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Welfare over Warfare? Russia's War on Ukraine through the Prism of Europe's Energy Security

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of war by the Russian Federation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 not only took world public opinion and politicians by surprise but, above all, demonstrated in all its glory the strong network of political and economic ties in Europe and far beyond the old continent. The attitudes of individual governments and entire societies, particularly in Europe, towards Russian aggression, differ fundamentally. These differences can most simply be explained in terms of economic and political dependence on Russian gas or proximity to the Russian Federation or its dependent countries like Belarus, which mark sharp dividing axes. In this paper, using a survey commissioned by the European Council on Foreign Relations in ten European countries as an example, I will highlight public attitudes towards the war in Ukraine and their potential impact on the policies of individual governments. The interventionist viewpoint presented in this article suggests that general welfare shapes not only public attitudes towards the war but also impregnates specific governmental positions. In the context of the large European economies, this could significantly yet negatively impact Ukraine's financial and military support in the coming months.

Keywords: War in Ukraine, Social Welfare, Energy Security, European Countries, Dependence on Gas Supply, Public Opinion

JEL Classifications: L71, A14, H12, H53, H56, I31.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022 evoked the worst memories of the beastliness of war and had a significant impact on the global economy with its supply chains and international energy and food dependencies. Mainly, the issue of energy security has come to the forefront of strategic considerations in Europe due to the dependence of individual economies on Russian gas supplies (Montgomery, 2022). It is worth noting that the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which was supposed to reconfigure energy security in Europe, has not been opened and is unlikely to carry gas from Russia to Germany. This is by no means to say that other consequences of the war are less important. The massive migration of Ukrainians has already changed the structure of many societies, forcing a rapid reconstruction of basic social institutions, with the health and education systems at the forefront. According to the United Nations, as of 4 July, more than five million Ukrainians

have left their country (outward migration), while around seven million have moved within the country (internal migration) (BBC News, 2022a). The repercussions of the food security crisis caused by the Russia-Ukraine war for the North African or South-East Asian area are already visible and will get worse with each passing month. Agriculture is one of the core industries of Ukraine, which is described as the "breadbasket of Europe" (Caprile, 2022), and additionally, "forty per cent of the World Food Program's wheat supplies come from Ukraine" (Green, 2022). In contrast, Russia and Ukraine are "key agricultural players, together exporting nearly 12% of food calories traded globally" (Caprile, 2022). Detailed data is provided in Table 1, which explains why the war in Ukraine has highlighted how "fragile our food systems are" (Haddad, 2022).

And not just the food system, as we will see below. The attitudes of governments and societies towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine vary considerably. A key factor in this aspect is the degree

Table 1: Percentage share of global exports in 2021

Commodity	Ukraine (%)	Russia (%)	Russia and Ukraine (%)
Wheat	10	24	34
Maize	15	2	17
Barley	13	14	27
Sunflower oil	31	24	55
Sunflower cake	61	20	81
Vegetable oils	—	—	10
White fish (Alaska Pollock)	—	16	—
Fertiliser mineral intermediates*	—	13	—
Finished fertilisers	—	16	—
Food calories traded globally	6	5.8	11.8

*Ammonia, phosphate rock, sulphur. Source: UN FAO (March and April); AMIS Market monitor, cited by Caprile (2022)

to which a country depends on Russian gas supplies. Gas is also crucial for the production of fertiliser, which in turn is used to grow crops. Shortly after the war began, “fertiliser plants across Europe have announced they will scale back production” (Tollefson, 2022: 232). In addition, because energy security affects so many aspects of the functioning of modern developed societies, such as the competitiveness and profitability of companies and entire economies (and therefore indirectly the level of unemployment), the level of prices for goods and services (inflation), or the cost of living (the price of energy used, for example, to heat or cool homes), it affects people's opinions and attitudes towards the ongoing war. The social welfare determined by a high standard of living in economically developed European countries is conditioned by energy security in the broadest sense, enabling material needs to be met (cf. French “Le mouvement des Gilets jaunes”). Russia's war on Ukraine, in addition to the tragedy of Ukrainian society, has deeply damaged the foundations of this security. And let us keep in mind that, according to estimates by the European Commission (2022, cf. Fisher, 2022), the Russian Federation supplies more than 40% of the EU's natural gas, 27% of oil and 46% of coal, which shows the scale of the link between European economies and Russian energy resources. Dependence on Russian gas varies from country to country, so it is worth considering the data in Table 2, which includes the share of Russian gas supply in the 2 years before the war.

