence. Currently, the phenomenon of forced migration has affected many families from Ukraine, where the war has been going on since February 24, 2022. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the world as we know it is coming to an end. Ukraine and Russia will change and the consequences of the conflict will affect Poland, other European countries and the world.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has a catastrophic impact on people's lives and the state of the economy in both countries and will lead to significant economic losses in the region of Central Europe and Asia, as well as worldwide.

According to a recent report by the World Bank's chief economist for the Europe-Central Asia region, the war caused a severe economic shock and slowed recovery after the Covid 19 pandemic, the OECD estimates that global GDP will fall by about 1 percent, with a significant increase in the level of extreme poverty. The war will also have a negative impact on consumer and investor confidence, as well as on the functioning of financial

markets.

The war contributed to the collapse of industrial production, constraints in supply chains, rising energy and food prices. Inflation has risen sharply, both in Ukraine, where it reached 13,7% in March (year-on-year), and in the region as a whole, affecting the spread of extreme poverty, which rose from 1,8% in 2021 to today's 19,8%.

The war also affects traffic. Restrictions on access to airspace over Ukraine and Russia have halted the recovery of air traffic after the pandemic and are negatively affecting air transport costs in the region and around the world. For example, the report's authors state that in 2021, passengers from Russia and Ukraine accounted for 5% of international air passengers in 30 countries and 10% in 18 countries. The effects of the war are also being felt in maritime transport: trade in the Black Sea region has fallen by 82 percent in Ukrainian ports and by 45 percent in Russian ports.

The consequences of the war in Ukraine

The phenomenon of war and peace has existed since the beginning of humanity, because war and conflict are inseparable from human actions. For theoretical and practical reasons, the war has so far been the subject of research by philosophers, political scientists and sociologists. For many centuries, scientists have been looking for ways to avoid war. Along with the development of science and technology, with the subsequent transformations of socio-political systems, the theories, ways of leading and perceiving wars have changed. The nature of armed conflicts was largely determined by the development of means of combat.

The global consequences of the war in Ukraine from the perspective of the European Union

Under the influence of the war in Ukraine, there was a reaction of companies and the media in the EU, and in Western Europe there was pressure on political actors. Another element was the US intervention and the pressure of the so-called governments. NATO's Eastern Wing, which called for a radical response to Russia's brutal aggression. Under the influence of all these factors, the policy of Western Europe was corrected, which was reflected in particular in the Berlin approach. Germany has agreed to provide weapons to Ukraine, which is defending itself, [1] although there have been many challenges in fulfilling this promise. Germany has also moved away from the Nord Stream legalization process. They accepted the gradual abandonment of energy imports from the Russian Federation, as well as the freezing of economic exchange with the aggressor. However, they insisted that the severance of these relations should be selective, leaving some gaps that would mitigate the effects of the sanctions imposed on Russia on the German economy and, more broadly, on the EU. An example was the maintenance of certain exemptions from the exclusion of the Russian financial sector from the SWIFT system, as well as the maintenance of Russian oil and gas supplies to Germany during a transitional period (until mid-2024 for natural gas imports). Even less eager to review the previous policy were French politicians, known for many decades for their pro-Russian sympathies and dislike of Americans.

Nevertheless, in 2022, the European Union imposed further sanctions packages on the Russian Federation, affecting a total of several hundred people and institutions associated with Vladimir Putin's government. Strict financial sanctions have been imposed, including a ban on transactions with the Bank of Russia. In this way, the EU and the US together have frozen about half of Russia's foreign exchange reserves, which are estimated at a total of almost \$ 630 billion. Individual member states have also begun banning their citizens from trading with the Russian central bank. The embargo was imposed on investments in certain sectors of the Russian economy, in particular in the energy and defense sectors, as well as on the supply of modern technology from the EU. In addition, many European corporations have withdrawn from the Russian market.

The EU's response to Putin's aggression was therefore serious, much greater than experts originally expected. However, the ensuing EU sanctions package was preceded by an internal debate within Member States, and for some instruments it was difficult to obtain the consent of all EU members. Brussels' response to the effects of the war in Ukraine was too bureaucratic in some areas and far from sufficient. This was also the case with

the refugee crisis. The European Commission has only agreed to redirect a relatively small amount of cohesion policy funding for 2014-2020 to this goal. Unlike the migration crisis in 2015, neither new and earmarked funds nor other instruments were introduced, such as the mechanism for relocating refugees between Member States, despite the fact that the influx of Ukrainians into the EU was several times greater than the wave of immigrants in 2015. It is difficult not to notice that either Western Europe has already been exhausted by the subject of immigration, or it has been more sensitive to the problems of immigration in parts of the western and southern parts of the continent than in Central Europe.

The consequences of the war on the population

According to the latest figures, 2.95 million people have already fled the country in connection with the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said on Tuesday. However, this data is probably out of date. And the number of refugees has certainly exceeded 3 million. Prolonging the war in Ukraine could expose about 90 percent of Ukraine's population to living in poverty and poverty. With each passing week or month, the situation changes dramatically. According to UN officials, if the war continues and lasts until 2023, the situation of the Ukrainian economy will be catastrophic and nine out of ten Ukrainians can experience poverty.

War and mental crisis

In the current situation, the Ukrainian population is most vulnerable to the mental crisis, which is either currently in areas affected by military operations or is forced to flee to other countries (including Poland) in order to obtain a safe haven for themselves and their families. These people should be covered by comprehensive psychological help. Research shows that early psychological intervention in the face of a crisis is very important and allows for lasting management of stress and negative and heightened emotions related to anxiety, despair, anger, sadness, desire, as well as often guilt. People fleeing the war in Ukraine - those who still remain within their borders, as well as those who leave the country, need not only shelter and food, but also understanding and psychological help.

Children and the war in Ukraine

Children are always the biggest victims of the conflict. It is they, the innocent beings, who have to face the unimaginable fear, suffering and vision that will remain with them for life. Emotional photos published in the mass media show how strong the impact of the Russian attack on Ukraine on children is. A whole generation is growing up in ruined cities, displaced villages, among mass graves and victims of violence.

The children were evicted from their homes, separated from their guardians and directly exposed to the war: they themselves witnessed or experienced physical or sexual violence. Even the bomb blasts and sirens are traumatic. In addition, almost all children have to fight the absence of fathers and men from the immediate family. These experiences leave scars in the psyche, which can take many years to heal. In general, war-related events will affect the health of an entire generation who will have to fight the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The war in Ukraine arouses strong emotions in everyone: fear and anxiety, as well as feelings of helplessness and compassion for the people who live it. Therefore, helping people in war requires good organization in many areas: war trauma, protection of children's rights, helping children in difficult times, relationship and emotional first aid, supporting the well-being of children in the face of war in Ukraine, increasing the resilience of children and families in the context of war, rights and obligations of people fleeing Ukraine, psychological first aid, restoring a sense of security.

Help of the Slovak Catholic Charity

The Slovak Catholic Charity immediately responded to the military conflict by declaring financial aid, declaring aid in the form of accommodation and volunteering, food and material collection. The third stage of Catholic charity assistance is currently underway. In the following text we offer a brief description of the individual stages of assistance.

The first stage of assistance

Employees and volunteers of the Slovak Catholic Charity and Diocesan and Archdiocesan Charities have been helping against the barriers of the Slovak-Ukrainian border continuously since the arrival of the first Ukrainian refugees, they are part of the crisis staff and the first contact line. However, the help of the Catholic charity does not remain only in Slovakia. It also travels where it is most needed - directly to Ukraine.

More than 71,000 people fleeing Ukraine have crossed the Slovak-Ukrainian border since the beginning of the war. Charity staff and volunteers give them snacks, hot drinks, blankets and words of comfort. They direct them to places of accommodation and, in possible capacities, also ensure their transport. They usually do not bring much - one bag or suitcase, the other hand always belongs to the child.

„When it comes to women saying goodbye to their husbands and children to their fathers, it's hard to fight emotions. Our colleagues also wipe the tears of the children and cry with their mothers. The despair that Ukrainians have been experiencing in recent days has affected us all, as evidenced by the immense wave of solidarity from people all over Slovakia. Thank you very much for every gift, „says Miroslav Dzurech, Secretary General of the Slovak Catholic Charity.

More than € 750,000 has already been raised in the collection that the charity has announced to help the people of Ukraine. Of this amount, 40,000 were sent to a Ukrainian charity (Caritas - Spes), which is deployed in helping local ones, and 25,000 to diocesan and archdiocesan charities in Slovakia, which provide acute assistance to refugees in Slovakia. It is still possible to contribute to the assistance to Ukraine at www.charita.darujme.sk/ukrajina/ or by transfer to the account SK93 1100 0000 0029 4546 3097, VS 380.

Caritas also encourages people who know how to provide accommodation for refugees to register on the website of the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia. There is also a need for volunteers helping at the border or taking refugees to the accommodation. They can apply at the e-mail address svobodnictvo@charita.sk. Caritas also regularly updates the list of necessary food and material donations that you can bring to collection points throughout Slovakia. You can find more information at www.charita.sk.

Aid to Ukraine

The war also changed the direction of charity donations to aid projects in Ukraine. SKCH has been helping in the neighboring country since 2014: the Distance Adoption project to help children from poor families and children's homes and the humanitarian aid project for families who have fled the separatist area. Today, however, the partners with whom the charity works provide assistance not only to the 5,144 children and approximately 70 families involved in the projects, but also to people coming from areas of immediate danger. Thanks to donations from Slovakia, they help the wider area, provide food, drink and attract fleeers. SKCH sent 42,000 euros for humanitarian aid in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Charity and the local Donetsk Charity provide food, medicine, accommodation and psychological assistance for those fleeing from the east of Ukraine. People were evacuated from the combat zone quickly and often arrive without luggage, food and basic necessities.

