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Reaction to the Russian aggression against Ukraine: cities as international standards' supporters

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ABSTRACT

Cities are taking part in enforcing international standards/law by humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and relief for Ukrainian refugees, severing sister cities' ties with Russian cities and breaking other forms of cooperation with them. This enforcement consists of implementing sanctions against Russia and supporting the victim of illegal Russian aggression in the exercise of collective self-defense. The research goal of this article is to examine the reaction of 12 cities (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Geneva, London, Madrid, Munich, Paris, Stockholm, Strasbourg and the Hague, chosen as part of a broader research project that the authors are implementing) to Russian aggression against Ukraine and on that basis to catalogue or classify their actions as well as answer the question whether they are enforcing international standards only by following their states' actions or by acting ahead of them. The cities had been chosen as part of a broader research project that the authors are implementing. The research methods include desk analysis and multiple case studies. The information has mostly been obtained from the websites of the respective city councils as well as via e-mails from the International Affairs offices/officers of examined cities.

KEYWORDS

Cities; Russian aggression; international law enforcement; sanctions

1. Introduction

The situation in Ukraine may be classified as an international armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, which started in 2014 when Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula and provided support to the separatist forces in Donetsk and Luhansk. The conflict entered a new phase on 24 February 2022, when the Russian military forces, supported by Belarus, attacked the territory of Ukraine. This attack has been recognized as illegal aggression (Gil 2022; Janik 2022; Kelly 2022; Kleczowska 2022; Milanovic 2022). The US (US Department of the Treasury 2022), the EU (European Council 2022) and like-minded (Strangio 2022; Australian Government 2022) imposed sanctions on Russia; among others, the EU and the US froze the assets of the Russian Central Bank, multiple companies (including the VTB bank), and numerous individuals. Russia was also blocked from the SWIFT. President Putin is among those sanctioned, along with the members of Russia's Security Council (Moiseienko 2022).

Next to states, cities support international standards/law enforcement by humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and relief for Ukrainian refugees, severing sister cities' ties with Russian cities and breaking

other forms of cooperation with them. The support for enforcement consists of implementing sanctions against Russia and supporting the victim of illegal Russian aggression in the exercise of collective self-defense. This is quite an extraordinary confirmation of the increasing participation of cities in international politics and international law enforcement not only domestically but also globally, which can be exemplified by Los Angeles and San Francisco implementing the *UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women* even though the US did not ratify the Convention (Knop 2012; Resnik 2012; Wexler 2006; Lin 2018, 47–51) or the city of York in the UK which purposefully used international human rights as a framework for its local policies while the UK, as a rule, opposed the Human Rights Act. The city also chose to mitigate the growing severity of national migration policies by welcoming refugees (Lin 2018, 48).

The research goal of this article is to examine the reaction of 12 cities (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Geneva, London, Madrid, Munich, Paris, Stockholm, Strasbourg and the Hague) to Russian aggression against Ukraine and on that basis to catalogue or classify their actions as well as answer the question whether they are enforcing or supporting the enforcement of international standards only by following their states' actions or by acting ahead of them. The hypothesis is that by all their activities analyzed here, cities help maintain fundamental international norms, such as the principle of territorial integrity and the prohibition of unlawful force, human rights, and refugee law. The authors used a hybrid inductive-deductive approach as on one hand they included a set of empirical observations, seeking patterns in those observations, and then theorizing about those patterns, but on the other hand the authors also included a theoretical approach of growing role of cities in international relations (in particular visible in the review of the literature) and against this background tested the above hypothesis.

More than a decade ago Cornago (2010) pointed that – against conventional approaches that tend to minimize the importance of sub-state diplomacy – the undergoing process of legal and political inclusion of cities in international relations deserves greater attention from both diplomatic practitioners and experts. Therefore, this article is a contribution to the discussion on the growing role of cities in international relations on the example of the war in Ukraine. According to Cornago (2010, 11) this process of inclusion, 'which is embedded in wider structural transformations, is driven simultaneously by two competing forces that are present in virtually all states: first, international mobilization of sub-state governments themselves, since they increasingly pursue relevant political objectives in the international field through their own methods and instruments; and second, the various attempts to limit and control that activism deployed by central governments through various legal and political instruments'. The war in Ukraine should be included in the first group as an example of sub-state governments' activities undertaken with the use of various tools that are often complementary to the tools used by states and/or international organizations on the international level.

In the current crisis, some cities are clearly supporting or implementing state-imposed sanctions, sometimes anticipating states' ideas. Some of the cities' calls to freeze Russian assets or put an embargo on Russian gas and oil closely resemble imposing their own sanctions, as the justifications invoke international norms or European values. The research methods include desk analysis and multiple case studies. The information has mostly been obtained from the websites of the respective city councils as well as via e-mails from the International Affairs offices/officers of examined cities. The authors searched the websites of the 12 cities, looking for any news or tabs dealing with Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. As to the e-mails, they were sent to the International Affairs offices/officers asking them a general question: How did your city react to Russian aggression against Ukraine? And additional, more detailed questions: did your city sever twin city relations with Russian cities? Did it impose other sanctions on Russia? Does your city support, and, if yes, how – Ukrainian refugees?

