

## **We stand with Ukraine**

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Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine and its people has killed thousands of Ukrainian civilians. Ukrainians have been defending their country, their lives, their families, their freedom. Ukrainian children have had no childhood anymore. Russia has targeted and destroyed civilian infrastructure causing hardship and misery to millions in Ukraine by damaging energy supply, grossly violating international humanitarian law and threatening the region through endangering the safety and security of civilian nuclear facilities. More than eight million Ukrainian civilians have – unwillingly - had to flee their homes and their country.

24 February 2022 marked a terrible turning point for Ukraine: The war has brought immeasurable suffering to the people of Ukraine. Russian troops are committing serious war crimes: killing and maiming thousands by using cluster bombs, missiles and drones against peaceful civilians, torture prisons in dark cellars, the abduction of Ukrainian children by the thousands. Every day, Russia is violating and trampling on the most basic principles of international law that bind all peoples.

For the rest of the world too, a new era began on 24 February 2022, an era that nobody wanted, and that we hoped had been consigned to the past forever. War has returned to Europe. EU and NATO countries bordering Russia and Ukraine are bracing for the fact that they will be the next victims of a Russian attack. And across the developing world, the war has driven up grain prices, causing hunger and misery and hitting the poorest the hardest. Putin has stood by, allowing the citizens of many countries around the world to suffer, whilst he pursues his ambitions in Ukraine.

Ukraine's supporters across the G7, EU and NATO have been working intensively to find the right response, the right way to support Ukraine. We have been engaged in exchanges unparalleled in intensity, continuously weighing decisions, including on sanctions, carefully and cautiously, and deciding on joint actions in an unprecedented show of unity to stand by Ukraine in its struggle for survival, while at the same time seeking to avoid escalation at all costs. We have sought to mitigate the weaponisation by Russia of food in its war of aggression against Ukraine, which triggered world-wide disruptions of agricultural production, supply chains and trade.

In view of the daily horror inflicted on civilians in Ukrainian cities and villages, it is understandable that people all over the world are hoping for an end to the terrible violence. Nobody in the EU, G7 or NATO wants war. The hope for peace, for a negotiated solution, for an end to the horror and the immeasurable suffering is just as understandable as the concern that the violence will increase, that it will spread to other countries. And so, in our democracies, an open debate should and must be held on how to end this war.

But those who call for an immediate halt to military assistance to Ukraine should be very clear about what they are doing. They are proposing that we ignore the will of Ukraine, the very country that is being destroyed by its neighbour. They are denying the people of Ukraine – whose resolve, skill and resilience have pushed Russia further back than anyone expected – the help and support they need to defend themselves. Instead, they are pushing Ukraine to start peace negotiations with an aggressor who makes the recognition of its territorial annexation, which is contrary to international law, a precondition for these negotiations. So far, Putin has not presented any meaningful options to end the war diplomatically; to end the suffering he started in February 2022. On the other hand, Ukraine has tabled a peace proposal in 10 points to start peace negotiations. To no avail so far.

Let's be clear: This war could end right now. Russia can end it immediately by stopping its attacks and withdrawing its troops from Ukrainian territory.

The recent calls made in many European countries, however well-intentioned, have in common that they do not answer the most important questions: should we deny Ukraine the right to determine its own future? Would ending military support for Ukraine lead to peace or even a ceasefire? Why would Russia stop its attack while Ukraine's partners are weakening the country's defences by withdrawing their support, and when Putin's publicly proclaimed objective is the complete subjugation of Ukraine?

Not only is there no sign whatsoever that Russia is seriously interested in negotiations or an end to the war. On the contrary: in view of massacres in Butcha and Mariupol, in view of the mass rapes, the torture centres and the abductions, who seriously believes that Russia would be more willing to negotiate with a defenceless Ukraine?

It is very dangerous and effective propaganda for the Kremlin to list the EU states, NATO or the USA on the one hand, and Russia on the other, in one sentence and accuse all of them of not having a mandate for this war. This makes the former jointly responsible for this war and its continuation in an unacceptable way. And this suggestion exonerates exactly one actor: the country that, without provocation, invaded Ukraine. The country that started this war and keeps it alive every day. The country that has grossly violated international law. The country that could end this war immediately. That country is Russia alone.

We all agree with the aim of the peace appeals, we all want peace. This war must never become normal for us. It must stop. But the war will not stop if we only assure the Ukrainian people of our moral support with fine words, while leaving them alone to defend their country, or even expect them not to defend themselves against an aggressor who shows no mercy.

The EU, G7 and NATO are not parties to this war. But they have been there for Ukraine since the first day of the Russian war of aggression - with humanitarian aid, with financial aid and with military aid. Not because they presumed to claim a mandate for this war. But rather they have to ask themselves again and again what will happen if they do not take certain decisions. They decided that in this situation they must stand by those who are defending their - and ultimately our - freedom.

Anyone who still believes after 24 February 2022 that Russia isn't serious has still not understood, or simply does not want to understand, what Putin's goal is. In his speeches last year, he left no doubt that he is serious in his objectives. The people of Ukraine have had to experience this painfully.

When you have to choose between right and wrong, between an aggressor and the victims - then we are on the side of the right and on the side of the people. We will never accept that in Europe or anywhere else in the world internationally recognised borders are moved by force and that unspeakable suffering is inflicted on millions of people.

Ukraine is fighting for its sovereignty. Our desire for peace cannot be achieved at the expense of the freedom of the people of Ukraine, their fundamental rights and their very survival.