A Fragile World

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letter	8 min

The war is closer than neighbouring countries think. A letter from Ukraine as a call for caution and fight for common truth.

My husband once told me there's no point in asking me about the weather because I always think it's nice. It's true. I was fortunate enough to be born as someone who enjoys life the way it is. That's probably why this text will distance itself from political analysis and instead fill us with hope that one day “love will save the world.” And I'd like to talk about international relations (especially relations between Ukraine and the Czech Republic) in this way, no matter how naive or feminine it might sound.

But this text will also be about war. Partly because it's a new reality that has changed not only Ukraine but also the world as a whole, and in turn has also affected our mutual relations with you. And also partly because it's my own personal reality: a prism through which I now see everything around me. I've made no discoveries, but I've reassured myself of some of the truisms I want to share with you.

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And the first thing, which not only needs to be talked about but also needs to be shouted out constantly so that people are reminded of it every day, is that the world is fragile. I saw it in my native Mariupol – women raped by the Russians – and I can't stop thinking about it while I sit here in the beautiful, flowering landscape of the Czech Republic where things are secure and still peaceful. The last thing I want to do is bring up misery, but I consider it necessary to warn people and remind them that danger is out there. Everything someone creates can easily be ruined, destroyed, defaced, or demolished by someone else. Whether this pertains to buildings, the economy, cultural heritage, or international relations... it doesn't matter whether we're talking about Ukraine or the Czech Republic, the world is fragile and we'll always be equally as vulnerable.

Should we transform our relationships in this new reality? – I was asked this today. This process has already begun. The war has not altered the course our relations are headed in. It has only been a catalyst for a speedier reaction. Civilized countries have offered Ukraine a shoulder to lean on.

We are eternally grateful for your help. Though, in reality, we needed it much earlier, the Russian-Ukrainian war didn't start in February 2022. For eight years Russia has been invading and torturing my beautiful country without consequence, annexing our territory, and taking the lives of my fellow citizens. According to UN data, in the period between 2014 to 2021, more than 13,000 people were killed in the aftermath of the war in eastern Ukraine, including 3,375 civilians. Over 30,000 people were injured, thousands were kidnapped or disappeared without a trace, and hundreds of thousands lost their homes and became forcibly displaced. I understand how “faraway” and “foreign” the war might have seemed to Europeans living in security. They turn numbers into statistics from miles away and, at best, express on a regular basis how “deeply concerned” they are by recent developments in

Ukraine. I can totally understand that.

Indeed, Europe has really sympathized with us all this time, imposing sanctions on Russia, even though it time and time again allowed businesses to circumvent them. In one way or another, Europe has supported Ukraine, even though it made sure to keep its distance from all this so that it doesn't become infected with this unpleasant and, at least for now, still foreign disease.

This war is closer today than you think.

Since February 24th, 2022, Ukraine has been exposed to a full-scale attack, and Europe: to a full-scale state of shock. The fire, which had not been extinguished all these years, burned with a newfound fury, becoming harder to ignore. Ukraine's losses have increased and continue to grow at an exponential rate. But now, a bloodthirsty Russia is not only remorselessly destroying the Ukrainian people, pillaging their cultural heritage, and crippling their economy, but also blackmailing Europe and mocking the entire civilized world.

The reasonable and foresighted Czech Republic, which is territorially and mentally closer to Ukraine than other European countries, and which still remembers Soviet tanks rolling into the streets of Prague, felt the proximity and proportions of this disaster and reacted quickly. Now we are even closer and believe me, every Ukrainian is aware of this and will always remember it with gratitude. And I would very much like for nice and tender-hearted Czechs to understand how important this rapprochement is to them too.

What can Ukraine offer today, you might ask? How can it be of use to the Czech Republic and align with its national interests? Perhaps by the mere fact that it's out there now defending Czech borders. This war is closer today than you think. And the world's diplomatic tactics, calculation, and indecisiveness has allowed for it to burn with such unprecedented intensity and to gradually reach ever new territories and come dangerously close to your borders.

Can you really be sure it won't reach you too? Not even the slightest. Insanity knows no bounds – that's another truism. Putin threatened to invade Ukraine, and he did just that. So why should he stop there and not live up to his other insane threats? He's got everything he needs: a red button and a mindless zombie ready to push it on his command. Who knows where the next missile will fly to tomorrow? For this predatory, bloodthirsty beast who's gone rogue, fair play is no longer in the cards. It's not important to him whether tomorrow he kills Ukrainians, Germans, Finns, or Czechs. He's tasted blood and couldn't stop himself now even if he tried. So we must unite and stop him. And that's why we need each other.

Victory in this war should be the victory of good over evil, the law over lawlessness, and civilization over barbarism.

For me, personally, victory in this war will not come with the liberation of our territories and Russia surrendering. Satisfaction will only come at the tribunal where everything will be called for what it really is loud and clear: genocide, crimes against humanity. And where criminals will be named and handed down sentences for their war

crimes and actually serve the time. And that's not all. Victory in this war should be the victory of good over evil, the law over lawlessness, and civilization over barbarism. I can feel it under my skin that the time has come for humankind to take the next step towards humanity.

In a world where the use of animals in circuses is forbidden, it's time to think of people too. Why is it a crime for pickpockets to steal a wallet on the tram while a war where hundreds of thousands of people die remains de facto legal? Why is a driver who hits a pedestrian and every rapist, thief, and murderer considered a criminal, while a president who orders his troops to rape, rob, and murder on a massive scale seems untouchable? Is it not time to revise the morally obsolete norms of international law? Is it not time we band together and reclaim our common truth?

And you, dear neighbours, today can become not only witnesses but above all participants in this important historical process. Drivers of change! And when it comes time for you to share stories about your life with your grandkids, you won't remember how much you were paying for heating in the winter of 2022 because you won't even care. But you'll be proud to tell them that you, too, contributed to making this world a more humane and fairer place and that you'll be handing over the world to them better off than you found it.

Sincerely yours and with faith in us,

Oksana Stomina

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