



4 July 2023

Consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and role of national parliaments in Ukraine's reconstruction

Background document

We, the Leaders of Europe, have come together to state our resolve to unite around our values and against Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, a flagrant violation of international law and everything we stand for. (...)

We express our full support to Ukraine and its people. We will stand with Ukraine, for as long as it takes. Without accountability, there can be no lasting peace and we support the principles for a just and lasting peace as outlined in President Zelenskyy's Peace Formula. We therefore reaffirm the need for an unequivocal international legal response for all victims, as well as for the State of Ukraine. (...)

We will support Ukraine's reconstruction efforts, including through financing and implementing the Council of Europe's Action Plan for Ukraine "Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction", and commit to using all means available within the Council of Europe, including through the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB).

**Reykjavík Declaration,
4th Summit of Council of Europe Heads of State and Government**

Introduction

The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has forged a renewed bond amongst democracies in support of Ukraine. The 4th Summit of Council of Europe Heads of State and Government, held in Reykjavik on 16-17 May 2023, has been the expression of this unity and resolve around common values.

How can parliaments contribute to turning the commitments taken by European leaders in Reykjavik into reality?

Supporting Ukraine

The damage which the Russian Federation is inflicting on Ukraine is staggering. The total direct war damage is estimated at over US\$135 billion and affects housing, civilian, energy, and industrial infrastructure. Ukraine is severely contaminated by landmines and explosive remnants of war. Environmental damage is extensive, with severe consequences on health and the economy. The cultural heritage is being targeted, in an attempt by Russia to erase the Ukrainian national identity. Food insecurity is an issue across the country.

The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has triggered the biggest population movement in Europe since the Second World War, and one of the fastest growing humanitarian emergencies on record. More than 8 million people have left Ukraine because of the aggression, while another 8 million have been displaced within Ukraine – some more than once. More than 9 000 civilians have lost their lives since the beginning of the large-scale invasion, while more than 15 000 have been injured.

In order to face these enormous challenges, neighbouring countries have gone to considerable lengths to quickly adopt tailored measures to provide housing, food, cash, and schooling for people fleeing Ukraine, in addition to aid for the families hosting them.

As the war continues to rage, there is continued need for financial assistance, medical aid, and expert programmes to meet the needs of those who are in a vulnerable situation, victims of trauma, victims of torture and sexual violence, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. Specific programmes should be developed to support children, including those who have been forcibly deported and taken away from their families.

The reconstruction effort should not be limited to rebuilding Ukraine's infrastructure but should lay the foundations for a stronger, resilient, and democratic Ukraine. The principles "Build Back Better" should apply to all sectors, ranging from energy to housing, from agriculture to health. It should also apply to democratic governance, and the Council of Europe is particularly well placed to help in this endeavour.

In December 2022, the Committee of Ministers adopted a €50 million Action Plan for Ukraine "Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction" 2023-2026. The main objective of the Action Plan is to contribute to Ukraine's stability, security, and prosperity by addressing immediate and medium term needs in time of war and then during the post-war period, in the areas where the Council of Europe has expertise and added value. It is of the utmost importance that Council of Europe member States contribute to this Action Plan and make resources available to ensure the long-term democratic resilience of Ukraine.

Following the unanimous adoption by the Verkhovna Rada of the law that allows the country to join the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), the Bank will operate in Ukraine with a distinct focus on social sectors such as healthcare and housing, deploying its long-standing expertise as Europe's oldest multilateral development bank. This is especially important as needs have increased in these sectors due to recent attacks on critical infrastructure.

The Bank's Strategic Framework 2023-2027 envisages a volume of operations of around €200 million this year, increasing gradually to about €400 million per year by 2027. It is of critical importance that member States of the Council of Europe Development Bank rapidly subscribe to the capital increase, approved in 2022, to endow the Bank with the means to pursue its support to Ukraine and to neighbouring countries hosting Ukrainians fleeing the war.