The mentioned 12 cities were chosen as part of a broader research project that the authors are implementing, based on the criteria including the latest rankings and indexes, among which influence, power and wealth were taken into consideration. From the available rankings and lists, the following were ultimately selected:

- (1) Global Power City Index 2020: http://www.mori-m-foundation.or.jp/pdf/GPCI2020_summary.pdf
- (2) Global Cities Index: <https://www.kearney.com/global-cities/2020>
- (3) Cities of Influence 2018: <https://www.colliers.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/cities-of-influence-2018-180309-colliers.pdf>
- (4) OECD National GDP growth contributed by metropolitan areas (2000–2013): https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/reg_glance-2016-20-en.pdf?expires=1611908139&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=CD176572D9823612DD973B34EA9B714C
- (5) Most dynamic cities in Europe: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/07/these-are-the-17-most-dynamic-cities-in-europe/>
- (6) The wealthiest cities in the world (we included only European ones): <http://www.citymayors.com/statistics/richest-cities-2020.html>
- (7) Largest urban agglomerations in Europe in 2020: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1101883/largest-european-cities/>

European cities (as the project implemented by the authors is limited to European cities) appearing in the above-mentioned rankings were moved to the matrix in order to identify those that appeared most often (only cities that were listed more than twice were selected). Hence, the nine selected cities include: London and Paris (both appeared in the rankings seven times), Madrid (five times), Barcelona and Moscow (four times), and Amsterdam, Berlin, Munich and Stockholm (three times). Furthermore, the list was expanded by additional four cities – Brussels, the Hague, Geneva and Strasbourg. Adding the last four cities is important for another reason: it reflects so-called geography of international law, meaning that certain cities have specific connotations, e.g. like the Hague is the capital of justice and Geneva is closely associated with human rights. Additionally, all those cities are considered important political centers, nodes in a global political network of interdependencies. A feature that predisposes these above-mentioned cities and the way they function to being a subject of a thorough study is not only their frequent presence in the top of city rankings but also their frequent membership in European city networks. Overall 12 (as Moscow had to be excluded) dynamic and influential European cities were examined.

The level of cities was chosen because the role of cities in international affairs is not a standard topic in international relations and, as such, it requires in-depth research. The reaction of cities to Russian aggression shows that we are dealing with the new reality of cities that have shifted from objects of international regulations to subjects/actors in international affairs and law-making. Frug and Barron (2006, 8) sum up this process by stating that '[c]ities have entered into a new phase in history. Their orientation has become external rather than internal. Their associations have become global rather than domestic'. Given the growing importance of the cities in multi-level governance, it is important to check whether cities could play a role as a supporter of international standards and in which way.

Moreover, the cities examined may be termed 'global cities'; this term emphasises that a global city is no longer deep-rooted or embedded in the state's urban structure and state governance but participates more extensively and directly in multi-level global governance. Sassen's works are particularly important here. She explains that global cities are 'command and control centers in the organization of the world economy, key locations and marketplaces for the leading industries of the current period, that is, finance and specialized services for firms, sites of production including the production of financial innovations and as markets for the products and innovations produced' (Sassen 1991, 3–4).

Alongside Cantir (2021), it has to be emphasized that contemporary cities can and should be perceived as emerging foreign policy actors. Their contribution to helping Ukraine and Ukrainians living and fighting there as well as Ukrainian refugees in European countries in the context of the Russian aggression of 2022 is one of many examples of such a perception of cities. Although cities can work either in harmony with or in opposition to central authorities by

bolstering or compromising the executive's diplomatic goals and actions (Cantir 2021), the war in Ukraine has already proved that in this case the activity of cities is not only an extension of the foreign policy of their central governments but in many cases – a complement to it. Numerous cities conduct these international assistance activities on their own and with their own funds, and in many cases they seek help in finding solutions and tools from their partner cities or other cities abroad (sharing good practices and making use of city networks), and not from their central authorities.

This study fits into the institutional liberalism paradigm, which highlights the role and importance of non-state entities in international relations. It gives prominence to the plurality of actors in the international arena as well as to democratisation of international life, increasing global interdependence and the interrelatedness of all states' interests. The main contribution of the article is empirical, supporting the opinion that cities take part in international relations as independent global players, including matters related to international norms and human rights; a conceptual contribution is the catalogue/classification of cities' actions in response to Russian aggression against Ukraine, which shows that cities can act as supporters of international standards. To the authors' knowledge, it is the first paper examining this issue. As shown below, there is literature on cities' participation in international relations and their various connections to international law, but the present research topic is new and hence, there are no publications on it. The literature review shows that cities are influential global actors, and our paper sheds new light on cities' role in international relations in the context of the current, quite unprecedented crisis in times when the role of cities in international relations is so important.

2. Literature review

Currently, the crucial texts on the participation of cities in international relations are Acuto (2013), Curtis (2014a, 2014b, 2016), Taylor et al. (2007); Amen et al. (2011) and Davis and de Duren (2011). In his monograph, Michele Acuto describes the influence that global cities exert on international politics; he highlights cities' pervasive agency and diplomatic connections in modern global governance. Acuto and Steele (2013) examine global cities and cities' connections in their multiple dimensions – political, architectural, historical, postcolonial, literary and virtual – as well as how these aspects reflect the participation of cities in global processes of decision-making. In turn, Simon Curtis (2016) claims that the rise of global cities is a characteristic of the international society and a part of a wider process of transformation the international order is currently undergoing. Curtis examines the constituents and evolution of the international system as well as the position of cities within it and the roles they play. Taylor et al. (2007) analyze the ways in which concepts of systems and networks can be combined to faithfully represent relations between cities as well as the relevant political issues. Amen et al. (2011) postulate re-inventing the theory of international relations theory, illustrating the proposal with examples of multiple intersections between the global and the local and discussing how these intersections can impact the conditions that result from the processes of globalization. Diane E. Davis and Nora Libertun de Duren have compiled a volume exploring a variety of comparative and historical cases and different disciplinary points of entry; they aimed to explain relations between cities, sovereignty, and conflicts based on identity. The above texts to some extent also explore the relations of cities and states, suggesting that we may need to redefine the concepts of international society and relations so that these notions include cities as new actors with significant impact. These ideas will be elaborated on in the next section.

Yet even considering the mentioned studies, cities still need to be analysed from the perspective of international relations – to elucidate among others the connections between globalising cities and global governance. Particularly in international law studies, there still is a dearth of research on cities and urban areas in general. Although cities increasingly participate in making and enforcing international law, textbooks still fail to appropriately recognise and represent this aspect; thus, the authors would like to cover this gap in knowledge in this paper.

