



# EESC Info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil society

April 2022 | EN

EESC info SPECIAL - EESC for Ukraine

## [The Grassroots View – S3 Episode 17 – Civil society united against Russian aggression](#)

**Since 24 February 2022, Ukraine has been dealing with its invasion by Russia. In addition to the military and financial aid that arrives from all over the world, European and Ukrainian civil societies are working hand in hand to help communities in distress. In this episode of The Grassroots View, we invited some of their representatives to tell us their stories.**

**Elena Calistru**, member of the European Economic and Social Committee, explains how and why many Romanian citizens are helping fleeing Ukrainians find shelter and food. She also talks about the role of the EESC which, by using the power of its network, manages to quickly set up mechanisms to help the weakest.

**Marta Barandiy**, founder of the NGO Promote Ukraine, based in Brussels and Kyiv, gives us a Ukrainian perspective on the situation. She tells us how her work changed when war broke out, how the role of civil society is crucial, and how the Ukrainian people will never give up in the face of an invader.

Finally, **Bartosz Wieliński**, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Gazeta Wyborcza, tells us about the war's impact on Poland and how the Polish people are adopting a new approach to the phenomenon of refugees. He explains, for example, how the school system welcomes and helps young Ukrainians. (tk)

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## WE STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE



### Editorial

Dear readers,

At this tragic time caused by Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, we stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

During the EESC plenary session in March, representatives of Ukrainian and Russian civil society brought a strong emotional impact to the debate through their first-hand experiences of the war. *"This war is not only a military aggression against Ukraine, but also a crime against civilisation"* - the words of **Anatoliy Kinakh**, president of the National Tripartite Social and Economic Council of Ukraine, resonated among the members and guests in the plenary.

The members of the Committee supported the [Resolution on the "War in Ukraine and its economic, social and environmental impact"](#), expressed their solidarity with Ukraine and highlighted the role of civil society in assisting the Ukrainian people and refugees.

Europe is faced with the biggest refugee crisis since World War II, as in one month alone some 3.5 million refugees, including 1.8 million children, were forced to flee the country. However, Europe stands united with the Ukrainian nation, turning solidarity into action.

Since the beginning of the war, we have observed a unique wave of human generosity towards the Ukrainian refugees, a unique example of solidarity, unity and altruism.

Civil society stands with the Ukrainian people. The Ukrainian nation is defending peace and security for all. This human tragedy does not have borders; it concerns us all.

The European Economic and Social Committee representing organised civil society is turning words into deeds. Our members and their organisations are fully committed to assisting the Ukrainian refugees in every possible way, and have mobilised impressively, as you can see from our special webpage dedicated to Ukraine: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/initiatives/eesc-ukraine>, which shows the work and initiatives being carried out by our members and their civil society organisations.

**Cillian Lohan, EESC Vice-President**



## FROM UKRAINE ON THE ROAD TO..

**The tragic history of Ukraine is unfolding before our very eyes, thanks to the tireless and heroic work of journalists, photographers and cameramen, who go where we cannot go.**

One of them, **Sławek Kaminski**, a Polish photographer, sent us his photos from the Belarus-Polish border, the Polish city of Rzeszów and the Polish-Ukrainian border in Medyka-Shehyni.

Today, we are publishing the second one from the Polish-Ukrainian border. Thank you for the moments captured in the frame. (ehp)

Foto: Sławek Kaminski/GW



## TO THE POINT

In our column "To the point", we invite EESC members to highlight aspects of an opinion or initiative that they consider important. This time we asked **Veselin Mitov**, co-chair of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform to explain the role of the platform and particularly its task in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform was established in 2015 under article 469 of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which was signed on 21 March 2014, to allow civil society organisations from both sides to monitor the implementation of the agreement. (at)



## "OUR FIRST TASK NOW IS INTEGRATING UKRAINIAN WAR REFUGEES INTO EUROPEAN SOCIETIES"

For me, as a co-chair of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform, it is necessary to restore and maintain the links between the members of the platform, who represent employers, workers and NGOs. At this crucial time, with the ongoing war in Ukraine, we must maintain contacts with the Ukrainian participants of the Civil Society Platform.

If we succeed in keeping vibrant links and ensure the functioning of the network, we can make progress on the priorities. For the time being, the principal objective should be to identify the practical needs of the Ukrainian people and see how we, as EU Civil Society Platform members, can assist our Ukrainian colleagues with acts of solidarity in this extremely difficult situation.

But I believe our most important task is helping with the integration of Ukrainian war refugees, as more than five million have fled to neighbouring and other European countries. Top of our agenda in the upcoming EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform meeting should be the social and economic integration of Ukrainian refugees. We need to find ways to incorporate Ukrainian adults and children into the social and economic structure of the individual countries to help heal the trauma of the war. Of course, when the war is over, our next step will be to help these people integrate back into Ukraine.

We stand with the Ukrainian people and as the Civil Society Platform we express our full solidarity.

**Veselin Mitov, EESC Member, co-chair of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform**

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## ONE QUESTION TO...



## One question to...

In our "One question to ..." column, former EESC member **David Stulík** answers a question from *EESC info* on the possible consequences of the war in Ukraine.

**David Stulík** is currently a senior analyst and the head of the Eastern European programme at the European Values Center for Security Policy, a Czech think tank. He is also a co-chair of the official Czech-Ukrainian Civil Society Forum. Before that, he spent 12 years as an EU diplomat in Ukraine as Press and Information Officer at the EU Delegation. After the Czech Republic's EU accession, he was appointed by the Czech government as a member of the European Economic and Social Committee, where he represented the Czech non-governmental sector and also served as rapporteur for Belarus. Among his fields of interests and expertise are EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy, development of civil society, EU communication policies, EU lobbying, civic dialogue, and the socio-economic consequences of post-communist transition. (ab)



## David Stulík: "We are witnessing an unprecedented wave of solidarity and support for Ukraine"

**EESC info:** In the face of Russia's war against Ukraine, we are witnessing an unprecedented mobilisation of civil society, which is working hard to help the Ukrainian people. What are the most remarkable actions in this huge wave of human support for Ukraine - humanitarian aid, transport, education, accommodation, schools, foreign language learning? What lessons are there for us as citizens who are confronted with a human tragedy?

