



International and European human rights law as a tool to defend peace and democracy

Introduction

The aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation has fundamentally changed the situation in Europe and the world, particularly in military, political, economic and humanitarian terms, and with severe social implications. The war is an attack not only on the sovereignty of Ukraine and the freedom of its people, but also on international law and a rules-based world order guided by peace, democracy, human rights and dignity.

This PEACE WATCH briefing note focuses on the reactions by and actions brought before human rights law institutions at international (the UN, including e.g. the ILO) and European (the Council of Europe and the European Union) level in response to the invasion by the Russian Federation in Ukraine. It outlines the mobilisation of European and international legal instruments to ensure that human rights, including trade union and workers' rights, are effectively protected and respected. The briefing note also provides information on the various statements and actions launched by the European and national trade union organisations, mobilising human rights law in response to the war.

The response by the international and European community has been strong and united, with **key messages and targeted actions** to recall applicable human rights instruments and to mobilise existing cooperation structures:

- **Condemning in the strongest terms possible the unjustified and unprovoked attack** on Ukraine by the Russian Federation, causing loss of life and immense human suffering. Calling on Russia to withdraw immediately its military forces from Ukraine.
- **Condemning the violations of human rights and international law** resulting from the Russian aggression.
- **Raising deepest concerns about violence against civilians** including vulnerable groups such as women, children, elderly and persons with disabilities. Condemning attacks on civilian facilities, such as residences, schools and hospitals.
- **Expressing worry about the increasingly difficult situation of Ukrainians** without or with limited access to food, healthcare, water, sanitation, electricity and other interconnected services essential for survival.
- **Urging immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access** in Ukraine, as well as safe corridors to ensure assistance, supplies and evacuation.
- **Calling to stop attacks on humanitarian, emergency and health care workers**, protected by international humanitarian law.



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- **Underlining the need to provide safety and protection** to refugees and displaced persons fleeing from the war in Ukraine. Recalling the importance of gender-sensitive reception procedures and support services for women and girls, who are particularly vulnerable in conflict, threatened by physical and sexual violence.
- **Raising concerns about increased risks of abuse and human trafficking**, as organised crime groups look to exploit the desperation of individuals fleeing the war.
- **Denouncing Russia's use of disinformation and misinformation** to legitimise its unjustifiable attack on Ukraine. Criticising the government's censorship laws intended to gag critics and human rights defenders and blindfold the Russian population.
- **Expressing solidarity with workers and employers** of Ukraine. Recalling that working people are among the first victims in conflict, causing devastation of jobs, enterprises and livelihoods, and requiring all possible assistance.
- **Promoting efforts to document and raise awareness about the war** in Ukraine, including initiatives to identify human rights violations. Recognising the need to support civil society organisations in Ukraine.
- **Setting up independent international inquiries and investigations** to establish facts, circumstances and root causes of violations and abuses. Imposing urgent measures in response to the massive human rights violations committed by Russia in Ukraine.
- **Calling for those responsible to be held accountable** for their actions in breach of international law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, crime of aggression or genocide.
- **Suspending and/or expelling Russia** from membership (Council of Europe) and/or rights of representation and participation in international organisations and cooperation networks. Considering the Russian human rights violations in Ukraine incompatible with its commitments under international law.

One note of caution, this briefing note captures a dynamic situation which is subject to ongoing change. We therefore kindly ask affiliates to provide us with further information on any further related measures that have been introduced in your country so that we can update this briefing note.

This briefing note was originally produced on 25 March 2022 and updated on 1 April 2022 to take account of the recent developments at the level of the Council of Europe, the European Union as well as European and national trade union responses in defence of human rights.



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I. International level

Representing a fundamental attack on the basic principles of the UN, the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has provoked an ongoing series of reactions by the UN, its institutions and specialised agencies like the International Labour Organisation ([ILO](#)) as well as courts like the International Court of Justice ([ICI](#)) and the International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)).

The site [UN News](#) provides access to all media updates on Ukraine from the United Nations and the UN system.

i. **United Nations General Assembly (UN)**

Failing a decision by the Security Council on 28 February 2022 because of the [veto](#) of the Russian Federation, the General Assembly subsequently adopted a resolution on Ukraine. Alongside with this development other UN institutions have dealt with the international human rights law aspects like the Human Rights Council and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly [adopted](#) a [Resolution](#) on 2 March 2022 demanding that Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine.

Known informally as the world’s “town hall”, the Assembly is where all 193 UN Member States have a voice. A total of 141 countries [voted](#) in favour of the Resolution, which reaffirms Ukrainian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Only 5 UN Member States voted against: Russia, Belarus, DPRK (North Korea), Eritrea and Syria. 35 Member States abstained and, 12 did not participate in the vote.

The Resolution demands that Russia “*immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraws all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.*” It was sponsored by more than 90 countries and needed a two-thirds majority in the Assembly to pass. The Resolution reflects the international community’s grave concerns about the situation in Ukraine. UN Member States also express their concern about “*reports of attacks on civilian facilities such as residences, schools and hospitals, and of civilian casualties, including women, older persons, persons with disabilities, and children*”.



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UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), [who also addressed reporters](#), stated he was duty bound to stand by the resolution and be guided by its call. “*The message of the General Assembly is loud and clear: End hostilities in Ukraine now. Silence the guns now. Open the door to dialogue and diplomacy now.*” “*Looking ahead, I will continue to do everything in my power to contribute to an immediate cessation of hostilities and urgent negotiations for peace,*” Mr. Guterres stated.

“*People in Ukraine desperately need peace. And people around the world demand it.*” For Ukraine’s Ambassador to the UN, Sergiy Kyslytsya, this was “a defining day,” recalling words from his statement in the Assembly.

The draft resolution is available [here](#). The adopted resolution is not yet available at the official UN websites. However, an online version of is published [here](#).

On 24 March, the General Assembly adopted a further [Resolution](#) recognizing that the Russian Federation’s military offensive inside Ukraine — and its humanitarian consequences — are on a scale that the international community has not seen in Europe in many decades. Adopted with 140 in favour to 5 against (Eritrea, Russian Federation, Syria, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Belarus) and 38 abstentions, the Assembly demands amongst full protection for civilians, including humanitarian personnel, journalists and persons in vulnerable situations, women and children among them. It further demanded full respect for — and protection of — all medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their equipment and means of transportation, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities. The Resolution was also [welcomed](#) by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, in a [statement](#) issued on behalf of the EU27.

ii. UN Human Rights Council (HRC)

In a [Resolution adopted](#) on 4 March 2022, the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva agreed to establish a commission to investigate violations committed during Russia’s military attack on Ukraine. 32 UN Member States voted in favour of the Resolution, which was presented by Ukraine. Russia and Eritrea voted against it, while 13 nations abstained.