As to the specific term of 'international law', it has been traditionally used to denote the principles governing the legal relations of nation-states. The Westphalian order assigned legal personality to states only; since then, they were considered as the only entities capable of having rights and bearing duties as well as making and enforcing the law (Cassese 2005, 3; Warbrick 2003, 206). Yet this approach does not fit the present reality. In the 1950s, international organizations joined the ranks of international law subjects; since then, this group has expanded to comprise also such entities as national liberation movements, insurgents, the Holy See, the Sovereign Order of Malta, and individuals (Cassese 2005, 71–150). While their impact varies, all these actors have been weaving 'a fragmented body of rules and practices' (Durmus and Oomen 2021, 3; Wouters 2019, 246).

In 2006 Yishai Blank noted that although extending international law to different non-state entities (e.g. minorities, transnational corporations, civil society organizations and individuals) had been widely discussed, the list had not included cities (2006, 871). In the same year, Gerald E. Frug and David Barron observed that cities had become oriented externally and started to form global associations, and consequently, their role in international relations and decision-making has been growing (2006, 8).

An analysis of today's normative activities of cities can prove further that international law no longer governs only the co-existence of states, and that there are diverse theoretical concepts of international legal order (Lin 2018, 20). Jolene Lin (2018, 16) also claims that cities' interaction is no longer modelled on the traditional internal/external (or domestic/international) divide but rather takes the form of multi-level and multi-actor partnerships. Lin notes that cities' involvement in different forms of international governance demonstrates that in the last decades states also have transformed from separate monolithic entities to diverse and flexible systems that include a multitude of networks of various state components (Lin 2018, 17). Hence, the classic international law is likely to soon be replaced by a hybrid system allowing the mixing and merging of traditional state-centered actors, processes and institutions with a variety of their transnational equivalents (Sari and Jachec-Neale 2018, 35).

Other texts on cities and international law are a rather modest collection, consisting mostly of book chapters and articles. A fundamental text in this field is Helmut P. Aust and Janne Nijman's *Research Handbook on International Law and Cities* (2021). In the introduction, the editors claim that while cities are subjects of international norms and international institutions' decisions, they are also capable of influencing transnational developments by acting alone or in cooperation with other cities or international intergovernmental organizations (Aust and Nijman 2021, 6). This fits the notion that cities' impact on international relations is growing. The volume also contains a chapter by Yukiko Takashiba (2021) on international law making and implementing, particularly relevant to the current topic.

The latest contributions to this field of research include Oomen and Baumgärtel (2018); Eslava and Hill (2020) and Swiney (2020). Both Swiney and Eslava and Hill proposed applying new terms (e.g. global law and international urban law) to accurately reflect the growing importance and influence that cities have in international relations. Swiney's article analyses the ways in which cities take part in international relations, for example by implementing international law with increasing frequency. Oomen and Baumgärtel claim that cities have been demonstrating a significant potential to help addressing challenges in such fields as human rights. The authors analyse the relevance and legitimacy of using human rights (considered in an urban context) as a governance discourse, the consequences that the provisions of a domestic constitution may have for enforcing human rights law, as well as the possible meanings and changes of a 'legal personality', particularly in the context of a fragile or fallen state. Human rights are a very relevant field here as it enables local governments to strengthen their position within the state and to assert domestic and international prominence.

A recent study on the role of cities and transnational city networks in generating international legal norms was written by Elif Durmus and Barbara Oomen (2021, 2). The article explores the hows and whys of cities' involvement in '*jurisgenerative* (norm-generating) practices in the governance of migration that resemble international legal practice'.

3. Cities supporting Ukraine

Cities' reaction to the Russian aggression against Ukraine has been quite vivid and varied. Some elements are similar, others surprisingly not. Stockholm has taken part in several international initiatives, highlighting the city's stance on the current Russian invasion of Ukraine. It has also participated in bilateral discussions with other cities, the EU institutions and the Mayor of Kyiv. In support for Ukraine, Stockholm has also raised the Ukrainian flag, and invited the Ukrainian ambassador to speak at the city council meeting. Currently, the city council is also analyzing how the ongoing situation can affect Stockholm's daily operations, such as the city's services for migrants (information obtained via e-mail from Stockholm's International Affairs Officer Kristoffer Bengtsson, 22 March 2022).

Barcelona – just like Stockholm – has organized numerous meetings aimed at improving support for Ukrainian cities (including a meeting with the Mayor of Kyiv on March 17 – see: *Barcelona y el resto de ciudades . . .*, 2022). It also acceded to declarations against the war within the framework of city networks (e.g. Eurocities and the Pact of Free Cities) such as the Letter of Support from the Mayors of Eurocities to the Cities of Ukraine of 18 February (2022) issued by all the examined cities except Geneva; Statement by the Mayors of the Pact of Free Cities condemning the attack and invasion of the Russian army, 24 February (2022), issued together with Amsterdam, London, and Paris; Declaration of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR); 'European local and regional governments strongly support their peers in Ukraine', 24 February (2022); and UCLG Statement on the attack on Ukraine, 25 February (2022). After a meeting of European cities with the deputy Mayor of Mariupol on 14 March, the 'Urgent Call from Mariupol' (2022) was issued by more than 200 cities, including Barcelona, Brussels and London (see *Barcelona y un centenar . . .*, 2022; information obtained via e-mail from Jorge Fuentealba Diez from the Department of International of Barcelona City Council, 24 and 25 March 2022). This appeal calls for safe humanitarian corridors in Ukraine, a unified response amongst Europeans to the refugee crisis, and an end to all trade relations with Russia and Belarus.