**David Stulík:** The wave of solidarity and support for Ukraine in the EU is unprecedented and, as such, brings the hope that eventually European values will prevail over Russian barbarianism and the cruel use of brute power.

It is so touching and emotionally encouraging to see all the humanitarian assistance that Europeans are providing to Ukraine. However, we should be aware of a few issues which EU civil society must take into account.

First, by helping Ukrainian refugees to meet all their needs (accommodation, education of children, jobs), we are dealing with the consequences of evil actions and war crimes committed by Putin's Russia. However, we

have to tackle the reason that led to these atrocities. The reason is the existence of Putin's regime, which still enjoys widespread support among Russian people.

If we manage to stop this, we will also stop the flow of Ukrainian refugees to Europe. Ukrainians would be more than happy to stay in their home country and live there in peace.

This brings me to the second element of what I believe European civil society should push for. We all have to stop the senseless actions of the Russian leadership.

We have to realise that they are attacking us too, not only Ukraine. Russian propaganda portrays us, the EU and NATO, as their arch enemies, using Ukraine as a puppet against Russia.

Having said that, the logical question arises of how to stop Putin's Russia. Economic sanctions alone will not lead to a change of regime in Russia.

I am afraid that the only solution to stop Putin is the military defeat of his armies in Ukraine. This should be priority no 1 at the moment, to stop the killing of innocent civilians in Ukraine and prevent the war from spilling over into other parts of Europe. There is no doubt that Russia's aggressive behaviour and plans concern us as well, at least some EU Member States, especially those in Eastern and Central Europe. Yes, we are also on the radar of Russian generals as another "legitimate" target.

If the war in Ukraine is not stopped today, we will be next and the war will come to us too. We have to acknowledge that we are de facto already in that war. At least, this is how the roles of the EU and NATO are presented in Russia's (censored) media.

Therefore, we Europeans should do our best to contribute to the victory of Ukraine on the battlefield. Alongside tightening economic and other sanctions against Russia, we must be ready to supply the Ukrainian army with all the necessary military means it is asking for.

I am myself a pacifist, but these are decisive moments, when liberal democracies must defend themselves against those who intend to destroy them. These enemies of ours understand only the language of force and military power. We should not be afraid and ashamed of using it since our survival as democratic societies is at stake.

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## GUESS WHO IS OUR GUEST...



## [The surprise guest](#)

**Every month in this column we introduce a public figure whose work and commitment are a source of inspiration. Their courage, strength of character and determination to take action set a shining example and their bravery deserves respect.**

Our guest is Ukrainian journalist **Tetyana Ogarkova**, coordinator of the international department of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center and co-presenter of the podcast "Explaining Ukraine". She is also a lecturer at Mohyla University in Kyiv and has a PhD in literature from Paris XII Val-de-Marne University.

Tetyana is a much sought-after guest in television and radio programmes around the world, where she describes the dramatic plight of the Ukrainian people and provides deep insights into this human tragedy.

In this special edition of EESCinfo, she shares with our readers her personal testimony, which is all the more powerful as it was written from a Ukraine under siege, tormented and heroic, which she has not left despite the war. (ehp)



## [Tetyana Ogarkova: Vladimir Putin's last war](#)

**On 24 February 2022, we were woken up at 5 in the morning by strange noises that could be heard far and wide that sounded very much like explosions. Children were sleeping peacefully in their beds, but phones were buzzing with a constant string of messages. The war had begun. Explosions, which turned out to be missile strikes, were reported in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Ivano-Frankivsk and other cities around the country.**

**One of the first strikes destroyed a building on a military site in Brovary, where our older daughter's dance teacher lived. A few hours later, I got in my car to go look for a friend who was no longer answering her phone. I was met with Ukrainian tanks, their tracks leaving traces in the asphalt.**

**Since the painful wake-up call of 24 February 2022, which forever destroyed the world as we knew it, we have not gone back to sleep. We are looking at our new reality with eyes wide open. During the first week of the war we saw, for the first time, our friends dying in combat. We also saw that the Ukrainian army was capable of resistance in the face of the "world's second most powerful army". We saw Europeans supply us with weapons and discuss future sanctions.**

**But above all, we are looking at Russia with eyes wide open. We can't believe the levels they are sinking to: soldiers bragging to their wives about stealing coffee makers, rugs and even washing machines from devastated villages. Their cruelty is beyond belief: shooting unarmed**

**civilians in the back of the neck, raping Ukrainian women in front of their children and burning their bodies. They are bombarding our hospitals and sending missiles, every day, without exception. It's also hard to believe how stupid they're being: their soldiers spent over a month digging trenches in the soil in Chernobyl and then ended up needing to be transferred to Belarus due to radiation syndrome, which they are now dying from.**

**We are looking at the reality of modern Russia with eyes wide open. Putin is not the only one conducting this war. According to a recent Levada Center study, he has the support of 85% of Russians.**

**It is time to confront this new reality. The heroic resistance of Ukrainian soldiers, the military aid and strong sanctions from Ukraine's Western partners are helping.**

**However, the war is still happening. The most important thing is to hold on, not to give up, not to succumb to the temptation to agree on a ceasefire too lightly or too quickly, no matter how much we all want peace. We have this unique opportunity to make sure this unconscionable aggression on the part of Russia is its last war. No ceasefire, concession on territories or compromise will change anything - they would only allow Russia to claim partial victory and fuel aggressive and vengeful sentiments among Russian society.**

**Transnistria in 1992, Georgia in 2008, Crimea and Donbas in 2014: every decade, Russia has increased the challenges and dangers eating away at the region. The Kremlin has used the West's every weakness as an excuse to pursue its aggression. We are looking at reality with eyes wide open: to achieve peace, we must continue the war. The war against Russia.**

