



**European Committee
of the Regions**

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS]

WORKING GROUP ON UKRAINE

30 MARCH 2022

12:30 – 13:00 (BRUSSELS TIME)

Dear Mayor Dulkiewicz,
Dear Commissioner Johansson,
Dear President Verbeek,
Dear Mayor Sadovy,
Dear Mr Chernov,

Dear colleagues from Ukraine,

Today's meeting was meant to be the moment to launch a new project on integrity, bringing together five Ukrainian cities and five EU local and regional authorities to cooperate on good governance led by common European values.

Mariupol was one of the five Ukrainian cities committed to working across our borders.

Instead, the ruthless invasion and violent war against Ukraine has put this initiative of dialogue and cooperation on hold.

In fact, the mayors in Ukraine had to re-invent their role. Rather than running their cities through times of peace, they are leading their communities, through times of war.

And as we speak, these mayors are fighting hard to defend their cities and protect their people, while houses, schools, hospitals, markets and theatres are being bombarded.

And at the same time, in Ukraine, mayors have been kidnapped in a blatant disregard for international law.

So let's be honest: the mayors of Ukraine are being targeted because they stand for democracy and freedom; because they have chosen to walk the European path.

While this is happening in Ukraine, regions, cities and villages across the EU have opened their arms and their hearts to the Ukrainian people that have had to leave their country.

They have welcomed the almost 4 million Ukrainian refugees who have left so far, offering shelter, food and support.

The European Union has also been swift to help.



**European Committee
of the Regions**

It is thanks to Commissioner Johansson that new EU laws were adopted quickly giving Ukrainians rights and protection while in exile.

It is thanks to Commissioner Ferreira that EU funds – originally earmarked for EU territorial development – are helping those who have fled the war.

And it is Commissioner Lenarcic who is driving humanitarian aid.

This is European solidarity.

This is Europe showing that it has learned from past experiences and crises.

Let us not forget that cities and regions are also helping refugees to enter the local labour market and welcoming pupils into the education system.

Furthermore, many regions, including my region, Central Macedonia in Greece, have already channelled humanitarian aid and medical supplies, along with financial resources.

The region Sud of France launched "*Humanitarian convoys for Ukraine*" to Ukraine, Moldova and Poland. 45 trucks have already left France and brought 1,000 tons of emergency and first aid kits to the people of Ukraine.

And today, ladies and gentlemen, our Committee is launching an Information and Support Platform for local and regional leaders. This is a sign of concrete help that is facilitated by the European Committee of the Regions, offering up to date information on EU funds and rights.

The Info-Support Hub also matches requests and offers for aid: cities and regions sheltering refugees can submit their specific needs and find help from other European regions or cities.

So this is my call today, to all regional and local leaders across the EU, to join our solidarity project, and support the bordering regions that alone cannot help the millions of refugees.

We, the cities and regions of Europe, must share the responsibility, must show solidarity in action, and must show what Europe is and stands for.

Dear Commissioner,

I welcome the 10 points adopted last Monday at the Council to strengthen EU coordination to welcome people fleeing from war.

Nevertheless, we need to remember that many of the steps identified by the 27 EU Member States, fall in the remits of regional governments.



**European Committee
of the Regions**

Politically and practically speaking, in order to be implemented, the full involvement of the three levels of government, is needed.

We cannot be in favour of this top-down approach disregarding subsidiarity and in particular the support provided by mayors and presidents of regions all over Europe.

Dear colleagues,

during our Summit held in Marseille, we opened a permanent contact line between EU cities and regions and the association of regional councils of Ukraine.

This working group is a bridge to our colleagues in Ukraine and I thank you for giving them a voice within the EU.

For instance, the mayor of Gdansk mobilised hundreds of mayors replying to a call from Vadym Boichenko, the mayor of Mariupol, who demanded our national leaders to fully ban trade with Russia, and to give Ukraine the EU-candidate status.

Today, we must not forget that in Mariupol, there are still 160,000 citizens which are de facto prisoners of the Russian army:

Today, we echo their call for safe humanitarian corridors – now!

Dear colleagues, by granting the Mayor of Kyiv, President of the association of Ukrainian municipalities, the honorary membership of the European Committee of the Regions, we wanted to stress our call to strengthen the European perspective of Ukraine.

This perspective must be part of the Reconstruction Plan offered to Ukraine once the war is over.

Finally, next week, with Commissioner Ferreira, a delegation from our Committee will go to the bordering regions of Poland.

We want to see first-hand the real needs on the ground of the regions.

In addition, at our next plenary session in April, we will discuss with Commissioner Lenarcic about the humanitarian aid channelled to Ukraine.

Dear Commissioner Johansson,

Thank you for your hard and very important work, thank you for joining forces with cities and regions, and thank you for standing firm, in solidarity with Ukraine and its people.



**European Committee
of the Regions**

Just as we, the regions and cities in Europe, stand together with our partners and the people of Ukraine.

Thank you.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY