

“Europe should use all of its imagination to support Ukraine”

Article by Tomas Tomilinas

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Sharing a border with Russia, Lithuanian citizens are acutely aware of the security threat presented by their neighbour. Since the invasion, the country has witnessed a broad mobilisation in support of Ukraine and its war effort. Tomas Tomilinas explains why the war calls for nothing short of a deep transformation to Europe’s economy.

Green European Journal: I’d like to start by asking you about your visits to Kyiv. Can you describe the reality for the people living there and the situation as you experienced it?

Tomas Tomilinas: I have travelled to Kyiv twice [in 2022], in April and November. During both visits I saw no panic. The people are not desperate. The city is very quiet. It is totally dark at night. People have restarted some aspects of their lives. Some of the bars are open and some minimal cultural life is happening but there are still major security restrictions and a curfew from 10PM.

The country remains very much in a state of war. It’s a miracle that Ukraine as a country, as a governmental and municipal system is working properly. All the services people need are there. Europe and the world are helping, of course, but it is still a miracle that everything is more or less well organised.

As part of your visit, you also met President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. What was his message for Greens and progressive parties in Europe?

We met people at every level. We met with the Kyiv administration, the city mayor, the prime minister, the parliamentary groups – the ruling group and the opposition – and President Zelenskyy. We discussed the situation and, of course, the main message was that there is no security for Europe without Ukraine. It’s a fact. It’s impossible to shape our future without integrating Ukraine into all European institutions. Ukraine is Europe. It is the European Union.

We also discussed NATO and security guarantees, including Ukrainian security guarantees towards Europe because without Ukraine we cannot be secure as they have proved on the battlefield. The debate is moving faster and it is possible we’ll be talking about Ukraine joining NATO at the summit we are hosting in Vilnius in 2023. Lithuania is focussing its efforts on having a clear plan for Ukraine joining NATO, whether after its victory or however else.

What more could Europe be doing to support Ukraine?

Do you know how many tanks Britain produced in one year during World War II? 10,000. Yet we are talking about sending 20 tanks to Ukraine from all countries. The European Union could provide thousands if it transformed its economy to a war economy. The EU is not fighting so it has the privilege to transform its economy and provide the weaponry faster. We know it's possible because we've done it in the past, so why are we not considering this?

European solidarity is a reality but it remains too slow, which has cost many lives. Europe has many countries with powerful weapons industries ready to be transformed into a war regime. Of course, it will cost us a lot but how can we compare it to the cost of human lives and our security?

Latvia is the biggest contributor to the Ukrainian effort in terms of GDP and Lithuania is the fourth. Is this transformation into a war economy happening in the Baltic states already?

The Baltic states are receiving many refugees and providing them with the same social security as our own citizens. We are sending all the weapons we can, which represent huge amounts of our army parts, weapons, and stocks. So, the Baltics are doing what they can but we are too small to be very substantial. It's up to the larger countries to make a real difference.

There should be a common European campaign to transform economies to win the war, not just to help – it's not a charity effort. Europe should use all of its imagination to create a solidarity mechanism to support Ukraine. Maybe we should think about a war tax? Because Ukraine will need this support for some time. So far, we have enough resources at the EU level but we still need more to win. How we mobilise it is an open question but I think we can find solutions.

Lithuania was once part of the Soviet Union. It borders on Russia because of Kaliningrad. How has the war changed how Lithuania thinks about its security?

There are two scenarios for the future of Lithuania's security policy. The first is the militarisation of society. Lithuania becomes like Israel. This scenario is already mainstream in the debate not only in Lithuania but also Poland, Latvia, and other nearby countries. It is becoming more common for people to join the army reserves and paramilitary organisations. It is today's fashion, not the climate. This trend has not reached the western part of Europe but it's only a question of time.

The second option is that Europe thinks of and make new supranational security rules to protect against this kind of situation. By this, I mean new forms of solidarity-based security that mean that we do not have to militarise so deeply. Here is where the Greens can step in and think about the future of security on the European continent and globally. Because you cannot be a pacifist unless you win the war. Our fathers had the privilege of being pacifists because our grandfathers won the war. This is the situation we are now in and provide constructive ideas that can act as credible alternatives to the militarisation of Europe, especially eastern Europe.

Has the fact that energy is such a major part of this war accelerated the green

transition in Lithuania and the Baltics?

Yes, it's moving much faster because of the war. The energy transition is the only way for us to be independent. In Lithuania, many steps had already been taken before the war, unlike other parts of Europe. We were ready to stop gas imports from day one. We're continuing to make progress insulating rooves, installing solar panels, and building windmills at sea. There is no political debate about this direction. Lithuania decided against nuclear power in 2012 and the few attempts to revive the discussion failed, so we are focused on the green transition.

One day Putin will be defeated or deceased. What foundations need to be built to ensure a peaceful future for eastern Europe after the war?

We have to end this stupid debate for and against NATO. There's no alternative to NATO so we have to strengthen it. Macron failed to show any leadership for Europe as a continent. Right now the real leader of European security is Ukraine itself.

I don't have a full list of solutions but two points are important. First, the Greens have always been a political force with vision and an eye on the future. We, as Greens, therefore need to be the ones setting out a vision for the security of the European continent and the world. Zelenskyy and his team have been excellent at playing with German interests, with Dutch interest, and so on. They somehow managed to overcome all the very difficult European politics and become candidates for EU membership. But they can play even more of a role in thinking and providing ideas for the future as well. We Greens can help them with thinking up new institutions, regulations, and forms of global governance. What will NATO look like? How will we reform the UN? The UN is just a humanitarian charity agency. It is no longer a security organisation. Do the Greens have the vision on how to reform it? We need to have stronger vision than our political rivals on how to reinforce security institutions after victory, from a detailed plan of Ukraine NATO membership and EU membership to a reform of the UN security council. Greens cannot say that these issues are too difficult. If we know how to prevent climate change, we can definitely kick Russia off the security council.

Second, the only historical lesson we have here is World War II and there the lesson was that the priority is winning the war. I don't want solidarity with Ukraine to end up as a cultural event that passes. There needs to be full support now.

You've recently started a new political party in Lithuania. Where do you see this new force going in the coming period?

We are quite eager to find a political family. I'm hopeful that we will join the Green political family. Our brief history is that a large part of our leadership was in the Farmers and Greens Party, myself include. This party took a sudden change of course and became increasingly populist and adopted stances against human rights on some topics. So we left to found a new party.

Our party, Democrats for Lithuania, has four main pillars. First, democracy. By this, we mean that parties lack democracy. Most of the parties call themselves social democratic or liberal but lack a real democratic practices and only serve power. We are working on proper

party democracy, something that is truly important but often underestimated. The second pillar is green ideas. The third is social justice: we are the centre-left party. The fourth pillar is still under discussion and is decentralisation as a core values. The desire to see power at the grassroots is something that we inherited from the Farmers and Greens Movement. I would say we are the strongest opposition force in the country and we are doing everything we can to keep democracy alive in parliament.



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