Beat: Politics

Starts a new era for Europe

Debate about Ukraine in the EP

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USPA NEWS - Debating Russia's invasion of Ukraine, MEPs expressed unwavering support for Ukraine and for efforts to bring the country closer to the European community.

On Tuesday, the European Parliament held an extraordinary plenary session in Brussels to assess Russia's military assault on Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Speaker of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada (parliament) Ruslan Stefanchuk spoke live from Kiev. European Council and Commission Presidents Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen, as well as the EU's Foreign Policy chief Josep Borrell, also participated in the debate.

Opening the debate, Parliament President Roberta Metsola said: "We are here today in the dark shadow cast by Putin's war. A war we did not provoke. A war we did not start. An outrageous invasion of a sovereign, independent state. On behalf of the European Parliament, I condemn the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in the strongest possible terms and express my solidarity with all those suffering and all those killed."

"We will stand up. We will not look away when those fighting in the streets for our values face down Putin's massive war machine. We will support the International Criminal Court's jurisdiction and investigation of war crimes in Ukraine. We will hold him accountable", she added.

Zelenskyy calls on the EU to prove it stands with Ukraine

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, "in a break between missile strikes", that the Parliament and the EU's leaders must now "prove that the EU is with Ukraine." "I speak today on behalf of the citizens of Ukraine who are defending it by paying the ultimate price", he continued.

Zelenskyy referred to the attack on Kharkiv, "the city with the largest square in the country, called 'Freedom Square'". "This morning, two missiles hit this Freedom Square, with dozens killed. This is the price we are paying for our freedom. From now on, every square in every Ukrainian city will be called Freedom Square".

"We are fighting for our rights, our freedoms, our lives, and currently - for our survival. We are also fighting to be equal members of Europe. So now, prove that you are with us", he told MEPs. "Prove that you indeed are Europeans and then life will win over death, and light will win over darkness. Glory to Ukraine".

Verkhovna Rada Speaker Ruslan Stefanchuk told MEPs: "Ukraine is defending the border of the civilised world, and if Ukraine falls, nobody knows where the Russians will stop". He insisted that the best way to support Ukraine "is a real recognition of our European aspirations".

"This brutal, massive invasion of Ukraine is unjustified, unprovoked and is based on despicable lies, and it happens for one reason only: because in Maidan Square, you made the choice of freedom, democracy and rule of law," said European Council President Charles Michel, calling Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion "geopolitical terrorism". He assured MEPs that the Council will analyse the "serious, symbolic, political and, in my view, legitimate request" by Ukraine to join the EU.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said: "This is a moment of truth for Europe. This is a clash between the rule of law and the rule of the gun, between a rule-based order and naked aggression. We cannot take our security for granted, we have to invest in it". She underlined that "if Putin was seeking to divide the EU, NATO and the international community, he has achieved the exact opposite."

"To make peace, we need to be two; but for war, it is enough with one, as Putin has shown. That is why we need to increase our

deterrence capacity a lot, in order to prevent war", said EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell. "Defending rule of law and strengthening trade relations will not be enough to turn the world into a peaceful place", he added.

A new era has begun

During the debate, many MEPs emphasised how the Russian invasion of Ukraine marks the beginning of a new era for Europe and the world. They condemned Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin's brutal aggression and expressed their admiration for how the Ukrainian army and people are resisting the assault, fighting for their country, freedom, democracy and common European values.

They also welcomed Europe's strong response to the illegal attack, such as the adopted sanctions packages, while stressing the need to remain united to continue to face the serious challenges ahead.

Some Members advocated acknowledging Ukraine's European aspirations and fight for freedom by stepping up the EU's work to grant the country EU candidate status. Others highlighted the importance of jointly addressing the repercussions that the sanctions on Russia will have on a European economy still recovering from a global pandemic, by way of ensuring support for countries most affected as well as for businesses and citizens. Finally, some pointed to the need to welcome Ukrainians fleeing war and to all EU countries sharing that responsibility.

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