
Ukraine. Ferrara: "We are worried about the Zaporizhzhia plant, IAEA inspectors must access the site as soon as possible"

There is grave concern throughout the international community and especially within the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding the situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, involving potentially severe risks. Tensions are running high. Speaking to SIR, **Pasquale Ferrara**, Political and Security Affairs Director General at Italy's Foreign Ministry since May 2021, confirmed the gravity of the situation. We asked him for a "snapshot" of the ongoing diplomatic efforts regarding the Ukrainian question. "This power plant has repeatedly been disconnected from the power grid - Ferrara explains - which is indispensable for all its circuits to function, especially the cooling systems and remote access to monitor the power plant's levels and its overall condition. All our efforts are currently focused on ensuring that International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Grossi may be able to access the site and determine the extent of the damage, if any, and proceed with subsequent repair." In a tweet earlier today, the International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General announced he was heading to the Ukrainian nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia. "The day has come, the IAEA mission to Zaporizhzhia is now on its way. We must protect the safety and security of Ukraine's and Europe's biggest nuclear power plant," Rafael Grossi wrote on social networks, pointing out that the mission will be arriving on site later this week. **Is the situation that serious?** A nuclear plant that is completely out of control is extremely dangerous. Avoiding events that could result in radiation leak is the first priority. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Lviv a few days ago. The talks touched on, inter alia, the steps needed to ensure that inspectors will be allowed access into the power plant. The first question is understanding which access route is feasible, i.e. whether to enter from Russian-controlled territory or from Ukrainian-controlled territory. That is a crucial question, as it affects both the military operations underway in that area and the exercise of sovereignty over the plant. It is an extremely thorny issue, and attempts are being made to resolve it pragmatically, without, however, undermining the principle of Ukrainian sovereignty. **How long could it take?** Initially, the mission was scheduled for the last week of August. However, at least three problems remain to be solved. First, the logistics question, i.e. determining the route via which the inspectors will access the site. Secondly, the safety issue, requiring de-conflicting initiatives, given that the plant lies on the war's front lines, and the inspectors' and technicians' safety must be guaranteed. Thirdly - as already mentioned - the political implications of territorial control in the medium to long term. But we are quite confident. There was much scepticism surrounding the wheat agreement too, but fortunately the deal is on track, with the 33rd ship having left yesterday. It's important not to lose hope that at least some specific issues can be resolved via diplomatic efforts. **Moreover, no one can afford to underestimate the risk of a nuclear disaster in Europe.** The nuclear threat is a major trans-national risk that concerns everyone. It concerns Europe, but it also concerns Russia. It should be remembered that whenever a war breaks out, the risk that the military approach may not be attuned to the politico-diplomatic agenda is always present. Military leaders on the ground occasionally pursue objectives that are not aligned with the political ones. I do believe, however, that the safety of a nuclear power plant, just like food security linked to the export of Ukrainian grain, are matters that cannot be relegated to short-term military goals, for they are matters relating to global security, and not just pan-European security. **How could it have spiralled out of control so badly?** All wars have very serious 'side effects'. They hit the economy, communication channels, human mobility. In an extremely complex situation such as the Ukrainian one, not least because of Ukraine's position and role in the European continent, and in terms of the exports of essential goods it supplies worldwide, the negative impact of this crisis is obviously greater than elsewhere. In fact, the core of this crisis is the geo-political, historical and geographic heart of the pan-European continent. **The prospect of a cease-fire and the possibility of resuming negotiations are becoming more unlikely with each passing day,**

aren't they? It's hard to say, not least because there are some conflicting signals. For instance, we have seen that in some circumstances, when a specific situation is circumscribed, a diplomatic prospect is possible. This happened with the wheat crisis, as mentioned before. We are confident that it will be the same with the power plant. Therefore, it would be wrong to say that diplomatic efforts are bound to fail during a war. Such efforts are party successful, and with regard to specific issues. Diplomacy has hitherto failed as regards the cessation of hostilities. It is something the G7 and the EU have been calling for for a long time. But the problem in this case is that this could be a long-lasting war. The Russians have no intention - based on what we have seen so far - of rapidly ending this war of aggression, nor do the Ukrainians - rightly and for the sake of self-defence - have any intention of surrendering. **What is Italy's role?** Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio recently travelled to Kyiv for a diplomatic visit that had been planned for some time with the aim of showing that Italy continues to be at Ukraine's side and supports it not only in the area of defence and financial aid, but also in other sectors. During the mission Minister Di Maio announced support to a demining project in Ukraine with \$2 million contribution, for example. This project also has a humanitarian dimension because it is aimed at protecting the lives of civilians and it will be implemented partly through a UN agency and partly through an awareness raising activity for children to make them aware of landmine risks. This inevitably involves a long-term perspective, with initiatives to be implemented as soon as the military operations on the ground have ceased. **Do you have concerns about Italy's ongoing election campaign?** Some of Italy's foreign policy positions are marked by continuity. Italy's stance on Ukraine has evolved at the European level, among the 27 EU Member States as well as within the G7, especially in its transatlantic relations with the United States. A war of aggression is something objectively destructive and detrimental to the international order. The Charter of the United Nations expressly condemns all forms of aggression and calls on all States to find ways to resolve disputes peacefully. I do believe that this commitment is shared by the whole of Italian society and by every political party.

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