**We will need courage. A great deal of courage. Not only on the part of Ukrainian soldiers, but also our Western partners to strengthen sanctions (to destroy the Russian economy) and to deliver the necessary offensive weapons to Ukrainians (to push Russian troops back across the border).**

**We will also need decisiveness. The decisiveness necessary to - after the inevitable defeat of Russia - impose the historical responsibility for this inhuman barbarism on every Russian citizen. With reparations to be paid over two or three generations. With history textbooks containing detailed descriptions of their war crimes. With a museum of the battle of Mariupol, or Bucha, in the centre of Moscow.**

**It is only after this suicidal war that another Russia will be possible; one rid of the complex of an injured empire and the desire to return to its former grandeur at its neighbours' expense.**

**Waking at 5 in the morning on 24 February 2022, we heard Putin referring to "denazification" and "demilitarisation" as the aims of his "military operation". But let's get real. Ukraine does not need "denazification" and "demilitarisation", it is Russia that needs these things.**

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# EESC NEWS



## [EESC debates resolution on economic, social and environmental impact of war in Ukraine](#)

**The European Economic and Social Committee on 24 March adopted a resolution on the war in Ukraine and its economic, social and environmental impact against the background of a European Council summit placing the war at top of the agenda.**

The resolution was adopted by the plenary session following a debate with home affairs commissioner **Ylva Johansson** and several leading representatives of Ukrainian and Russian civil society.

EESC members expressed their solidarity with Ukraine and highlighted the role of civil society in assisting Ukrainian people and refugees.

Opening the debate, EESC President **Christa Schweng** stressed: "This invasion has put our security and values under threat, and the EU rightfully and forcefully stands with Ukraine, responding in unity and solidarity".

Home Affairs Commissioner **Ylva Johansson** highlighted the EESC's extremely important role in using its knowledge on the ground. Europe has so far welcomed 3.5 million Ukrainian refugees, including 1.8 million children. Civil society's unprecedented solidarity to people fleeing the war in Ukraine has been remarkable, "making all of us proud to be Europeans", said Ms Johansson.

The Presidents of the EESC's three Groups, rapporteurs for the resolution, underlined the crucial challenges Europe is facing as a consequence of the war.

**Stefano Mallia**, President of the EESC Employers' Group said, "We welcome in our resolution the humanitarian actions taken so far and we urge Member States to do more to help Ukraine".

**Oliver Röpke**, President of Workers' Group said: "One of my key messages is that the international community and Europe has to stand united in this situation".

**Séamus Boland**, President of the Diversity Europe Group, said: "The Russian invasion of Ukraine represents the most violent unprovoked aggression on the European continent since 1939 and we must stand against it".

Representatives from Ukrainian and Russian civil society brought a strong emotional impact to the debate through their first-hand experiences of the war.

The founder of the Open Russia movement, **Mikhail Khodorkovsky**, flagged up the disastrous consequences of disinformation and said: "Trying to combat disinformation is our prerogative, even beyond Russia".

The President of the National Tripartite Social and Economic Council of Ukraine, **Anatoliy Kinakh**, described Russia's acts as "not only a military aggression, but a crime against civilisation".

**Alexander Shubin**, chair of the Ukrainian Civil Society Platform, asked Europe to continue to support Ukraine and its aspirations to be part of the European family.

**Gennadiy Chyzykov**, President of the Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, asked European employers and business organisations to support Ukrainian companies.

Finally, **Yevgenya Pavlova**, from the Ukraine National Assembly of People with Disabilities, urged people not to forget Ukrainians with disabilities, who need special attention. (at)

The [full text of the EESC resolution](#) can be found on the EESC website.



## [The EESC shows its solidarity and unity with Ukraine](#)

### **Christa Schweng, President of the EESC**

We see an unprovoked aggression against freedom, against democracy, against values and against the foundations of the European Union as such which was founded on the power of law not on the law of power. The reason for building a European Union - that is peace - today is more important than ever. As Europeans we need to stand together in solidarity and with Ukrainian people.

### **Cillian Lohan, Vice President for Communication**

We stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people. I see with great admiration the strong partnership already built between the EU and Ukrainian civil societies. Since the beginning of the war, we have observed a unique wave of human generosity addressed to Ukrainian refugees, a unique example of solidarity, unity and altruism. The

Ukrainian nation defends peace and security for all. The human tragedy does not have borders; it concerns all of us.

### **Giulia Barbucci, Vice President for Budget**

At any latitude or longitude, war is never acceptable and must always be condemned. It brings only destruction, death and horror. In Ukraine, close to the borders of the Union, the clock of European history has been turned back in time to things we thought belonged only in the past. In this terrible tragedy, the European institutions have joined forces, raising their voices against this unacceptable aggression and opening their doors to those fleeing the war, especially women, children and older persons. The EESC,

together with civil society organisations, has deployed all the strength of its solidarity to help the victims of these atrocities. The European Union has a duty to play a decisive role in the search for diplomatic solutions that will bring an end to the conflict, to take immediate action to prosecute those responsible for these crimes, and to take concrete steps towards reconstruction.

**Stefano Mallia, President of the Employers' Group**

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU pushed measures that were unimaginable just a few months ago. The war in Ukraine is bringing out the humanity of the EU and its citizens, who are putting freedom and peace before interest and trade. The awakening of Europe is visible across the policy spectrum. If Europe wants to continue to live in peace, it must build a strong foreign policy and common defence. The taboo has vanished seeing war again on our continent. This growing momentum towards safeguarding peace and solidarity is giving Europe its new torch to rally Europeans and not only. The EU needed to rediscover the desire for peace to keep building its construct. Putin, rather than dividing Europe, has united us all towards that mission.

**Oliver Röpke, President of the Workers' Group**

Russian aggression is a direct threat on the European Union. We need to be united and stand side by side in full solidarity with the people of Ukraine, both the ones fleeing as refugees these days, and the ones staying behind to fight. Trade Unions remember that the war machine is fed with the blood of workers, call for the withdrawal of Russian troops, and support civil society in both Ukraine and Russia.

