



News from the Independent and Liberal Democrat Group

We stand with **UKRAINE**
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CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES – COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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UKRAINE: A WAR IN EUROPE

Marc Cools, ILDG President

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After the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 followed by a military intervention in the Donbass, the Russian Federation is carrying out a large-scale invasion of Ukraine since 24 February. The aim is to wipe this country off the map or at least to annex a large part of its territory. This is the return of the use of brute force in international relations. War has returned on the European continent. Many civilians fall victims of bombings. Cities are being destroyed. War crimes have been committed by the Russian army in Mariupol, in Bucha and in other cities. In the Ukrainian territories controlled by Russian forces, mayors and elected officials have been kidnapped and sometimes executed. This is a lot of suffering for the **Ukrainian people who are fighting with extraordinary courage to preserve their freedom, sovereignty**

and independence.

I know Ukraine well. I visited this country several times between 2013 and 2018 as the rapporteur on Local Democracy in Ukraine. I observed the elections there twice. I can attest that Ukraine is anything but a "puppet state" as Vladimir Putin claims. **It is a democracy, and maybe that is exactly what disturbs the Russian president because he does not want to have a democratic state by his borders.**

It is very logical that Russia was excluded from the Council of Europe following its aggression against Ukraine. Of course, this deprives Russian citizens of the protection of the European Convention on Human Rights. There are Russians who show courage in opposing the war, but unfortunately, a very large part of the Russian population only hears lies about it. Freedom of expression no longer exists in Russia. The country has returned to the dark days of the Stalinist era.

In his book "The Anatomy of Peace" published in 1945, the American journalist of Hungarian origin Emery Reves wrote: "Nothing can distort the true picture of world events more than to consider one's own country as the centre of the universe and to judge all things only in terms of this fixed point". This is Vladimir Putin's error, as he constantly exacerbates Russian nationalism and wants to restore the "Russian empire". The Russian Federation is a very large country with a rich history and culture. To be a great country, it does not need to annex its neighbours.

Condemning the Russian aggression is not enough. Citizens all over Europe are showing tremendous solidarity with Ukraine and its people. Many European countries are also providing support to Ukraine, including weapons. As local and regional elected representatives, we have a duty to back all these efforts and to respond to the needs of Ukrainian cities and regions. We must also think about the post-war period and for example about partnerships that we could establish between our cities and regions and Ukrainian counterparts.

In recent years the number of democratic countries in the world has been declining. And in democracies, some surrender to populism aspiring to "strong power". **Democracy and the freedoms that go with it cannot be taken for granted.** Ukrainians are fighting for their freedom. Their victory or defeat could also affect ours.

WE PUBLISH THIS NEWSLETTER IN RUSSIAN AND IN UKRAINIAN

Traditionally our newsletter is published in the two official languages of the Council of Europe, French and English, but also in Russian. The latter is spoken by our former colleagues from the Russian Federation, but it is also the first or the second foreign language for elected representatives from other Eastern European countries. We will continue to publish our newsletter in Russian and hope that – who knows – some Russian citizens will read it. This is a way of showing that we respect the Russian language and Russian speakers and that our condemnation of the aggression in Ukraine concerns Russian authorities and not the Russian people. As this issue is largely devoted to Ukraine, it is also published in Ukrainian.

WHAT WILL YOU GIVE TO SAVE UKRAINE?

Liliia Pashynna, head of the Ukrainian delegation to the Congress, Kyiv municipal councillor

The war has come to Kyiv on 24 February, 4 a.m., loudly, with explosions, waking up our people in different parts of the city. 2 million people have been forced to leave their homes. The capital has been targeted by Russia but never surrendered. The bravery of the Ukrainian people and the consolidated response of our European partners prevented the fall of the beautiful city of Kyiv. And although it is very likely that Russians will try to seize the capital once again, the life is coming back to the city.

You cannot say the same about Bucha, Borodianka and Irpin, where local authorities are still discovering dead Ukrainians every day – tortured, raped, and killed without mercy by those who came to “liberate” them. With unspeakable brutality, the Russian army destroys Ukrainian schools and hospitals, Ukrainian mothers and children.

As of the beginning of April, there have been more than one thousand dead civilians in the Kyiv region. Victims of the unjustified and inhumane attack.

The attack on principles that we vowed to protect to never let the atrocities of World War II happen again. Again, it is happening in Ukraine. And again, our country is defending against the invasion of tyranny that cannot bear to observe the democratic progress of past years.

