

As war in Ukraine enters fifth week, G7, NATO & EU leaders strongly condemn Russia

On Feb. 24, Russian President Vladimir Putin went on television and announced a “special military operation” in eastern Ukraine to protect the people who, he said, “have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime.” The “special military operation” was, in fact, a full-fledged, multi-pronged invasion of Ukraine from Belarus in the north, Crimea in the south, and Russian territory adjacent to eastern and northeastern Ukraine. Over the past four weeks, Russia has waged a war against Ukraine and its citizens living in and around Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Dnipro, Mariupol and other cities. Apartment buildings, homes, hospitals, schools, and other non-military structures have been attacked and destroyed. Many men, women and children have been killed or wounded, and the UN estimates that, as of yesterday, 4 million have sought refuge in adjacent states and 6.5 million others have been displaced from their homes.

Yesterday, the 30 NATO heads of state and government, the G7 leaders, and the leaders of the 27 member states of the EU met in a series of meetings in Brussels to discuss the situation in Ukraine. After each meeting, the leaders issued a powerful statement condemning Russia’s war in Ukraine and calling on it to cease fire, negotiate an end to the war, and withdraw its forces from Ukraine. Here, below, are very brief summaries of each meeting, followed by a link to the full statement issued after each meeting.

The 30 NATO leaders, meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels, strongly condemned the invasion and called on Putin to immediately stop the war and withdraw Russia’s military forces from Ukraine. They condemned the attacks on civilians and said they will work with the rest of the international community to hold those responsible for violations of humanitarian and international law. They said Russia needs to show it is serious about negotiations by immediately implementing a ceasefire and engaging constructively in credible negotiations and moving toward a complete withdrawal of its troops from Ukraine. They made it clear they will continue to provide Ukraine with assistance in cybersecurity and protection against threats of a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear nature, will continue to provide humanitarian support, including for the millions of refugees, will step up their security assistance for NATO’s “partner” states (i.e., Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova), and will take all necessary steps to protect and defend the security of all Allied populations and territories. Toward that end, they said they have activated NATO defense plans for those territories, deployed elements of the NATO Response Force and 40,000 troops on its eastern flank, and are forming four additional multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. In light of the current situation, the leaders extended Jens Stoltenberg’s term as Secretary-General for a year; his term was scheduled to end September 30, after which he was slated to become head of Norway’s central bank. For the NATO leaders’ statement, see https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_193719.htm.

The G7 leaders then met at the NATO headquarters. They welcomed the investigations of war crimes being undertaken by international authorities, including the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, agreed to work together to support the gathering of evidence of war crimes, and said they would spare no effort to hold Putin and the architects and supporters of the aggression accountable for their actions. They also underlined their resolve to impose severe consequences on Russia, including additional sanctions and other measures as required. For their statement, see <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/24/g7-leaders-statement-brussels-24-march-2022/> .

Yesterday afternoon and evening, the EU leaders met for the first day of the two-day meeting of the European Council, which consists of the heads of state or government of the 27 member states. In a meeting in which they held an exchange of views with President Biden on transatlantic cooperation in the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the EU leaders agreed that “Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine grossly violates international law and is causing massive loss of life and injury to civilians. Russia is directing attacks against the civilian population and is targeting civilian objects, including hospitals, medical facilities, schools and shelters. These war crimes must stop immediately. Those responsible, and their accomplices, will be held to account in accordance with international law. The siege of Mariupol and other Ukrainian cities, and the denial of humanitarian access by Russian military forces are unacceptable. Russian forces must immediately provide for safe pathways to other parts of Ukraine, as well as humanitarian aid to be delivered to Mariupol and other besieged cities....The European Council demands that Russia immediately stop its military aggression in the territory of Ukraine, immediately and unconditionally withdraw all forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine, and fully respect Ukraine’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and independent within its international recognizes borders.”

The EU leaders also reaffirmed what they said in their March 10 Versailles Declaration, “acknowledging the European aspirations and the European choice of Ukraine, as stated in the Association Agreement.” And they reiterated their invitation to the Commission to submit its opinion in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Treaties in regard to Ukraine’s application for membership, which President Zelenskyy submitted on Feb. 28. And, they said, “bearing in mind the destruction and enormous losses brought upon Ukraine by Russia’s military aggression, the EU is committed to provide support to the Ukrainian Government for its immediate needs and, once the Russian onslaught has ceased, for the reconstruction of a democratic Ukraine. To that end, the European Council agrees to develop a Ukraine Solidarity Trust Fund and invites its international partners to participate and calls for preparations to start without delay.” Turning to the question of sanctions, the leaders said the EU stands ready to close any loopholes and target actual or possible circumvention of the sanctions as well as to move quickly with further coordinated sanctions on Russia and Belarus and called on all countries to align with the sanctions. For the European Council’s statement, see <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/25/european-council-conclusions-on-the-russian-military-aggression-against-ukraine-24-march-2022/> .

In addition, the G7 and EU leaders announced further sanctions on Russia, including sanctions on more than 300 members of the Russian Duma and the Duma itself as well as 20 leaders of Russian financial institutions and almost 50 Russian state-owned defense firms that have produced weapons used in its war against Ukraine. In addition, the G7 and EU leaders announced an initiative to share information about efforts to evade the sanctions. And the G7 and EU leaders agreed to work together to reduce Russia’s ability to use its international reserves to support its economy and the war by extending the current sanctions to include transactions involving gold held by the Russian Central Bank. The U.S. also announced it is prepared to provide more than \$1 billion for humanitarian assistance, including food, medical supplies, and other necessities, and \$320 million to support democracy and human rights in Ukraine.

The leaders of NATO, the G7, and the EU are to be commended for their strong condemnations of Russia’s war against Ukraine and the decisions they took yesterday. But the one most important question of all remains: When and how will this war end?

David R. Cameron
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