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**The European Economic and Social Committee sends a strong message that support to Ukrainian civil society must continue for "as long as it takes"**

**Just one day before the anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted a resolution calling for Ukraine's swift accession to the EU in full respect of enlargement** **principles. The EESC supports establishing a special international tribunal on crimes of aggression against Ukraine, and points out that support to civil society must continue for "as long as it takes".**

On Thursday 23 February 2023, the EESC adopted its third resolution on Ukraine at its plenary session, entitled [***Ukraine: One year after the Russian invasion – the European civil society perspective***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/presentations/ukraine-one-year-after-russian-invasion-european-civil-society-perspective), and hosted a debate on the impact of the war on people in Ukraine and in the EU. Guest speakers included **Oleksandra Matviichuk**, head of Ukraine's Centre for Civic Liberties and Nobel Peace laureate for 2022, and **Lora Pappa**, founder and president of the Greek NGO METAdrasi – Action for Migration Development.

In its resolution, the EESC advocates for Ukraine's accession to the European Union. "We are facing the fight of democracy against autocracy," stated EESC president **Christa Schweng**. "We call for a swift accession process for Ukraine to the EU in full respect of enlargement principles, and targeted support for Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery. Ukrainian civil society and Ukrainian citizens remain the highest priority for the EESC".

The resolution calls for establishing a special international tribunal on crimes of aggression against Ukraine, as well as sanctions against the Russian Federation, in line with the European Parliament's position. In an emotional speech, **Ms Matviichuk** reported the unprecedented number of war crimes and atrocities committed by Russian troops. So far, 31000 war crimes have been documented, and hundreds of survivors interviewed. "It is time to transform will into decision and empower legal procedures, because sustainable peace is impossible without justice. We must break the cycle of impunity in order to save other nations from what the Ukrainian people have experienced",she said.

**Seamus Boland**, President of the Civil Society Organisations Group, added: "We also support the calls for recognising the Russian Federation as a state sponsor of terrorism and for establishing a special international tribunal on crimes of aggression against Ukraine. Finally, the Wagner Group must be included on the EU terrorist list".

One year since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, employer and worker organisations and civil society at large – both in Ukraine and abroad – have given their support to 8 million refugees and 6 million internally displaced people. However, fatigue is starting to become apparent. As pointed out by **Ms Pappa**, "we need to fight war fatigue and find ways to keep on raising awareness of humanitarian values and EU principles".

The EU must do everything in its power to prevent desensitisation to war and its atrocities. It is important to continue to provide assistance and concrete help to civil society organisations. **Oliver Röpke**, president of the Workers' Group, stressed: "Our first and foremost task is to support and reinforce cooperation with civil society organisations in Ukraine. Ukrainian civil society shouldn't be guests here, they should be at home".The EESC therefore recommends setting up a mechanism to empower Ukrainian civil society, by providing funding and facilitating its participation in EU civil society networks, and by supporting the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform under the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, including Brussels-based umbrella networks and Ukrainian diaspora organisations.

The EESC acknowledges that reconstructing Ukraine will be immense and calls for the involvement of social partners and organised civil society organisations in devising, implementing and monitoring reconstruction and recovery plans. The EESC calls for re-establishing social dialogue in Ukraine under martial law, despite the challenges it might present, and welcomes the recent positive tripartite agreements on the labour law reforms in Ukraine, and the expected improvement of legislative provisions on collective agreement.

In the same vein, we must also help Ukrainian businesses. They should not only have access to the single market, but also be allowed to benefit from key EU programmes.

It is clear that civil society will be a pillar of the post-war recovery. They are imperative and will guarantee transparency and fairness and ensure that resources are deployed where they are needed most. On this, **Stefano Mallia**, president of the Employers' Group, said: "Civil society is ready to do whatever it takes and for however long it takes to support Ukraine on the way to recovery. Peace and justice must prevail".

**Séamus Boland**