

EU leaders reiterate condemnation of Russia and commit to continued military & financial assistance for Ukraine



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel after yesterday's discussion of the war in Ukraine.

On Friday, in the second day of their two-day meeting in Brussels, the leaders of the 27 member states of the European Union, meeting as the European Council, discussed Russia's war against Ukraine. In its Conclusions, issued after the meeting, the Council said it "reiterates its resolute condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter, and reaffirms the European Union's unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and its inherent right of self-defense against the Russian aggression."

Importantly, the Council said, "The European Union will continue to provide strong financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes. In particular, the European Union and its Member States will continue to provide sustainable military support to Ukraine, notably through the European Peace Facility and the EU Military Assistance Mission, as well as bilateral assistance by Member States. The European Council underlines the importance of Member States' efforts and, in the immediate term, the need to accelerate the delivery of military support to Ukraine to help meet its pressing military and defence needs, including missiles and ammunition, notably under the one million rounds of artillery ammunition initiative, as well as air defence systems to protect its people and its critical and energy infrastructure. In the longer term, the European Union and Member States will contribute, together with partners, to future security commitments to Ukraine,

which will help Ukraine defend itself, resist destabilization efforts and deter acts of aggression in the future. The European Council invites the High Representative [Josep Burrell, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission], based on a framework to be endorsed by the Council, to consult with Ukraine on the EU's future security commitments and to report back on those discussions at the European Council meeting in December.”

That statement was followed by an intriguing one-sentence paragraph that stated in full, “Military support and security commitments will be provided in full respect of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and taking into account the security and defence interests of all Member States.” The EU hasn't offered an explanation but it's quite possible the sentence was included at the insistence of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who was strongly criticized by some of the other leaders for having met with Russian President Putin at the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing on Oct. 17; Robert Fico, the newly-elected Prime Minister of Slovakia; and/or the soon-to-be-former-Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, all of whom have recently expressed their opposition to continued military assistance for Ukraine.

Continuing, the Council said, “In the face of continued Russian attacks against Ukraine's civil and critical infrastructure, the European Union and its Member States will intensify the provision of humanitarian and civil protection assistance to Ukraine, including equipment such as power generators, power transformers, mobile heating stations, and high-voltage and lighting equipment.” It also said, “The European Union and its Member States will continue their intensified diplomatic outreach efforts and cooperation with Ukraine and other countries to ensure the widest possible international support for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace and the key principles and objectives of Ukraine's Peace Formula, with a view to a Global Peace Summit being held.”

Noting Russia's responsibility for the massive damage caused by its war against Ukraine, the Council said, “decisive progress is needed, in coordination with partners, on how any extraordinary revenues held by private entities stemming directly from Russia's immobilized assets could be directed to support Ukraine and its recovery and reconstruction, consistent with applicable contractual obligations, and in accordance with EU and international law,” and called upon the High Representative and the Commission to accelerate work with a view to submitting proposals in that regard. Roughly \$300 billion in assets of the Russian central bank has been frozen by western sanctions. Much of it is held in Euroclear, an international securities depository located in Brussels. Last week Euroclear reported that it has earned €3 billion thus far this year on the roughly €200 billion it holds in Russian assets, most of it assets of the central bank. There is some disagreement about whether the earnings of a sanctioned entity can be distributed to entities other than the owner of record and that will obviously have to be examined by the High Representative and the Commission. But if they can be, they would of course be of great benefit to Ukraine.

The Council also said that “Russia and its leadership must be held fully accountable for waging a war of aggression against Ukraine and other most serious crimes” and called for work to continue on efforts “to establish a tribunal for the prosecution of the crime of aggression against Ukraine that would enjoy the broadest cross-regional support and legitimacy, and towards the establishment of a future compensation mechanism. Moreover, the European Council expresses its support for the work of the International Criminal Court and condemns the Russian attempts to undermine its international mandate and functioning.” It said it “condemns in the strongest terms Russia’s unlawful deportation and transfer to Russia and Belarus of Ukrainian children and other civilians, and urges Russia and Belarus to immediately ensure their safe return.” And it said that “Russia’s ability to wage its war of aggression must be further weakened, including by further strengthening sanctions, and through their full and effective implementation and the prevention of their circumvention, especially for high-risk goods, in close cooperation with partners and allies.” The Council also registered its opposition to Russia’s unilateral termination of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and its deliberate attacks on Ukraine’s grain storage and export facilities and actions to hinder the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, all of which demonstrate that Russia continues to weaponize food and undermine global food security.

All in all, and notwithstanding the presence at the meeting of some Putin friends, a powerful condemnation of Russia’s war in Ukraine.

David R. Cameron
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