The Distance Adoption project has set aside € 130,000 since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine. Prices have risen several times since the beginning of the war, goods are unavailable and shops are often closed. Thanks to donors from Slovakia, cooperating centers and children's homes are able to provide food, petrol, blankets,

mattresses and other necessary necessities. They are involved in helping the fugitives, bringing families to the borders, sheltering whole families and helping with the local organization. Thanks to funds from Slovakia, we were able to help even in the most shelled city of Kharkov, in the amount of approximately € 3,000. [2]

The second stage of assistance

Four food aid trucks from Slovakia set out for Mukachevo on the morning of March 17. In the Ukrainian city, a local charity will take the aid and transport the food to areas of central and eastern Ukraine for people suffering from hunger. The aid consists of durable food, which was purchased thanks to the generosity of more than 12,000 donors from the collection of the Slovak Catholic Charity (SKCH).

Traveling to Ukraine is increasingly risky, but a convoy that leaves 3 weeks after the start of the war is not the first or last shipment of aid. Several trucks and supplies from diocesan, archdiocesan and eparchial charities associated in the Slovak Catholic Charity have already been delivered to Ukrainian cities. They contained food, hygiene items, baby diapers as well as baby food, blankets and sleeping bags or medicines and medical devices provided by donations from Slovak donors. Charitable employees and volunteers „drove off“ the dangerous journey to Ukraine. Today's aid worth € 60,000 and 80 tonnes of flour, sugar, rice, milk, buckwheat and baby semolina is no exception.

The least we can do is help...

In war-torn Ukraine, there are mainly children, the sick, the disabled or the elderly, who find it difficult to travel and assimilate in the new country. „*Women with children for whom it is inconceivable to leave their husbands also remain in Ukraine. Almost everyone who comes to us at the border leaves someone close to Ukraine. Creating the safe and supportive environment for them to wait for the return of their loved ones is the most important thing we can do now,*“ says SKCH Secretary General Miroslav Dzurech. The charity's staff is part of the crisis staffs, helping at borders, hotspots, bus and train stations. They provide temporary accommodation, food, material, psychological and financial assistance, connect the needy with other auxiliary organizations and also deliver assistance to detention centers, accommodation facilities or home addresses offered jointly by people from Slovakia. At the same time, they are constantly channeling aid abroad - to Ukraine for those who stayed there. [3]

The third stage of assistance

The aid we sent to Ukraine exceeded an incredible 300 tonnes. More and more trucks travel from charities from various dioceses in Slovakia and deliver aid to people who have not escaped and who are defending their country. All this thanks to generous donors and their contribution to the collection.

Medicines for the injured and sick in Ukraine

Deep after midnight 26.3. first aid from Western countries in the form of special medical supplies and medicines that require refrigeration went to Ukraine. In charity deliveries, we transported insulin, antitoxin, oxygen bombs, surgical supplies, bandages and painkillers worth 70,000. €. Our colleagues gradually handed it over to several hospitals in the western and central part of Ukraine, including Kiev. Today, the gift helps save lives at the local hospital, and some has even been transported to Irpin, where the front line is and where residents suffer the most.

An employee from the Spiš Catholic Charity, Tony Frič, has already noted in his previous trips to Ukraine that hospitals are acutely lacking in medical supplies. The nurses tore the sails and boiled them in boiling water to treat the patients. And medicines were one of the demands made to us by local organizations, including the Ukrainian charity and the mayor of Kiev.

After unloading medical supplies and drugs, some colleagues remained in Kiev. They mapped the situation

and in a few days visited local hospitals, help centers and partner organizations. „Several loud explosions woke me up at four in the morning. Small arms fire was also heard. All too far to hurt us, but close enough to realize the presence of war. Kiev is under fire and almost 2 million people still live here,“ Tony Frič wrote on social media during the trip. We fill warehouses in Mukachevo and Uzhhorod with food and material aid. Additional food aid costs go weekly to areas where people from the eastern parts of Ukraine who do not want to or cannot leave the country are concentrated. They are sick, elderly people, women with children waiting for fighting husbands or even men who cannot go to their families because of the war.

Most of our humanitarian aid is handed over to these areas, which we pass on to our partners - a Ukrainian charity whose employees have remained in need of services. On March 29, three humanitarian aid trucks delivered durable milk, rice, pasta, canned meat, baby food, but also baby diapers, sleeping bags and blankets. It was only less than 2 weeks after we sent 4 trucks with 80 tonnes of aid to these areas, and a few days before another load of 3 trucks with blankets, toiletries and food aid. Thanks to the Charity of St. Michal in Mukachevo, part of this assistance regularly reaches the east of Ukraine, where scary reports of ongoing fighting and immense human suffering come from. [4]

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