In its Resolution, the Council condemned in the strongest possible terms the human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law resulting from the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine and called upon the Russian Federation to immediately end its human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law in Ukraine. The Council called for the swift and verifiable withdrawal of Russian Federation troops and Russian-backed armed groups from the entire territory of Ukraine, within its internationally recognised borders, as well as its territorial waters. The Council also urged immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access.



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The Council decided to urgently establish an independent international commission of inquiry, constituted by three human rights experts, to be appointed by the President of the Human Rights Council for an initial duration of one year, with the following mandate: to, among other things, investigate all alleged violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, and related crimes, in the context of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, and to establish the facts, circumstances, and root causes of any such violations and abuses; and to make recommendations, in particular on accountability measures, all with a view to ending impunity and ensuring accountability .

iii. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [reiterated](#) deep concern on 11 March 2022 at the increasing number of civilian casualties in Ukraine following the Russian invasion. It reminded Moscow that any targeting of non-combatants could be a war crime.

“Civilians are being killed and maimed in what appear to be indiscriminate attacks, with Russian forces using explosive weapons with wide area effects in or near populated areas,” said the [OHCHR](#).

In a [press release](#) on 11 March 2022 by the OHCHR, an independent expert appointed by the Human Rights Council described Russia's recent adoption of a punitive “fake war news” law as an alarming move by the government to gag and blindfold an entire population: *“While the Government claims that the purpose of the new legislation is to protect the ‘truth’ about what it euphemistically calls a ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine, in reality the law places Russia under a total information blackout on the war and in so doing gives an official seal of approval to disinformation and misinformation”*.

iv. International Labour Organisation (ILO)

In a [statement](#) on 3 March, the Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Guy Ryder, condemned *“the unprovoked and unjustifiable attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine conducted without regard to international law, and the continuing loss of life, and immense human suffering that it is inflicting on the people of Ukraine.”* He echoed the UN General Assembly (see above) in demanding that Russia immediately ceases its use of force and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

He furthermore considered that the situation in Ukraine *“stands among the darkest chapters in the ILO’s century long history and a brutal repudiation of our organization’s mission to promote peace through social justice. Those responsible for the aggression know full well that among its first victims will be working people and that the devastation of jobs, enterprises and*



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livelihoods will be massive and endure for many years.” “The ILO’s duty is to stand in solidarity with the government, workers, and employers of Ukraine and to join with the rest of the United Nations system in providing all possible assistance to them”, he stated.

On 24 March, the Governing Body of the ILO adopted a [resolution](#) on the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine with 42 for, two votes against and eight abstentions (and four countries that did not participate in the vote). The 27-paragraph resolution expresses amongst others the following:

- Calls upon the Russian Federation to immediately and unconditionally cease its aggression, withdraw its troops from Ukraine, end the suffering it is inflicting on the people of Ukraine, as well as refrain from any further unlawful threat or use of force against any Member State and take the path of peaceful resolution consistent with the UN Charter and international law;
- Demands all parties to allow safe and unhindered passage to safe destinations outside of Ukraine, including for seafarers, and urges immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for those in need;
- Urges all Members to take measures, in accordance with national and applicable international law, to protect and ensure labour rights and a safe environment for all those fleeing Ukraine, in particular all those in vulnerable situations;
- Makes a pressing appeal to all constituents, to consider the adoption of appropriate measures to urge the Russian Federation to respect in full its duties and obligations arising from ILO membership, as well as cease violations and abuses preventing fulfilment of labour rights in Ukraine;
- Decides, while safeguarding the ILO’s technical cooperation or assistance to all other countries within the purview of the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team and Country Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, to temporarily suspend technical cooperation or assistance from the ILO to the Russian Federation, except for the purpose of humanitarian assistance, until a ceasefire is agreed and a peaceful resolution is implemented;
- Requests the International Labour Office to explore options to safeguard the technical cooperation or assistance to all other countries in the aforementioned region, including the possible relocation of the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team and Country Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia to an area outside of the Russian Federation;
- Decides to suspend invitations to the Russian Federation to attend all discretionary meetings, such as technical meetings and meetings of experts, conferences and seminars whose composition is set by the Governing Body.



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v. **UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)**

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees on 3 March 2022 issued a statement calling for peace, dialogue and diplomacy. *“In just seven days, one million people have fled Ukraine, uprooted by this senseless war. I have worked in refugee emergencies for almost 40 years, and rarely have I seen an exodus as rapid as this one”*, he stated.

Following the decision by EU Member States on 3 March 2022, the UNHCR also [welcomed](#) the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive [2001/55/EC](#). The UNHCR urged Member States to *“swiftly implement the Directive to continue to provide those fleeing the violence with much needed safety and protection – as the situation in the country continues to deteriorate and numbers of people fleeing continue to rise. This is fast becoming Europe’s largest refugee crisis this century.”*

vi. **Other UN specialised agencies**

The World Health Organisation ([WHO](#)) has called in [several statements](#) on Russia to respect international humanitarian law, in particular by stopping attacks on health workers and health facilities and to ensure that safe corridors are created to ensure the delivery of medical assistance and supplies and to allow safe, unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance for those in need.

Statements on Ukraine have also been issued by international organisations such as the [International Organization for Migration](#), [UN Women](#), [UNICEF](#), [UNESCO](#), [World Food Programme](#), [UN Food and Agriculture Organization](#), [UN Development Programme](#), [UN Population Fund](#), [International Atomic Energy Agency](#), [IMF](#) and the [World Bank](#).

vii. **International Court of Justice (ICJ)**

On 26 February 2022, Ukraine [launched a complaint](#) against the Russian Federation before the International Court of Justice, which is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. The case (*Ukraine v. Russian Federation*) concerns allegations of genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In its [application](#), Ukraine contends, inter alia, that *“the Russian Federation has falsely claimed that acts of genocide have occurred in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts of Ukraine, and on that basis recognized the so-called ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ and ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’, and then declared and implemented a ‘special military operation’ against Ukraine”*.

On 1 March, the ICJ announced that public hearings would be held on 7-8 March and [streamed online](#). The Russian Federation informed the Court that it *“ha[d] decided not to participate in the oral proceedings due”*, and submitted that the ICJ lacked competence in the case. Ukraine submitted that Russia should immediately suspend its military operations.



In response to Ukraine’s request, the Court on 16 March delivered an [Order](#) indicating the following provisional measures:

1. The Russian Federation shall immediately suspend the military operations that it commenced on 24 February 2022 in the territory of Ukraine;
2. The Russian Federation shall ensure that any military or irregular armed units which may be directed or supported by it, as well as any organizations and persons which may be subject to its control or direction, take no steps in furtherance of these military operations;
3. Both Parties shall refrain from any action which might aggravate or extend the dispute before the Court or make it more difficult to resolve.

The Order of the Court has binding effect, but whether in practice Russia will abide is in question.

viii. *International Criminal Court (ICC)*

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is an intergovernmental organisation that investigates and tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression. On 28 February 2022, the ICC Prosecutor announced he would seek authorisation to [open an investigation](#) into the situation in Ukraine.