Dear colleagues, it is just about the time for you to understand: the war in Ukraine is not only the war of Ukraine. It is the battle between democracy and autocracy, good and evil, life and death. The future of Europe depends on the responses we give and on the actions we take.

What happens today on the streets of Kyiv, Mariupol and Kherson will pretty much define what will happen in the streets of Angres, Calco and Hamburg tomorrow.



We are thankful to our partners, and especially the president of the ILDG group in the Congress, for your solidarity with the people of Ukraine. But solidarity is not enough. Ukraine gives its best people to save democratic countries. What will democratic countries give to save Ukraine?

CITIES4CITIES.EU: A COORDINATION PLATFORM TO ASSIST UKRAINIAN CITIES



By following this link <http://www.cities4cities.eu> you can access the platform created by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. It is a platform for Ukrainian and European cities that aims to provide support to Ukrainian local and regional leaders.

Mayors, local and regional leaders are the first point of contact for citizens, especially in times of war and crisis. This platform is meant to be a tool to exchange with our Ukrainian colleagues and to respond to their needs

HOSTING UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN BELGIUM

Marc Cools, Uccle, Belgium



A tremendous surge of solidarity is taking place in Belgium as in other European countries. Many Belgians are offering temporary accommodation to Ukrainian refugees in their homes. The municipalities in Belgium are responsible for identifying accommodation possibilities on their

territory. Anyone who is willing to provide temporary accommodation for Ukrainian refugees in their home is asked to report to their town office, which will check whether the proposed accommodation is suitable. The municipality then passes on the accommodation proposals to the federal government, which is responsible for dispatching the refugees.

THE PROVINCE OF GELDERLAND (NETHERLANDS) OFFERS AID TO UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

Jan Markink, Regional Minister, Province of Gelderland, the Netherlands



The war in Ukraine is a humanitarian disaster of a very great magnitude. Many Ukrainian refugees have crossed the border in the Polish region of Lubelskie. The Province of Gelderland in the Netherlands has cooperated with this Polish region for over twenty years.

Gelderland shows solidarity with Ukraine and offers aid to Lubelskie. An amount of € 200.000 has been dedicated for aid to Ukrainian refugees in the Lublin region. The intention is to use a part of this amount to support humanitarian organisations and supplement the aid provided by the regional government. In addition, it is being evaluated whether Gelderland can provide auxiliary materials that are in short supply in Lubelskie.

« UKRAINIAN HOUSE » IN STRASSEN, LUXEMBURG

Martine Dieschbourg-Nickels, Vice-President of the Congress, municipal councillor, Strassen, Luxembourg

24 February 2022 will always be remembered as the day war returned to Europe. The sovereign state of Ukraine was attacked by its Russian neighbour. The intensity of fighting quickly led to an exodus of the civilian population, and already at the beginning of March the first Ukrainian displaced persons arrived in our town. They are hosted by families of Strassen. The Luxembourg National Reception Office has also provided hotel accommodation in Strassen to almost one hundred Ukrainians seeking international protection. Today we welcome around 150 people in Strassen; this number is still increasing.

The college of aldermen (municipal executive) and the municipal council have reacted rapidly. Together we elaborated and supported various initiatives to help Ukrainians remaining in the country through donations to various international humanitarian organisations. But we also wanted to do more for the people who came to Strassen, children and adults who have experienced traumatic situations, who were cut off from their families and who had to

make an exhausting journey to get to safety.

This is when the idea of opening a "Ukrainian House" was born! A house for the Ukrainians, run by the Ukrainians! A meeting place for all newcomers, a place that allows them to talk, to spend a moment together and to have a cup of coffee, a place where children find several rooms well supplied with toys for all ages, a place with a beautiful garden which allows outdoor activities. Following the needs assessment, we have installed Wifi Internet in the building, as well as a laundry room with washing machines and dryers, a service much appreciated by the people staying at the hotel.

This house is owned by the municipality. It is located in the centre of our town opposite to the municipal building and close to the sports fields and children's playgrounds. It is managed by Iurii S., who was able to leave his country as the father of three



minor children. He immediately agreed to take on this responsibility and, in the meantime, he became the first Ukrainian war refugee to have signed a working contract in Luxembourg. The contract is with the municipality of Strassen for the management of the "Ukrainian House" that is open every day. He is assisted by an employee of the municipality and by volunteers from Strassen when necessary.

Since its official opening on 10 March 2022 in the presence of Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration Mr Jean Asselborn, our "Ukrainian House" has been a great success and has encouraged other municipalities to do the same.