**Séamus Boland, President of the Diversity Europe Group**

We are standing at a precipice and we must reach out to civil society organisations in Ukraine. Our European values and principles are at stake and we must speak out loudly against aggression and in favour of the values that Europe has stood for since World War II. We know from our history that peace is a 'fragile flower'. It requires all of our attention and our commitment. To trample on it, we as humans have the capacity to wipe out our world and all its life forms. It is imperative that the EU and indeed the wider European family must remain unified and in solidarity with our neighbours.

**Dimitris Dimitriadis, President of the External Relations Section (REX)**

The EESC will strive to continue supporting Ukrainian civil society through our well-established channels, such as the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform and through our bilateral contacts.

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## EESC opens its doors to Ukrainian Civil Society

**To turn solidarity with Ukraine into concrete action, the EESC is joining the European Parliament's "civil society hub" initiative for Ukraine, allowing the NGO Promote Ukraine to use part of its premises at rue de Trèves 74, along with logistical equipment.**

The official handover ceremony was held at the EESC's Jacques Delors building on 20 April 2022. The EESC president **Christa Schweng** welcomed the Ukrainian civil society representatives, offering them a symbolic "free access" badge in the colours of the Ukrainian flag.

**Christa Schweng** said: "The EESC, as the home of organised civil society in the EU, is opening its doors to Ukrainian organised civil society, which is part of our European family. We stand with Ukraine and its people, and are turning our solidarity into concrete action. Together we stand united to defend our shared values: freedom, democracy and the rule of law."

Civil society coordinator **Natalia Melnyk** stressed: "24 February changed our lives. Not for the better. However, we do not accept any condolences. There is now a lot to be done and I hope that in these premises we will be able to do more to support Ukrainians. This hub is open for all Europeans who want to support Ukraine."

**Serghii Tereshko**, deputy head of the mission of Ukraine to the EU added: "I would like to express our gratitude for the solidarity with Ukraine and for the EESC resolution on the "War in Ukraine and its economic, social and environmental impact". Thank you for the support of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform for helping us to get closer to the European Union. Granting us the premises is the first step towards establishing a permanent Ukrainian presence in the European institutions."

**Marta Barandiy**, chair of NGO Promote Ukraine, stressed that: "The European institutions have given us the space to speak. Now we receive the space to work. A space to cooperate with European civil society."

The offices and parking area at the building B68 (rue de Trèves 74), as well as administrative and logistical support (equipment, printing and IT services) will be used to coordinate the Ukrainian civil society activities. The EESC is thereby facilitating the work of this NGO, providing a secure home for Promote Ukraine at the heart of Europe. (ab/ehp)

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## EESC MEMBERS SPEAK

## [VIDEO - Cillian Lohan - A unique wave of human generosity towards Ukrainian people](#)

"Since the beginning of the war we've observed a unique wave of human generosity, a unique example of solidarity, unity and altruism towards Ukrainian people. Our members and their organisations have shown an impressive mobilisation and are fully committed to assisting the Ukrainian refugees".

Watch EESC Vice-President Cillian illustrate civil society's sustained efforts in support of war-stricken Ukraine.



### [POLAND: "We are helping Ukrainian entrepreneurs move away from the ruins and recreate their businesses"](#)

**Tomasz Wróblewski, EESC member, Poland**

**When this war is over, Europe will no longer be defined by the experiences of the Second World War or the Cold War, but by everything that is happening today in Ukraine and its consequences, which cannot yet be predicted. What we will go through and the lessons we will learn will change most of our perceptions of the world.**

For Poland, this will forever be a nation-building moment. What we have learned about the fragility of the world by watching millions of people flee from evil, but also what we have learned about ourselves through hosting hundreds of thousands of foreign people in our homes, will leave its mark

for years to come.

We sometimes speak about the Ukrainisation of Poland, a spiritual transformation of these two countries.

2.7 million people who have come to our country have found housing, help and places for their children in schools and kindergartens.

Everyone I know and people I meet on the street or in shops are doing something to help. Each in their own way. The bravest are transporting medication and bulletproof vests to Ukraine. Others spend all their free time helping immigrants fill in documents, open bank accounts or look for work. Those at the border spend all day welcoming refugees, who are crossing our border in increasing numbers.

They cook, find them lifts to other cities or countries, distribute hundreds of thousands of donations - blankets, backpacks, teddy bears for the kids. All of this is coming to the border from around the world.

What we can do as members of an organisation of entrepreneurs is help where we can contribute most. We are helping Ukrainian entrepreneurs recreate their businesses in Poland. Moving them away from factories, shops, clinics or beauty salons that lie in ruins and giving people – many of whom have been left without a home, without means to make a living and without their loved ones – a job in Poland.

In the centre of Warsaw, there is an office for Ukrainian entrepreneurs' organisations. Besides office space and administrative support, we are helping them find space for companies that decide to rebuild their businesses in Poland. We started with renting tens of thousands of square metres of production space. Thanks to the generosity of Polish companies in the industrial part of Warsaw, Ukrainian entrepreneurs can receive space free of charge. They only pay for water and rubbish collection.

After almost two months of this refugee crisis, not one refugee camp, or any other place where human dignity and safety would be at risk, has been created in Poland.

Ukraine is entering a new stage of the war, but so is Poland. We want to give the people who have found a safe haven here their lives back. We can't give them back their country, but at least by giving them jobs we can give them back some sense of normality.



## [POLAND: EESC members bring humanitarian aid to Ukraine](#)

**By Marcin Nowacki, EESC member, Poland**

**On 8 March 2022, my organisation in Poland (ZPP) and the Kulski Foundation (with which EESC member Małgorzata Bogusz is associated) organised a small but quick humanitarian convoy.**

It was the second trip for that week. I went to Lviv, Ukraine, with Małgorzata Bogusz and Tom Palmer, VP of the Atlas Network from the United States. The purpose of the trip was to provide medicine and medical and hygienic materials to Ukraine. Equipped with two full buses, we arrived at the meeting point indicated by our Ukrainian counterparts, who pack and distribute products to places with the greatest needs.

