How the EU has been supporting Ukraine

Even before Ukraine came under attack from Russia in February 2022, the EU was keen to support Kyiv and forge closer links. Find out how.

Background

Since withdrawing from the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine has been keen to pursue its own path, including forging closer links with the rest of Europe.

Russia

Ukraine’s relations with Russia have been tense due to the latter’s determination to keep the country within its sphere of influence. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea in violation of
international law, a move strongly condemned by the EU. It has also been waging a hybrid war against Ukraine, including economic pressure and disinformation attacks.

In a resolution adopted in December 2021, MEPs called on Russia to withdraw its troops threatening Ukraine and said any aggression by Moscow must come at a high economic and political price. Parliament had already expressed grave concern about the large Russian military build-up at the border with Ukraine and in illegally occupied Crimea in a resolution adopted in April 2021,

Members of Parliament's foreign affairs committee and security and defence subcommittee went on a fact-finding mission to Ukraine from 30 January to 1 February 2022.

MEPs called for a united response and voiced support for Ukraine in a debate on EU-Russia relations, European security and Russia’s military threat against Ukraine on 16 February 2022. Parliament President Roberta Metsola and the political group leaders also issued a statement on the situation in Ukraine.

On 22 February, leading MEPs strongly condemned Russian President's Vladimir Putin's recognition of the non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine as independent entities.

Two days later - on 24 February - Russia launched a wide-ranging attack on Ukraine. The EU responded with a series of sanctions against Russia as well as initiatives to support Ukraine.

*Check out our timeline of how the EU and the European Parliament have supported Ukraine since the start of Russia’s invasion on 24 February.*
Association agreement

In September 2014, the European Parliament gave its consent to the EU-Ukraine Association agreement, which includes a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. The deal established political association and economic integration between the EU and Ukraine and provided for mutual free market access.

The agreement established ground rules for cooperation in areas including energy, transport, and education. It also required Ukraine to implement reforms and respect democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law.

The free trade agreement substantially integrated EU and Ukraine markets by dismantling import duties and banning other trade restrictions, albeit with specific limitations and transitional periods in sensitive areas, such as trade in agricultural products.

The EU is Ukraine’s main trading partner, accounting for more than 40% of the country’s international trade.

Visa
In April 2017, the European Parliament supported an agreement to exempt Ukrainian citizens from EU short-stay visa requirements.

Ukrainians who hold a biometric passport can enter the EU without a visa for 90 days in any 180-day period, for tourism, to visit relatives or friends, or for business purposes, but not to work.

Other support

There are various EU initiatives to support Ukraine's economy, aid its green transition and help the country to reform.

Since 2014, more than €17 billion in grants and loans have been mobilised by the EU and financial institutions to support reforms in Ukraine, while applying conditionality dependent on their progress.

Since 2015, more than 11,500 Ukrainian students have participated in the EU's popular Erasmus+ programme.

The EU invests in projects to stimulate Ukraine’s economy, including direct support to 100,000 small and medium-sized enterprises, assistance to more than 10,000 firms in rural areas and funds to modernise public IT infrastructure.

Since the start of the Covid pandemic, the EU has mobilised more than €190 million for Ukraine to support immediate needs and socio-economic recovery as well as €1.2 billion in macro-financial assistance. The EU has supplied more than 36 million items of personal protective equipment, as well as ambulances, critical medical equipment and training for health care staff. In cooperation with civil society, the EU provides food and medicines to vulnerable families.

On 16 February 2022, MEPs approved a €1.2 billion macro-financial loan to help Ukraine cover its external financing needs in 2022.

Sakharov Prize

In 2018 Parliament awarded its Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Oleg Sentsov. The Ukrainian film director and human rights activist was imprisoned for protesting Russia’s annexation of his native Crimea on Independence Square in Kyiv, but released from jail on 7 September 2019 as part of a prisoner exchange deal between Russia and Ukraine.

Briefings

Russia's war on Ukraine: background
Russia's war on Ukraine: implications for EU energy supply (March 2022)
EU-Ukraine association agreement (July 2020)