Russian invasion of Ukraine has created a social emergency as millions of refugees have been seeking refuge in European countries. Barcelona and the Hague reacted by preparing to offer shelter and guarantee the refugees' rights in their territories. The Hague additionally informs that the refugees do not have to apply for asylum. All the information that may be necessary or useful for Ukrainian refugees can be found on dedicated city websites: Barcelona's City Council (Barcelona Ciutat Refugi – <https://www.ciutatrefugi.barcelona/en/>), the Hague's Municipality website – <https://www.denhaag.nl/en/municipality-of-the-hague/ukraine.htm>). There is also a dedicated Ukrainian part of the website: <https://www.denhaag.nl/nl/bestuur-en-organisatie/oekraïne/bizenci-ukraina-vidpovidi-na-posireni-zapitanna.htm>. The Hague has various bottom-up and locally organized initiatives to support Ukraine and its people, in particular regarding the reception of refugees (information obtained via e-mail from Rob Schuurmans, Senior policy adviser in the Directorate of International Affairs, 25 March 2022).

The government of London has provided support for Ukraine on three levels. First of all, the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan condemned the action of the Russian regime at the beginning of the invasion in Ukraine, as did Chair of London Assembly Andrew Boff who expressed his support to the Mayor of Kyiv in the face of Russian aggression. Both politicians agreed that there was an urgent need for the seizure of assets owned by allies of President Putin as well as called for the UK Government to accept Ukrainian refugees. Given the fact that the London population includes a large number of people from Ukraine, the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has remained in close contact with the Ukrainian Ambassador V. Prystaiko in order to address issues that appear on daily basis (information obtained via e-mail from Greater London Authority Councillor Len Duvall, 4 April 2022 and official publications published on www.london.gov.uk).

Secondly, Greater London Authority (GLA) administration engaged themselves in different kinds of donation schemes. Some of them were coordinated by Department of Levelling-up, Housing and

Communities, such as Homes for Ukraine. London Fire Brigade sent a 22-vehicle convoy to Poland, carrying vital equipment and supplies. Londoners are also attracted to donate funds to the Ukraine Emergency Appeal – Donate to Ukraine (information obtained via e-mail from Greater London Authority Councillor Len Duvall, 4 April 2022 and official publications published on www.london.gov.uk).

Thirdly, building on previous international cooperation running by GLA, the Mayor of London got in touch with his international partners. Next, he connected with humanitarian advisers from UN World Food Program; started a close cooperation with the Pact of Free Cities; signed a declaration – the above-mentioned Joint Call from Mariupol – condemning President Putin's invasion of Ukraine led by the City of Gdańsk at Eurocities forum or contacted directly with Ukrainians Mayors such those from Lviv or Kyiv (information obtained via e-mail from Greater London Authority Councillor Len Duvall, 4 April 2022 and official publications published on www.london.gov.uk).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in the last decades, London has built a long tradition of providing sanctuary for migrants. This is why there is a form of openness and understanding on a social and political level to provide help and support to people in desperate need. A few months before the outbreak of the Russian invasion the Government of London, along with boroughs, pledged to resettle more than 200 families in long-term accommodation. The best way to show the long-standing policy to help migrants is the GLA website, which includes a subsite devoted to migrants and refugees, not to mention people from Ukraine (information obtained via e-mail from Greater London Authority Councillor Len Duvall, 4 April 2022 and official publications published on www.london.gov.uk).

Analogously, the capital of France is engaged in supporting Ukrainians in many ways. Paris set up a whole network of measures delivered by the national and local administration as well as non-governmental organizations. The entire process is coordinated by a 24/7 reception center (Accueil Ukraine) which collects information about migrants' needs and responds by offering psychological support, accommodation, medical aid and French lessons. Apart from the public services offered to Ukrainians, the City of Paris set up two places, including the Marie Paradis gymnasium, where migrants can stay. The objective to do this is to allow refugees waiting for care to have a space suitable for rest, catering and entertainment for children (information obtained via e-mail as an official response to the query sent to the metropolitan government of Paris, 12 April 2022).

Moreover, the Government of Paris alongside with the municipalities organize different kinds of donations for Ukrainians such as material or financial help. A special collection for Ukrainians has been arranged in all primary schools in Paris. On top of that, the City of Paris has released an emergency aid of 1 million euros for non-governmental organizations providing help for refugees in countries neighboring Ukraine (information obtained via e-mail as an official response to the query sent to the metropolitan government of Paris, 12 April 2022).

Another step was taken by the Government of Paris in solidarity with the capital of Ukraine. Honorary citizenship of Kyiv was voted by the Paris Council on 22 March. Heartfelt support for Ukrainians has also been displayed during many cultural events; some artists from Ukraine like the members of the Kyiv City Ballet at the Théâtre du Châtelet are welcomed as residents (information obtained via e-mail as an official response to the query sent to the metropolitan government of Paris, 12 April 2022). Ukrainians are allowed to use other public services organized for migrants from different countries. One of its humanitarian centers is managed by The Salvation Army Foundation, which is keen to offer specialized help in terms of health, social and administrative support, education and culture (information obtained via e-mail as an official response to the query sent to the metropolitan government of Paris, 12 April 2022).

The activity of German cities such as Berlin or Munich should be analysed not only in the context of the role and tasks they play in the process of admitting migrants from Ukraine, but also in terms of attempts to influence international politics. The scope of assistance offered by city authorities can be divided into two areas: basic – covering mainly formal matters such as registration of refugees and issuing residence permits in Germany, and additional scope, i.e. assistance directly related to the

policy pursued by the city authorities. On the map of Germany, Berlin is the first and most important point for organizing aid for refugees from Ukraine, which is confirmed by the wide range of activities undertaken by the city's authorities. The process of legalizing the stay of refugees in Germany is carried out in cities by appropriate city office units. Due to the exceptional situation, the Berlin authorities made the procedure for refugees from Ukraine more flexible – applications can be made online, allowing a legal stay in the city until the end of August 2022, without the need for applying for a visa (Berlin – information for refugees from Ukraine, n.d.).

