

Book and Culture Fair
Saturday 7 May 2022 in Luxembourg City

Mr Jacques FAURE

**What peaceful policy for Europe
in the face of Russian military aggression against Ukraine?**

SUMMARY

In his introduction to the conference, the president of the Ad Pacem association placed the Russian invasion of 24 February in the logic of the policy of aggression that Russia has been conducting for years against Ukraine as a consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Former French diplomat with years of experience as head of international organisations or as ambassador in Eastern European capitals, guest Jacques Faure first commented on the reasons Vladimir Putin gave on 21 February 2022 on his country's media channels to justify the "special military operation" against Ukraine.

Putin claims that he wants to demilitarise Ukraine, although this has already been done on a large scale since the country gained independence in 1991. Ukraine gave up all its nuclear warheads and rockets (1,300) to the Russian Federation in a 1994 treaty, which also meant the shutdown of a large part of the military-industrial complex that was located on Ukrainian territory. In return, Russia signalled in a bilateral agreement its willingness to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its existing borders and its willingness not to interfere in its economic and political policies.

The 1997 agreement provided for the sharing of the Black Sea fleet between the two countries. Russia reserved the best ships for itself. In 2010 the pro-Russian president Yanukovich, who wanted to buy Russian gas at an advantageous price, extended the presence of the Russian fleet in Sevastopol and a contingent of twenty-five thousand soldiers until 2042. The difference between the Russian and Ukrainian armies being one to twenty, Ukraine was not a threat to the Russian Federation until 24 February 2022.

Putin wants to denazify Ukraine, although this country has been democratically electing its presidents since independence, which is not the case in Russia, where Putin has remained in power since 2000 and wants to stay there until 2036. In his historical account, Putin forgets to say that the Soviet Union and Hitler's Nazi Germany were allies under the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact until 24 June 1941. Putin does not say that among the 22 million Soviet soldiers who died in the Second World War, there were about 8.6 million Ukrainians who were also fighting Nazism.

Putin calls Ukraine a Nazi because it did not accept Russia's annexation of Crimea by rising in the Maidan uprising. The Ukrainian parliament voted to remove President Yanukovich from office because he wanted an economic partnership with Russia and shot at the Maidan protesters before

being flown out to Russia by helicopter. He calls the Ukrainian government a Nazi for illegally overthrowing Yanukovich and therefore does not support it.

Apart from the two small far-right parties, Svoboda and Right Sector, there is no large far-right party in Ukraine as there is in Russia (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia).

Putin wants to restructure Ukraine, but that is all it has done since its independence. And he is wrong when he claims that Kyiv is the mother of Russian cities. It was founded in the 9th century by the Varegans, Vikings who came from Scandinavia. The Ukrainian Cossacks already existed in the 17th and 18th centuries when Catherine II of Russia and the tsars denied the Cossacks any existence of their own through intense Russification. Taras Shevchenko, the Ukrainian national poet of the 19th century, was also a victim.

Asked whether NATO was responsible for the Russian invasion because it had accepted the Eastern European peoples who had freed themselves from the Soviet yoke, Mr Faure explained that each of the countries had freely asked to join NATO because they did not feel protected by Russia. On the other hand, Putin indeed sees himself as the unifier of the former Russian lands like Peter the Great and Stalin before him. He refused to join the partnership proposals offered by NATO. In all negotiations between Europe or NATO and Russia, the Russian negotiators have the same reflex of saying each time: "what is ours is ours (Russians) and what is yours (Westerners) is negotiable". Yet states, whether in the West or the East, are free to choose to join NATO. The Minsk agreements of 2004 and 2014 could not be achieved because the two self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk did not want free elections.

Putin continues to say that Belarussians, Ukrainians and Russians are one people; he considers that these different cultures, peoples, languages and states have no right to exist.

As in the time of the tsars in the second half of the 18th century or in the time of Stalin, Putin believes he can occupy these lands militarily to annex them to Russia.

For Mr Faure, Russia and Europe are at odds in Ukraine because the latter is supporting the Ukrainian people who are rising to demand and defend their rights as a nation militarily, with the supply of arms and by taking in refugees in European countries. The French diplomat pleads to help Ukraine resist a Russia that is guided by men who live stuck in their false historical narrative and influenced by the reports of the FSB spy service that cannot see the reality.

Secondly, the Ukrainians do not see at the moment how peace talks can take place when Russia has not respected any of the agreements made with Ukraine since the country's independence.

On the European side, there is a clear desire to defend Ukraine without wanting to completely break with Russia. But Mr Faure is keen to point out Putin's interest in returning to a bipolar world because he cannot stand the unipolar world that the Americans would try to impose. After each war, he has led (the second war in Chechnya, against Georgia, in Syria, against Ukraine in 2014), Putin's popularity has increased. But this time, for Mr Faure, it could be different. With a war that will extend over time, the Russian population will always be less willing to follow.

The French diplomat ended his lecture by saying that in the long run, as in the 1962 Cuban nuclear missile crisis when Nikita Khrushchev was forced to step down, Putin could also be forced to step down by the leaders of the FSB and the military-industrial complex if the power of Russia and its army is weakened too much.