On 1 March 2022, the ICC received a State Party referral from the Republic of Lithuania, followed by an additional 39 State Party referrals. Already on 2 March, however, its Prosecutor announced he had launched an investigation on the basis of referrals received. The scope of the investigation encompasses any past and present allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide committed on any part of the territory of Ukraine by any person from 21 November 2013 onwards. In other words, the ICC has jurisdiction on Ukrainian soil, despite the fact that Russia has never ratified the Statute of the Court.

On 15 November 2016, Russia in fact [withdrew](#) its signature from the Rome Statute which governs the International Criminal Court. The announcement came in reaction to the publication of an ICC [Report](#) which considered the Russian annexation of Crimean to be an ongoing occupation falling within the jurisdiction of the Court. Russia had signed the Rome Statue already in 2000, but eventually never ratified it.

On 16 March 2022, Liudmyla Denisova, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights [called](#) for the establishment of a “*special tribunal to punish war crimes in Ukraine*” during an [exchange](#) with the Sub-Committee on Human Rights of the European Parliament.



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ix. **International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)**

INTERPOL on 10 March issued a [statement](#), expressing its “*deepest sympathy and sorrow over the loss of life and suffering in connection with the conflict in Ukraine*”. The global police cooperation organisation also recalled its longstanding neutrality, even in situations when member countries are engaged in conflict.

Ukraine has [called](#) for the expulsion of Russia from INTERPOL, since Russia has long used INTERPOL red notices and diffusions to intimidate and threaten critics of the regime abroad. However, the INTERPOL Constitution does not provide for the suspension or exclusion of a member country, nor does its mandate include sanctions or punitive measures. Article 2 of the Constitution calls on the organisation to maintain police cooperation and ensure communication channels remain open.

Nevertheless, the Secretary General together with the Executive Committee has issued a decision to ensure heightened supervision and monitoring in relation to Russia, as regards “*potential misuse of INTERPOL’s channels to the targeting of individuals within or beyond the conflict in Ukraine*”. “*NCB Moscow must now send all diffusions to the General Secretariat to be checked for compliance with INTERPOL’s Rules. Only if a diffusion is found compliant will the General Secretariat then disseminate it to member countries.*” INTERPOL also recalls that each member country maintains full control over the information they decide to share with other countries.

At the same time, INTERPOL also underlines the importance of continued cooperation and information sharing to uphold global safety and security. “*In addition to the tragic loss of life, conflicts invariably lead to an increase in crime, with organized crime groups looking to exploit the desperation of individuals seeking safety, with an increased risk of abuse and trafficking, in addition to weapons smuggling and trafficking in illicit goods and medicines.*”

II. **European level**

i. **Council of Europe**

a. **Committee of Ministers (CM)**

On 25 February 2022, only a day after the attacks by the Russian Federation on Ukraine, at an extraordinary meeting and in line with Article 8 of the Statute of the Council of Europe¹, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in a joint committee meeting with the

¹ Article 8: Any member of the Council of Europe which has seriously violated Article 3 may be suspended from its rights of representation and requested by the Committee of Ministers to withdraw under Article 7. If such member does not comply with this request, the Committee may decide that it has ceased to be a member of the Council as from such date as the Committee may determine.



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Parliamentary Assembly and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, [decided to suspend](#) with immediate effect the Russian Federation from its rights of representation in the Committee of Ministers as well as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, as well as in any respective subsidiary organs or bodies thereof, such as the Steering Committee of Human Rights ([CDDH](#); and in which the ETUC has a permanent observer status).

At that moment, the Russian Federation remains member of the Council of Europe and party to the relevant Council of Europe conventions which it ratified, including the European Convention of Human Rights and European Social Charter. The Russian judge elected to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) still remained member of that Court and applications introduced against the Russian Federation continued to be examined and decided by the Court. (See also section on European Court of Human Rights below).

On 24 February, on the day of the launch of the attack itself, the Committee of Ministers had already [condemned](#) in the strongest terms the armed attack on Ukraine by the Russian Federation as being violation of international law. The legal and financial consequences of the suspension of the representation rights were then further clarified in a [Committee of Ministers' Resolution of 2 March](#) and extended to e.g. the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (and its subsidiary bodies). On the other hand, the suspension did not hamper the Commission for Human Rights as well as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) to continue to visit the country for work visits, nor did it exclude Russia from its obligation to continue to pay its financial contribution to the overall Council of Europe budget.

The suspension is not a final measure but a temporary one, leaving channels of communication open. However, based on Articles 7 and 8 of the Statute of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers can request the Member State also to withdraw itself from the Council of Europe. If such member does not comply with this request, the Committee of Ministers may decide that it has ceased to be a member of the Council of Europe as from the date as determined by the Committee of Ministers.

While the Committee of Ministers did not make such a request for withdrawal by Russia, it [decided on 10 March](#) during a meeting of the 46 ministers of foreign affairs to consult the Parliamentary Assembly to move towards a decision to expulse Russia as member of the Council of Europe (see below 'b. Parliamentary Assembly').

Following that opinion of the Parliamentary Assembly of 15 March, the Committee of Ministers [decided](#) in an extra-ordinary meeting on 16 March that the Russian Federation ceased to be a member of the Council of Europe as from that day, after 26 years of membership. It is important to note that the decision comes from the Council of Europe itself, as the Russian Federation tried to short-circuit the expulsion by announcing on 14 March, i.e. before the opinion of the Parliamentary Assembly (see below), that it had notified the Secretary General, under Article 7 of the Council of Europe Statutes, of its voluntary departure.



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In the wake of these developments, the Committee of Ministers also [decided](#) on 17 March to suspend all relations with Belarus as a result of the country's active participation in the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. In its decision, the Committee of Ministers suspends the rights of Belarus to participate in all meetings and activities of the Council of Europe. This also concerns Belarus' participation in partial agreements of the organisation, including the Venice Commission, but is without prejudice to the rights of Belarus as contracting party to international conventions. The Committee of Ministers also decided to cease all technical co-operation with Belarus. Nevertheless, the Committee decided to maintain and to enhance relations with the Belarusian civil society and the opposition in exile.

