

## Speech by the President of Latvia Egils Levits at the extraordinary session of the Saeima to honour the memory of the victims of the Ukrainian people

Published more than 2 years ago

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Honourable Speaker of the Saeima!

Honourable Members of the Saeima!

Distinguished diplomats!

Dear guests!

I

A year ago, Russia launched its criminal war against Ukraine.

The Ukrainians' heroic resistance to the invaders thrills and inspires the whole world

II

A year ago, war in 21st century Europe seemed impossible.

Western countries had given in to economic expediency and wishful thinking in their relations with Russia.

The growing authoritarianism in Russia was turned a blind eye. Moral landmarks had faded

### III

Russia's authoritarian regime is based on the imperialist, colonialist and racist ideology of the 19th century.

As long as Russian society, and I emphasize – the entire Russian society – does not renounce this ideology, it will endanger its neighbours and the whole of Europe.

Two weeks ago, addressing the European Parliament, I said that the romantic notions of the broad Russian soul should remain for the lovers of literature. This cannot be a leitmotif for politicians who are responsible for the security of their own people. Russia showed its true nature to the whole world in Bucha, in Irpin, in Mariupol.

The only effective strategy to deter Russia is to strengthen NATO's defence capabilities.

We, as a country on NATO's Eastern flank, particularly need this.

### IV

Latvia is one of the countries that has been providing the most aid to Ukraine since the first day of the war.

And not only our government, but also our people. Our total aid, provided by people individually, has reached 38 million euros.

We feel deep solidarity with Ukraine. We know what the Russian occupation means.

The Baltic States and Poland have led European public opinion on Ukraine.

We have shown leadership both in assessing the situation and proposing ideas for solutions to the security crisis.

Based on our vision, Europe has managed to build a consensus on support for Ukraine

Thus, active participation in shaping the policy and agenda of the European Union and NATO has given us a historic opportunity to steer it in the right direction.

### V

At the Munich Security Conference a week ago, there was clearly expressed growing support for Ukraine.

Also, when we met US President Joe Biden two days ago, we saw that both America and Europe are united in their support for Ukraine.

Moreover, the political objective has become clearer - we have gone from saying that we must help Ukraine to saying that Ukraine must not lose. The objective is clearly defined - Ukraine must win. This means that Russia must go back to its internationally recognised borders.

Ukraine's victory in this war is crucial for Europe and the entire western world.

What Ukraine needs most now is arms and ammunition. The West needs to build up its military industrial capacity. NATO is currently also considering this and trying to do everything possible to increase military production and effectively help Ukraine.

But Ukraine also needs justice and a future in Europe.

That is why Latvia will continue to be a strong advocate for Ukraine's accelerated accession to the European Union.

We were the first country, together with Estonia, to say that Ukraine should be in the European Union. A few months later, the European Union also accepted this idea and Ukraine was granted candidate status. Now we must stand up for the negotiations

not to be postponed. Negotiations must begin so that Ukraine can move purposefully and consistently towards Europe.

## VI

Distinguished audience!

Waging an aggressive war against another sovereign state is the greatest possible international crime. It has been the standard of international law since the end of the Second World War – since the United Nations Charter was adopted in 1945.

However, there is currently no international court with the jurisdiction to adjudicate this issue. There is a certain contradiction here – there is a crime, but there is no court. This contradiction must be resolved in such a way that an international tribunal is established.

Therefore, since the first days of the war, Latvia has been consistently advocating the creation of such a special tribunal to try the crimes of Russian aggression.

Currently, this proposal is gaining quite wide support

It is legally possible, but it is a question of the political will of the international community. This political will is also steadily growing because of our pressure.

In January this year, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the need for such an international tribunal. 470 MEPs voted in favour, 19 – against.

In January, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also adopted a similar resolution.

We will continue to work effectively and consistently in this direction, as we have done so far, because the question now is how to achieve the greatest possible support for such a tribunal. There are various options here, and they should all be 'on the table'. We need to start with the best option – the UN General Assembly.

At the moment, the General Assembly is also quite clear on this issue, because today, as you saw, a resolution condemning Russia's aggression in Ukraine was adopted by 141 votes out of 193. So, we have to work there, but we must not forget the other options.

Russia's war crimes must be punished, because impunity leads to new aggression.

Russia's imperial aspirations must be stopped once and for all

## VII

Honourable Members of the parliament and guests!

I thank you for your contribution to the decision on support for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees in Latvia.

I thank every person in Latvia who has given and will continue to give a helping hand to Ukraine.

I thank Oleksandr Mishchenko, the current Ambassador of Ukraine to Latvia, who has been a very active and effective representative of his country and people throughout this year.

## VIII

A free, independent and democratic Ukraine is the common goal of the democratic world.

Latvia will stand with Ukraine until its victory.

The flags of free Ukraine will continue to fly in Latvia.

Glory to Ukraine!

Glory to the heroes!



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