These figures show how much the economic prosperity of European countries depends on the supply of energy sources from the Russian Federation, but also the lack of an accurate and coherent policy by the governments of the old continent to safeguard their interests. It is worth recalling that the sizeable German economy, which depends almost 50% on Russian supplies, does not have a single LNG terminal (Pifer, 2021). The shortsightedness of Germany's energy strategy, especially after the political decision to abandon nuclear power in 2011 (McCauley et al., 2018), was highlighted in the very first days of Russian aggression in Ukraine.

2. DATA AND METHOD

The data used in this study comes from a survey conducted between 28 April and 11 May 2022 by Datapraxis and YouGov on behalf of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Using an online survey, 8,172 respondents were surveyed from ten European countries, nine of which are members of the European

Table 2: European countries' dependence on Russian gas

Country	Share in 2019 (%)	Share in 2020 (%)
North Macedonia	100	100
Bosnia and Herzegovina	100	100
Moldova	100	100
Finland	100	94
Latvia	93	93
Bulgaria	79	77
Germany	49	49
Italy	41	46
Poland	44	40
France	24	24
Netherlands	37	11
Romania	8	10

Source: Own elaboration based on EU ACER. EU ACER: European Union Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators

Union (Table 3 for exact details of national samples and survey dates).

The key division between a “Peace” camp and a “Justice” camp (as well as “Swing voters” and the “Rest”) was adopted from Krastev and Leonard's (2022) policy brief. The question “Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?” was used to construct these four respondent segments. Participants in the survey were able to select one of the four responses. Those who favoured the answer, “The most important thing is to stop the war as soon as possible, even if it means Ukraine giving control of areas to Russia”, were assigned to the Peace camp. Those indicating the option “The most important thing is to punish Russia for its aggression, even if it means that more Ukrainians are killed and displaced” were included in the Justice camp. Conversely, those who answered “Neither” or “Don't know” were asked to indicate what action the EU should take to deal with Russian aggression in Ukraine¹. Selecting at least five of these options was used to distinguish the “Swing voters”, while under five was used to indicate the “Rest” group of respondents.

¹ These actions include: (1) “Accepting more Ukrainian refugees into their country”; (2) “Providing more economic assistance to Ukraine”; (3) “Increasing economic and diplomatic sanctions on Russia”; (4) “Completely stopping imports of fossil fuels from Russia”; (5) “Sending additional arms and military supplies to the Ukrainian government”; (6) “Enforcing a no-fly zone over Ukraine, even if this might trigger a direct conflict between the West and Russia”; (7) “Sending troops to Ukraine to help the Ukrainian government defend itself against Russia”; (8) “Supporting Ukraine's admission into NATO”; (9) “Sending additional troops to NATO countries in Eastern Europe”; (10) “Supporting Ukraine's accession into the EU” (Krastev & Leonard, 2022).

Table 3: Characteristics of the countries surveyed

Country	Polling dates	Size of the national sample (n)*	EU country**
Poland	29 April–5 May	1002	▲
Great Britain	10–11 May	1103	▼
Finland	29 April–5 May	500	▲
Portugal	29 April–6 May	506	▲
Spain	29 April–5 May	1050	▲
Sweden	28 April–5 May	501	▲
France	28 April–5 May	1,000	▲
Romania	29 April–5 May	501	▲
Germany	28 April–5 May	1000	▲
Italy	28 April–6 May	1009	▲

*The samples of respondents are nationally representative due to basic demographics and past voting. The overall measurement error is ± 3 per cent for a sample of 1000 and ± 4 per cent for a sample of 500. ▲ ** EU country, ▼ non-EU country. Source: Own elaboration based on ECFR survey. ECFR: European Council on Foreign Relations

3. DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

The four groups of respondents distinguished on the basis of the survey questions make it possible to see the differences within the public opinion of European countries on the war in Ukraine and the specific problems related to it (e.g. on the cost of living and energy, the economic downturn and its negative impact on the labour market or the refugee crisis). The proposed methodological approach concerning the “camps” of respondents allows us to go beyond the geographic-political divisions formulated by politicians and journalists and reinforced by the media (cf. Figure 1, variant A). And also makes us realise that the positions of individual governments are not the same as the opinions of members of their societies (Baranowski, 2022a).

Regarding the standard picture of supporters and opponents of the Russian Federation among the analysed European countries shown in Figure 1 (variant A), apart from the traditionally neutral southern European countries (Portugal and Spain), we have two opposing groups of countries. At one extreme, there are the positively oriented big countries (Germany, France and Italy), which before the outbreak of the war “earned reputations as *Russlandverstehers* (‘Russia understanders’)” (Krastev and Leonard, 2022: 2). On the other, there are negative countries such as Poland and Romania (central and eastern Europe), Sweden and Finland (Scandinavian countries) and the UK (a traditional US ally in Europe). The degree of dependence of a given European economy on Russian gas (Table 2) varies significantly among both sceptics and supporters of the Russian Federation’s policy. It, therefore, cannot be the only explanatory factor. Let us, therefore, look at the breakdown by camps of respondents proposed in the survey to analyse the positions of public opinion in each of the ten countries.

Within the overall population of the countries surveyed, the most significant proportion of respondents is located within the Peace camp (35%), i.e. supporters of ending the war even at the cost of Ukraine losing territories. Supporters of the Justice camp account for 22%, and one-fifth is the Swing group, who did not opt for extreme positions. The remaining 23% of respondents were counted among the Rest. More interesting information is provided

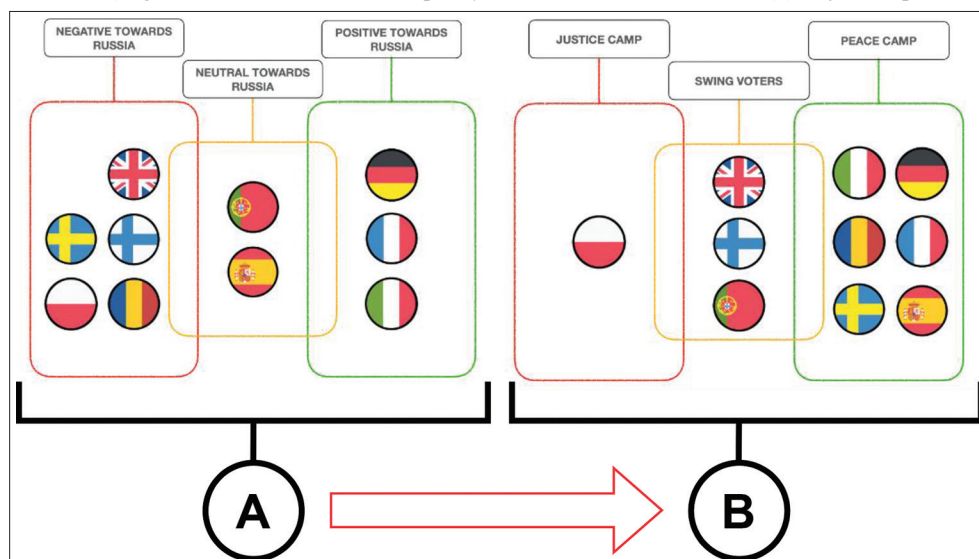
by a detailed breakdown of the camps in each country surveyed, as presented in Figure 2.