Following its decision of 16 March (see above), the Committee of Ministers clarified in a Resolution of 22 March the legal and financial consequences of the cessation of the Russian Federation membership to the Council of Europe. It entails amongst others the following:

- The Russian Federation no longer has any rights of representation in the Committee of Ministers and in the Parliamentary Assembly nor in any subsidiary organs or bodies thereof;
- The Russian Federation no longer has the right to be represented in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities nor in any subsidiary bodies thereof;
- Any participation by the Russian Federation in activities and programmes organised by or conferences convened by the Council of Europe is henceforth governed by the provisions in force or practices applicable to participation by non-member States. In light of the fact that the projects implemented by the Council of Europe Programme Office in Moscow have been discontinued, the conditions for maintaining the Office are no longer met;
- The Russian Federation ceases to be a member of several so-called partial agreements and enlarged agreements, including the European Commission for Democracy through Law ([Venice Commission](#)) and the Group of States against Corruption ([GRECO](#));
- The Russian Federation shall cease to be a High Contracting Party to the European Convention on Human Rights on 16 September 2022. In line with the Resolution of 22 March 2022 of the European Court of Human Rights, the Court remains competent to deal with applications directed against the Russian Federation in relation to acts or omissions capable of constituting a violation of the Convention provided that they occurred until 16 September 2022. The Committee of Ministers will continue to supervise the execution of the judgments and friendly settlements concerned and the Russian Federation is required to implement them. The Russian Federation is to continue to participate in the meetings of the Committee of Ministers when the latter supervises the execution of judgments with a view to providing and receiving information concerning the judgments where it is the respondent or applicant State, without the right to participate in the adoption of decisions by the Committee nor to vote.



However, on the other hand, the Russian Federation is bound to fulfil its full financial obligations arising out of its membership of the Council of Europe and of partial agreements, up to the date it ceased to be a member of the Organisation, including its contributions for 2022 determined on a pro rata temporis basis. It also remains liable for all arrears accrued at the date of termination of its membership.

b. Parliamentary Assembly (PACE)

The Parliamentary Assembly delivered its Opinion – with 216 in favour, 0 against and 3 abstentions, at its [extraordinary meeting on 14 and 15 March](#), in which it concluded that the Russian Federation “*committed grave violations of the Council of Europe Statute incompatible with the status of a member State, does not bear its undertakings before the Council of Europe and does not comply with the commitments before it*” and that therefore it considers that the Russian Federation “*can no longer be a Member State of the Organisation*”. Furthermore, in its [Opinion](#) the PACE:

- considers that the Russian Federation’s armed attack on Ukraine is in breach of the Charter of the United Nations, qualifies as a “crime against peace” under the Charter of the International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg Charter) and constitutes an “aggression” under the terms of Resolution 3314 (XXIX) of the United Nations General Assembly adopted in 1974. It is a violation of the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe;
- it is also a serious breach of Article 3 of the Statute of the Council of Europe and a violation of the obligations and commitments that the Russian Federation accepted upon becoming a member of the Organisation, including the commitments to settle international and internal disputes by peaceful means, rejecting resolutely any threats of force against its neighbours, and to denounce the concept of treating neighbouring States as a zone of special influence called the “near abroad”;
- is deeply disturbed by evidence of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by the Russian Federation, including attacks against civilian targets; indiscriminate use of artillery, missiles and bombs, including cluster bombs; attacks on humanitarian corridors intended to allow civilians to escape from besieged towns and cities; and hostage-taking. It notes with shock the reckless attacks by Russian armed forces on nuclear facilities in Ukraine;
- supports all efforts aimed at ensuring that those responsible are held accountable for their actions, including the decision by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to investigate the situation in Ukraine and the establishment of a special investigation commission by the United Nations Human Rights Council, and will evaluate the proposals to establish a special international criminal tribunal for war crimes committed during the war in Ukraine started by the Russian military aggression.



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It also welcomes other efforts to document possible crimes under international law committed in Ukraine, including through the publication of commercial satellite imagery, the analysis of this imagery and other forms of open-source intelligence by private actors. Similarly, it takes note of the application filed by Ukraine before the International Court of Justice instituting proceedings against the Russian Federation concerning a dispute relating to the interpretation, application and fulfilment of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

- regrets that the Russian Federation has failed to implement numerous decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, including its interim measures, asking the Russian Federation to refrain from military attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including residential premises, emergency vehicles and other specially protected civilian objects such as schools and hospitals, and to immediately ensure the safety of the medical establishments, personnel and emergency vehicles within the territory under attack or siege by Russian troops.

The PACE also asked the Committee of Ministers to request the Russian Federation “to *immediately withdraw from the Council of Europe*” and if Russia does not comply with the request, the Assembly suggests that the Committee of Ministers “*determines the immediate possible date*” from which the Russian Federation would cease to be a member.

Vis-à-vis other Council of Europe bodies, the PACE:

- invites the Commissioner for Human Rights to continue her efforts aimed at raising awareness about the situation of those fleeing Ukraine and those who remain in Ukraine, and to support initiatives aimed at documenting human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law in Ukraine, including through regular contact with her network of human rights defenders and civil society;
- invites the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to ask her Special Representative on Migration and Refugees to give priority, in her activities, to the situation of refugees and displaced persons fleeing from the war in Ukraine, also relying on the Network of Focal Points on Migration, and in the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021-2025); and
- encourages the European Court of Human Rights to consider giving priority to applications brought by Ukrainian citizens against the Russian Federation for acts committed in the temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine, taking into account the fact that these persons have no access to effective remedies against such acts at national level.

As the Russian Federation ceases to be a member of the Organisation, the Council of Europe should envisage initiatives to be able to continue to support and engage with human rights defenders, democratic forces, free media and independent civil society in the Russian Federation.



A general policy debate on the consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine will be at the centre of the spring plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), to be held in hybrid format from 25 to 28 April 2022.

On 15 March Women@PACE paid tribute to the outstanding courage and strength of women in Ukraine, and called for women's empowerment to ensure women's involvement in the peace process and at the negotiation table. This cross-party group for women MPs of the Parliamentary Assembly held an [exchange of views](#) on the need for support activities, such as collecting humanitarian aid, increasing refugee protection, organising debates in national parliaments and assisting local NGOs, especially those working on the ground.

c. European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)

On request by Ukraine and by Ukrainian citizens in relation to the situation in Ukraine, the ECtHR indicated urgent interim measures against the Russian Federation. It had also to deal with the consequences of the war situation in relation to cases coming from Ukraine and Russia.

Interim measures indicated to the Russian Government

Following a request from the Ukrainian Government of 28 February, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) indicated on 1 March [urgent interim measures](#) to the Russian Federation in relation to the "massive human rights violations" being committed by the Russian government and troops due to the invasion of Ukraine. Interim measures are urgent measures which apply only where there is an imminent risk of irreparable harm (Rule 39 of the Rules of the Court).

The ECtHR considers that the attacks on civilian population indeed give rise to real and continuing risk of serious violations of the European Convention of Human Rights, in particular under Articles 2 (right to life), 3 (prohibition of torture and inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment) and 8 (right to respect of private and family life). With a view to preventing such violations the Court has decided to indicate to the Government of Russia to refrain from military attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including residential premises, emergency vehicles and other specially protected civilian objects such as schools and hospitals, and to ensure immediately the safety of the medical establishments, personnel and emergency vehicles within the territory under attack or siege by Russian troops.

The Government of the Russian Federation was also requested to inform the Court as soon as possible of the measures taken to ensure that the Convention is fully complied with. The Court furthermore indicated that the interim measures already indicated to the Russian government in March 2014 following the case *Ukraine and the Netherlands versus Russia* remain in force and urged both the Ukrainian and Russian governments to comply with their engagements under the Convention.



