

The war in Ukraine. The urban dimension of a geopolitical threat

Barcelona, 11th July 2022, 17:30h – 19:30h CEST

CIDOB. Elisabets, 2, Barcelona

Organised by: CIDOB's Global Cities Programme with the support of the Barcelona City Council

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has once again proven that cities are the places that bear the greatest burden of conflict. Ukrainian cities, which were home to about two-thirds of the country's population before the start of the war, are the focus of the Russian assault and key strategic targets. Many Ukrainian mayors have been threatened by invading Russian forces and pressured to call off local resistance. At the same time, with urban neighbourhoods becoming battlegrounds, 10 million people have been forcibly displaced both within the Ukraine and beyond the country's borders, making this is the fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war.

Cities in the Ukraine and in neighbouring countries such as Poland, Romania and Hungary, are receiving the majority of refugees, most of whom are women and children. The rapid humanitarian response and solidarity that city governments and local civil society organisations have demonstrated have been admirable. However, in the medium to long term the sheer number of displaced people that are seeking refugee will exceed the capacities of local services and voluntary helpers.

The devastation of Ukrainian cities like Mariupol and Kharkiv, also means that post-war reconstruction efforts will be concentrated in and around cities. In anticipation of the massive investments and resources that will be needed to rebuild the country's urban centres, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has announced the launch of a special urban reconstruction programme.

In the face of these multidimensional urban challenges and against the backdrop of profound geopolitical changes, city diplomacy is emerging as a strategic tool for cities in the Ukraine and in neighbouring countries to respond to the conflict and its impacts. In alignment with Western governments' condemnation of Russian aggression, many city governments and city networks across Europe and the North America have frozen or discontinued sister city relations and other partnerships with their Russian counterparts. By contrast, others have chosen to maintain relations, highlighting the importance of keeping open channels of dialogue at local level and standing with Russian citizens that oppose their nation's actions.

At a more practical level, city councils are cooperating to provide and deliver direct financial and material aid to communities in Ukraine – often working with local Ukrainian diasporas as bridge builders; they are coordinating and sharing knowledge on how to improve the reception of Ukrainian refugees and the provision of services, from housing to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities; and, starting to prepare for providing support with the post-war reconstruction and reconciliation process.

To promote understanding of the new and still evolving role of city diplomacy in times of conflict, CIDOB's Global Cities Programme is organising a workshop that analyses how cities are collectively positioning themselves vis-a-vis the war. Building in a wider analysis of this major geopolitical threat, the workshop brings together experts and analysts in foreign policy and transnational urban cooperation that will explore different aspects of how city diplomacy is changing in this new conflict era, and how it can strengthen local responses to conflict and war.

Programme

- 17.30 – 17.45 **Welcome remarks**
Pol Morillas, Director, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)
Laia Bonet, Deputy Mayor for the 2030 Agenda, Digital Transition, Sports and Territorial and Metropolitan Coordination, Barcelona City Council
- 17.45 – 18.15 **Keynote speaker**
Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook, former Director and CEO, German Council of Foreign Relations
- 18.15 – 19.15 **Panel discussion. City diplomacy in a new era of conflict**
Christiane Heimann, Visiting Fellow, German Marshall Fund
Henri-Paul Normandin, former Ambassador of Canada; Fellow, Institut d'Études Internationales de Montréal (IEIM) (*online*)
Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi, Director, City Diplomacy Lab; Lecturer in City Diplomacy, Columbia Undergraduate Global Engagement
Chair: **Agustí Fernández de Losada**, Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Global Cities Programme, CIDOB
- 19.15 – 19.30 **Concluding remarks**
Agustí Fernández de Losada, Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Global Cities Programme, CIDOB