In all analysed cities, the authorities coordinate assistance to refugees from Ukraine by creating or selecting units responsible for the integration of the support process. The authorities of Berlin have developed special websites in Ukrainian, German, English and Russian (<https://www.berlin.de/ukraine/en/>), which contain all the necessary information for refugees from Ukraine (i.e. online application for residence permits, medical care, applications for social benefits, working in Berlin, information for refugees with disabilities, practical tips). The situation is somewhat different in Munich, where the authorities did not specifically distinguish between refugees from Ukraine and other migrants coming to this city with a view to settling down or taking up a job (Munich – Information for Migrants N.d.).

The primary scope of assistance offered both by the Federal Republic of Germany and individual German cities includes access to free public transport by rail, tram, and bus. Berlin's activity is particularly visible in terms of additional aid and support measures provided for the refugees from Ukraine. The support offered by the city of Berlin includes assistance in opening bank accounts, money transfers, free access to the city's public infrastructure, including sports, cultural and social infrastructure, as well as educational facilities (i.e. free access to public libraries, museums, swimming pools, sports facilities), or access to healthcare (including medical, psychological and preventive support for pregnant women as well as testing for the presence of the COVID-19 virus). The Berlin authorities in cooperation with the Goethe-Institute also offer German language courses for a symbolic amount of seven hryvnias (approximately EUR 0.25) (Berlin – information for refugees from Ukraine, n.d.).

It should also be noted that the aid and activities supporting the migrants from Ukraine cannot be limited only to the system solutions presented above. The authorities of many German cities, Berlin in particular, engage in organizational and financial assistance focused on helping refugees from Ukraine. Additionally, they apply for appropriate support to federal governments. Markus Lewé, president of the German Association of Cities said that: '... especially in the big cities, even the new emergency shelters in exhibition halls and event halls will soon be overcrowded' (German states call ..., 2022). The German Association of Cities demands from the federal authorities greater financial support and better coordination of activities, particularly in the area of reallocation of Ukrainian refugees so as not to overburden some German cities that are most popular among refugees (German states call ..., 2022).

On 23 March 2022, Vitali Klitschko, the Mayor of Kyiv, spoke online to the Munich City Council. As a gesture of solidarity to its twin city, Munich donated 12 life support vehicles with the most modern equipment and 8 rescue and firefighting vehicles as well as electric tools and special protective clothing for firefighters. In the acknowledgment made available on social media, the Mayor of Kyiv noted that the new German equipment was being used in the liberated suburbs of the capital. Moreover, Munich and Kyiv authorities are constantly in touch to facilitate support for Ukraine and the war refugees (Antonino, 2022).

Geneva is another city that did not remain indifferent to the situation in Ukraine. Firstly, to show support for and solidarity with the Ukrainian population, the city decided to grant emergency aid to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the city of Geneva alone granted an emergency aid of 100,000 Swiss francs). Intended for the inhabitants of Geneva, the Ukraine Solidarity green line was launched, where they could make donations in cash or goods, offer accommodation or apply to be a volunteer (Solidarité Ukraine N.d.). Similar actions were taken by Chaîne du Bonheur – La Suisse Solidaire, which raised more than 115 million Swiss francs during the

first 2 months of the war (500,000 Swiss francs from the Municipal Council of the city of Geneva). It financed 14 projects of their Swiss partner organizations, thus helping over half a million war-affected people in Ukraine, Poland, Romania and Moldova alone. In mid-March 2022 the Executive Council of the city of Geneva decided to allocate the Môle space (Salle du Môle) to the Hospice Général in order to organize the first reception and information point for refugees from Ukraine. This space was to be shared with the association 'Colis du Coeur' that continued distribution of food parcels to migrants in need.

Additionally, Geneva created an economic working group on Ukraine devoted to the consequences of the conflict on the economic and financial situation (Genève crée un groupe de travail économique sur l'Ukraine, n.d.). The Executive Council of the City of Geneva also made an official statement on Russian aggression against Ukraine. The Council expressed its deep concern caused by the fact that peace, democracy, human rights and international law were being seriously violated. It also called on all parties, and in particular Russia, to respect international humanitarian law with special regard to the Geneva Conventions. The Executive Council also declared its willingness to consult the means of providing humanitarian aid and commitments with other Swiss cities, municipalities and cantons (<https://www.geneve.ch/en/actualites/immediate-conflict-ukraine>). A visible sign of solidarity with the people of Ukraine was the Ukrainian flag flying over the Geneva City Hall and at the Palais Anna et Jean-Gabriel Eynard.

The City of Brussels and its Public Welfare Centre facilitated welcoming procedures in Brussels including registration, finding shelter, applying for integration courses and financial support, informing about refugees' rights and duties, as well as free medical care (<https://www.brussels.be/welcoming-ukrainians>).

Like other cities, Brussels almost immediately became involved in helping Ukrainian citizens. According to the federal government decision Belgium cities and municipalities were allowed to create temporary shelters for Ukrainian refugees without completing the environmental permit procedure. To accommodate the needs of refugees reaching Brussels, a former care facility in the Brussels neighbourhood of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean was converted to a reception centre (Walker 2022).

Serve the City is a movement of volunteers active in various cities all over the world supporting shelters and refugee centres not only in Ukraine but also in neighbouring countries (i.e. city of Cracow in Poland). Its Brussels chapter answered the call of Serve the City Poland and delivered 500 boxes with essential items to the team in Cracow, where they were distributed among the people fleeing Ukraine. Serve the City Brussels remains ready to support refugees with projects on the spot (i.e. food outreach: Helping Hands at Hayzel, Lunch 4 All, and Solidarity Breakfast). Additionally, volunteers can sign up for shifts using a special app. ServeNow, as well as make an online donation (Serve the city Brussels N.d.).

