
Von der Leyen: “Putin has failed. He sent young Russians as cannon fodder.” Europe stands by Ukraine

A firm, assertive speech. Coherently expressed concepts with words that leave no room for glimmers of a political, negotiated peace, at least for now. On February 24, marking one year since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the President of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen, reaffirmed that EU's 27 member countries are determined to stand by Kyiv. She uttered these words in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia (among the Baltic countries under constant threat from Moscow), in a speech delivered from the podium beside Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas and - most significantly - NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. **“Young Russians as cannon fodder.”** “One year on, from the start of his brutal war, Putin has failed to achieve a single one of his strategic goals. Instead of dividing the European Union, he finds us united and determined to stand by Ukraine for as long as it takes. Instead of dominating the global energy market, he has seen his main source of revenue slashed. Instead of wiping Ukraine off the map, he is confronted with a nation more vigorous than ever.” For Von der Leyen, Ukraine has become “a testament to the bravery of a nation which will never relent in its quest for freedom. We have seen that in every single day of the 365 days since the beginning of this atrocious war.”

But one year on, “the fight rages on”, remarked the German politician.

“And Putin has upped the stakes. He is sending hundreds of thousands of young Russians as cannon fodder in the trenches in Ukraine. What we saw and heard earlier this week from Moscow tells us that as the losses mount on the battlefield, so does the desperation, the delusion, and the disinformation. That shows the strain Putin's regime is under. But it also comes with real and renewed danger for Ukraine.” **Moscow increasingly isolated.** While the President of the Commission was delivering her speech in Tallinn, Ukrainian President Zelensky delivered an equally powerful speech in Kyiv and called for a minute's silence for the victims. In Brussels, EU-27 Heads of State and government released a joint statement (after considerable internal divisions) expressing closeness, support and solidarity with Ukraine. Von der Leyen reiterated that EU countries will continue to support “Ukraine financially, economically and militarily”, further increasing “our own defence capabilities, and the pressure on Russia.”

Russia, she said, “is increasingly isolated.”

She explained: “I think the vote yesterday at the United Nations General Assembly was very telling – 141 countries voted in favour of the resolution condemning Russia. Russia is falling backwards towards an autarchic economy, cut away from the world. Our sanctions are eroding sharply its economic base, slashing any prospect to modernise it. We will continue to put pressure on Russia and on those supporting it on the battlefield. We will continue going after Putin's cronies. And we will go after those helping Russia to circumvent sanctions or replenish its war arsenal.” **More financial and military support.** The President of the European Commission thus broached a different topic. “At the same time, we work to ensure Ukraine's economic and military resilience. First, with continued financial support. We mobilised so far EUR 67 billion. Second, with increased military support. We aim to train 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers in the European Union. Our Member States are delivering military equipment. And we will turn to joint procurement to deliver urgent military supplies for Ukraine.” Finally, “this is not just about winning on the battlefield. Ukrainians are fighting for their right to choose their own future. And they have already chosen. They have chosen the European Union. They have chosen the unity of principles – as President Lennart Meri said. The Ukrainian soldiers fighting in the trenches of Bakhmut are defending this unity of principles. And in these dark

times, the hearts of Ukrainian people are warmed by the confidence that Ukraine will join the European Union one day. This is how principles shape the geography” of the European continent.

Gianni Borsa