

## It's time: EU candidate status will strengthen Ukraine and Europe – Metsola

**This is a moment where we must remain together. Addressing EU leaders, EP President Metsola spoke also on climate, energy, inflation and the war's social and economic impact.**

**European Parliament President Roberta Metsola remarks at the European Council of 23 and 24 June 2022, Brussels.**

These months have not been easy. We are facing an aggressive Russia that has ripped up the rules of the game. Every State - every leader - is under unprecedented pressure with:

- inflation at previously unheard of levels;
- an energy crisis that means dwindling supply and rising costs
- food shortages meaning a real possibility of global famine;
- the social impact on the most vulnerable in our societies - only just coming out of a two-year pandemic - growing heavier by the day;
- fluctuating markets fuelling uncertainty;
- Russian disinformation pushing populism, nationalism and isolationism,

This is a moment where we must remain together. It is a moment we did not choose, but one that we have no choice but to meet.

I know there are no easy answers or easy decisions, rest assured that there are wrong ones, that we must avoid.

And it would have been a historically wrong decision not to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova today, or give a clear perspective to Georgia.

### *Candidate Status*

It is a decision that is warranted, that is necessary, that is possible and that I am pleased to see consensus around this table. Today is historic!

EU membership will not come overnight, we have always been honest about that, but candidate status will mean an impetus for an unprecedented reform agenda, it will mean access to programmes, and most significantly it will mean that the hope of those suffering in Ukraine, of those worried in Moldova, will translate into tangible progress. And we should be clear this is not

simply some symbolic act, this will strengthen the EU and it will strengthen Ukraine and Moldova. It will show our people, as well as theirs, that our values matter more than rhetoric. That hope can mean results. And other countries waiting - those in the Western Balkans - also need to see hope lead to results. It is time.

### *War fatigue*

It would also be wrong to assume that public opinion will continue to drive our actions in support of Ukraine or to underestimate the extent of Russian influence. We have to acknowledge that inflation-fuelled fatigue is setting in, that we are seeing many cases where the resilience of our citizens to the social and economic impact is waning and we need to push back harder. We need to counter the Kremlin's narrative not feed into the fears it spreads.

It is not the Green Deal pushing prices up or causing inflation to hover at close to 20% in some cases. It is not our sanctions that impact purchasing power. It is because the Kremlin wants more influence. It is because they want the comfort of vassal States. It is because they think democracy is a frail concept and weakens States. We know the opposite is true.

### *Climate and Energy*

It would be a wrong decision to backslide on our medium and long-term climate goals. We absolutely need to break free from Russian energy, end European energy islands and secure our energy independence - what is strategic autonomy without it? - Equally, we cannot pushback a promise we made to a generation. It is about security as well as the environment. So my appeal is to ensure that immediate, short-term measures do not become the new normal in the medium-term.

### *Inflation, Social and economic impact*

It would be a wrong decision to dismiss concerns on rising costs and inflation as a passing phenomenon or to assume it will not get worse. In many States we have not reached the peak yet. We need a steady, clear and united approach that shows that we are all in this together. There is no one-state solution to the social and economic impact we are facing. Nothing should be off the table.

### *Sanctions and aid to Ukraine*

Concurrently, we need to speed up delivery of military, humanitarian and financial aid to Ukraine. And we need to advance on sanctions.

Sanctions are a useful tool if implemented properly, and here we need to start the next package, close loopholes or extend where necessary. And it *is* necessary, because Russia is gambling on us blinking first. They bet that the pressure that they fuel within our societies will break our unity and they will be able to go back to the future of iron curtains and spheres of influence. Of "us" versus "them", of "might is right". Europe has come too far to let that happen now, and pressure

is growing on Russia too.

### *Food security*

We must push back against false and cynical Russian propaganda blaming the looming food security crisis on Ukraine's actions or EU sanctions. The blame is squarely with the aggressor.

Here, let me commend the efforts of the Commission and Member States concerning the Solidarity Lanes initiative. We should increase them and address logistical bottlenecks.

### *Migration*

We are facing the East but we cannot underestimate the impact this war will produce on our southern neighbourhood too. We need to be ready to help and we cannot be caught unaware when migration flows pick up again. I am worried that we will soon be facing a situation that is entirely predictable and yet one that will once again find us entirely unprepared. There are options on the table that could help us in this reality of omni-crisis, with vulnerable people used as pawns in geo-political games.

### *Future of Europe*

On the Future of Europe: We must be ambitious. We can enhance the Union's capacity to act in vital areas such as health, energy, defence and fundamental values. The Parliament is ready to act as our two resolutions attest to. They should not be ignored. The next natural step is having a convention. I know some here are reluctant, but this is how we can keep the conversation on our EU project going. We must be ready to look at how we operate and see where we can do better.

The European Parliament stands ready to face our challenges. And is ready to do it with jointly with the Institutions and Member States.

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