## Ukraine: EU's local leaders condemn Russian attrocities and offer support to rebuild cities

*Leaders of Mariupol, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Melitopol and Lviv share "unimaginable" threats facing their cities whilst EU local leaders also demand "robust sanctions" and immediate release of kidnapped officials*

**During a debate with Ukrainian local leaders, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) called for "robust sanctions against Russia", demanded the "immediate release of Ukrainian mayors and civil servants kidnapped by Russian occupation forces", and offered the expertise of EU's regions and cities to help Ukraine's local and regional authorities in reconstruction efforts. The resolution, adopted today, also highlighted the role of past decentralisation reforms in ensuring Ukraine's survival.**

**Apostolos Tzitzikostas** (EL/EPP), president of the CoR and Governor of Greece's region of Central Macedonia, said "We condemn the Russian atrocities committed against innocent civilians and every local leader. The EU's local and regional governments will not stop providing humanitarian aid and welcoming the millions of Ukrainians who have fled war. We are ready now to help re-build Ukraine. Our institution is ready to pool experts in spatial planning, urbanism and sustainable development from across European regions and cities. We will call on the EU and its member states to increase and facilitate access to funds to help rebuild Ukraine".

The focus of **three debates over three hours** – including with European Commissioners Elisa Ferreira and Janez Lenarčič – was, however, firmly on the experiences of Ukrainians. The mayors and local leaders – from Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv, Mariupol, and Melitopol – shared their experiences and pleas for support during the CoRs plenary session

**Vitaly Klitschko**, mayor of Kyiv and – since March – an honorary member of the CoR, called for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops, but cautioned people from returning, because of ongoing missile attacks, "unexploded munitions" and widespread destruction of some of the most densely populated parts of the city. *[check against delivery]*

**Vadym Boychenko**, the mayor of Mariupol, said that there were "unimaginable scenes" of suffering of "women and children", as well as of devastation. *[check against delivery]*

**Ivan Fedorov**, mayor Melitopol, provided first-hand experience of Russian captivity. The mayor, who was kidnapped by Russian forces in March and released in a prisoner exchange five days later, said that he had been specifically targeted in part to intimidate citizens in his city, which lies in a strategic position in southern Ukraine. *[check against delivery]*

**Tetiana Yehorova-Lutsenko**, chairwoman of the Kharkiv District Council, said the country's second-largest city remained under heavy artillery attack. "Vast swathes of the city were now uninhabitable", with hospitals and many basic public services very badly disrupted. *[check against delivery]*

**Andriy Sadovyi**, mayor of Lviv, the largest city in western Ukraine, said that the city's population continues to swell, with arrivals from the east of the country now being joined by refugees returning from the EU, despite what he described as "daily" attacks by Russian artillery and missiles. *[check against delivery]*

During the debates, CoR members from across the EU spoke how their regions and municipalities are helping refugees and the challenges they face. Around 5.2 million Ukrainians have fled Ukraine, the UN says.

The accounts by local leaders were complemented by a discussion on how to improve support from the EU in this emergency.

**Elisa Ferreira**, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reform, said: "The testimony of the Ukrainian Mayors was very moving. They have our full solidarity and unwavering respect for their bravery and determination. This unprovoked aggression by Russia is not just an attack on Ukraine, it is an attack on our European values of peace and democracy, and the right of free peoples to choose their own path. From the very first day, Cohesion policy has been, and will continue to be, at the forefront of Europe's support to the refugees, assisting in their temporary or permanent integration".

**Janez Lenarčič**, European Commissioner for Crisis Management, said: "I appreciate the rapid response of the the EUs local and regional leaders to the crisis in Ukraine. Most notably the immediate  mobilisation of resources and organisation of emergency aid collection centres. with each day the humanitarian situation only gets more dire, while its spill-over effect in the neighbourhood continues. It is  time this unjustifiable Russian military aggression against Ukraine ends. Until then the European Commission will continue to provide emergency support to Ukrainians, Moldova and any EU Member State affected. We should never forget – Europe's response is stronger when all of us act in solidarity"

President Tzitzikostas called for the creation of a "'EU Ukrainian Refugees Local Facility', not as a new fund, but as an operational tool to cut red tape and fast-track local leaders' access to current funds".

The resolution urged EU regions and cities to also called for a "reinforcement of the European perspective for Ukraine" as well as the "establishment of a concrete reconstruction plan for Ukrainian cities and regions".

The CoR has been working with Ukrainian cities and regions since 2010, setting up a task-force on decentralisation in 2015 and later a working group. The working group, which is headed by **Aleksandra Dulkiewicz**, mayor of Gdańsk, last met on 30 March. CoR actions since Russia's invasion on 24 February include the creation of a **Help Ukraine: Info-Support Hub**, which also connects transit regions and overburdened local and regional authorities with those from other EU member states that have capacities to help.

The debates can be **re-watched here**.

**Contact:**
Andrew Gardner
**andrew.gardner@cor.europa.eu**
+32 473 843 981