Ensuring the accountability of the Russian Federation

Supporting Ukraine also means ensuring the accountability of the Russian Federation, its leadership, its military, its proxies and the private military companies or paramilitary groups acting on its behalf for their manifold wrong doings. Since the beginning of the large-scale aggression, war crimes and international humanitarian law violations of the utmost gravity have been documented.

The establishment of the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation Against Ukraine is the most important deliverable of the 4th Summit of Council of Europe member States and represents a milestone in multilateral efforts to ensure the accountability of the Russian Federation. The fact that it takes the form of an Enlarged Partial Agreement, and as such it is open to any country in the world, adds to its political relevance. National parliaments should take all the necessary steps to ensure that the Register is rapidly and fully operational, and to encourage the largest possible number of countries to join.

In line with the political commitments taken by the Heads of State and Government in Reykjavik, national parliaments should put their political weight towards the establishment of an international compensation mechanism which makes it possible to use Russian confiscated assets to pay for war damages. They should also pursue their efforts in view of the establishment of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression to prosecute the political and military leadership of the Russian Federation.

Supporting rules-based multilateralism in the face of growing security risks

The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has ushered the world into a new security environment fraught with risks. The United Nations Security Council is undermined in its ability to maintain international peace and security. The new geopolitical context also has a negative impact on the functioning of multilateral mechanisms aimed at preventing and resolving conflicts, including those established under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

At the same time, the Russian leadership has brandished reckless threats of nuclear warfare and the risk of nuclear accidents involving the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is high. Russia has deployed tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus and has withdrawn from the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, a cornerstone of the European security architecture. It has also pushed the limits of what can be used as a weapon, from migrants to energy, from economic leverage to elite capture, from ecocide to passportisation, extending the concept and the targets of its hybrid warfare.

A security challenge of such magnitude and complexity cannot be tackled without international co-operation, including at inter-parliamentary level. The Council of Europe should strengthen its role as the international standard-setter in the core domains of the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Its Parliamentary Assembly should intensify dialogue with national parliaments and international assemblies, also with a view to developing greater resilience against threats, reinforcing early warning, prevention and rapid reaction.

Questions for discussion

- How can national parliaments support the process of rebuilding the Ukrainian civilian infrastructure?
- How can national parliaments contribute to strengthening Ukraine's democratic security and resilience?
- What can be done to support the Verkhovna Rada and strengthen its institutional capacity, now and in the period of transition which will follow the end of the hostilities?
- How can national parliaments support the preservation and reconstruction of the Ukrainian cultural heritage?
- How can national parliaments raise awareness and contribute to the development of specific programmes to help meet the needs of vulnerable persons, including children and victims of torture and sexual violence?
- What can national parliaments do to ensure that a comprehensive system of accountability of the Russian Federation is put in place and becomes operational as soon as possible?
- How can the Parliamentary Assembly better work with national parliaments to promote rules-based multilateralism?
- How can the Council of Europe better contribute to democratic security in Europe?

Appendix: Key reference documents

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Resolution 2506 (2023) "[Political consequences of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine](#)"

Resolution 2495 (2023) "[Deportations and forcible transfers of Ukrainian children and other civilians to Russian Federation or to Ukrainian territories temporarily occupied: create conditions for their safe return, stop these crimes and punish the perpetrators](#)"

Resolution 2482 (2023) "[Legal and human rights aspects of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine](#)"

Resolution 2448 (2022) "[Humanitarian consequences and internal and external displacement in connection with the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine](#)"

Resolution 2473 (2022) "[Strengthening the role of the Council of Europe as a cornerstone of the European political architecture](#)"

Resolution 2444 (2022) "[Recent challenges to security in Europe: what role for the Council of Europe?](#)"

Council of Europe

4th Council of Europe Summit, [United around our values – Reykjavík Declaration](#), 2023.
Action Plan for Ukraine "[Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction](#)" 2023-2026
[Ukraine joins the CEB](#)