Passenger cars and buses made up a long, continual queue along the Polish-Ukrainian border towards Poland. Unfortunately, the need to evacuate civilians is not diminishing, but is systematically growing. As of

10 March 2022, Poland had already received over 1.5 million Ukrainians.

On the way to Lviv we passed several checkpoints. The largest, secured by the military, was located at the very entrance to the city. It was a very lively place bustling with people. There were several hundred thousand more people in the city than usual. Lviv is currently a transfer and logistics centre supporting central and eastern Ukraine. On the outskirts of the city, we met our guide, who led us to the logistics centre. A team of people was waiting there, and they immediately started unloading. All products were sorted and properly catalogued. Process management was at the highest level, and after our efforts we found time to exchange ideas on the current situation and on the Ukrainians' greatest needs. Lviv residents have opened their homes and offered accommodation, food and transport to refugees from areas under attack by Russia.

During my stay, our Ukrainian counterparts communicated to us their key recommendations and needs. We worked together every day and I feel honoured to convey their message. Their recommendations and needs can be broken down into three fundamental groups: political, military and civilian. The most pressing are:

- Financial assistance and military equipment provisions, which is a task for governments and large companies.
- Pressure and deep, wide-ranging sanctions on Russia and Belarus. Sanctions that cannot be evaded. In these there will also be costs for us, and we need to accept that. It is finally time to redefine our energy policy.

From government to employers' and workers' organisations, and to civil society as a whole, these are the concrete actions that are needed:

- Support by way of medical product supplies.
- The provision of other necessary supplies specified by our partners.
- Support for evacuating families. On our way back from Ukraine, we had the honour of transporting those evacuating Ukraine. The other option is to engage on the border and assist with transportation.
- To receive and accommodate families who come to EU countries. The countries of the region need support by way of places for refugees to stay – spare rooms in your homes, and in your empty apartments. As for Poland, we already have over 2.8 million war refugees.
- To streamline the job-hunting process for those who can and wish to work.

I would like to emphasise that the ongoing refugee crisis is unprecedented in Europe's modern history. To deal with it we must involve civil society from all Member States.

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## [ROMANIA: Sheltering Ukrainian refugees at their most fragile](#)

**By Ionuț Sibian, EESC member, Romania**

**In Romania, several civil society organisations, including [FONSS](#), [Afterhills Association](#), Parentis Association and [Our Smile Group Association](#), have teamed up with the [Municipality of Iasi](#) to run a refugee centre for Ukrainians fleeing the war. The following story, which was reported by my colleague, Mihaela Muntean, is one of the many touching experiences we have been living through.**

The first refugee to arrive at the [Humanitarian and Social Assistance Centre for Refugees CTR Nicolina Iasi](#) was two-week-old Iovana – tiny and quiet in her mother's arms, who was also quiet and pale, after giving birth in a shelter and a 21-day journey. Then came tall Roman, the baby's

father, his mother and his 86-years-old grandfather. Four generations stepped out of the loaded car, walking slowly towards the reception.

- Where have you come from?

- Kharkov!

The word sounded painful, like someone talking about a prison sentence.

We hadn't officially opened yet, but a colleague had called from the customs point and asked if we could take them in, so we put them up on the two floors for vulnerable people.

The little girl had been born three days after they left home, in war conditions. What terror the young mother must have experienced. Roman's heart must have been torn between a duty to fight on the one hand, and so many vulnerable people to protect on the other.

When they got out of the car with their luggage, they said they just wanted to sleep. After the first night they told me it was so quiet in our house. But the little girl was restless, and the old man, whose eyesight was failing, wasn't talking to anyone. He had experienced war as a teenager. Now, leaning on his cane with the burden of old age and a life experience he could not leave behind, he moved awkwardly from one couch to another.

The first day in the centre meant baths for Iovana and a baby massage by our [Parentis](#) team. In fact, we all revolved around them. The next morning they were more rested after a full night's sleep when the little one hadn't even woken up for feeding.

Then, a few peaceful days followed - with a talkative and sweet grandmother, a discreet and pleasant mum, and a sweet newborn. Roman quickly started to come to the help of other refugees, helping in any way he could, probably feeling that he was giving back what he had received. We washed and hung laundry together, told stories. The old man brightened up enough to answer greetings and show up perfectly on time for meals.

The balance was broken again after a few days when Roman's mother, wife and little girl tried to leave for Belgium. At the airport they found that only his mother could leave. The wife did not have a biometric passport.

I don't want to know how the woman who left behind her son, granddaughter and father felt. When Roman returned with the child in his arms, we were all upset. In the end they found a way for the young mother and the baby girl to leave. Only the men remained, silent and dejected, each alone with his own thoughts and helplessness. Soon they were on the road again. They left behind the memory of a refugee turned colleague for a little while, the joy experienced by all of us the morning the mother said the little girl had calmed down and slept unturned, and a thank-you note by Roman, expressing the immense joy of having witnessed the miracle called Iovana - the child who stubbornly insisted to be born when others were dying.



## [HUNGARY: Helping in any way we can](#)

**By Zsolt Kükedi, EESC member, Hungary**

**As a delegate from an environmental organisation, I know there is very little room to discuss environmental issues in my country at the moment. People are busy facing the human tragedy and the huge influx of Ukrainian refugees, and appreciate even the smallest sign of interest and compassion and any help one can offer.**

Because of my regional development work, I know a lot of local mayors and county leaders who immediately and selflessly offered their community houses and common areas to refugees after the war began. There was a settlement of barely 700 people that took in more than one hundred Ukrainians. It has been giving them food ever since, keeping a roof over their heads and washing their clothes. Immediately after the

outbreak of the war, when I returned home from the EESC plenary session, I wrote to 18 local government members, mayors and county leaders in eastern Hungary asking what was happening to them and what we might be able to help them with from faraway Budapest. I did not plan on rushing to the border myself, as in the early days enthusiastic volunteers can be more of a hindrance than a help in humanitarian work.

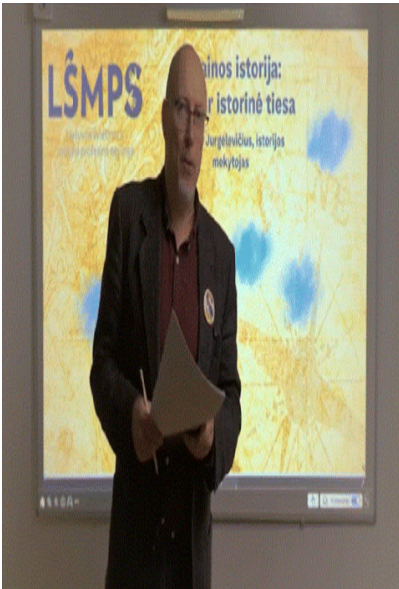
Nine of the 18 people I contacted responded. The others presumably didn't have time to read or reply to emails, which is completely understandable in this situation. Those who responded, however, said that my letter was reassuring to them. Just the fact that we were thinking of them and knowing that they could turn to us was very good to hear. Someone asked for money because they needed blankets and detergents. Someone redirected me to where donations were requested. But overall, they promised to get in touch if the situation stabilised and they could no longer bear it financially or personally.

We also took part in another form of help: collecting medical supplies and delivering them to those in need who were unable to obtain them in this situation. We delivered stoma bags from my wife's workplace. Stoma bags are special containers for people who are unable to excrete their bodily waste naturally due to a defect or disease affecting some parts of the digestive or urinary tract. Bodily waste is excreted through an opening, or stoma, in a specific location in the abdominal wall. Patients need a new bag every day. Transporting these vital bags was something we had not expected to do. However, our lives are complex enough to understand that in a situation like this, we also have to make unusual donations.

In our section meetings at the EESC we discussed the Ukrainian-Russian war and its impact. I was asked to call a speaker from the battlefield and a nuclear expert to understand the threat surrounding Ukrainian nuclear power stations. As I have a lot of personal acquaintances in Ukraine due to my development work, I managed to connect with **Serhii Prokopenko**, a young man from Kharkiv, an innovation and entrepreneurship specialist, consultant and economic researcher. He reported straight from the battlefield, from a bunker in Kharkiv where he had been sheltering following the bombing of the area shortly before our meeting. He alternated with the Hungarian nuclear expert who came after him as the internet connection stalled. Dr **Zsolt Hetesi**, senior research fellow at the National University of Public Administration, has been involved in environmental, energy and sustainability research since 2005. Previously, as one of the leaders of the Research Group on Sustainable Development and Resources, he had talked a lot about the crisis resulting from overpopulation and over-consumption of resources. As an expert on resource depletion, he talked about the situation, vulnerability and chances of a potential nuclear disaster at any of the four nuclear power plants in Ukraine. He tried to reassure the audience that for the time being the world did not seem to be in immediate danger from these nuclear power plants. This presentation was followed by Serhii, and as he spoke we could feel the reality of war. He received a big round of applause. The section sympathised sincerely with his account, and we were unable to focus on business as usual.

I feel that this is also a humanitarian task: to connect with the people who are isolated by the war and to throw away our apparent sense of security so that the wind of reality can reach us and we feel that there is something we can do too, even from afar.

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## [LITHUANIA: An open lesson about Ukrainian history](#)

**By Tatjana Babrauskienė, EESC member, Lithuania**

**The Lithuanian education community is observing the current large-scale and very aggressive military actions by Russia in Ukraine with deep sadness and disbelief and has launched an initiative to teach the younger generation about the myths and reality regarding Ukraine's history.**

It is very important to understand the roots of and reasons for the recent unprecedented aggression. One of them is the information war organised by Russia, which incorporates elements of propaganda, disinformation and fake news about Ukraine.

The Lithuanian Education and Science Trade Union (LSMPS-LESTU) has organised a campaign to counter the information war and support Ukraine in Lithuanian schools. On 28 February, we invited teachers of all subjects and leaders of educational institutions to give their first lesson in support of Ukraine and the truth about its history.

**Audrius Jurgelevičius**, deputy chair of LSMPS/LESTU and a history teacher, gave an open history lesson covering a century of Ukrainian history and the origins of statehood. We broadcast the lesson live online and all Lithuanian schools could join in.

The lesson had three goals: to show, first, that the people living in Ukraine, Ukrainians, are an independent nation and not Russians, and, second, that Ukrainians have been building their own history and their own state, which they are now managing. If they created it themselves, they should be grateful to no one for having a state; and if they owe nobody for having their state, no one has the right to take it away. The third purpose of this lesson was to uncover certain myths that sometimes turn into lies when talking about the history of Ukraine.

The lesson has already been translated into Russian, Polish and English and shared with all continents via the Lithuanian diaspora and Education International.

We prepared stickers and invited pupils to print and display them during the lesson to express their support for Ukraine. We also asked them to capture moments from the lesson and send us the images. We have shared these moments with the Ukrainian educational community, along with a declaration of support and solidarity.

It is very important that we stand united. We cannot allow history to be rewritten.

The lesson with English subtitles is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0lu8AM0o8c&t=17s>

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## LITHUANIA: How civil society has been mobilising for Ukraine

**By Emilis Ruželė, EESC member, Lithuania**

**By early March, the Lithuanian people had donated more than EUR 12 million. My organisation, Investors' Forum, has donated EUR 1000 and our member companies have donated more than EUR 300 000 to various organisations helping Ukraine.**

A volunteer organisation, Stiprūs Kartu (Stronger together), is helping with finding transportation, accommodation and other resources for refugees from Ukraine. Investors' Forum has made half of its office in Vilnius available to help, and is ready to host a family of refugees there. I personally have made a room in my own apartment available to accept refugees.

Finally, in Vilnius people are protesting outside the Russian Embassy every day.