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On 4 March, and due to the fact that, following its decision of 1 March, the Court has already received a number of requests for interim measures from individuals against the Russian government, in particular from persons taking refuge in shelters, houses and other buildings, fearing for their lives due to ongoing shelling and shooting, without or with limited access to food, healthcare, water, sanitation, electricity and other interconnected services essential for survival, in need of humanitarian assistance and safe evacuation, the Court [decided](#) that the interim measures of 1 March covered any request brought by persons falling into the above category of civilians who provide sufficient evidence showing that they face a serious and imminent risk of irreparable harm to their physical integrity and/or right to life and that the Government of the Russian Federation, in accordance with their engagements under the Articles 2, 3 and 8 of the Convention, should ensure unimpeded access of the civilian population to safe evacuation routes, healthcare, food and other essential supplies, rapid and unconstrained passage of humanitarian aid and movement of humanitarian workers. This was followed by the Court ordering interim measures versus Russia in some particular cases like the interim measures in the [case](#) of the Russian daily newspaper Novaya Gazeta.

Consequences for cases coming from Ukraine and the Russian Federation

On 2 March, and against the background of the war in Ukraine and following a request received from the Ukrainian government on 24 February 2022, the Court communicated several [procedural measures](#) to be applied in respect of cases in which Ukraine is a respondent or an applicant government including to “suspend the examination of all applications against Ukraine until further notice”.

On 10 March 2022, the ECtHR decided to take a number of [measures](#) which will now be applied in all cases concerning Russia until further notice owing to the disruption to the postal service since the start of March 2022.

Consequences of the cessation of membership of the Russian Federation

Following the expulsion of the Russian Federation from the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights in its plenary session of 21-22 March adopted a [Resolution](#) in which it declared that

1. The Russian Federation ceases to be a High Contracting Party to the Convention on 16 September 2022;
2. The Court remains competent to deal with applications directed against the Russian Federation in relation to acts or omissions capable of constituting a violation of the Convention provided that they occurred until 16 September 2022;
3. The suspension of the examination of all applications against the Russian Federation pursuant to the decision of the President of the Court of 16 March 2022 is lifted with immediate effect;



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4. The present Resolution is without prejudice to the consideration of any legal issue, related to the consequences of the cessation of the Russian Federation's membership to the Council of Europe, which may arise in the exercise by the Court of its competence under the Convention to consider cases brought before it.

d. European Commissioner for Human Rights (CommissionerHR)

Already on the day of the attack, 24 February, the Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, strongly [condemned](#) what “*had seemed unthinkable in Europe in the 21st century*” i.e. that the European continent is once more being drawn into an armed conflict. She urged the authorities of the Russian Federation to prevent the further unfolding of this human rights disaster by immediately putting a stop to all military actions in Ukraine and adhering strictly to international humanitarian and human rights law.

On 1st March, she [reiterated](#) the demands as this war tramples on international law and human rights and obliterates humanitarian law because millions of people fear for their lives under the indiscriminate shelling that has struck hospitals, schools and homes and the fact that thousands of civilians have been cut off from basic facilities, and lack access to water, medication, food, electricity, sanitation and shelter. Also hospital workers struggle to provide care, forced by frequent shelling to relocate their patients to bomb shelters or basements. Streams of refugees and displaced people desperately seek safety.

One week later, on 7 March, the Commissioner [urged](#) the Russian Federation also “*to end the internal repression against human rights defenders, journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens who oppose the war and to fully respect their human rights including freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association in line with the international and European human rights obligations by which Russia is bound.*”

From 16 to 22 March, and following an earlier [mission to Moldova on 9 March](#), the Commissioner visited the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Romania to focus on efforts made in assisting people fleeing the war in Ukraine and assessing their human rights' needs. Following those missions, the Commissioner will present preliminary observations as well as a more detailed report. Some particular issues that need increased attention are for instance:

- how to ensure that civil society actors, including Russian and Belarusian human rights defenders and journalists who had to leave their country to escape reprisals can continue to carry out their work from abroad and what role that Council of Europe member states could play in ensuring an enabling environment for their legitimate activities. (see Commissioner [statement](#) of 24 March following her visit in Czech Republic),
- to ensure clarity about the various options regarding the possibility to move to other European countries, to return to Ukraine, or to access employment, healthcare, social



assistance and education in different member states as well as the protection of specific groups of people in particular in relation to the risk of trafficking in human beings of women and that any further actions are taken in this regard based on the recommendations by the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings ([GRETA](#)) and the [Lanzarote Committee](#) (see Commissioner [statement](#) of 24 March following her visits to Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic and Romania).

e. European Committee for Social Rights (ECSR)

Karin Lukas, President of the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR), [expressed](#) on 10 March her deepest concern about the Russian military aggression against Ukraine as this is having fatal consequences in terms of the lives and human rights of the people in Ukraine, including their enjoyment of social rights as set out in the European Social Charter. She also recalled that *"the basic social rights of refugees must be respected wherever they are and at all times, so as to ensure dignity for all"* and *"when signing and ratifying the Charter, the member States of the Council of Europe agreed to guarantee to their populations the social rights protected by the Charter in order to secure and improve their standard of living and their well-being"*.

On 24 March, the European Committee of Social Rights issued a [Statement on the crisis caused by the Russian Federation's military aggression against Ukraine](#). The Committee recalls that *"by signing the Charter, the member States of the Council of Europe agreed to secure to their populations the social rights specified therein in order to improve their standard of living and their social wellbeing"*. It *"emphasises that military aggression against another State Party is per se inconsistent with the spirit and purposes of the European Social Charter and with all the specific commitments undertaken by the States Parties under Part II of the Charter"*. Finally, the Committee considers that this crisis *"should not have as a consequence the reduction of the protection of the rights recognised by the Charter, both within Ukraine and beyond its borders, and that the States Parties to the Charter are bound to take all necessary steps to ensure that Charter rights are effectively guaranteed at all times, including, where necessary, through international assistance and cooperation."*

f. Other reactions and actions

On 8 March, the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (with Italy being currently holding the Council of Europe Presidency and thus the Chair of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers), Luigi Di Maio, the President of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, Tiny Kox, and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić, launched a [Statement](#) urging the Russian Federation to implement the interim measures indicated by the European Court of Human Rights on 1 and 4 March 2022 (see above) as well as to guarantee to all persons under its jurisdiction the rights and freedoms



enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, including the right to liberty and security, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

On 7 March, ahead of the International Women’s Day, the Council of Europe Secretary General [recalled](#) to Russia that the Council of Europe’s Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), and which complements the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, that requires its state parties to develop gender-sensitive reception procedures and support services for asylum seekers. This implies amongst others that refugees, in particular children and women, fleeing from death and destruction should be allowed the safe passage via the humanitarian corridors and that women and girls, who have because of the war become even more vulnerable, threatened by violence, sexual assault, and rape, be provided with specific support and protection. Russia has not yet signed nor ratified the Istanbul Convention (Ukraine only signed it) but the Secretary General called upon Russia to ensure that the ongoing ratification process of the Istanbul Convention should continue without delay.

