

## ZAKI LAÏDI

Former Personal Advisor to the High Representative and Vice President of the Commission EEAS

**Terry Martin, Journalist, TV news anchor**

Zaki Laïdi, would you like to begin?

**Zaki Laïdi, Former Personal Advisor to the High Representative and Vice President of the Commission EEAS**

Yes, thank you. I will start talking about the main issue, which is Ukraine. We were here one year ago with virtually the same panelists, including the anchor, and I would like to just insist on what has changed and what has not changed since last year. What has not changed, from a European perspective, is a strong alignment with Ukraine. We are the main provider of economic and military aid to Ukraine, ahead of the United States, and I insist on that point. Our contribution is huge, and it will certainly remain important.

Second, there is no doubt that Russia will remain, for the EU, a major security threat for the coming years. All of the assessments made by the military in Europe conclude that Russia will reinforce its military capacity, and therefore the Europeans, of course, have to avoid any kind of military confrontation with Russia, it would be irresponsible. But we need to deter Russia, and in order to deter Russia we need to ramp up our military effort on a national basis. However, we also have to do it collectively. We are now talking about reaching not simply the 2% target, but the 3% target. However, this is not going to be enough if we do not start working seriously together. There are a lot of discussions, a lot of projects on the table, very huge projects on the table, in order to ramp up the military efforts of the European Union. At the same time, we all know the obstacles on the way, including bilateral cooperative programs, such as the French and the German programs, which are not in a very good shape. This is what has not changed.

What has changed is, first, the fact that we, of course, have to realize that Russia did not collapse, that the regime in Russia has adapted itself to a war economy, in spite of the huge problem the Russian economy is facing. We cannot underestimate those difficulties. They are huge. However, at the same time, the Russians have been able to adapt, and the regime is not on the verge of a collapse. It has adapted itself to a war economy. I mean, there are very, very different ways. On the military front, we are facing what I call a sort of bloody stalemate, in the sense that the Russians are advancing in the Donetsk very slowly, but they are advancing, and they are advancing at a huge human cost. In October, Russia lost 1,500 soldiers during the months of October. It is the highest level of casualties since the beginning of the war, which means that their progression has a huge cost.

However, the Russians have a huge capacity to generate new forces. If they lose between 1,000 or 1,500 soldiers a day, they are able to generate at least 25,000 to 30,000 soldiers a month. Moreover, the Russian regime has been able to overcome the political obstacle created by a possible draft. If you look at the composition of Russian forces in Ukraine, you see that 70% of the soldiers are engaged on the basis of contracts. They are contractors, people who have a contract. You have convicts, 12%, and you have only 7% of people who have been drafted, which means that the political pressure from the population on the regime is lower. It is lower. Moreover, those who get money to go to war, their life expectancy is limited, around three weeks or so, but the families get the money. There is a very interesting chart which shows the evolution of saving rates in Russia, but also in Tuva and in Buryatia. You see that the saving rates are skyrocketing in Tuva and Buryatia, whereas on average the saving rates in the rest of Russia is increasing, but not that much, which means that politically the Russian regime has been able to adapt itself.

On the military front, and I can develop this point, but very quickly, the Russians have been able, and this is something which is not mentioned a lot in publications and in debate in the press, to acquire a formidable capacity to master EW, electronic warfare.

**Terry Martin**

Sorry, we need to wrap up a little bit, so we can get to everyone.

**Zaki Laïdi**

Yes. Frankly, as Europeans, we all know that there will be no military solution to the conflict in Ukraine. I think that everybody agrees with this. We need to support the Ukrainians in order to face the Russians in possible political negotiations. When I was with the high representative in Kyiv two weeks ago, we discussed the different scenarios. I will not go into details, but of course we need to support the Ukrainians to face the possibility of political negotiations.

**Terry Martin**

Thank you very much. You were just in Ukraine, as you mentioned, just a couple of weeks ago. You sat down with Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the president of Ukraine. I presume Josep Borrell was also there with you at that meeting. Maybe just give us one anecdote from that meeting, very quickly, what you learned.

**Zaki Laïdi**

Well, I will not disclose the content, but what I can say is that he was very appreciative of the role of the European Union. Also, of course, they are interested in – but this is on the public record – joining NATO very quickly. I do not think it is going to happen. Their participation in the European Union is progressing quite well, but it does not mean that it's going to take place within five years. They are very appreciative of the role of the EU in general and in detail.

**Terry Martin**

Said like a true veteran diplomat. Very good.