

12 February 2024

Bureau declaration on the second anniversary of Russian Federation's war against Ukraine

1. Recalling Declaration 5 (2022) "The Russian Federation's war against Ukraine" and Declaration 6 (2023) "The anniversary of Russia's war against Ukraine" of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Bureau of 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, and reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

2. In the two years since it was launched, this brutal, full-scale war has caused the loss of tens of thousands of innocent lives as well as massive destruction throughout Ukraine, forcing millions of people to flee their homes and spreading violence and disinformation, with dramatic long-term repercussions on cities and communities in Ukraine and worldwide.

3. The Bureau again joins the international community's call for the Russian Federation to end its unjustified and unprovoked war against Ukraine and withdraw its troops from the territory of Ukraine immediately, fully and unconditionally.

4. The Bureau, furthermore:

a. deplores and condemns once again the horrific acts of abduction, torture, deliberate targeting and killing of locally elected representatives and civilians, and the calculated destruction of civilian infrastructure, unlawful deportation of Ukrainians, forced Russianisation of Ukrainian children, instrumentalisation of sexual violence, and other war crimes as well as acts of possible genocide that have been committed by Russian forces;

b. deplores in particular the impact of the war on the children of Ukraine, including children who have been internally displaced, forced to flee Ukraine, separated from their families and/or forcibly deported by the Russian authorities, and, in consonance with the recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly in this regard, calls on local and regional authorities where these children are presently living to take comprehensive action to protect them, in line with their competences;

c. reiterates its solidarity with Ukrainian citizens and their elected leaders and other representatives of local and regional authorities, who continue to demonstrate extraordinary courage and resilience in defending their country against the aggressor State;

d. condemns the holding by the Russian Federation of illegal so-called elections in regions within the internationally recognised borders of Ukraine in autumn 2023 and the plans to hold Russian presidential elections in March 2024 in the same regions, and emphasises that such actions, which are in flagrant breach of international law, undermine international peace and security and violate the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of local affairs;

e. pays tribute to the key role that local and regional authorities in Ukraine are playing in addressing the devastating humanitarian consequences faced by their citizens, and to the cohesion and support they have shown one another;

f. commends the solidarity and unity of Europeans and their cities and municipalities, which have welcomed millions of people fleeing the war against Ukraine and provided assistance and support to meet their needs from the outset of the full-scale aggression, and calls for this support to be maintained and increased in order to help Ukraine to defend itself and its people;

g. calls on European cities and regions to continue mobilising and providing large-scale financial, security and humanitarian assistance to their Ukrainian counterparts, and invites European cities and regions to explore possibilities to establish direct, multi-faceted partnerships with Ukrainian cities and regions, ideally with a long-term vision, and to work to remove any bureaucratic obstacles to this assistance;

h. highlights the critical importance of seeking justice for victims and holding the Russian Federation accountable for its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine and supports, in line with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the creation of a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine and the setting up of an international compensation mechanism for the injury, damage and loss incurred by the State of Ukraine as well as natural and legal persons in Ukraine;

i. welcomes in this context the establishment, following the Council of Europe Summit held in Reykjavik on 16-17 May 2023, of the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, expresses its full support for this body, whose action it will support through capacity-building activities at local and regional level, and calls on local and regional authorities to contribute actively to its work;

j. supports the reform efforts that Ukraine is undertaking in the framework of its request for accession to the European Union;

k. firmly believes that Ukraine's decentralisation and local self-government reform significantly contributes to its resilience at local and regional levels and underlines the importance of pursuing the reform process during the post-war recovery to further deepen local and regional democracy;

l. pledges to continue its efforts to contribute to strengthening municipal and regional activities, multi-level governance and fostering strong and resilient cities and communities in Ukraine, notably through co-operation agreements with local authorities seeking to strengthen transparency and respect for human rights at local level and through the pursuit of the High-Level Dialogue on Good Democratic Governance with the Ukrainian government, parliament and local government associations.

5. The Bureau stands by the Ukrainian people at this historically decisive time for Ukraine and the world and believes in a common, democratic future based on respect for international law and a just peace.