Several other Council of Europe specialised committees/bodies have expressed themselves on the Russian invasion in Ukraine:

- Council of Europe’s Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) on the [need to protect refugees from Ukraine from human trafficking](#) (17 March) ;
- European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) calling to all sides to refrain from any ultra-nationalistic or racist hate speech or conduct in relation to confrontations and conflicts and committing to continue to monitor racism and intolerance in the Russian Federation ([4 March](#));
- Consultative Council of European Judges ([CCJE](#));
- European Commission for Democracy through Law (‘Venice Commission’) ([Statement of the President 1 March](#));
- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe: different [statements](#) and [declaration of 28 February](#);
- Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe also published different statements e.g. [open letter of 28 February](#), as well as its [specialised committees](#) on Migration and the Rights of the Child.

ii. European Union

a. European Commission (COM)

On 24 February, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen issued a [statement](#) on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. “*We condemn this barbaric attack, and the cynical arguments to justify it. It is President Putin, who is bringing war back to Europe. In these dark hours, the European Union and its people stand by Ukraine and its people. We are facing an*



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unprecedented act of aggression by the Russian leadership against a sovereign, independent country. Russia's target is not only Donbas, the target is not only Ukraine, the target is the stability in Europe and the whole of the international peace order. And we will hold President Putin accountable for that."

Already on 23 February, the EU had adopted a first package of sanctions in response to Russia recognising the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine. The following day, the Commission presented to European leaders for approval a second package of massive sanctions targeting strategic sectors of the Russian economy by blocking their access to technologies and markets. Since then, further [sanctions](#) have been introduced against both Russia and Ukraine, including the suspension of cooperation in various European networks.

On 2 March the Commission proposed to activate the Temporary Protection Directive [2001/55/EC](#) to offer quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Under this proposal, those fleeing the war will be granted temporary protection in the EU, meaning that they will be given a temporary residence permit.

b. European Council (EUCO)

In the extraordinary meeting of the European Council on 24 February, the EU leaders adopted [Conclusions on Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine](#). The EU Heads of State and Government condemned in the strongest possible terms the Russian Federation's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine. They agreed on further restrictive measures that will impose massive and severe consequences on Russia for its action, in close coordination with EU's partners and allies.

Following the proposal of the Commission to activate the Temporary Protection Directive, the Council on 4 March unanimously adopted its implementing decision. The objective of this temporary protection scheme is to alleviate pressure on national asylum systems and to allow displaced persons to enjoy harmonised rights across the EU. These rights include residence, housing, medical assistance, access to education for children and access to the labour market for adults.

Following the 10-11 March informal meeting of the European Council in Versailles, EU leaders adopted a [Declaration](#) reiterating that Russia's military aggression against Ukraine grossly violates international law and undermines European and global security and stability. The Council pledged to boost ties with Ukraine and support it along the European path, confirming its readiness to move quickly with further sanctions. Leaders also welcomed the decision of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to open an investigation, and called for the safety and security of Ukraine's nuclear facilities to be ensured immediately. They stated that the EU and its member states would continue to provide coordinated political, financial,



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material and humanitarian support in Ukraine, while also sustaining their efforts to support refugees and the countries hosting them.

The [Conclusions](#) adopted at the 24-25 March European Council stated that “Russia is directing attacks against the civilian population and is targeting civilian objects, including hospitals, medical facilities, schools and shelters. These war crimes must stop immediately. Those responsible, and their accomplices, will be held to account in accordance with international law.” The Council urged “Russia to urgently guarantee safe passage to civilians entrapped in all other war zones to a destination of their choice, to immediately release all hostages, to provide uninterrupted humanitarian access and to establish humanitarian corridors.”

“Bearing in mind the destruction and enormous losses brought upon Ukraine by Russia’s military aggression, the European Union is committed to provide support to the Ukrainian Government for its immediate needs and, once the Russian onslaught has ceased, for the reconstruction of a democratic Ukraine.”

On 7 March EU Agencies within the remit of [Justice and Home Affairs](#) also issued a [joint statement](#) with a commitment to support work of EU institutions and Member States as they help Ukraine and its people as war once again touches Europe. “By working together and utilising each agency’s particular expertise, we engage as a matter of urgency to assist EU Member States in terms of humanitarian support, respect for fundamental rights, management of EU external borders, visa measures, anticipation of hybrid threats, and reception of people fleeing war. This includes establishing a temporary protection mechanism for the displaced persons from Ukraine.”

The nine EU Agencies issuing this joint statement are: the European Institute for Gender Equality ([EIGE](#)), the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction ([EMCDDA](#)), the European Union Agency for Asylum ([EUAA](#)), the EU Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice ([eu-LISA](#)), the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation ([EUROJUST](#)), the EU’s Law Enforcement Agency ([EUROPOL](#)), the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights ([FRA](#)), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency ([FRONTEX](#)) and the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training ([CEPOL](#)).

c. European Parliament (EP)

In its [Resolution on the situation at the Ukrainian border and in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine](#) adopted on 16 December 2021, MEPs called on Russia to withdraw its troops threatening Ukraine and warned that any aggression by Moscow would come at a high economic and political price. Already in a [Resolution](#) on 29 April 2021, the Parliament had expressed grave concern about the large Russian military build-up at the border with Ukraine and in illegally occupied Crimea.



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Following the increasing tensions and Russia's military threat against Ukraine, Parliament President Roberta Metsola and the political group leaders issued a [statement](#) on 16 February 2022. MEPs called for a united response and voiced support for Ukraine. Subsequently, on 22 February leading MEPs strongly [condemned](#) Russian President's Vladimir Putin's recognition of the non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk.

On 24 February, Parliament President Roberta Metsola and the political group leaders [denounced](#) Russia's military attack on Ukraine within hours of it taking place and announced a special plenary session on 1 March. “*We remain firm in our unity, in our resolve and in our response to unprovoked Russian aggression. The European Parliament supports an unprecedented European and international response, including new and severe sanctions that will ensure the Kremlin will be held accountable for its actions.*”

During the special plenary session on 1 March, the Parliament adopted a [Resolution on the Russian aggression against Ukraine](#) with 637 votes in favour, 13 against and 26 abstentions. MEPs called for tougher sanctions on Russia and progress to grant Ukraine EU candidate status.