In regards to twinning cooperation, the city representative admitted that while Kyiv is a sister city of Brussels, this relationship has not been very active recently. However, in recent weeks the Mayor has taken the initiative to reach out to his counterpart in Kyiv, with the assistance of the Ukrainian Embassy in Belgium. The Brussels Mayor Philippe Close organised a collection of medical aid and sent the donations to Kyiv in coordination with the Ukrainian Embassy. In addition to direct aid to its sister city, Mayor Close promoted many initiatives in the city (i.e. the benefit concert on 10 March 2022) aimed at raising money for Ukraine as well as supporting the arrival of Ukrainian refugees by securing food, assistance, and accommodation. Finally, the city was also communicating with the Ukrainian authorities in order to organise an event in support of Ukraine (information obtained via e-mail from Nathan Clarke, the City of Brussels International Relation Staff Member, 4 April 2022).

Regarding Moscow, Brussels established this partnership 30 years ago. However, there has been no record of an active partnership with the city of Brussels and none since the appointment of the current Mayor (information obtained via e-mail from Nathan Clarke, the City of Brussels International Relations Staff Member, 4 April 2022).

From the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Amsterdam authorities have shown a proactive attitude in support of Ukraine. The local government has launched the 'Amsterdam supports Ukraine' tab on the city's official website. The information contained in this tab is also available in Ukrainian and includes practical tips relevant for refugees planning to settle in the city. The website provides information on issues such as obtaining a citizen service number (BSN), which is a prerequisite for receiving a monthly living allowance; opening a bank account; being granted free parking in Amsterdam's parking garage; declaring residence in the city; finding about employment opportunities in the Greater Amsterdam Area and worker's rights, access to education, health care, rules for travelling with animals, and location of churches (Amsterdam supports Ukraine, n.d.). The city has also taken steps in organizing and facilitating support for Ukrainian refugees by Amsterdam residents. In cooperation with the Dutch Council for Refugees, the local government informs residents about the possibility of welcoming refugees into their homes and provides the necessary support (Housing refugees . . . , n.d.).

It is also worth mentioning that Amsterdam contributed 150,000 euros to the fund of the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) in order to help Ukraine. The city also pledged to send experts to assist in rebuilding and restoration of Ukrainian cities once the process begins. Notably, the city remains open to the possibility of providing any assistance to Ukrainian partners through the relevant NGOs (information obtained via e-mail from Director of the International Office at the City of Amsterdam Sabine Gimbrère, 19 April 2022).

The Madrid authorities have offered a similar range of assistance to Ukraine. Actions in this regard are implemented primarily within the framework of the 'District 22 Kiev' program, presented by Begoña Villacís, the Deputy Mayor of Madrid, at the United Nations Mayors' Forum held in Geneva on 5 April 2022, which was remotely attended by the Mayor of Kyiv Vitali Klitschko. 'District 22 Kiev' implies the involvement of the Madrid local government in three fields: 'immediate humanitarian aid in the face of the conflict emergency, projects with refugees in neighboring countries, comprehensive care and housing for refugees, and future aid in the reconstruction of the city and its main infrastructures' (Presentation . . . , n.d.). As is the case in Amsterdam, Madrid's authorities have also taken a number of measures to help Ukrainians seeking to settle in the city in the wake of Russian aggression. Hundreds of refugees have found shelter in designated locations in the city, with access to job training and placement programmes. The capital city government, with support from international organizations and NGO's has also provided funding and material assistance to the Ukrainian border services (Presentation . . . , n.d.).

However, it is essential to note that Madrid, unlike, for example, Amsterdam, does not have a website where refugees can find comprehensive information on important aspects of settling and living in the city. Launching such a website would be beneficial to Madrid's image as a refugee-friendly city and would strengthen the media coverage of the aid provided by the local government.

The Strasbourg authorities, in cooperation with senior authorities in the region, organized a reception center providing Ukrainian refugees among others with temporary protection, an allowance, health cover and the right to work. The Mayor of Strasbourg, Jeanne Barseghian, highlighted the priorities for assistance, focusing on finding accommodation – preferably collective, and financial donations (Opening of the reception . . . , 2022). Strasbourg also serves as the main logistics center from which humanitarian aid transports for Ukrainian refugees, for example in Romania, are distributed. Another element distinguishing Strasbourg's support for Ukraine is the symbolic aspect. Almost from the beginning of the invasion, the city authorities declared their solidarity with the Ukrainian people and assured of their readiness to help Ukrainians, depending on their needs, also in cooperation with NGOs and higher authorities (Solidarité avec l'Ukraine . . . , 2022). Ukraine is also mentioned in the context of important initiatives organised or co-organised by the city, including cultural events. As an example, the Festival of Europe (May 1–31) is an opportunity to remind the city residents of important values, such as peace, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, set in the context of Ukraine fighting for its freedom (Fête de l'Europe . . . , 2022). As a symbolic gesture, important city buildings, including the City Hall, were illuminated on February 24th in the colors of

Ukraine as an expression of solidarity, combined with a call on the Russian authorities to immediately cease hostilities and return to the path of diplomacy (Solidarité avec le peuple . . ., 2022).

4. Cities implementing or imposing sanctions

Apart from supporting Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, cities in a way attempt to implement or contribute to implementing sanctions imposed on Russia. For example, the Declaration of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (2022) is especially important as it uses international law terminology when strongly condemning the ‘violations of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine’ and calling for ‘the Federation of Russia to cease its attack, to leave the national territory of Ukraine, to respect all international treaties and fundamental principles of international law and to recognise the full sovereignty of Ukraine over all its territories, including Donbas and Crimea’. Hence, cities such as Barcelona are contributing to international law standards’ enforcement.

