

**Commemoration Ceremony on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of the  
Full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against  
Ukraine (23 February 2024)**

**Elements for statement by Theodoros Rousopoulos  
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council  
of Europe**

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Dear Chair of the Committee of Ministers,

Madam Secretary General,

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

We are gathered here to mark the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. On 24 February 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine from the east, north, and south. It used missiles, fighter jets, and ground forces to attack key military and civilian infrastructure. For millions of people, the sound of sirens and explosions became part of their daily lives. A whole generation of children would draw tanks instead of flowers and learn that the hallway is the safest place in the house during bombing raids.

I am deeply saddened, and I cannot stop thinking of all those young people who already died and who continue to die in this horrible war. I do not know how many of you have experienced war conditions. As a journalist for many years, I have unfortunately been on many war fronts in the Balkans and the Gulf. I risked losing my life to bullets whizzing past me and bombs falling at close range. I 'smelled' the stench of death at close range and the anxiety of not knowing whether I would be alive in the next minute.

I feel these feelings very strongly some decades later, and I understand how the citizens of Ukraine, who are constantly under the specter of imminent sudden death, feel. The specter of the imminent sudden death of a relative, a friend, a neighbor, a loved one.

Today we are gathered here in solidarity with the Ukrainian people. And I cannot help but ask myself why we could not prevent such a tragedy. Were the Russian constitutional amendments of 2020, which completely eroded the system of democratic accountable governance in the country, already the last irreversible steps towards war? Should we have reacted more firmly to the annexation of Crimea in 2014? Should we have condemned more strongly the imprisonment of Khodorkovsky in 2003, or held Russia more accountable for the serious violations of Council of Europe principles during the conflict in Chechnya in 2000?

Could we have prevented these events by adopting a different approach, rather than appeasement, thus sparing ourselves the deep pain of lost lives, ecological disasters, and war in Europe?

These are the questions we must ask ourselves today if we are to avoid further tragedies. We must not turn away from them and we must not turn away from the ongoing sufferings of the Ukrainian people. The worst that can happen is for us to get used to this war, to start perceiving it as a new normality. We must avoid this at all costs!

But I also ask myself what we can do for the people of Ukraine. Justice and accountability are the most important pillars on which the Council of Europe will continue to focus its efforts to ensure that suffering, damage or crimes caused by the Russian Federation do not go unpunished.

Ukraine is also in great need of international support, particularly military munitions.

The year 2024 will be crucial for Ukraine. The security of its borders, as well as Europe's democratic path, depend on Ukraine's ability to resist the Russian aggression. I know that this can only be achieved if we do not stand aside but work hard hand in hand to convert our solidarity in concrete actions.

I express my deepest admiration of the Ukrainian people, their courage, resilience and love for freedom!

And I wish to assure you – this war is also our war, and we will not submit to the temptation to put it somewhere at the back of our minds. We will stand with you and stand strongly for as long as it takes!

Slava Ukraini!