

The Bureau of the Congress

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Draft declaration Ukraine: Towards a Just Peace

Bureau rapporteurs

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¹ This document is classified confidential until it has been examined by the Bureau of the Congress

Draft declaration

1. Referring to its Declaration 5 (2022) “The Russian Federation’s war against Ukraine”, Declaration 6 (2023) “The anniversary of Russia’s war against Ukraine”, Declaration 8 (2024) “The second anniversary of the Russian Federation’s war against Ukraine”, Declaration 9 (2024) “The destruction of cultural heritage in Ukraine” and Declaration 11 (2025) “Recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine”, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) reiterates its condemnation, in the strongest terms, of the ongoing war of aggression being waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, in breach of international law and the Statute of the Council of Europe. At a time when geopolitical assumptions are being challenged and multilateralism is under threat, the Congress reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.
2. The Congress utterly deplores and condemns once again the fact that the Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine, started in February 2014, continues to cause the mass loss of innocent lives and human suffering, as well as the targeted destruction of cultural heritage and of vital infrastructure, which represent human rights violations unprecedented in recent European history. Millions of people, the majority of whom are children, continue to be displaced from their homes. Furthermore, thousands of Ukrainians are still in captivity and subject to violence, inhuman treatment and torture.
3. For more than three and a half years, Ukrainians have defended their country with strength and courage against the Russian Federation’s ongoing brutal, illegal, unprovoked and unjustified full-scale military invasion. The Congress commends the work of Ukraine’s local and regional authorities to ensure the provision of emergency support and the functioning of public services in the most difficult of circumstances, and commends the support subnational authorities from other member states have provided for this.
4. The Congress strongly supports efforts to bring an end to the Russian Federation’s war of aggression, in the understanding that only a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, based on the UN Charter and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within internationally recognised borders extending to its territorial waters, can be a sustainable peace whereby Ukraine’s territory and communities can prosper in safety and security.
5. In this respect, it welcomes the meeting between the American and Ukrainian presidents and the European Union and NATO leaders on 18 August 2025 and, while deploring the Russian Federation’s subsequent armed attacks on Ukraine and the deaths and injuries that this has caused, hopes that a meaningful peace process will soon begin.
6. The Congress is clear that for diplomacy to succeed, there must be the engagement of Europe and the United States, which will both be central to providing the legally binding, robust and credible security guarantees that Ukraine needs. In turn, this will create the conditions for democratic security, whereby the people of Ukraine will be free to live in a future shaped by human rights, democracy and the rule of law, underpinned by effective multilevel governance, including at the local and regional levels.
7. Recognising that accountability will be required for a just peace, the Congress remains committed to its role in supporting local and regional authorities in Ukraine to contribute, within their competencies, to the work of the Register of Damage which records evidence of damage, loss and injury on the ground.
8. The Congress also emphasises that a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine will be an important element of justice. It therefore welcomes the signature on 26 June 2025 of an agreement on establishing that tribunal, including its Statute, by the President of Ukraine and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. This is an important step towards ending impunity for those responsible for the crimes that have caused loss, damage and destruction in so many communities across Ukraine.
9. Equally, there must be specific measures to ensure justice for the youngest Ukrainians, given their particular circumstances. In this regard, the Congress also welcomes the appointment on 5 February 2025 of a Special Envoy of the Secretary General on the situation of children of Ukraine and stands ready to provide what support it can to aid the return of deported or displaced children to their families and local communities, and help Ukrainian local authorities as they seek to provide services

including health, education and trauma-informed care that are vital to the welfare of Ukrainian children who have been exposed to various and often terrible experiences during the Russian Federation's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine. Other groups, including veterans and returning IDPs, also require tailored assistance on which the Congress is ready to provide whatever support it can.

10. The Congress is clear that work on the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine must not, and does not, wait for the agreement of a just peace, but takes place now and should continue to be implemented at the local and regional levels in line with changing circumstances. This includes the extensive efforts of governments at all levels to support citizens and repair the damage caused by Russian military attacks on homes, businesses and infrastructure, and the commendable work done by local and regional authorities, acting individually and in alliance, to ensure the ongoing provision of vital public services such as housing, transport and the supply of water and energy.

11. The Congress reiterates that the further decentralisation of power in Ukraine will support more efficient recovery and reconstruction. It supports the process on decentralisation reform currently underway, and on which the Congress is working closely with Ukrainian counterparts, including through its Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance, with the aim of ensuring empowered citizens and communities that can make a greater contribution to a shared, peaceful and prosperous future. Alongside this, the Congress emphasises the potential of its project "Strengthening multilevel governance and local democracy to support Ukraine's recovery", launched on 4 June 2025 as part of its contribution to the Council of Europe's Action Plan on Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction for Ukraine, as a means to take further positive steps in this direction, noting the importance of transparency, integrity and citizen participation in the future of local and regional governance in Ukraine.

12. The Congress underlines the importance of "rebuilding better" by establishing long-term and predictable funding mechanisms to support local and regional authorities in Ukraine as they lead recovery and reconstruction efforts. In addition to financial support, targeted capacity-building and training programmes are essential to strengthen the institutional resilience of municipalities, particularly in post-conflict governance, service delivery, and citizen engagement. Furthermore, the Congress stresses that reconstruction must be environmentally sustainable, integrating climate resilience and ecological restoration into planning and implementation to ensure a future that is not only peaceful and democratic, but also green and sustainable.

13. At a time of uncertainty, but with the hope that a meaningful peace process to end Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine might be possible, the Congress reaffirms its solidarity with the Ukrainian people and authorities and its commitment to a common, democratic future based on respect for international law and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.