Barcelona has indicated that some kind of a formal ‘sanction’ that has been imposed by the City Council is the break off of institutional relations with the Russian Consulate of Barcelona (Barcelona’s statement on Twitter). On the other hand, at the moment it has been decided not to break the twinning agreement of Barcelona with Saint Petersburg that was concluded in 1985; however, during an online meeting with the Mayor of Kyiv, Mayor Ada Colau announced that ‘Barcelona has temporarily suspended exchanges with the Russian city of St. Petersburg [...] without reaching a complete break in order to avoid stigmatizing the Russian population’ (information obtained via e-mail from Jorge Fuentealba Diez from the Department of International of Barcelona City Council, 24 and 25 March 2022; Ada Colau transmit el suport . . ., 2022). At the institutional level, a Declaration of the 41 councilors of the Barcelona City Council on the invasion of Ukraine was issued on 25 February; they condemned the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine and called for a dialogue to put an end to it. This declaration expressly referred to international law and human rights law regulations by stating that the Russian invasion ‘constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights and international law, having grave consequences both regionally and globally, which its perpetrators must take full responsibility for’ (Institutional declaration on the invasion of Ukraine, 2022). In the same vein Barcelona called for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine (Eurocities 2022a). Stockholm and the Hague, which did not have twin cities agreements with Russian cities, did not have to sever such ties (information obtained via e-mail from Stockholm’s International Affairs Officer Kristoffer Bengtsson, 22 March 2022; information obtained via e-mail from Rob Schuurmans, Senior policy adviser in the Directorate of International Affairs, 25 March 2022).

The municipal council of Brussels during the session on 14 March 2022 unanimously condemned “military attacks by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, its sovereignty, territorial integrity and people; recognition by Russia of the ‘People’s Republics’ of Luhansk and Donetsk, as well as the continued military occupation of Crimea” (War in Ukraine . . . 2022). As mentioned, the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan also condemned the action of the Russian regime, and so did Chair of London Assembly Andrew Boff, who expressed his support to the Mayor of Kyiv in the face of Russian aggression. Both politicians agreed that there was an urgent need for sanctions in the form of the seizure of assets owned by allies of President Putin. Even though cities do not conduct foreign policy, the above voices mirror or sometimes even anticipate the ideas of states. Although some cities (such as Berlin and Brussels) suggest a milder version of sanctions, they by no means distance themselves from the commitments their states have taken on as members of NATO and the EU.

In terms of sanctioning issues, the Amsterdam local government shows a commitment to controlling the origin of money held by Russian companies operating in the city. This is extremely important in the context of anti-money laundering legislation in force in the city. Due to the problems encountered in the control process, e.g. privacy restrictions, Amsterdam’s decision-makers addressed large legal firms with a proposal of cooperation in the discussed area. It is

worth emphasizing that Amsterdam recognizes the importance of obligations resulting from the need to implement sanctions adopted by the EU (information obtained via e-mail from Director of the International Office at the City of Amsterdam Sabine Gimbrère, 19 April 2022).

Of an entirely different nature are the sanctions adopted by the Madrid local government. At its meeting on 29 March 2022 Madrid City Council decided to strip Vladimir Putin of the Golden Key of the city (Madrid quita . . . , 2022). Although this gesture should be considered symbolic, it is a condemnation of the aggression perpetrated by Putin-ruled Russia, as well as an expression of solidarity with the Ukrainian people. This is confirmed by the announcement by Isabel Díaz Ayuso, the president of the Community of Madrid, that Ukraine's president Volodimir Zelenski had been awarded the International Medal of the Community of Madrid, which came just one day after the City Council passed a resolution stripping Putin of the key to the city gates. Zelenski was awarded 'in recognition of his defense of the freedom of all, especially of Europe and its people' (Ayuso decorates . . . , 2022).

Although Strasbourg does not have twin city agreements with Russian cities (only Boston, Dresden, Leicester, Ramat-Gan and Stuttgart have such ties), the city maintains partnerships with Volgda and Moscow. According to the city's official website, 'Strasbourg attaches great importance to cooperation with Russia, as seen in multiple and varied exchanges on a daily basis and over numerous years: youth exchanges, cultural projects, academic cooperation, experience sharing between local authorities, etc'. (Vologda/Russia N.d.). An analysis of press releases and materials posted on the city's official news portal indicates that the Strasbourg authorities not only did not break cooperation with Russian partners, but also did not introduce any other sanctions in connection with the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

One cannot ignore the fact that Berlin's sister city is Moscow, whereas Munich is twinned with Kyiv. Despite the call from Ivan Fedorov, the Mayor of Melitopol (Russian-occupied Ukrainian city), Berlin is not going to end its 31-year-old partnership with the Russian capital. A spokesperson for the Berlin senate chancellery announced that the city had no plans to terminate the agreement dating back to 1991. The Governing Mayor of Berlin Franziska Giffey spoke in a similar vein, indicating that the only person responsible for the invasion is the President of the Russian Federation; therefore maintaining the partnership helps to keep lines of communication with pro-democracy groups open. A completely different attitude was presented by Kai Wegner, the leader of the Christian Democratic Union in Berlin's state parliament, who questioned the appropriateness of maintaining friendly relations with Moscow and called for the partnership to be suspended (Hernández-Morales 2022).

Unlike Berlin, numerous other cities decided to cut or limit connections with their Russian partners. In March, Coventry expressed its 'horror at what is happening' by suspending its ties with Volgograd despite an 80-year-long history of mutual relations. Similar steps were taken, e.g. by Tokyo and Hiroshima while Chicago and Dallas cut their ties with their Russian counterparts. While Berlin's decision met with varying degrees of disapproval, the Washington-based organization Sister Cities International (SCI), recognized by many city partnership as an overseeing body, has been asking cities not to sever their connections in disapproval of Russia's actions. According to SCI president Leroy Allala, such form of protest, though superficially sound, would first and foremost close a channel of communication that might prove vital for isolated or vulnerable populations members (Hernández-Morales 2022). This statement shows arguments against severing twin city relations.

The above-mentioned 'Urgent Call from Mariupol' (2022) may be placed under the umbrella of calling for sanctions as it demands an end to all trade relations with Russia and Belarus. As the EU Committee of the Regions reconvened for its plenary session on 28 April, the Call from Mariupol was strengthened by the special short video of 12 out of 300 mayors; the film was released in social media and sent to the European Commission, European Council and EU prime ministers (the video can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwkMN2QITz8>). The 300 mayors of British, French, German, Italian, Polish and Spanish cities requested the leaders of European states to cease funding the war in Ukraine. This echoes the voices of the people's representatives in the European

Table 1. Summarizing cities' reactions to Russian aggression against Ukraine.