The data shows that only in Poland do supporters of the Justice camp outnumber those of the Peace camp by a ratio of 41%-16%, an exception among the countries surveyed. And only in the UK and Finland is public opinion almost equally divided between the two main camps. This can be explained in Finland’s situation by its border with Russia (1340 km long) and threats from Putin (BBC News, 2022b; Roth, 2022). The UK, as already mentioned, is strongly linked to the American *raison d’etre*, which is a “natural” advantage for Russian geopolitical aspirations. In other countries, the Peace camp’s advantage over Justice is at least 10% (Portugal), and in Italy, even 36%. Cost of living and higher energy prices were identified as the most significant concerns about the ongoing war in Ukraine in both Portugal (69%), Italy (67%), France (65%) and Spain (64%), with the average for all countries surveyed at 61%. Given the level of dependence on Russian gas supplies (Table 2), there is no clear basis for reducing attitudes towards the war solely to concerns about energy costs (58% of Finns, whose economy is highly dependent on Russian gas, indicated this concern and 53% of Poles, whose country receives 40% of its gas from the Russian Federation).

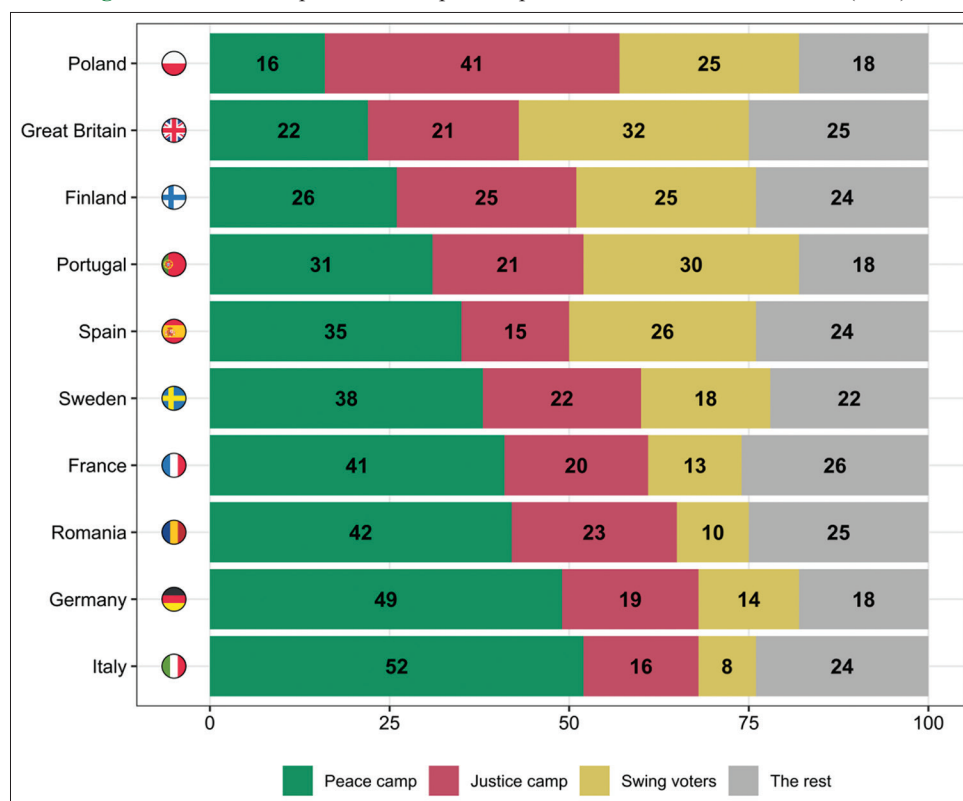
Representatives of the two extreme camps cannot be described by “classical” political divisions, in which supporters of the left should naturally form the Peace camp and the right the Justice camp. Well, in Germany, “the preference for Peace dominates among both centre-right Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and centre-left Social Democrat voters – while, form among main parties, the Greens stand out in having the largest number of Swing voters” (Krastev and Leonard, 2022. p. 7).

However, while in the example of Italy, Germany or France, we can see that public opinion is consistent with the government narrative (although, for instance, in the case of Germany² and

2 In Germany’s case, Liana Fix at the Körber says “The big gesture of change that Olaf Scholz communicated and presented in the Bundestag is still not filled with actual real content, and people are now really starting to doubt it”, and Euronews (2022) concluded that “[o]pinion polls show that Scholz is actually not in line with the German public”.