The Parliament “*underlines that the military aggression and invasion constitute a serious violation of international law, and in particular the UN Charter, and calls on the Russian Federation to return to fulfilling the responsibilities of a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in maintaining peace and security and to respecting its commitments under the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the Budapest Memorandum; considers the Russian invasion in Ukraine an attack not only against a sovereign country but also against the principles and mechanism of cooperation and security in Europe and the rules-based international order, as defined by the UN Charter*”. The EP also “*expresses its inconsolable grief at the tragic loss of life and human suffering caused by the Russian aggression and stresses that attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure as well as indiscriminate attacks are prohibited under international humanitarian law and therefore constitute war crimes*”.

One month after Russia attacked Ukraine, MEPs unanimously condemned the brutal invasion during a [debate](#) with the Commission and Council on 23 March and urged the EU to further sanction Moscow and protect the EU economy.

d. European Committee of the Regions (COR)

The EU's assembly of regional and local representatives on 24 February issued a [statement](#) strongly condemning the Russian military aggression of Ukraine. In a [Declaration of the European Union's Regions and Cities on Solidarity with Ukraine](#) adopted on 3 March, the Committee urged “*all local and regional governments in the European Union to support Ukraine in these times of need*”.



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e. European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

On 24 March, the EESC adopted a [Resolution on the war in Ukraine and its economic, social and environmental impact](#). The Committee strongly condemns Russia's unilateral aggression against Ukraine and considers that the EU should provide full support to ensure that all war crimes and crimes against humanity are recorded and processed. The EESC also *"demands enhanced support for the Ukrainian civil society, both in and outside of Ukraine; believes that the EU should consider involving Ukrainian civil society in all Ukraine-related discussions; Ukrainian civil society will be directly involved in alleviating the impact of war and in rebuilding the socio-economic fabric of the country; in this context, the EESC calls for consolidating and enhancing existing funding schemes designed to support civil society in Ukraine"*.

f. European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)

The Asylum Agency of the EU on 25 February issued a [statement](#) joining *"the global community in condemning the unprovoked armed invasion of Ukraine. Such actions have no place in an international system whereby nations are expected to settle differences through diplomatic means, in the spirit of mutual respect for human lives and national sovereignty. Armed conflict only leads to human suffering and the tragic loss of life."* The EUAA affirmed its readiness to provide support in the reception of asylum seekers in the EU.

On 4 March, the EUAA [launched](#) a [Situational Update](#) on the war in Ukraine, providing key information on the response actions that the European Union and its Member States have taken to provide shelter and temporary protection for displaced people from Ukraine. The information will be revised on a regular basis, as the situation develops.

g. European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX)

On 25 February, FRONTEX issued a [statement](#) saying it *"keeps monitoring the situation in Ukraine 24/7 and stays in contact with the Member States and is ready to support them when requested."* In a [press release](#) on 11 March, the Agency announced it had started "supporting EU Member States in the organisation of humanitarian return flights. The aim is to help non-Ukrainian and non-EU citizens fleeing the war in Ukraine reach their home countries."

h. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

FRA Director Michael O'Flaherty on 28 February sent a [message](#) of solidarity with Ukrainians crossing the EU borders. *"The tremendous wave of support and help EU countries, institutions, civil society organisations and people across Europe are showing to Ukrainians fleeing their country gives hope in these dark times. People fleeing conflict should be welcomed irrespective*



of their nationality or ethnicity.” The Agency reaffirmed its commitment to support the EU and its Member States in upholding the human rights of all who cross its borders in flight from war.

At the publication of the FRA [Report EU-Ukrainian border check points: First field observations](#) on 23 March, O’Flaherty [stated](#) that “*there are grounds for immediate concern which urgently need addressing, such as allegations of discrimination and racism, and the danger of trafficking. In addition, EU countries need to start now planning ahead for the needs of millions of people who may no longer have a home to return to*”. The Report also highlights the need for increased support and long-term solutions in receiving refugees, including measures to bring children into education and prevent labour exploitation.

i. European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (EUROJUST)

On 28 March, EUROJUST issued a [press statement](#) that it has supported the setting up of a joint investigation team into alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine. The responsible national authorities of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine have signed an agreement to enable the exchange of information and facilitate investigations into war crimes, crimes against humanity and other core crimes. Participation in the investigation may be extended to other EU Member States, third countries or other third parties in due course.

j. European Police Office (EUROJUST)

The Management Board of EU’s law enforcement agency on 17 March adopted a [Decision on the situation in Ukraine](#). “*Regardless of the changing circumstances amid the crisis, Europol will remain strongly committed alongside the Member States to identify and tackle the criminal threats arising from this major crisis. Furthermore, the Board decided to suspend any cooperation with Russia, including through the strategic agreement concluded in November 2003. Europol continues to work at all levels to support the EU Member States impacted by the conflict.*”

III. Trade union responses in defence of human rights

i. European Trade Union Confederation

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on 24 February the ETUC organised a [demonstration](#) for peace and democracy in front of the headquarters of the European Commission and Council. The following day, the European Trade Union Confederation issued a [joint statement](#) together with the International Trade Union Confederation. “*We strongly condemn the war, that hits people and workers first, and advocate for dialogue, peace, and democracy to be reestablished immediately.*”



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On 25 February, the EU cross-industry social partners also adopted a [joint statement](#) on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. *“The European Union must continue to show unity and determination in building a common response, putting at the heart of its intervention our commitment to defend international law and support those suffering from the conflict. The collective strength of the EU can only be expressed through a common voice when facing external threats and challenges such as the one that we are currently facing.”*

On 9 March, the ETUC Women’s Committee adopted a [statement](#), underlining that *“armed conflict and humanitarian crisis bear particular threats and consequences for women and girls in all their diversity. It is well documented and unanimously agreed by the international community that sexual violence against women and girls in all their diversity is used as a common tactic in armed conflict and as a war weapon. Domestic violence and trafficking is also exacerbated during war and humanitarian crisis. In addition, reproductive health care services for women are functioning under high risk and are deliberately chosen as targets for military strikes.”*

The Executive Committee of the ETUC on 17 March adopted a [Resolution on Ukraine](#), condemning the invasion of a sovereign nation and expressing its solidarity with all people, workers, and trade unions of Ukraine. *“The pursuit of peace and democracy is a fundamental value of the trade union movement and an essential condition to secure safety, social justice and worker’s and human rights. The ETUC supports all political and diplomatic initiatives and sanctions to secure peace and calls for humanitarian aid for the Ukrainian population in Ukraine and to welcome and support refugees in Europe.”*

ii. **European Trade Union Federations**

On 24 February, the **European Federation of Builders and Wood Workers (EFBWW)** issued a [joint statement](#) together with Building and Wood Workers International ([BWI](#)), strongly condemning Russia’s violence and military actions against Ukraine. The statement calls for trade union solidarity across borders, standing side by side with *“the Ukrainian building workers union, its staff and its members, and with all trade unions and people in the region.”*

On 25 February, the **European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE)** together with Education International ([EI](#)) issued a [joint statement](#) condemning Russia’s act of war. *“Educators across the world stand with our colleagues, students, and communities in Ukraine and denounce the invasion.” “Teachers, academics and their unions in Europe are shocked by the military intervention of the Russian Federation in the sovereign state of the Ukraine. ETUCE condemns the attack of Russia on the Ukraine and expresses its strong support and profound solidarity with colleagues, teachers, academics and students and all people of Ukraine.”*

Also the **European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)** on 25 February together with other human rights, media freedom and journalists’ organisations issued a [joint statement](#) in



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condemnation of invasion and attacks on the press in Ukraine and Russia. “We unilaterally condemn the violence and aggression that puts thousands of our colleagues all over Ukraine in grave danger.” The EFJ has also strongly [condemned](#) attempts by the Russian government to silence media coverage of the invasion in Ukraine, as well as the [killings of several journalists](#) reporting from the war. Together with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the EFJ has [called](#) on media employers to ensure the protection of reporters they send to war zones.

