
Ukraine. Ferrara (diplomat): "Self defence is now a priority but the prospect of dialogue is crucial"

"Recovering the Helsinki prospect of a credible dialogue is fundamental. Alas, we are not there yet, but it constitutes the concrete political-international response to the Pope's call for peace and for a peaceful, fair, mutually agreed, sustainable and lasting solution to the conflict. A possible way forward is an international conference, to be convened in due time and once the right conditions are in place, to restore peace along with cooperation and security in Europe", says **Pasquale Ferrara**, Director General for Political and Security Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since May 2021. SIR asked him to comment on Pope Francis' renewed appeal for peace in Ukraine at Sunday's Angelus prayer. "The Pope is a world authority by virtue of his words and the conviction marking his peace advocacy," the diplomat observed. "His message surely arrives to everyone and it draws the attention of diplomatic circles. Several leaders have also raised their voices, in harmony with those of the Pope. Our President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, in a recent speech to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, made a heartfelt appeal to avoid a return to the Yalta axioms, that is, the partition of the world into spheres of influence, and not to give way to force. Instead, he referred to the Helsinki Agreement, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, (CSCE) of 1975, which also involved the Soviet Union and was to some extent a pivotal event in the process of detente that led to the disintegration of the blocs in Europe. We now have to recover the spirit of Helsinki." **The Pope also said that the Ukrainian crisis should have been "a challenge for wise statesmen, capable of building, with dialogue, a better world for the new generations."** **What mistake has diplomacy made so far?** Before the determination to ignite a conflict, diplomacy has clearly very little room for manoeuvre. So I would say that the biggest mistake was made by Russia when it decided to wage armed aggression against Ukraine. Various attempts were made to avoid that outcome, such as the Minsk Agreements or the visits of State leaders to Moscow and Kyiv before the outbreak of the war. The issue at hand now is: if diplomacy failed in the early stages, we now need to understand how diplomacy could succeed towards ending the war. But even in this case, the cessation of hostilities is clearly a precondition. The role of diplomacy is to identify fair solutions, mutually agreed and accepted by both sides, otherwise it would not be peace but surrender. Therefore, there is indeed room for diplomatic efforts, but enabling conditions are needed, which unfortunately have not been in place so far. We must work to make this happen. **Ukraine is constantly asking for assistance in armed defence while the Pope warns against the risk of a "peace based on the balance of weapons", on "mutual fear". "This means," Francis says, "turning history back seventy years." But faced with such violent aggression that does not spare civilians and children, how can one not defend oneself?** Here the Pope clearly offers an extremely relevant historical perspective. He is referring to the arms race and the freeze in relations between the two power blocs during the Cold War. That scenario must absolutely be averted. Here the issue at stake is self-defence. The United Nations Charter prohibits the use of force in general, with the only exception of authorised and legitimate self-defence evoked in Article 51 in the case of an armed attack. I believe this is precisely the situation Ukraine faces today. However, self-defence is also a policy, which poses a dilemma and also a paradox, because it stipulates the use of instruments of war to defend oneself against a war. Self-defence serves to put an end to an attack, but we also know that wars end not only by virtue of self-defence but also with the prospect of negotiation. War ends with diplomacy, which is what President Zelensky said, among others. However, the time is unfortunately not ripe for diplomacy. Because warfare is still raging. It should be clear that self-defence is only relevant if it is combined with a negotiating perspective. And negotiations must guarantee the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. There must be a just peace. Peace cannot be imposed from above. **The conflict is likely to drag on for a long time while the process leading to its conclusion appears complex. What is the way out of this**

tunnel of war? We must always remember that there is a twofold path. The first is self-defence, as I said. The second, which must be pursued with equal determination, is the path of diplomacy. Whatever the outcome of the war, it is necessary to gather around a table and explore the parameters for a just and lasting peace. There must be what I call "strategic patience", i.e. not letting oneself be overwhelmed by the situation today, but rather extend one's gaze and broaden one's vision to identify a possible resolution of the conflict. Obviously, peacemaking requires the willingness of both sides, and if the other side is unwilling, then we are clearly facing a conflict that is bound to last for a long time, something we should try to avoid by all possible means. **Pacifist initiatives in Italy, inspired by associations and peace movements such as the Peace Caravans in Odessa and the March in Kyiv, have been planned for June and July. What do you think about these initiatives? Could they and do they have a bearing?** First and foremost, the humanitarian dimension of these initiatives is fundamental. It expresses concrete solidarity and friendship but also, and above all, it testifies to the fact that this is a European war. With regard to pacifist initiatives, I believe they represent a significant commitment. However, it should be remembered that Ukrainians' priority right now is defending their country. Therefore, at this stage, one could hardly ask the Ukrainians to cease their resistance without some guarantees, because it would be tantamount to a more or less unconditional surrender. It is therefore necessary to speak of peace also and especially to those who don't want peace at the moment and who have deliberately violated the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Having said that, peace movements are not just holding demonstrations, they are also conveying a political perspective, thereby displaying an awareness of the complexity of this conflict and of what needs to be done, by all sides, to end it.

M. Chiara Biagioni