## PORTUGAL: Public demonstrations say "No to war! Yes to peace!"

**By Fernando Manuel Maurício de Carvalho, EESC member, Portugal**

**A public demonstration took place in Largo de Camões, Lisbon, on 10 March, in pouring rain, with protesters speaking out against war, sanctions and those who profit from selling arms or use war as an excuse to militarise. Demonstrations were also held elsewhere in the country.**

Protesters in Lisbon carried blue or white flags featuring a hand-drawn dove and the word "peace". "Stop the war, give peace a chance" was the message that stood out at the event, which featured several speeches. These speeches included one by **João Coelho**, from the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP-IN), who condemned the

"war hawks" coming together in Europe to increase weaponry, and those who were now getting rich selling arms.

CGTP-IN expressed its solidarity with workers and peoples who are victims of war and, in particular, with those in Ukraine. CGTP-IN's actions have always been driven by the principles of standing up for peace and condemning war, stressing the need to stop war and to give peace a chance.

We call for a path of dialogue to build a peaceful solution to the conflict. War is not a solution, and our concern is for the workers and people of Ukraine, and of all countries, as they are the first and main group affected by war and destruction.

We believe that in order to stand up for peace, we need to fight militarism and the arms race, while focusing on a peaceful solution that involves establishing agreements or mechanisms for dialogue based on mutual trust, cooperation and the security of Europe's countries and peoples. There is therefore an urgent need to put an end to the ongoing military escalation.

Imposing sanctions does not stop war and has damaging consequences for workers and people, both in the countries affected and elsewhere. Sanctions against countries such as Iraq have shown these effects and the resulting deterioration in living conditions, along with the repercussions for other countries. This requires measures to be taken now to tackle attacks on rights that jeopardise workers' living conditions.

CGTP-IN points out that there is a need to ensure full support for refugees, while combating all forms of racism and xenophobia, and stresses the need for humanitarian support to address the challenges facing people in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.

We once again express our solidarity with peoples who are victims of war, in particular the people and workers of Ukraine, but also those in Palestine and Western Sahara, Yemen, Somalia, Syria and Afghanistan. At the same time, we underline that the path to peace must be built in accordance with international law and within the UN framework.

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## [VIDEO - Ionuț Sibian "Our house should be their house"](#)

Listen to EESC member **Ionuț Sibian** describe the massive mobilisation of Romanian civil society for the Ukrainian refugees seeking shelter from the war, and encourage the whole of European civil society to welcome their Ukrainian neighbours: "This is the message we should give to the outside world: Our house in Brussels should be their house. We are here and we will take care of our colleagues from Ukraine to offer them a safety net, moral support and whatever is needed".

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## [VIDEO - Antje Gerstein: European solidarity in action](#)

Watch Germany's **Antje Gerstein** as she describes German civil society's very concrete help for Ukrainians refugees.

"Our quick mobilisation to support Ukraine, its people, its businesses and civil society with concrete gestures makes me proud. Several German retail and food companies delivered 4000 tonnes of food to Ukraine. This is European solidarity in action".

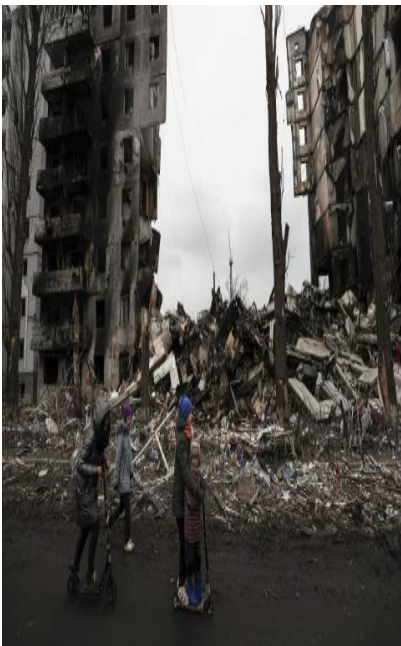
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## [VIDEO - Salgado Manuel Garcia Spain: UGT donates percentage of budget to humanitarian aid](#)

**In this video Spanish EESC member Salgado Manuel Garcia calls for "peace, solidarity and respect" as he announces his trade union's pledge to help war-stricken Ukrainians.**

"On behalf of the Unión General de Trabajadores, the major Trade Union in Spain, we fully condemn the invasion of Ukraine by Vladimir Putin's armed forces. This is not only an attack on the founding values of the European Union, but also an attack on civilians. We call urgently for solidarity and humanitarian aid".

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## [VIEWS: A political, economic and strategic response to the war in Ukraine](#)

**By Cinzia del Rio, EESC member, Italy**

**The Russian invasion of Ukraine will change the geo-political and economic relations in the world, and most certainly between Russia and the EU. The outrageous military intervention, which is causing victims among civilians and destruction of the country's cities and civil and economic structures, has been firmly and strongly condemned by the democratic international community and by the trade union movement.**

We have expressed our full support to the Ukrainian people, we have organised demonstrations against Putin and his unprovoked war and we support the introduction of severe economic sanctions against Russia, which should put pressure on the regime. After a month and a half, the

atrocities continue, humanitarian corridors have proven difficult, millions of Ukrainian people have left the country to look for shelter in EU countries, many more are displaced inside Ukraine and the negotiations on a ceasefire and peace process are behind.