On 8 March, the **European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF)** issued a [statement on war and transport workers](#). “During war, transport workers find themselves on the front line. Transport is crucial for access to food, medicine, and goods as well as work and leisure, and society’s reliance on transport and transport workers becomes even more noticeable during war, as access to food, medicine, and aid becomes essential to survival. The strategic importance of transport, to civilians and the military, means that transport routes and infrastructure – railways, highways, shipping lanes, airports, transport corridors, etc. – are under military threat, and transport workers risk their lives.”

On 18 March, the **European Public Service Union (EPSU)** issued a [solidarity message](#) together with the European Hospital and Healthcare Employers’ Association ([HOSPEEM](#)). The sectoral social partner organisations strongly condemn the war and “are horrified by the reported attack on a maternity and children hospital in Mariupol, Ukraine on March 9. As of March 10, the WHO has confirmed 25 other attacks. Attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure such as hospitals must stop immediately.” EPSU and HOSPEEM underline the need to respect and protect in all circumstances health facilities, civilian and military medical units in line with international humanitarian law. Health providers must be protected so they are allowed to treat the injured, and to save lives.

industriAll European Trade Union (IAE) adopted a [Statement on Ukraine](#) on 25 March. “We stand in full solidarity with the people of Ukraine, our brothers and sisters in the trade union movement and working people caught up in the war. We condemn the repression faced by those in Russia and Belarus bravely speaking out and protesting for peace.” “Trade unions are part of the global peace movement. We have a role to play in building peace, starting by uniting the global trade union movement. It is only with dialogue and diplomacy that peace can flourish. We stand ready to work with the EU, governments and within our labour movement and society.”

UNI Europa the European trade union federation for service workers has [joined](#) the ETUC in condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Together with over 100 advocacy groups, [UNI](#) also signed on to a [letter](#) calling for Big Tech corporations to take action against the spread of disinformation that justifies Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. In a [press release](#) on 15 March, UNI outlined actions for worker-to-worker solidarity. We are supporting workers reps to use their say within multinational companies to push for contributions to the peace effort.



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The **European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT)** on 16 March issued a [joint statement](#) with the European hospitality association of hotels, restaurants and cafés ([HOTREC](#)). “HOTREC and EFFAT maintain their support to the employers’ associations and trade unions in Ukraine and encourage all efforts our member organisations are undertaking at national level to provide shelter and protection to the refugees.” On 29 March EFFAT together with the Employers’ Group of Professional Agricultural Organisations ([GEOPA](#)) and the food manufacturers [FoodDrinkEurope](#) adopted a [joint statement](#). “This war has important European and global consequences for the agri-food sector. The interruption of Ukrainian agricultural production and exports, as well as the legitimate sanctions imposed on Russia, will severely affect global markets and food supplies”. “While primarily focusing on the ongoing conflict resolution, EU decisionmakers must also consider the impact on the agri-food sector and its workforce, an essential sector providing food all across the world.”

iii. National trade union responses

In **Bulgaria**, the **Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CITUB)** adopted a [position](#) on the war in Ukraine, strongly condemning Russia's military invasion of Ukraine and calling for a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the conflict. The union also launched the charity initiative ‘CITUB for Ukraine’, on the one hand running a campaign to collect donations for Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria, and on the other hand providing trade union support to people fleeing the war. The campaign started on 15 March, collecting food, hygienic products, tents, lanterns, batteries and generators. As part of the campaign, CITUB prepared a dedicated video and photos with the slogan ‘Solidarity with Ukraine’. CITUB has also opened up for receptions by its territorial structures in Varna, Burgas, Haskovo, Dobrich in order to offer Ukrainians advice on labour and social security issues, including labour market integration measures.

In **France**, the **Confederation Force Ouvrière (FO)** in its declarations and exchanges with the French government has underlined the obligation of the Russian Federation to respect international law in general and human rights law in particular. Furthermore, FO has raised concerns about the consequences of the withdrawal of Russia from the Council of Europe, in terms of peace and stability in Europe as well as the exercise of fundamental rights for Ukrainian and Russian people. This is also something that FO raised during the Tripartite Social Summit of the European Council on 23 March 2022, advocating for greater support from the EU to the Council of Europe despite being two separate organisations. More generally, FO has emphasised the need for greater support of Russian and Belarussian people who are calling for peace and for independent journalists in Russia and Belarus, in order to ensure their safety and the protection of their fundamental rights against repression and retaliation. FO has also issued internal communications on the crisis in Ukraine to offer its members a better understanding, including with a focus on human rights law.

Beyond the national dimension, FO has been active within the G7 to highlight the importance of international law, including the ILO, and more broadly a ruled-based international order. FO



has also welcomed the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive and has exchanged with the French government on its practical implementation, highlighting the need to ensure the effective exercise of the rights encompassed in the Directive. Moreover, FO has alerted the National Committee in charge of the fight against undeclared work on the risks of exploitation of people fleeing from Ukraine, advocating for further cooperation with the European Labour Authority and its Platform tackling Undeclared Work. To this end, FO has also underlined the need for further financial, human and material means for the Labour Inspectorate to ensure the respect of fundamental rights of every worker in France including people fleeing from Ukraine. In this context, FO will continue to stay vigilant in relation to the communications of GRETA monitoring body of the Council of Europe and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, in order to advance advocacy at national level, e.g. in the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) and in the French National Council on Human Rights (CNCDH). Finally, FO has also been vocal publicly against any discrimination in the treatment of refugees and migrants, also in light of the up-coming presidential elections, and has denounced any form of discrimination, racism or antisemitism.

IV. Other responses in defence of human rights

In a [statement](#) of 2 March, the **European Network of National Human Rights Institutes (ENNHRI)** calls for an immediate cessation of the armed attack on Ukraine by the Russian Federation in accordance with the principles of international law, humanitarian law and human rights law, and urges the Russian government to implement the interim measures granted by the European Court of Human Rights (see also above). Furthermore, ENNHRI supports its member NHRI, the Office of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, in its efforts to promote and protect human rights in Ukraine in an extremely challenging situation and expresses concern for the safety of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, her staff, and all individuals impacted by the conflict.