Ukraine: Committee of the Regions sets up an information and support hub

Sean O'Curreen, Secretary General, Renew Europe Group, European Committee of the Regions

Following the brutal invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the European Committee of the Regions has set up, at the request of its members including the Renew Europe CoR, an information and support hub to help municipalities in Ukraine, and EU municipalities hosting Ukrainian refugees. The online hub offers a [matching service](#) where municipalities in the EU can indicate their interest in hosting refugees or sending humanitarian aid, and for those already hosting refugees to indicate their material needs in terms of aid. The hub also provides [information on the humanitarian aid needed by Ukrainian municipalities](#) with lists submitted by the Ukrainian Association of District and Regional Councils, the Mayors of Kyiv and Nikopol, and the Ukrainian diplomatic mission in Brussels. Finally, it contains information on [financial, technical, social and educational support](#) being provided by the European Union to EU municipalities hosting refugees.

As part of this process of support, the CoR's Conference of Presidents, including Renew Europe's President François Decoster, [recently visited the Polish town of Rzeszów with European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms Elisa Ferreira](#), learning about their rapid reaction [to host half a million refugees](#), and meeting the [courageous Tatiana Yehorova-Lutsenko, President of the Region of Kharkiv](#).

Amongst its symbolic actions, the European Committee of the Regions, as the body that represents the voice of EU subnational government, has granted honorary membership to Vitali Klitschko, Mayor of Kyiv, is flying the Ukrainian flag along with the EU and 27 Member State flags, and has encouraged all its members and mayors of the EU to celebrate Europe Day on 9 May this year as a reminder of the importance of peace on our continent, and where possible involving Ukrainian citizens in the activities, celebrations, and commemorations.

HELPING UKRAINIAN REFUGEES: A VIEW FROM GAGAUZIA

Alexandr Tarnavski, member of the People's Assembly of the autonomous territory of Gagauzia



ILDG MEMBERS' PLENARY REPORTS: 42ND SESSION, 22-24 MARCH 2022

Brigitte VAN DEN BERG, Netherlands

- Involving children in sustainable development in their cities

Jimmy MOLONEY, Ireland (co-rapporteur)

- Rural youth and the role of local and regional authorities

THEMATIC SPOKESPERSONS OF THE CONGRESS:

Harald BERGMAN (Netherlands)

- Human rights at local and regional level

Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom) & Randi MONDORF (Denmark, substitute)

- Local and regional election observation

Carla DEJONGHE (Belgium, substitute)

- South-Med Partnership

Amelie TARSHYS INGRE (Sweden, substitute)

- Environment and climate change

The Republic of Moldova with a population of about 3 million people borders Ukraine and has so far received more than 300,000 Ukrainian refugees; more than 100,000 refugees remain in our country. The share of the refugees from Ukraine has already reached around 4.0% of our total population.

The Gagauz autonomy in the Republic of Moldova - the region I represent in our delegation to the Congress - borders the Odessa region of Ukraine. That is why we were among the first ones to comprehend the scale of the refugee crisis.

At first, we had to deal with humanitarian issues: accompanying refugees, providing accommodation and necessities. Today, we must think about more complex issues: employment, primary schooling, and higher education. An important challenge is the integration of refugees into the national healthcare system.

Unfortunately, – and that is quite understandable – our education, healthcare and social protection

systems were not prepared for such a massive crisis which is happening against the backdrop of the ongoing Covid pandemic, the sharp rise in energy tariffs and growing food prices in our country.

But despite the difficult situation, these tragic events have united our people who demonstrate empathy, charity and mercy. Providing free accommodation and food, establishing volunteer groups to help the refugees and creating groups on social networks for fundraising – these are just a few examples of how the Gagauz and the Moldovan people help our Ukrainian brothers in distress.

Our country is one of the poorest in Europe: most people live with less than 200 euros per month; high tariffs for imported natural gas and high food prices even by European standards, force us to live in quite uncomfortable conditions. In this context, the willingness of our people to help the Ukrainians is particularly valuable and I am proud – being of Ukrainian origin – that I represent Moldova and the Gagauz region.

It is of course important to highlight the courage of our local councillors who show by their own example that the subsidiarity principle we all cherish at the Congress proved its absolute consistency in the current refugee crisis. Our local leaders were the first to face the challenges and to propose solutions not only to their own citizens, but also to the citizens of the neighbouring Ukraine.

More than ever, do my region and our country need your support: not necessarily financial, it can take the form of humanitarian projects because adults should have jobs, children should continue education, and the healthcare system should be accessible to our Ukrainian friends.

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Next meeting: 24 October 2022

