

1457bis Meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (24 February 2023)

Statement by Tiny Kox

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear Chair of the Committee of Ministers,

Madam Secretary General,

Deputy Secretary General,

Ambassadors,

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

One year ago, on 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation (then a member State of the Council of Europe) launched an unprovoked and unjustified full-scale aggression against another member State of our organisation – Ukraine. By crossing Ukraine's borders and starting a war of aggression, Russia also crossed the red line of the Council of Europe, which states that "the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international cooperation is vital for the preservation of human society and civilisation."

We can be proud of the swift and decisive response of our organisation by which we reacted to the unilateral illegal act of Russia in an exemplary multilateral fashion, suspending the membership of the Russian Federation within one day and expelling it from Europe's oldest and broadest organization within only three weeks. By this, we have demonstrated our strong solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people and our commitment to European multilateralism.

Today, our solidarity and our unity has not been shaken, but became stronger. This might make us even more proud of the entire Council of Europe who continues to show its commitment to multilateralism as the most effective means to respond to aggression.

However, we should remember that multilateralism is much more than a beautiful concept. It is a practical mechanism to be used, maintained and developed to ensure that our solidarity with Ukraine is translated into tangible results.

Indeed, the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Governments, which you, dear ambassadors, unanimously convened to take place in Reykjavik in May 2023 offers a unique opportunity to prove that our solidarity with and support to Ukraine will deliver meaningful outcomes to protect our member State Ukraine.

I strongly support the proposal of the Secretary General Marija Pejcinovic Buric for the Council of Europe to play a leading role and to use the strong expertise of the European Court of Human Rights and its case-law as well as of the Committee of Ministers in supervising the Court's judgments in the establishment of a register to record and document evidence and claims of damage, loss or injury as a result of Russian aggression against Ukraine. This register, which the 4th Summit should ideally endorse, will be an important part of current international initiatives to set up a compensation mechanism for Russia's crimes of aggression.

Our Assembly has unanimously demanded the setting up of a special international criminal tribunal in The Hague to prosecute Russian and Belarusian political and military leaders who "planned, prepared, initiated or executed" this war of aggression. Establishment of such a tribunal, in close co-ordination with the ICC and other relevant mechanisms, will be another concrete expression of our multilateral solidarity and our commitment to international law.

Finally, we should not forget that our solidarity does not end when the war is over but will possibly be needed even more during the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine when the country's territorial integrity and national sovereignty will be fully restored. Of course, building roads and bridges is important, but strengthening democracy, promoting human rights and the rule of law is possibly even more important. And this is where the Council of Europe must offer its unique contribution and it is our responsibility to Ukraine and its people to deliver on this! Our Action Plan for Ukraine is a fine beginning. However, much more will have to be added and I hope we will be starting preparations as from today.

Dear Ukrainians, we stand with you, and be assured - we will stand with you for as long as it takes!