Figure 1: The shift from (a) general relations towards the policy of the Russian Federation to (b) major camps on the war in Ukraine

Source: own elaboration

Figure 2: Size of Europe's voter camps in response to Russia's war on Ukraine (in %)

Source: Based on Datapraxix and YouGov, May 2022

France, we can speak of a change in the attitude of those in power from the early days of the war in Ukraine, when the positions of the official authorities were incredibly soft towards Russia), the positions of Romanians and Swedes are a big surprise (this is shown in Figure 1, where there has been a transfer of these two countries from the “Negative towards Russia” group to the “Peace camp”). Notably, these two countries are not dependent on Russian energy resources, and the smallest percentage of respondents declare concern about rising living costs and higher energy prices (Romania, 54% and Sweden, 49%).

In attempting to translate the poll results obtained into an attempt to explain the “ambiguous” (“fuzzy”) positions of the governments of the large European countries (especially Italy, Germany and France) that are distancing themselves from aid to Ukraine (especially in terms of support for war equipment), it is worth clearly articulating the position of public opinion in these countries. Thus, the fuzzy semantics of Italian, German and French politicians is a consequence of the attitudes of their societies and therefore of their electorates. Suppose all three countries are strongly dominated by the Peace camp,

which is guided by the logic of its own social welfare (none of the countries' borders Russia and no direct military threats is formulated against them by Putin). In that case, those in power will pursue policies in line with public opinion preferences. In practice, this means that the willingness of the major economies of the European Union to support Ukrainian society will wane with the passage of time (and the approach of winter, which involves increased energy demands). The social welfare (and therefore energy needs) of the countries where the Peace camp dominates will force the ruling authorities to end the war as soon as possible, if only at the expense of Ukraine's integrity. And the number of tools available, including subtle and covert ones, to influence an increasingly weakened and Western-dependent Ukraine is considerable (e.g. cutting financial aid and delaying military support).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As this intervention paper has argued, Russia's war in Ukraine has significantly divided public opinion in European countries, which secondarily influences the positions of governments. This means that the division between the Peace and Justice camps, and the standard of living and quality of life preferences behind them, mark the key opposition to the fate of a Ukraine dependent on Western support.

This war has very strongly revealed that in the human needs (social welfare) system of developed societies, the need for access to sustainable energy sources plays a key role (Bartiaux et al., 2019), also due to so-called social welfare-related impacts, such as health benefits, reduced air pollution, and increased comfort (Chatterjee et al., 2022: 4). Less relevant to the public opinion of some of the rich countries of Western Europe are the real-life scenarios of a severe food crisis in non-rich African or Asian countries (which, according to Akram Belkaid (2022), threatens nearly 1.7 billion people with starvation).

The survey used in this article also shows the deep divisions in European societies about the war in Ukraine, which corresponds to one of the scenarios of the Economist Intelligence Unit (2022), which assumes that this war will "bring about a new division of Europe". Issues of energy policies, and directly related to this, social welfare, are at the centre of this conflict. An armed conflict that "is not just another regional war: it represents a rupture in Russia-West relations that will have profound repercussions for Europe and the world" (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022: 1). From the perspective of energy policies, this war may lead to an accelerated energy transition (Bordoff & O'Sullivan, 2022), which will ultimately lead to the spread of clean energy sources corresponding to nature-based social welfare, which are also a remedy for the politico-military use of non-renewable (clean or not) energy sources (Baranowski, 2021, 2022b; Tollefson, 2022). However, the progressive phenomenon of the so-called "vietnamisation" of war, i.e. the habituation and indifference of the inhabitants of – in this case – Europe to the armed conflict will work against the Ukrainians. This means that the Peace camp will grow at the expense of not only Swing voters and the Rest but also the Justice camp (especially as a result of more expensive energy,

i.e. rising price levels and increased numbers of refugees), which is not good news for Ukrainians dependent on European support.

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