

President

To the Permanent Representations of the member States
of the Council of Europe

Strasbourg, 7 April 2022

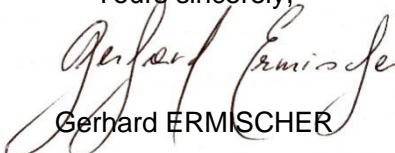
We are witnesses to a return of war in Europe on a scale and brutality that nobody would have envisaged before the unprovoked aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, a sovereign State, member of the Council of Europe. The scale of crimes against civilians evidenced by the images and reports which have come to light from towns like Bucha and Irpin have led to sorrow and outrage in the whole civilized world. It is in this context that the Conference of International Nongovernmental Organizations (CINGO) of the Council of Europe held its General Assembly on April 5 and 6 in Strasbourg. The members heard heart-rending interventions during this Conference by the Mayor of Lviv, representatives of Ukrainian civil society as well as refugees and citizens of Ukraine suffering from the consequences of this war.

Many of our member organisations are working in the field with Ukrainian refugees, helping to set up care and school classes for Ukrainian children in their mother tongue, providing shelter, physical and psychological aid. Many of them also still work directly in Ukraine together with grassroots NGOs and ad hoc networks to deliver humanitarian aid and provide support for the people in Ukraine who are enduring the most incredible hardship and suffering.

We are convinced that the fight of the Ukrainian people is not just to protect their own country and freedom, but it is genuinely a struggle for the values the Council of Europe stands for: Democracy, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law. The success of Ukraine in this struggle is directly linked to the willingness of all of Europe to resist attempts to undermine our continent's democracies and democratic developments in general. The Conference of INGOs therefore supports the ever louder calls from across Europe to our member States, not only to aid Ukrainian refugees, not only to provide military and humanitarian aid, but to help the Ukrainian people with measures that truly cripple the ability of the aggressor to continue committing its crimes by ceasing to buy gas and oil from Russia.

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, told the European Parliament on 6 April that the EU has paid €35 billion for Russian energy since the start of the war compared to the €1 billion it has sent to Ukraine in the form of foreign aid. This money serves to finance the bombs, missiles and grenades which kill Ukrainian civilians in their houses, schools, and hospitals. These billions keep the Russian tanks moving and destroying Ukrainian villages, towns, and cities. As the voice of civil society in the Council of Europe, the Conference of INGOs understands that these measures come with a price for the citizens and the States which implement them. We deeply believe, however, that this is a price which we should be willing to pay in support and solidarity with the Ukrainian people who are suffering death and destruction while defending our rights and freedoms.

Yours sincerely,


Gerhard ERMISCHER