City	Severing relations with twin cities in Russia	Facilities for Ukrainian refugees in the respective cities	Other sanctions
Amsterdam	No twin cities in Russia	Yes	Yes
Barcelona	Not yet (just temporarily suspending relations with St. Petersburg)	Yes	Yes
Berlin	Twin city – Moscow	Yes	No, as it might be the last channel of communication
Brussels	Twin city – Moscow	Yes	No – there has been no active cooperation for many years
Geneva	Does not practice twinning with other cities to keep its neutrality	Yes	No
The Hague	No twin cities in Russia	Yes	No
London	No twin cities in Russia	Yes	Yes (in terms of limiting the scale of the Russian capital in London)
Madrid	No twin cities in Russia	Yes	Yes
Munich	No twin cities in Russia	Yes	No
Paris	No twin cities in Russia	Yes	No
Strasbourg	No twin cities in Russia, but maintains cooperation with Vologda and Moscow	Yes	No
Stockholm	No twin cities in Russia	Yes	Yes (in the form of calling for an embargo on Russian oil, coal and gas)

Parliament. They recently called for a full embargo on carbon fuels from Russia to be introduced immediately, arguing that delaying this step goes against European values as each day funds the Russian actions in Ukraine. Some of the cities examined in this article are among these 300 – Barcelona, Brussels, London, and Stockholm (Eurocities 2022b, 300 Cities demand Europe to stop financing the war 2022).

5. Conclusions

Quick and decisive reactions of cities have proven that they are not only emerging international actors but already a vital part of multi-level governance. The involvement of cities has helped to globalize the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict. Cities have come to be regarded and to present themselves as independent global political players. Some of the examined cities have invoked international norms in their justification for implementing sanctions, and in this way their actions have complemented state-imposed sanctions. Thus the examined cities seem very active, particularly in their support for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, but arguably some of them also seem to be working to impose sanctions themselves, calling for more sanctions or, at least, implementing state-imposed sanctions. Here cities are not merely a means to support the enforcement of international norms but become sources of influence and political power in their own right. In other words, sometimes cities not only have merely followed or implemented national policies but have also tried to pressure their nation-states to adopt more aggressive sanctions, like in the 'Urgent Call from Mariupol' (2022), calling for an end to all trade relations with Russia and Belarus. Hence, the hypothesis that through all their activities analyzed in this article, cities help maintain fundamental international norms and support their enforcement, norms such as the principle of territorial integrity and the prohibition of unlawful force, has been positively verified. In the current crisis, some cities are clearly supporting or implementing state-imposed sanctions, sometimes even anticipating states' ideas. Furthermore, in doing so, cities have engaged local communities in different kinds of action so that sanctions have been truly implemented at all levels of governance – local, national and international. The gathered information allows us to say that specific formats of

cooperation between cities (such as sister cities and bilateral cooperation) become very effective and provide tangible support for people in Ukraine.

In most cases, cities that have sister cities in Ukraine were almost from the beginning involved in helping Ukraine and their Ukrainian partners, while some of them saw the need to take any action in relation to their Russian partner cities (e.g. officially condemning the attack or breaking the partnership agreement). [Table 1](#) summarizes the cities' activities in reaction to Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The above considerations enabled the authors to propose a catalog or classification of actions that cities have taken/can take to engage in the international law enforcement process:

1. Direct support for cities affected by the war;
2. Operations through existing city networks – for example, the Pact of Free Cities;
3. Putting pressure on subjects of international law such as international organizations and/or states; and
4. Creating new formats of cooperation – for example, the Declaration of 300 cities.

In this context, it should be emphasized that due to the involvement of cities in activities that are relatively new to them, it is difficult to talk about a formalized catalog of actions. Cities are only just learning this form of involvement, they often observe each other using previously existing cooperation channels (e.g. city networks).

As to sanctions, international law envisages organized and unorganized sanctions. The former are based on international (intergovernmental) agreements (e.g. sanctions provided in the UN Charter), while the latter are not so anchored but still states are aware of their existence (e.g. negative reaction of the public opinion in the form of the condemning UN General Assembly resolution or boycott of goods from a given state) (for more details see: [Cassese 2005](#), 310–313, 339–353). When this classification is compared to cities' participation in sanctions its application is possible only by analogy. Overall, cities participation may be termed institutional as such participation examined in this article is undertaken by local governments. The unorganized sanctions, which are of a more bottom-up nature, were not analyzed in this paper.

Taking all the above into account, it might be interesting to consider why this particular crisis has incited so much cities' activity. First of all, the scale and magnitude of Russian actions are quite unprecedented, which has caused a proportionally widespread reaction of many actors of international relations. Moreover, cities' participation in international relations and their role in enforcing international standards is growing, and so is cities' awareness of their position and influence on international relations. The geographical proximity and public opinion in the cities concerned are also of relevance. These seem to be the underlying causes of such a strong reaction to the current crisis in the 12 investigated cities.

All this shows the growing importance of cities as supporters of the enforcement of international law by implementing sanctions in the current specific situation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The activity of city authorities is also the basis for legitimizing the actions of central governments, showing support of their policies, and/or putting pressure if their directions are different or the tools used by them are less powerful. All of the examined cities clearly support states-imposed sanctions, and at the level of the government closest to the citizens such support is crucial to the mentioned legitimization. Finally, the authors would like to raise one general point that shows the importance of cities' involvement as a part of international standards supporters. Taking into consideration the evolution of war strategy toward hybrid conflicts, cities' mutual relation (e.g. sister cities) seems to create a unique opportunity to make enforcement of international standards more precise and tangible. This creates an additional factor to reinvigorate sister cities' relations as a part of bolstering cities' resilience in the face of growing insecurities.

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