

**1490th (Extraordinary) Meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (23
February 2024)**

**Elements for statement by Theodoros Rousopoulos
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,

On 24 February 2022, what seemed impossible and unthinkable did happen – 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 this organization – Ukraine.

It is hard to believe, but tomorrow we will mark already two years that this horrible war is waged in Europe, two years since innocent people die every minute in Ukraine, two years since women and children are abducted and forcefully displaced, since thousands of refugees flee their homes with no certainty when and whether they will be able to return. This is way too long that we witness these suffering and unfortunately, we do not see the end to this tragedy that the Ukrainian people endure.

Today, I wish to remember all those who died in this war fighting for the freedom of their country!

Of course, I am very proud of the strong and consistent response of our organization to this aggression which demonstrated our solidarity with Ukraine, our unwavering support to the Ukrainian people and our ability to set aside our differences and unite in the face of the real threat.

The membership of the Russian Federation in the Council of Europe was swiftly terminated within only three weeks, and we remain essentially the only international organization that dared to take such a step. Moreover, numerous international initiatives to address the consequences of the aggression originate from this building and, I am particularly happy that many of them were born in our Parliamentary Assembly and subsequently actively endorsed by the Committee of Ministers. We have jointly pursued an ambitious accountability agenda, which already resulted in some tangible results, most notably in the establishment of a Registry of Damage.

I am proud for these achievements, but I am also concerned that this war still goes on. And more than that, I fear that we may get used to it and start forgetting about the horror through which the Ukrainians live every day and about the heroics they demonstrate in the face of a ferocious enemy. For me, to keep this war atop of our political and legal agenda, maintain our solidarity strong, visible and meaningful is an utmost priority. I hope you all share this view.

The death of the Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny last Friday in prison, for which the Russian authorities bear full and unquestionable responsibility, is another sad and shocking reminder to all of us about the nature of the Russian regime and the extent of crimes it can commit. This clearly shows us the true face of the enemy that the Ukrainian people fight every day and the grim prospects for the entire Europe, if we weaken our resolve to support Ukraine in its struggle and let Putin's Russia prevail.

This must not happen! This murder is a powerful wake-up call for all of us and I urge us to rally behind Ukraine and its people with all possible support we can provide!

On behalf of our Assembly, I can assure you that we will continue standing strong for Ukraine and will continue looking for meaningful and innovative ways to maintain and strengthen our solidarity, solidify our support and engage new allies in this fight. This is not just the Russian-Ukrainian War, this is the war of the democracy and human dignity against dictatorship and oppression.

Of course, we as the Council of Europe cannot send tanks and F16s to the frontline in Ukraine. But there is still a lot we can do to help and, particularly in ensuring that this war ends with justice being done to its victims. We must continue to work in close dialogue and synergy of all Council of Europe statutory bodies on the development of the comprehensive accountability and compensation mechanism.

We must continue to push for the setting up of a special international criminal tribunal to prosecute Russian and Belarusian political and military leaders who planned, prepared, initiated or executed this war of aggression. We must ensure the full accountability of the Russian Federation for all wrongful acts it has done in and against Ukraine.

There can be no compromise of this – justice will be done and there will be no impunity!

The rule of law will prevail over the rule of force!

And the more united and resolute we stand for this, the sooner the peace returns to Ukraine!

Finally, we should not forget that our solidarity should 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 can already offer its unique contribution and it is our duty to Ukraine and its people to deliver on this!

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

Slava Ukraini!