

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Declaration 6 (2023)¹

The anniversary of Russia's war against Ukraine

1. February 24, 2023, marks one year since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in defiance of international law and the core values on which the member States of the Council of Europe are founded.

2. Russia's ruthless war continues to claim tens of thousands of innocent lives and cause massive destruction across the whole of Ukraine, forcing millions of people from their homes and spreading violence and disinformation, with dramatic long-term repercussions on cities and communities in Ukraine and worldwide.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (hereinafter "the Congress") therefore joins the international community's call for Russia to end its unjustified and unprovoked war against Ukraine and withdraw its troops from the territory of Ukraine immediately, fully and unconditionally.

4. Furthermore, the Congress:

a. deplores and most emphatically condemns the horrific acts of abduction, torture, deliberate targeting and killing of innocent civilians, children and locally elected representatives, the calculated destruction of civilian infrastructure, unlawful deportation of Ukrainians, forced so-called Russianisation of Ukrainian children, instrumentalisation of sexual violence as a weapon of war and other war crimes as well as acts of possible genocide that have been committed by Russian forces;

b. expresses its deep admiration for the extraordinary courage of the Ukrainians who are relentlessly defending their country against the aggressor State, from the battlefield to the home front. Ukrainian towns, cities and regions, and their elected leaders and other representatives of local and regional authorities, are acting like a veritable "second army" and showing great resilience in the face of the tragedy of war;

c. pays tribute to the key role that local and regional authorities in Ukraine have been playing in addressing the disastrous humanitarian consequences faced by their citizens and the cohesion and support they have shown one another;

d. commends the solidarity and unity of Europeans, their cities and municipalities which have welcomed millions of people fleeing the war against Ukraine and provided assistance and support to meet their needs from the outset of the Russian invasion, and calls for this support to be maintained and increased in order to help Ukraine defend itself and its people;

e. calls on European cities and regions to continue mobilising and providing large-scale financial, security and humanitarian assistance to their Ukrainian counterparts, including through online initiatives such as the Congress-sponsored "Cities 4 Cities/United 4 Ukraine" platform and invites European cities and regions to explore possibilities to establish multifaceted partnerships with Ukrainian cities and regions, ideally with a long-term vision;

f. emphasises that direct personal relations between cities can play a role in fighting disinformation, as false information from unclear sources in social media makes it difficult to assess situations objectively;

g. highlights the critical importance of seeking justice for victims and holding Russia accountable for its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine. It supports, as does the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the creation of a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine and the setting-up of an international compensation mechanism for the injury, damage and loss incurred by the State of Ukraine as well as natural and legal persons in Ukraine;

h. supports Ukraine in its accession process to the European Union and expresses its readiness to assist Ukraine in its reform efforts in this respect;

i. firmly believes that Ukraine's decentralisation and local self-government reform significantly contributes to its resilience at local and regional levels. It therefore underlines the importance of continuing the reform process during the post-war recovery to further deepen local and regional democracy;

j. pledges to continue its efforts to contribute to strengthening municipal and regional activities, multilevel governance and fostering strong and resilient cities and communities in Ukraine;

k. affirms, as it has done since the first day of the Russian invasion, its unwavering solidarity with Ukraine, its people and communities, as well as its resolute support for Ukraine's sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. It does not recognise the attempted illegal annexation by Russia of any parts of Ukraine's territories.

5. The Congress stands by the Ukrainian people at this historically decisive time for Ukraine and the world, and believes in a common, democratic future based on respect for international law and a just peace.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 21 March 2023, 1st sitting, rapporteur: Leen VERBEEK, the Netherlands (R, SOC/G/PD).