Civil society organisations, trade unions and NGOs across the EU, and notably in countries bordering Ukraine, have shown their unconditional solidarity, providing refugees with immediate help, medical care, shelter, food, clothes and medicine. The [Temporary Protection Directive](#) was fundamental in guaranteeing them protection and rights in the EU, helping them to cope with the emergency and to integrate into our societies as much as possible. Moreover, we must bear in mind that 80% of the refugees are women and children, who are experiencing for the first time the cruelty and violence of war, with psychological consequences that will mark them forever. The EU will have to be vigilant to ensure the protection of these vulnerable groups and address the risk of human trafficking and sexual exploitation as well.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has consolidated Ukraine's national identity, its geopolitical orientation towards the Western democracies and accelerated the start of the EU accession process; it has reunited - with solid relations - the EU and the USA, strengthened NATO on Ukraine's borders, and brought together EU countries which have reacted with unanimous condemnation of the Russian invasion and the brutality of war. But, after a first package of EU sanctions, recently extended to coal imports, a common decision on banning imports especially of gas and oil is today impossible, because it would mean Europe having to quickly look for alternative sources of supply in order not to make its economic survival dependent on Russia. But we are not ready yet, we need the unanimity of European governments, and the impact of a total blockade of Russian energy imports on national GDP for some countries would be dramatic.

It would mean the closure of enterprises and loss of jobs after the pandemic crisis. It will take time, of course, for a total embargo on gas and hydrocarbons, but the path has been set and previous economic relations with Russia have been set aside forever. In this context, however, the EU has a responsibility to save what is left of the Ukrainian economy, in order to avoid a long-lasting catastrophe for years to come and open a concrete dialogue with Ukraine regarding the accession process, without harming the ongoing accession process of the Western Balkans.

The EU has to establish compensation measures to address the negative economic and social repercussions of the conflict and the related sanctions on our countries. We cannot ignore that sanctions on Russia will impact on EU sustainable development targets, which we agreed alongside the investments of the Next Generation EU package. But we need to maintain the commitments made on the green and digital transitions and ensure a better social dimension in Europe.

The war also has serious consequences for global and European food supplies. It will worsen even further the already difficult situation for European farmers and consumers, due to rising prices. We must focus on measures to ensure food security in the EU, both in the short-term after the invasion and in the longer run. In the meantime, we should not ignore the war's strong impact on food supplies in non-EU countries as well. A new social and economic crisis must be avoided, and speculators of food and oil prices must be stopped and measures to tax their additional profits should be considered.

But the priority is to stop the war and find a way for the negotiations and peace process to take off. The EU should become a real geopolitical actor, the leading actor at the table, because its future is at stake. China and Turkey have their political and economic advantages in these negotiations, but they are not the champions of democracy and respect for fundamental human rights. This marks a turning point in the EU's story, with political, economic and strategic implications for the entire world. The EU must take on new responsibilities and move towards stronger political integration: we cannot have a common defence system without a common foreign policy and stronger and more cohesive political integration. Any move towards integrated defence must come with a clear democratic control over such a system.

The risk of a war within Europe should push EU governments to work towards a clear political integration process in the framework of CoFoE.

The EU has its values to defend and protect and has a responsibility to preserve the peace we have guaranteed in Europe over the past 70 years.



## [VIEWS: A Key Moment for Civil Society in Europe](#)

**By Andris Gobiņš, EESC member, Latvia**

**Each and every one of us can contribute to faster and more sustainable freedom. Here are some ideas on how to do it, based on my experience of growing up in a refugee family in exile and now working in Latvia.**

1. We have to understand our goals and act accordingly.

It is clear. The sooner Ukraine is fully freed from Russia's occupation and terror, the less murder, rape, torture, suffering and damage there will be. And the less negative impact there will be on the rest of Europe.

We have to do whatever it takes (yes, "whatever it takes") to help Ukraine win this war against terror and save the future of the EU and

Europe. And yes, we as civil society can contribute to it via pressure/discussions on our decision-makers and through better action and stronger links with civil society organisations.

2. Possible demands from civil society to governments includes:

- demanding action from politicians (including those who are members of your organisation or friends of it). All necessary arms must be delivered and full and strong sanctions must be enforced. There is no place for any appeasement. – This is what we must do.
- establishing strong action limiting the spread of and countering fake news and manipulation. – Stronger EU action needed.
- developing a Peace, Recovery and resilience mechanism for Ukraine and the Member States on the EU's Eastern border, making it the most stable and prosperous region in the world.

3. Possible action within and for civil society includes:

- boycotting all imports from Russia, including energy, and companies that continue to cooperate with or in Russia and buying Ukrainian products. – We have to do more here.
- joining the non-formal network of trade unions who refuse to load/unload Russian ships etc., CSOs who cooperate with Ukraine or serve its refugees. – let's take action in all these areas!
- including Ukrainian topics and representatives from Ukrainian organisations in all your meetings in your organisations and networks, as we did in EESC sections and in our plenary. – Let's keep up this good work.

Conclusions. - there must not be the slightest gains/benefits for the aggressor, Russia. The EU will gain the most if Ukraine becomes a Member State.

As we say very clearly in our Resolution, the EESC "believes it is of the utmost importance to the EU and the international community that no borders be changed through military means, and that no benefits be gained

by the aggressor. The rule of law must be upheld, not the rights of the strongest, and full reparations paid to Ukraine." Everything else would do great harm to the EU and to world peace, and would be linked to an unimaginably high cost, both human and financial.

I believe Ukraine must and will become a fully-fledged EU Member State very soon. The EU will be stronger and, yes, also better with Ukraine within it. And there are no doubts about sufficient motivation for the remaining reforms needed in Ukraine and the great positive impact on values and the related politics in the EU.

Incidentally, in Latvia, CSOs are leading an initiative to plant #UkraineSolidarity and #UkraineInTheEU sunflowers on 9 May, Europe Day. Key EU institutions and others will be taking part, so please join in!.

## Editors

Ewa Haczyk-Plumley (editor-in-chief)  
Daniela Marangoni (dm)

## Contributors to this issue

Amalia Tsoumani (at)  
Agata Berdys (ab)  
Ewa Haczyk-Plumley (ehp)  
Giorgia Battiato (gb)  
Thomas Kersten (tk)

## Coordination

Agata Berdys (ab)  
Giorgia Battiato (gb)

Technical support  
Bernhard Knoblach (bk)

## Address

European Economic and Social Committee  
Jacques Delors Building,  
99 Rue Belliard,  
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel. (+32 2) 546.94.76  
Email: [eescinfo@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:eescinfo@eesc.europa.eu)

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